

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: **THE ARTS OF DOMESTIC DEVOTION IN
RENAISSANCE ITALY: THE CASE OF
VENICE**

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This dissertation examines the rich visual culture that developed around the pervasive practice of religion in the Renaissance household, with a specific focus on the city of Venice in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is a subject that has received little attention in the recent art historical scholarship that has focused on the domestic arts in early modern Italy. Documentary evidence confirms, however, that over ninety percent of Venetian homes contained articles of spiritual import and function, consisting of a wide range of goods, from paintings by the period's most renowned artists to mass-produced items, such as prints, amulets, and prayer beads. These visible expressions of religion within the household context were essential for the formation and preservation of a devout familial dwelling. Sacred imagery fostered devotion and spiritual activity within the everyday lives of Venetians and ritual environments were fashioned throughout the household, from a picture hung on a wall to an altar furnished with the appropriate vessels and linens for mass. Images

of prophylactic saints, like Christopher, Roch, and Sebastian, along with thaumaturgic objects, such as amulets and prayer beads, provided bodily and spiritual protection to family members in this sea-faring city that continually faced disease and a host of other misfortunes. The religious visual culture of the *casa* also shaped the sacred and ethical character of the family, which included the moral formation of children, the role of women in the home as spiritual educators, and the preservation of the household for future generations. Additionally, while located within a “private” setting, religious objects from domestic spaces were intimately tied to Venice’s mercantile economy, and connected individuals and families to the city’s wider community of Christian devotion. In a period in which the laity assumed greater control over their spiritual lives, the home served as one of the most salient settings for religious activity and expression, made possible by the acquisition and display of a variety of devotional goods.

THE ARTS OF DOMESTIC DEVOTION IN RENAISSANCE ITALY: THE CASE
OF VENICE

By

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Introduction

Perhaps no place in Renaissance Venice was more intriguing and complex than that of the household interior. The luxurious and splendid *palazzi* that line the city's Grand Canal and numerous *campi* (fig. 1), as well as the more modest households nestled along the tiny *calli* and waterways that cut through the city, were once the sites of the consumption and display of a remarkable quantity and variety of material goods, and served as the locale for a range of pursuits encompassing all ages, genders, and ranks, from sumptuous banquets and musical concerts to the routine reality of household chores and the business interactions of the city's merchant and artisan classes. Sources show that these households were also full of sacred articles and other visible manifestations of faith, suggesting that they also operated as suitable and effective locales for religious practice. Although large numbers of people did not congregate in the homes of the Republic for worship—risking accusations of heresy if they had—families and individuals did fervently utilize the spaces of their domestic environments for meaningful devotional activity.

This dissertation examines the rich visual and material culture that developed around the pervasive practice of religion in the households of Renaissance Venice. It is a subject that has received little attention in the recent art historical scholarship focused on the domestic interior in early modern Italy. Documentary evidence confirms, however, that over ninety percent of Venetian homes contained articles of spiritual import and function, consisting of a wide range of goods from paintings by the period's most renowned artists, like Giovanni Bellini and Titian, to mass-produced items, such as prints, amulets, and prayer beads. These visible and material expressions of religion

within the household context were essential for the formation and preservation of a sacred familial dwelling. Not only did these images and objects create holy spaces and foster devotion within the interior setting, they also served important roles as protective aids and instruments for moral development, and functioned as outward signs of the family's devoutness and honorable reputation. They defined familial roles and behaviors, and secured bonds between the living and deceased members of a household. Additionally, while located within a "private" setting, religious objects from domestic spaces were intimately tied to Venice's mercantile economy and way of life, and connected individuals and families to the city's wider community of Christian devotion. As David Morgan has stated in his most recent book on religion and visual culture: "Images do what their users require of them."¹ In Renaissance Venice, this was especially true in one's personal and most intimate environments, where the physical and behavioral boundaries that sometimes developed around images—particularly religious ones—were often less rigid.

Through an in-depth study of the sacred visual culture of the household in late fifteenth and sixteenth-century Venice, I will demonstrate that the home was not considered by Renaissance contemporaries to be secular space as it has consistently been characterized by art historians and other scholars of recent years. The physical walls of the *casa* or *palazzo* did not constitute boundaries that restricted spirituality and religious action. Instead the home was conceived of as a primary medium for such practices, and the holy objects that individuals and families made a part of their everyday environments were critical in effecting this sanctification of space.

¹ David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 73.

A useful starting point for a discussion of the integration of religion into the domestic sphere is an anonymous woodcut (fig. 2), first published in the *Congestorum artificiosae memorie* by the Dominican Johannes Horst von Romberch in 1520 and later incorporated into Lodovico Dolce's adaptation of this book on memory devices published in Venice in 1562 as seen here.² Although the woodcut classifies the spaces and objects of the abbey, it also provides a kind of visual inventory of the contents that were found in the typical Venetian home. Notable among the domestic goods recorded in the top row labeled "Aula" are items of religious significance: a framed image of the Madonna and Child and a set of paternoster beads. Through objects like these, pious Venetians brought religion into their personal dwellings and adjusted it to their own surroundings and needs, thereby claiming ownership over aspects of the sacred experience that for centuries had been kept out of reach. In their studies of public ritual in Florence and Venice, both Richard Trexler and Edward Muir have ascertained that in the Renaissance, holy objects and the formalization of behavior that they evoked generated sacred spaces.³ Just as objects and rituals sanctified the ecclesiastical setting, I argue that pious items and their related devotions made the household dwelling holy. As the focus of veneration, religious goods established points in the domestic interior that were believed to be closer to the divine. Moreover, their spiritual authority invested them with influence over additional aspects of daily life, such as personal safety and moral development, making these objects an indispensable element of the familial environment.

² For more on this woodcut as a memory device, see Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 114-115, 163, and plate 5b.

³ Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); and "The Virgin on the Street Corner: The Place of the Sacred in Italian Cities," in *Religion and Culture in the Renaissance and Reformation*, Steve Ozment, ed. (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989), 25-40. Richard Trexler, "Florentine Religious Experience: The Sacred Image," *Studies in the Renaissance* 19 (1972): 7-41.

In his memoir written around 1543, the Venetian Benedetto Arborsani expounded on the ideal domestic condition, representing one of several vernacular treatises on household economy for the region. The overriding theme of Arborsani's chronicle was that the home was Christian, and equated with moral space; he even used the term *sagrestia* to define the family residence as a model of divine order.⁴ Four decades later, a similar sentiment was expressed by Cardinal Silvio Antoniano, whose extensive treatise on the Christian rearing of children, *Tre libri dell'educatione cristiana dei figliuoli*, was published in Verona in 1584. Antoniano urged fathers to hang holy paintings around the domestic interior (if one could not afford paintings, prints would substitute) to stir reverence and devotion in those who dwelled there, and to communicate to those who visited that this was a Christian home.⁵

It was thus through pious objects, many of them blessed and sanctioned by the Church, that devotion entered into domestic spaces; the contents of household inventories of Renaissance Venetians are evidence of the regular appropriation of piety into the personal sphere. Preserved in the archive of the Cancelleria Inferiore, Miscellanea Notai Diversi are over 700 of these inventories from the sixteenth century, while dozens more from the fifteenth-century have surfaced in additional Venetian archives and can also be found in published sources. These inventories list household goods of patricians and wealthy merchants as well as artisans and individuals of lower classes. They indicate that over ninety percent of Venetian households contained articles of religious significance

⁴ James S. Grubb, "House and Household: Evidence from Family Memoirs," in *Edilizia privata nella Verona rinascimentale: convegno di studi Verona, 24-26 settembre, 1998*, ed. Paola Marini, Paola Lanaro, and Gian Maria Varanini (Milan: Electa, 2000), 118-133. The Arborsani memoir can be found in the Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASV) Scuola Grande di Santa Maria della Valverde o della Misericordia, busta (hereafter b). 50, n. 2, ff. 1r-13v and 14r-23v, the term "sagrestia" on fol. 2r.

⁵ Silvio Antoniano, *Dell'educazione cristiana e politica de' figliuoli* (Florence: Tipografia della casa d' correzione, 1852), 150-151, 153-154. Reprint of Antoniano, *Tre libri dell'educatione cristiana dei cristiana dei figliuoli* (Verona: Dalle Donne e Stringari, 1584).

and function. Quattrocento dwellings typically housed one or two pious objects, normally a painting of the Madonna referred to as an *ancona*, which were often kept in cupboards or tabernacle-like frames; by the Cinquecento, however, families—even the less wealthy households—increasingly amassed devotional goods for their personal environments, both in quantity and in variety of subjects and types.

A visual culture built around domestic religion was not unique to Venice, of course, as many of the factors that spurred the phenomenon, such as a growing movement of lay spirituality and increased personal wealth, were felt elsewhere in Italy and Europe. But the sacred objects that the city's inhabitants acquired to fill their everyday spaces, as well as the functions they served within this context, were particular to the Republic's unique geographic, economic, and religious situation during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. And as Venetian domestic life receives increasing attention in the field of early modern studies, the role of religion within this context needs to be examined as well. By making the case for the importance and widespread nature of this phenomenon in Venice, I hope that scholars will begin to explore practices in other locales—both on the peninsula and throughout Europe—to provide a more complete perspective of not only domestic life in the Renaissance, but also how religion was experienced amongst the laity.

State of Existing Scholarship

No comprehensive study of the arts of domestic devotion exists. Given current scholarship, one can only piece together a semblance of religious practices in the Renaissance home, and its related visual culture. There are a number of reasons for the lack of attention to the subject. First, no truly authentic and intact Renaissance *casa* or

palazzo still survives that would offer any definitive visual or archaeological evidence for the configuration of the home in terms of its architectonic structure as well as the objects that filled its spaces. Second, the regularity with which domestic rituals were performed caused them to go largely unrecorded by contemporaries; mundane events in any historical period are always overshadowed by the exceptional for this very reason: lack of documentation makes them much harder to assess. Third, the traditional bias against the so-called “minor” or “decorative” arts in Renaissance art history has meant that the visual culture of the domestic setting, both sacred and secular, has not been seriously considered until recently. This prejudice is compounded by a long-established concentration in the field on iconography and issues of style, as well as an interest in the “great masters” as the object of study. Even those household articles that fit into more conventional artistic mediums, like painting and sculpture, have not been properly considered from the point of view of their original display context and use in the domestic environment.

The arts of the early modern interior have not been completely ignored. A few studies on household goods emerged in the early twentieth century, such as Attilio Schiaparelli’s *La casa fiorentina e i suoi arredi nei secoli xiv e xv* (1908), a comprehensive attempt to characterize the physical surroundings of the Florentine home; with few historical sources, however, it was largely descriptive rather than analytic in scope.⁶ More focused studies emerged shortly thereafter, like Paul Schubring’s monograph on *cassoni*, first published in 1915,⁷ and Moritz Hauptmann’s 1936 book on

⁶ Attilio Schiaparelli, *La casa fiorentina e i suoi arredi nei secoli xiv e xv*, 2 vols. (Florence: Sansoni, 1908), reprint, (Florence: Le Lettere, 1983). For the critical reception of Schiaparelli’s book, see John Kent Lydecker, “The Domestic Setting of the Arts in Renaissance Florence,” Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1987: 5.

⁷ Paul Schubring, *Cassoni: Truhen und Truhenbilder der italienischen frührenaissance*, 2 vols (Leipzig: K. W. Hiersemann, 1923).

the *tondo*.⁸ Ellen Callmann's 1970s monograph on one of the most prolific *cassoni* studios in Quattrocento Florence—that of Apollonio di Giovanni—supplemented these early twentieth-century studies.⁹ Although largely a cataloguing enterprise of artists and items, these publications endured for many decades as the seminal studies of Renaissance domestic arts.

As art historians incorporate new methodological approaches to move the field “beyond the canon,” many are now taking seriously a larger range of objects and images that constitute a more comprehensive Renaissance visual and material culture. In the past two decades, there have been a growing number of publications dedicated to the domestic arts from the perspective of patronage, feminism and gender studies, economics and consumer practices, and anthropology. The earliest contribution to the re-examination of this area of Renaissance culture was Kent Lydecker's 1987 dissertation on domestic arts in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florence.¹⁰ Based heavily on archival sources, in particular the household inventories of six prominent Florentine families, Lydecker carefully described the contents of these homes and drew conclusions about the period's broader patterns of collecting and display.¹¹ Lydecker successfully demonstrated that the domestic arena was a significant context for the visual arts in the Renaissance. In addition, he was one of the earliest scholars to pay particular attention to the rituals of

⁸ Moritz Hauptmann, *Der Tondo: Ursprung und Bedeutung und Geschichte des italienischen Rundbildes in Relief und Malerei*, (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1936).

⁹ Ellen Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

¹⁰ Kent Lydecker, “The Domestic Setting.”

¹¹ In particular, Lydecker looked at the inventories in the archive of the Magistrato dei Pupilli, the Florentine agency that served as legal caretakers for estates transferred to minors or of those who died intestate. Since Lydecker, a number of scholars working on the Florentine domestic interior have used these documents as one of their primary sources. For more discussion on this agency, see Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, “The Madonna and Child, a host of saints, and domestic devotion in Renaissance Florence,” in *Revaluating Renaissance Art*, eds. Gabriele Neher and Rupert Shephers (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 147-164: 148-149.

marriage and birth, which he concluded were the most important and frequent occasions for the establishment of a household and its decoration. Lydecker was also the first to surmise the importance Renaissance families placed on pious objects in the home; from a reading of a number of household inventories, he established that religious subjects were the most numerous of the works of art listed in a home and were almost always the first recorded, perhaps indicating the important function they held over other household goods. Such pictures were commonly displayed with candles in front or behind shutters or curtains—display tactics that further added to their sacred status. Despite these important findings, he dedicated only eight pages to the topic of domestic devotional articles in the dissertation, leaving deeper questions unanswered regarding the functions of this visual culture within the household setting.¹²

Although his dissertation remains unpublished, the recent scholarship on early modern domestic arts is indebted to Lydecker's research and discoveries. Peter Thornton's exhaustive study, *The Italian Renaissance Interior, 1400-1600* (1991), examined nearly all varieties of household goods from the period, from elaborately painted wall decorations to the furniture of hygiene, but religious objects remained only a mere mention.¹³ The greater part of the literature produced during the past decade and a half has focused on specific types of objects associated with marriage, birth, and the creation of a new household. Currently, the major book-length studies on art for the Renaissance domestic interior include: Anne Barriault's *Spalliera Paintings of Renaissance Tuscany* (1994);¹⁴ Christelle Baskins' *Cassone Painting, Humanism, and*

¹² Lydecker, 175-183.

¹³ Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400-1600* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991).

¹⁴ Anne B. Barriault, *Spalliera Paintings of Renaissance Tuscany: Fables of Poets for Patrician Houses* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

Gender in Early Modern Italy (1998);¹⁵ *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy* by Jacqueline Musacchio (1999);¹⁶ and a very recent publication by Katherine McIver, *Women, Art, and Architecture in Northern Italy, 1520-1580: Negotiating Power* (2006), which examines the relationship between women and material culture in Northern Italian households.¹⁷ A number of articles and essays have augmented this body of literature, and for the most part, they have concentrated on specific kinds of domestic goods, or common iconographic themes.¹⁸ Complementing the work of art historians are the publications of Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (1985), a social historian who has studied

¹⁵ Christelle L. Baskins, *Cassone Painting, Humanism, and Gender in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁶ Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). See also by Musacchio, "Imaginative Conceptions in Renaissance Italy," in *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, eds. Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Grieco (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 42-60. For a review of the books by Barriault, Baskins, and Musacchio, see Robert J. H. La-Palme, "Painting and Sculpture for the Tuscan Household. Review Essay," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54 (Summer 2001): 576-581. This review essay examines additional recent publications that deal with art created for Tuscan households. Baskins book is also reviewed by Megan Holmes, "Review of Roberta Olson, *The Florentine Tondo* and Christelle Baskins, 'Cassone' Painting, Humanism, and Gender in Early Modern Italy." *Art Bulletin* 83 (June 2001): 351-354.

¹⁷ *Women, Art, and Architecture in Northern Italy, 1520-1580: Negotiating Power* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006).

¹⁸ Ellen Callmann, "The Growing Threat to Marital Bliss as Seen in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Paintings," *Studies in Iconography* 5 (1979): 73-92; Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "Les noces feintes: sur quelques lectures de deux thèmes iconographiques dans les cassoni florentins," *I Tatti studies* 6 (1995): 11-30; idem, "Les coffres de mariage et les plateaux d'accouchée à Florence: archive, ethnologie, iconographie," in *A travers l'image: lecture iconographique et sens de l'oeuvre: actes du séminaire CNRS, GDR 712, Paris 1991*, ed. Sylvie Deswarte-Rosa (Paris: Klincksieck, 1994), 309-323; Musacchio, "The Medici-Tournabuoni *desco da parto* in context," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 33 (1998): 137-151; John Pope-Hennessy and Keith Christiansen, "Secular Painting in Fifteenth-Century Tuscany: Birth Trays, Cassone Panels, and Portraits," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 38 (Summer 1980): 2-64; and Brucia Witthoft, "Marriage Rituals and Marriage Chests in Quattrocento Florence," *Artibus et historiae* 3 (1982): 43-59. Cristelle Baskins has published a number of articles on iconography and domestic art. These include: "'La festa di Susanna': Virtue on Trial in Renaissance Sacred Drama and Painted Wedding Chests," *Art History* 14 (September 1991): 329-344; "Griselda, or the Renaissance Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelor in Tuscan Cassone Painting," *Stanford Italian Review* 10 (1992): 153-175; "Corporeal Authority in the Speaking Picture: The Representation of Lucretia in Tuscan Domestic Painting," in *Gender Rhetorics: Postures of Dominance and Submission in History*, ed. Richard Trexler (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1994), 187-206; "Trionfo della Pudicizia: Menacing Virgins in Italian Renaissance Domestic Painting," in *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, eds. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie (Cranbury, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1998), 214-217; "Gender Trouble in Italian Renaissance Art History: Two Case Studies," *Studies in Iconography* 16 (1994): 1-36; and "(In)famous Men: The Continenence of Scipio and Formations of Masculinity in Fifteenth-Century Tuscan Domestic Painting," *Studies in Iconography* 23 (2002).

household demographics and the place of women in the Florentine household—giving special attention to domestic customs and its related material culture—and Richard Goldthwaite, who from the 1970s has explored domestic architecture and the objects that filled these spaces from a largely economic perspective.¹⁹

The scholarship on family life and the domestic arts in Venice has emerged at a slower pace than that on Renaissance Florence, and the relationship of religion to the homes of the lagoon lags even further behind. For nearly a century, Pompeo Molmenti's multi-volume study on the history of the home in the Venetian Republic (1879) remained one of the few sources from which to glean information about the character of the domestic life in the city during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.²⁰ Utilizing household inventories from the Renaissance, Molmenti detailed the exteriors and interiors of typical Venetian houses and palazzi. His work, however, was more focused on tracing the development of architectural and decorative style over the span of the Republic's existence than examining the social and religious activities that took place within these spaces.

The doors to the residences of Venice have been opened further in recent years, through the exceptional, interdisciplinary contributions that have been made to the literature on the Renaissance interior. Historians such as Stanley Chojnacki, Monica Chojnacka, Dennis Romano, and James Grubb have explored from a variety of

¹⁹ Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 310-329; *Tuscans and Their Families*, co-written with David Herlihy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); and *Storia del Matrimonio*, edited with Michela De Giorgio (Bari: Laterza, 1996). Richard A. Goldthwaite, *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence: A Study of Four Families* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968); "The Florentine Palace as Domestic Architecture," *American Historical Review* 77 (1972): 977-1012; *The Building of Renaissance Florence: An Economic and Social History* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); and *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy 1300-1600* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

²⁰ Pompeo Molmenti, *La Storia di Venezia nella vita privata dalle origini alla caduta della repubblica* (Bergamo: Istituto italiano d'arti grafiche, 1879).

perspectives the social exchanges that were typical—and atypical—of early modern households in the lagoon city and its surrounding territories. Stanley Chojnacki has published extensively on the place of women in the public and private worlds of Venice, examining from legal and social perspectives marriage, motherhood, and the transfer of wealth.²¹ Women have also been the interest of the research of Monica Chojnacka, who has effectively argued in her book, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice* (2001), that females of the Republic exercised more social power than has been traditionally recognized, thereby shaping their own destinies in a multitude of ways.²² Dennis Romano (1996) has investigated the increasing social stratification of Renaissance Venetian society by examining one particular domestic relationship—that of master and servant—which bound together members of various social classes,²³ while James Grubb (1996) has studied family life in the provinces of the Veneto, using memoirs of particular households living in Vicenza and Verona.²⁴ Grubb devoted an entire chapter to spirituality and religion and looked at both personal devotion and the rapport between the household and the parish. As a historian, however, Grubb paid little attention to objects.

The pioneering work of Isabella Palumbo Fossati and Patricia Fortini Brown has shed much light on the rich material culture of the homes of the city's patrician and artisan classes, and the role of fine and applied arts in shaping familial identity. Fossati is the first scholar to interpret and analyze thoroughly the household inventories of Venetian Renaissance homes. She notes conventions amongst households of various classes, as

²¹ Stanley Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

²² Monica Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

²³ Dennis Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft: Domestic Service in Renaissance Venice, 1400-1600* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

²⁴ James S. Grubb, *Provincial Families of the Renaissance: Private and Public Life in the Veneto* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

well as novelties. In her 1984 article on the subject, and a recent essay titled, “La casa veneziana,” she carefully takes the reader room by room through the typical late-sixteenth-century home in the Republic.²⁵ In a fragile city, exposed to war, disease, and the caprices of the sea, Fossati argues that material life, especially that of the home, assumed particular relevance. She pays express attention to paintings—their size, subjects, and materials—and also concludes that a good proportion of lower and middle class households aspired to and achieved a lifestyle that had previously been restricted to the city’s nobility.²⁶

Venice’s patrician class is of primary concern in Patricia Fortini Brown’s most recent book, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice: Art, Architecture, and the Family* (2004). Brown looks at the Republic’s conflicting messages of prudence and pride in exhibitions of its material riches at a time when definitions of nobility were in constant flux.²⁷ She also explores wide-ranging themes that include: sumptuary laws and the display of personal wealth; the expression of family identity; Venetian decorative

²⁵ Isabella Palumbo Fossati, “L’interno della casa dell’artigiano e dell’arte nella Venezia del Cinquecento,” *Studi veneziani* VIII (1984): 109-153; and “La casa veneziana,” in *Da Bellini a Veronese: temu di arte veneta*, eds. Gennaro Toscano and Francesco Valcanover (Venice, 2004), 443-492. Palumbo Fossati has also published articles related to collecting, books, and music in the home. See, “La casa veneziana di Gioseffo Zarlino nel testamento e nell’inventario dei beni del grande teorico musicale,” *Nuova Rivista Musicale Italiana* 20 (1986): 633-49; “Il collezionista Sebastiano Erizzo e l’inventario dei suoi beni,” *Ateneo Veneto* 177:22, nos. ½ (1984): 201-18; and “Livres et lecteurs dans la Venise du XVIe siecle,” *Revue française d’histoire du livre* 54, n.s., no. 49 (1985): 481-513.

²⁶ A few dissertations completed in recent years have looked at the role of art patronage and collecting by members of Venice’s merchant and *cittadini*, or “citizens,” class as a means of attaining social and economic status in a city that restricted non-nobles from most political positions. See Blake de Maria, “The Merchants of Venice: A Study in the Sixteenth-Century *Cittadino* Patronage,” Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2003; and Monika Anne Schmitter, “The Display of Distinction: Art Collecting and Social Status in Early Sixteenth-Century Venice,” Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1997. Aspects of Schmitter’s dissertation were published in “‘Virtuous Riches’: The Bricolage of *Cittadini* Identities in Early-Sixteenth-Century Venice,” *Renaissance Quarterly* LVII (Fall 2004): 908-969.

²⁷ Patricia Fortini Brown, “Behind the Walls: The Material Culture of Venetian Elites,” in *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797*, eds. John Martin and Dennis Romano (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 295-338; and *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice: Art, Architecture, and the Family* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Brown has also explored the topic of Venetian domestic life in *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997), Chapter Three.

practices; and the spaces and roles allocated to women in the home. Brown addresses not only the appearance of the Venetian home, but also how its material culture communicated meaning and shaped the activities that took place there, from the daily work of women to sometimes extravagant forms of entertainment meant to impress a more public audience. While both Fossati and Brown acknowledge the high proportion of religious paintings in Venetian dwellings, neither presents the full range of the household's sacred visual culture, nor do they explore the functions of such imagery within this particular environment. Although the commercial culture of the Republic fostered new conceptions of domestic settings, reflected in the goods acquired for and activities performed within these spaces, religious observance persisted and thrived in the residences of all social levels throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and expressed itself in a variety of visual formats.

The domestic interior has now assumed a central position in early modern studies. In the past two to three years alone, it has been the theme of a major two-part symposium in 2004 titled, "*A casa: People, Spaces, and Objects in the Renaissance Interior*," as well as sessions at the annual conferences of professional associations both in the United States and abroad, including the Renaissance Society of America (2006), the College Art Association (2006) and the Association of Art Historians (2003).²⁸ A major exhibition dedicated to the subject—*At Home in Renaissance Italy, 1400-1600*—will take place at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London in Fall 2006, organized by a team of

²⁸ Renaissance Society of America (RSA), "The Early Modern House as Cultural Artifact," organized and chaired by Martin Elsky, and "The Domestic Interior in Renaissance Italy," organized and chaired by Christelle L. Baskins, 2006. College Art Association (CAA), "Cleaning House: Rethinking Gender and Domestic Space in Early Modern Europe," chaired by Allison Levy. Association of Art Historians (AAH), "Articulating meanings in late medieval and early modern interiors," 2003. A future CAA session, to be held in February 2007, will be dedicated to the subject as well. It is titled "New Perspectives on the Italian Renaissance Interior, 1400-1600" and is chaired by Maria De Prano and Stephanie Miller.

international scholars.²⁹ The discourse around the Renaissance interior is also moving beyond the Florence-centered nature of previous studies, offering a much needed pan-Italian perspective. For example, papers presented at the aforementioned conferences have focused on cities and regions such as Colle Val d'Elsa,³⁰ Ferrara,³¹ Brescia,³² Genoa,³³ Prato,³⁴ Siena,³⁵ and Northern Italy.³⁶ The topics within the field are expanding, as well; themes of class, gender, birth and marriage continue to be explored, as well as particular classes of objects, such as bronzes and tapestries, but a broader range of household activities and concerns are now being considered, ranging from bathing and hygiene to music, games, and sociability. It should be noted, however, that out of all the

²⁹ A conference is also being organized in conjunction with this exhibition, and a catalogue will be published with the same title.

³⁰ Shelley MacLaren, "'Flowers of speech,' and 'lovely love stories' in the Palazzo Galganetti, Colle Val d'Elsa," RSA.

³¹ Gudrun Dauner, "The Renaissance House as the Site of Theatrical Performances in Early Sixteenth-century Ferrara," RSA; and Anne Dunlop, "*Stanze*: Painted Rooms, Allegory, and the Space of Imagination," on Ferrara and Padua (RSA).

³² Barbara Bettoni, "Urban Aristocracy without Court: Domestic Interiors in Brescia during the Sixteenth Century (Casa Gambarara al Fontanone, Cittadella Vecchia)," RSA.

³³ Marta Ajmar, "*Grata accoglienza*: Domestic Sociability in Sixteenth-Century Italy"; Piero Boccardo, "La diffusione, la destinazione domestica e la funzione celebrativa dei paramenti di arazzi a Genova nel corso del Cinquecento"; Sandra Cavallo, "The House Of The Artisan"; and Stephanie Hanke, "Bathing *all'antica*. Private Bathrooms in Genoese Palaces and Villas of the Sixteenth Century." All of these papers were presented at the symposium, "*A casa*: People, Spaces, and Objects in the Renaissance Interior," organized by the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Villa I Tatti.

³⁴ Anne Dunlop, "Datini's Décor: Frescoes in Private Homes around 1400," presented at "*A casa*"; and Jérôme Hayez, "*Uno iscritoio che basterebe a la Ghabella de' chontrati*: Espaces de l'écriture dans le palais et les agences de Francesco di Marco Datini (vers 1370-1410)."

³⁵ Fabrizio Nevola, "Home Shopping: The Social and Architectural Place of Business in Renaissance Palaces"; and Benjamin David, "The Sensual Male Body in the Sieneese Domestic Interior," RSA; and Paula Hohti, "Creating Identities? Artisans, Interiors, and the Use of Material Goods in Sixteenth Century Siena," RSA.

³⁶ Anna Bellavitis and Isabelle Chabot, "Case e oggetti, famiglie e lignaggi a Venezia e Firenze tra XIV^o and XVI^o secolo"; Patricia Fortini Brown, "Living Domestically in the Renaissance: The North Italian Experience"; Stanley Chojnacki, "*Cosse per uxò de la dicta dona*: Wives in the Venetian Palazzo"; Cecilia Cristellon, "Spazo, oggetti, riti: il matrimonio di area veneziano (1420-1545)"; Iain Fenlon, "Music within (and without) the Venetian House"; Katherine McIver, "Two Cousins: A Look into Two Private Homes and the Women who owned them"; Francesca Cavazzana Romanelli, "Le scritture d'archivio nella casa rinascimentale veneziana"; and Monika Schmitter, "*La fronte e l'abitazione*: Composite Identity in the *casa* Odoni." All of these papers were delivered at the "*A casa*" symposium.

conference papers delivered in the past few years, to my knowledge, only a handful of them have looked at religion and spirituality in the domestic sphere.³⁷

In my opinion, however, the dearth of literature on the issue of the religious visual culture of the domestic interior may be rooted more fundamentally in a larger, anachronistic and binary framework that until recently had shaped Renaissance studies across disciplines, one that tended to polarize public and private, religious and secular, individual and communal, classical and vernacular, Northern and Italian. In the traditional narrative of European history, Italy had been assigned as the site where the recovery of classical culture and the modern secular state both emerged and prospered. Religion on the peninsula, therefore, particularly that which extends beyond the scope of the ecclesiastical institution and its intellectual relationship to humanism, did not fit easily into this paradigm. As a result, the Italian Renaissance had been characterized as a secular age hovering between an era of faith and the spiritual enthusiasm unleashed by the Reformation.³⁸ Northern Europe, on the other hand, is understood to have labored under the spell of medievalism until Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg (terms such as “Gothic” and “late medieval” have traditionally been used to characterize the fifteenth century in areas north of the Alps), remaining deeply pious and excessively concerned with the prospect of salvation.

While I am arguing neither for a homogenous nor a stagnant European culture during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, this depiction of the continent that

³⁷ For example, of the three conferences mentioned here, only two papers at the “*A casa*” symposium addressed this subject: Philip Mattox, “Domestic Sacral Space in the Florentine Renaissance Palace,” and my paper, titled, “Creating Sacred Space: The Religious Visual Culture of the *Casa* in Renaissance Venice.”

³⁸ For more on the state of religion in Italian Renaissance studies, see David S. Peterson, “Out of the Margins: Religion and the Church in Renaissance Italy,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 53 (Autumn 2000): 835-879, esp. 836.

persisted for decades offered somewhat one-dimensional portrayals of states and societies, and overlooked the political, economic, cultural, and most especially, the religious ties that often bound North and South—for good or for bad—both before and after the reforms of the sixteenth century. This pattern of scholarship is symptomatic of what Sally Promey, in her discussion of the state of religion in the field of American Art, has called the “secularization theory of modernity,” a trend which began in the Enlightenment when intellectuals first seriously critiqued religion.³⁹ As the birthplace of modernity, the historiography of Renaissance Italy had fallen victim to such tendencies, as well. For decades, religious issues outside the ecclesiastical context had been extracted from the period’s politics, economics, and art.

Beginning in the 1970s, studies of Renaissance religion have shifted focus, moving away from topics that had previously characterized the field—such as doctrine, the papacy, and church politics—to the ways in which people practiced and understood their faith. Bifurcations continued to appear, but this time in the approach to Renaissance religion itself. “Popular piety,” while finally being given its due, was typically examined in contrast to “elite” religious culture—both lay and clerical—never considered quite as creditable (or credible) as “higher” forms of religion, and thus continually at odds with it.⁴⁰ Fortunately, contemporary scholars are reassessing these reductive methods. The publication of Richard Trexler’s *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* in 1980 was

³⁹ Sally M. Promey, “The ‘Return’ of Religion in the Scholarship of American Art,” *Art Bulletin* 85 (September 2003): 581-603, esp. 584-587.

⁴⁰ Peterson, 841. Natalie Zemon Davis was one of the first scholars to challenge this “high”/“low” model. See, “Some Tasks and Themes in the Study of Popular Religion,” in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, ed. Charles Trictrichhaus with Hieko A. Oberman (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 307-336. Keith Luria has made similar arguments in his studies of piety in the Counter-Reformation period: “The Counter-Reformation and Popular Spirituality,” in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, eds. Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 93-120; and “Popular Catholicism,” in *Early Modern Catholicism: Essays in Honor of John W. O’Malley, S.J.*, Kathleen M. Comerford and Hilmar M. Pabel, eds. (Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 114-130.

groundbreaking in Renaissance studies for its approach to religion, society, and culture; by examining collective ritual performance—from the most simple to the most elaborate forms—Trexler treated religion as a system of behavior that identified and linked together particular social groups, rather than merely as a set of shared beliefs. Trexler rose above distinctions of theology and practice, popular and learned religion, and repositioned the sacred as central to Florentine politics and social life. Using Trexler’s anthropological approach, scholars of the Italian Renaissance from nearly all disciplines are reexamining the influence of spirituality in its infinite forms, and are placing more emphasis on lay religious initiatives in the larger social and cultural spectrum. As a result, previously understated topics, such as religious confraternities (particularly in urban centers), hospitals and charitable giving, female spirituality, local cults and public rituals, as well as religious dissent, are now receiving serious scholarly attention.⁴¹

A common characteristic of nearly all of these recent studies is their concentration on the civic aspects of this lay religiosity. This has certainly been true in the literature on the pious life of the laity in Renaissance Venice, which has looked principally at the city’s *scuole*, or confraternities, and public rituals.⁴² The focus on the collective has broadened our understanding of early modern religion, but in many cases, it naturally overlooks the personal, which was by no means distinct from the public, but was a very real and significant element of devotion in the period that has long been neglected Italian Renaissance studies.⁴³ The emphasis on the collective dimension of Renaissance religion has spilled over into studies of the period’s sacred visual culture, which has traditionally

⁴¹ The literature on these subjects is too vast to list here. I refer the reader to David Peterson’s review article on religion in the Italian Renaissance, *op. cit.*, for a more complete bibliography. For the state of lay religion in Counter Reformation Italy, see Keith P. Luria, “Popular Catholicism,” 114.

⁴² Pullan, *Rich and Poor*; and Muir, *Civic Ritual*.

⁴³ This is a characteristic of many recent studies that has been pointed out by Peterson, 852.

directed attention onto the art and architecture of ecclesiastical settings. Even research on family chapels has tended to distance these “public” acts of patronage from religious pursuits of the family or individual in the domestic realm.

Another reason why the personal religious experience—and hence the role of the domestic environment—has tended to be overlooked in studies of early modern Italy has been the traditional view of Renaissance man as opportunistic, and expressions of spirituality on behalf of the individual have generally been regarded with suspicion, and often even as insincere. This characterization is changing, evident most especially in recent literature on the female religious experience, as well as Dale Kent’s monograph on the patronage of Cosimo de’ Medici, published in 2000, which closely examines the spiritual motivations behind much of the commissions—in both the civic domain and his personal environment—of this famous Florentine.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, even in a very recent publication by Charles Mack, *Looking at the Renaissance: Essays toward a Contextual Appreciation* (2005), a book that aims to present a “holistic interpretation of the origins and characteristics of the threshold period to our modern age,” the impression of religious insincerity is perpetuated rather than challenged.⁴⁵ For example, when the author quotes a 1421 letter by Poggio Bracciolini to his friend Niccolò Niccoli, in which the humanist

⁴⁴ Dale Kent, *Cosimo De' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance: The Patron's Oeuvre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). On female spirituality, see: Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, ed., *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Chiara Frugoni, "Female Mystics, Visions, and Iconography," in Bornstein and Rusconi, 130-64; David Herlihy, *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe. Historical Essays, 1978-1991* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995); Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri, *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Sorelli, Fernanda, "Imitable Sanctity: The Legend of Maria of Venice," in Bornstein and Rusconi, 165-81; Gabriella Zarri, "Christian Good Manner: Spiritual and Monastic Rules in the Quattro- and Cinquecento," in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: Legenda, European Humanities Council), 76-91; and idem. "Living Saints: A Typology of Female Sanctity in the Early Sixteenth Century," in Bornstein and Rusconi, 219-304.

⁴⁵ This quote comes from the publisher’s description on the back cover of the book. Charles R. Mack, *Looking at the Renaissance: Essays toward a Contextual Appreciation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005).

expresses greater attention to and faith in sacred texts rather than his former interest in the humanities, Mack reads this not only as a temporary lapse on behalf of Poggio into the mindset of the medieval world, but possibly even insincere: “The Middle Ages were hardly over when Poggio did his backsliding, and this spate of pious contrition seems to have been but momentary (and may even have been a contrived affection).”⁴⁶

Given what are sometimes still pervasive characterizations of spiritual expressions on behalf of the individual, when it comes to one of the most profound expressions of the self in the modern era—the home—religion, regrettably, has not yet had a place.⁴⁷ Even the few studies dedicated to private devotional art in early modern Italy have not fully considered the images’ original domestic contexts. The focus has tended to rest on issues of style and the direct, one-to-one experience that the beholder/individual had with works of this type rather than the role of private devotional art in building domestic relationships and fulfilling familial needs.⁴⁸

Slowly but surely, however, studies on the religious arts of the Renaissance domestic sphere are beginning to emerge. Most published work on the subject has directed attention on a single type of object or image, such as Madonna and Child reliefs, and has examined such goods from the perspective of production and the marketplace

⁴⁶ Mack, 55.

⁴⁷ The work of Richard Goldthwaite, op. cit., had established the home as one of the hallmark of individual identity, power, and ambition in Renaissance Italy.

⁴⁸ Those books that have focused specifically on Renaissance Italy are few. One is a recent exhibition catalogue: Andrew Ladis and Shelley F. Zuraw, eds., *Visions of Holiness: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Italy*, exh. cat., University of Georgia, Georgia Museum of Art, 2001. Most texts deal with Italy in their discussion of Europe as a whole. They include: Sixten Ringbom, “Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions: Notes of the Place of Art in Late Medieval Private Piety,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 73 (1969), 159-170; idem, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting*, 2nd ed. (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1984); H. W. van Os, with Eugène Honée, Hans Nieuwdorp, Bernhard Ridderbos, *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300-1500*, translated by Michael Hoyle (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); *Private Prayers: Medieval and Renaissance Objects for Personal Devotion*, exh. cat. University of Georgia, Georgia Museum of Art, 1996; Linda Seidel, ed. *Pious Journeys: Christian Devotional Art and Practice in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance*, exh. cat. The University of Chicago, The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, 2001.

rather than personal devotion. Ronald Kecks' 1988 *Madonna und Kind: Das häusliche Andachtsbild im Florenz des 15. Jahrhunderts* remains one of the only published book-length studies of the religious visual culture of the domestic arena in early modern Italy.⁴⁹ Kecks gave primary consideration to the most ubiquitous subject in Renaissance domestic art—the Virgin and Child—but one that has traditionally been disregarded by scholars, particularly with regards to its original function and meaning, ever since Vasari's derogatory remarks on artists who made their living from the production and sale of images of the Madonna. Most homes, regardless of their social or economic standing, would have contained at least one picture or statue of “Nostra Donna,” or “Our Lady.” Kecks extended his study into both painting and sculpture, thus underscoring the demand for this subject in a variety of artistic formats. He argued that this pictorial genre was fundamentally different from that of the altarpiece.⁵⁰ Kecks looked principally at the manufacture of the Madonna image and the role of the workshop in their production. He did not, therefore, address questions regarding the reception of the images by their owners and the overall issue of household devotion.

Other scholars have continued to focus specifically on Madonna and Child images for the Florentine domestic setting. Anna Jolly's 1988 publication looked at the Madonnas that were commonly produced by Donatello and his artistic circle. While recognizing their intended domestic location, Jolly, like many scholars before her who have looked at Marian reliefs and statues within the artist's *oeuvre*, did not examine the role of these images within the household context. Instead, the monograph was largely

⁴⁹ Ronald G. Kecks, *Madonna und Kind: Das häusliche Andachtsbild im Florenz des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1988).

⁵⁰ For a review of Kecks book, see Alison Luchs' critique in *The Burlington Magazine* (July 1990): 498-499.

an overwhelming endeavor in connoisseurship, as she connected nearly a thousand of these largely neglected reliefs to Florentine sculptors of the period between 1410 and 1460. Beyond style, Jolly touched upon workshop practices and market demands and how these circumstances shaped the appearance of this genre of art.⁵¹

Several essays in more recent years, all by Geraldine Johnson, on Florentine half-length Madonna and Child reliefs have incorporated newer art historical methodologies, combining anthropological and feminist perspectives with social and economic history (1997; 2000; 2002).⁵² Johnson examined these works based on how fifteenth-century beholders would have appreciated, used, and displayed them within the domestic context. Her close visual analysis of the surviving reliefs by Donatello, along with some by Ghiberti, Luca della Robbia, and Jacopo della Quercia, was conducted in tandem with an exploration of related questions that include contemporary attitudes towards lay spirituality, technical developments in the production of sculpture, and the role of magic, devotion, and aesthetics in the design of religious imagery. According to Johnson, these new, more naturalistic reliefs functioned largely as talismans and may have played an important role in addressing Quattrocento concerns about birth and marriage, particularly for the female audience. Allison Lee Palmer explored similar themes in her articles on Madonna and Child plaquettes popular amongst the growing middle class in Florence

⁵¹ Anna Jolly, *Madonnas by Donatello and His Circle* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998). For a review of Jolly's book, see La-Palme, 589.

⁵² Geraldine A. Johnson, "Art or Artifact? Madonna and Child Reliefs in the Early Renaissance," in *The Sculpted Object 1400-1700*, ed. Stuart Currie and Peta Motture (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997): 1-17; idem, "Family Values: Sculpture and the Family in Fifteenth-Century Florence," in *Art, Memory and Family in Renaissance Florence*, eds. Giovanni Ciapelli and Patricia Lee Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 215-233; and idem, "Beautiful Brides and Model Mothers: The Devotional and Talismanic Functions of Early Modern Marian Reliefs," in *The Material Culture of Sex, Procreation, and Marriage in Premodern Europe*, ed. Anne L. McClanan and Karen Rosoff Encarnación (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 135-161. These essays stem from a chapter of Johnson's dissertation, "In the Eye of the Beholder: Donatello's Sculpture in the Life of Renaissance Italy" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1994), 270-333.

(2001; 2002). She argued that such small-scale works, often sewn into bed curtains, reinforced a family-centered piety based on the bond between mother and child.⁵³ While the studies of Johnson and Palmer have contributed much to our understanding of the possible functions of these particular types of domestic religious objects, like Kecks, neither author investigated them in relation to other sacred items within the household environment. The narrow focus perpetuates the common perception that this popular subject was the only sacred theme available for domestic consumption.

Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has published two short essays on holy dolls popular in Renaissance Florentine society (1985; 1998).⁵⁴ Used particularly by women who received them on the occasion of marriage—both a young bride’s earthly nuptials and a nun’s spiritual union with Christ—these *bambini* merged reality with the divine through the use of figuration. Like Johnson and Palmer, Klapisch-Zuber is concerned with a class of objects that played a significant role for a large segment of the female population. She looked carefully at trousseau inventories listed in Florentine *ricordanze* between 1450 and 1520, and combined this archival evidence with contemporary Renaissance accounts and more recent work on folklore and Florentine demographics, including her own contributions to this field.⁵⁵

Roberta Olson’s most recent book (2000) on the Florentine *tondo* examined another domestic pictorial type that commonly contained pious imagery, some of the more popular subjects being the *Madonna and Child*, *The Holy Family*, and *The*

⁵³ Allison Lee Palmer, “The Walters’ *Madonna and Child* Plaquette and Private Devotional Art in Early Renaissance Italy,” *The Journal of the Walters Art Museum* 59 (2001): 73-84; and “The Maternal Madonna in Quattrocento Florence: Social Ideals in the Family of the Patriarch,” *Source* 21 (Spring 2002): 7-14.

⁵⁴ Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual*, 310-329. This essay also appears in almost identical form in Klapisch-Zuber, “Holy Dolls: Play and Piety in Florence in the Quattrocento,” in *Looking at Italian Renaissance Sculpture*, ed. Sarah Blake McHam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 111-127.

⁵⁵ Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *op. cit.*

Adoration of the Magi. Olson did not look exclusively at the circular object as a devotional art form, however; she also explored the pictorial and iconographic origins of the *tondo*, as well as its use for portraiture.⁵⁶ While her aim was to contextualize these images in a particularly Florentine religious, cultural, intellectual, and social ambient, her isolation of *tondi* from other household devotional works is problematic, in much the same way as the aforementioned studies. Olson operated under the overall assumption that late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was a period that saw the “secularization of art,” and linked this transformation to the process of domestication, thereby working within the binary and presumptuous framework that regards the home as secular and the church as the only site for true expressions of religious faith.⁵⁷

The only other book-length study of art and household devotion in the Renaissance is Emerson P. Mattox’s 1996 unpublished dissertation on the domestic chapel in Florence from 1400-1550. In his manuscript Mattox examined the varying forms of oratories during this time period and the changing ways in which the chapel was perceived.⁵⁸ Many scholars have dismissed domestic chapels as an extremely rare occurrence in the Renaissance, particularly in the fifteenth century, citing the famous chapel of Cosimo de’ Medici as the exception. Mattox dispelled this common perception, and demonstrated that many of the leading merchants of Florence acquired the rights to an altar, the essential feature in the creation of liturgical space.⁵⁹ He also

⁵⁶ Roberta Olson, *The Florentine Tondo* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁵⁷ For a review of Olson’s book, see Holmes, 2001: 349-351.

⁵⁸ Emerson Philip Mattox, “The Domestic Chapel in Renaissance Florence, 1400-1550,” Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1996.

⁵⁹ Mattox, esp. Chapter 3, “The Proliferation and Function of Household Chapels during the Quattrocento Years of Medici Rule,” 152-306. Mattox uses a broader definition of chapel than scholars in the past, which may be why other family chapels besides the Medici have been overlooked. According to Mattox, the presence of an altar makes a chapel or oratory, not the walls of a room, and therefore many chapels with

paid attention to the circumstances of church history over the century and a half that had an effect on the private oratory, including the outcomes of the Council of Trent, which placed stricter controls on the acquisition of private altar rights.

Amanda Lillie has also published on the topic of domestic chapels, but with a specific focus on the patronage of villa chapels and oratories in the rural region surrounding Florence, thereby exploring a much overlooked area of religious architecture.⁶⁰ Although Mattox demonstrated that domestic chapels in Quattrocento Florence were not as rare as commonly believed, they were still probably the exception; Lillie has effectively argued, based on archaeological and documentary evidence, that at many of the major country estates, they were the rule. Villas constructed in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance were either built with a chapel or oratory, or were situated almost directly next to one.⁶¹ As an architectural historian, however, Lillie did not provide an extensive discussion of the appearance of these environments and the religious articles that were used within them.

One of the only studies to take a more comprehensive approach to theme of domestic devotional art is a short essay by Jacqueline Musacchio titled “The Madonna and Child, a Host of Saints, and Domestic Devotion in Renaissance Florence,” published

the use of a portable altar were situated in rather accessible areas of the house prior to the Council of Trent, 163-165.

⁶⁰ Amanda Lillie, “The Patronage of Villa Chapels and Oratories Near Florence: A Typology of Private Religion,” in *With and Without the Medici: Studies in Tuscan Art and Patronage 1434-1530*, ed. Eckart Marchand and Alison Wright (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 19-46; and “Francesco Sassetti and His Villa at La Pietra,” in *Oxford, China, and Italy: Writings in Honor of Sir Harold Acton on His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Edward Chaney and Neil Ritchie (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 83-93. Lillie’s published essays on the villa of Francesco Sassetti are based on her dissertation “Florentine Villas in the Fifteenth Century: A Study of the Strozzi and Sassetti Country Properties,” Ph.D. diss, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1986.

⁶¹ Lillie, “The Patronage of Villa Chapels,” 21.

in 2000.⁶² Working from the household inventories of the Magistrato dei Pupilli and other Florentine memoranda, such as domestic treatises and *ricordanze*, Musacchio provided a brief sampling of the kinds of objects used for devotion that would have been found in the typical fifteenth-century Florentine household. She also illustrated the link between the ritual of marriage and the purchase, borrowing, or inheritance of devotional art.⁶³ As outstanding as Musacchio's work in this area is, the nature of the scholarly presentation means very condensed demographics, and not enough descriptive information for a more complete understanding of the appearance and the function of these works of art in the early modern home. Nonetheless, I have utilized aspects of Musacchio's more inclusive treatment of the variety of religious objects made for the home as a model for my larger project on the conditions in Venice.

While the major studies on the Venetian domestic interior have acknowledged the high concentration of religious goods in these spaces, only one study has taken this subject as its focus. Two years ago, while I was fully immersed in this project, an essay by Rhonda Kasl about household devotion in Renaissance Venice was published in a catalogue dedicated to the devotional paintings of Giovanni Bellini; the contributors to the book took three paintings of the Madonna and Child by Bellini and his shop in the Indianapolis Museum of Art as their point of departure.⁶⁴ Kasl explores many of the

⁶² Musacchio, "The Madonna and Child," 147-164.

⁶³ Musacchio's research on the religious goods of the household will be part of a forthcoming publication on marriage in Renaissance Florence. She dedicates an entire chapter in this book to domestic devotional art.

⁶⁴ Rhonda Kasl, "Holy Households: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Venice," in *Giovanni Bellini and the Art of Devotion*, ed. Rhonda Kasl (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2004), 59-89. Other essays in the book include: Andrea Golden, "Creating and Re-creating: The Practice of Replication in the Workshop of Giovanni Bellini," 91-127; Cinzia Maria Mancuso and Antonietta Gallone, "Giovanni Bellini and His Workshop: A Technical Study of Materials and Working Methods," 129-151; David A. Miller, "The conservation of a Madonna and Child by Giovanni Bellini and His Workshop," 153-159; and Keith Christiansen, "Giovanni Bellini and the Practice of Devotional Painting," 7-57, an important study on the

same issues that are of concern to me in this dissertation, such as the display of sacred paintings in the home, the nature of lay devotion in Venice, and use of images as educational tools. Because of the subject of the book in which her essay appears, as well as her reliance solely on secondary literature for evidence, her study focuses principally on the theme of the Madonna and Child. While I agree with many of the conclusions that she draws and cite her work in my own project, the concentration on one iconographic theme maintains the false conception that pictures of the Virgin constituted the entirety of the religious visual culture of the Venetian *casa*. A thorough reading of household inventories for the period provides clear evidence that this was simply not the case. One of the aims of this dissertation is to present the full range of devotional goods—in terms of subjects, mediums, and artistic forms—that Renaissance Venetians consumed in their daily environments.

As in Kasl's essay, the art of one of Venice's most renowned Renaissance painters, Giovanni Bellini, has often been discussed in relation to private devotion, in particular his images of the Madonna and Child. The focus of these studies, however, has been on style, and few have given full attention to the domestic context in which these paintings were originally displayed and used. Rona Goffen highlighted Giovanni Bellini's Madonna and Child paintings as images for private devotion through a careful examination of their formal qualities and relationship to Byzantine models (1975; 1989). She did not discuss them, however, in terms of their original domestic setting, nor did she address how households, families, and patronage played a role in the formation and

maniera devota of Giovanni Bellini. This essay is an almost exact replication of Christiansen, "Giovanni Bellini e la maniera devota," in *Da Bellini a Veronese: temi di arte veneta*, vol. 6, Studi di Arte Veneta, eds. Gennaro Toscano and Francesco Valcanover (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2004), 123-153. Kasl's book was reviewed by Charles Dempsey in *Renaissance Quarterly* LVIII (Winter 2005): 1318-1319.

perpetuation of these popular images.⁶⁵ In a similar manner, Keith Christiansen (2004) has used style as a determinant of function in his analysis of Bellini's paintings for private devotion. His interest, however, lay more on the side of production rather than reception, exploring how workshop practices kept up with demand for these pictures esteemed for their qualities of devoutness.⁶⁶

Interdisciplinary research of late, by scholars working on locales throughout Europe, is leading the way in examining the place of religion in the medieval and early modern home, as well as the relationship between public and private forms of piety. One important contribution to this field of inquiry was the 2001 volume of *Quaderni di Storia Religiosa*, which took as its theme the issue of domestic religion; the essays contributed looked at Europe as a whole—although with a concentration on the Italian peninsula—and considered a range of topics, including: images of household saints; prayer and the education of children; and the influence of preaching and books on familial devotion.⁶⁷ A recently published collection of essays (2005), derived from a 2003 conference on the theme *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, has called attention to the focus that historians of sacred space have given to the public places of worship, be they shrines, chapels, churches, cemeteries, sanctuaries, landscapes or cityscapes. A major contribution to early modern religion and visual culture, the essays

⁶⁵ Rona Goffen, "Icon and Vision: Giovanni Bellini's Half-Length Madonnas," *Art Bulletin* (December 1975): 487-518. Goffen also discusses Bellini's private devotional paintings in her monograph on the artist, *Giovanni Bellini* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 23-118.

⁶⁶ Keith Christiansen, "Giovanni Bellini and the Practice of Devotional Painting," and "Giovanni Bellini e la maniera devota."

⁶⁷ See in particular: Carlo Delcorno, "Pietà personale e di famiglia nella predicazione quattrocentesca," 117-146; Donatella Frioli, "Tra oralità e scrittura. Appunti su libri e bibliotechedei laici devoti," 147-218; Luisa Miglio, "'Un mondo a parte': libri da donne, libri di donne," 219-248; Ottavia Niccoli, "Bambini in preghiera nell'Italia fra tardo medioevo ed età tridentina," 273-300; Dominique Rigaux, "Les couleurs de la prière. L'image sainte dans la maison à la fin du Moyen Âge," 249-272; and Fernanda Sorelli, "Oggetti, Libri, momenti domestici di devozione. Appunti per Venezia (secoli XII-XV)," 55-78.

in this volume investigate how sacred space was constructed by both personal experience and communal practice.⁶⁸ Five of them are dedicated to private worship, including that which took place in domestic spaces throughout Europe both before and after the Reformation, pointing the way to new directions in the field.⁶⁹

Methods, Sources, and Limitations

Through a comprehensive treatment of the arts of devotion in the households of Venice during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—a time when the domestic sphere began to assume great significance in the lives of most residents of the city—this dissertation treats an aspect of Renaissance visual culture highly valued during the period in which it was produced, but subsequently overlooked in the art historical literature. My manuscript, furthermore, recontextualizes some of the era’s most renowned works of art that today hang in museum and gallery spaces, enabling both scholars and curators to envision more accurately the domestic settings for which these objects were intended and their multitudinous functions. Rather than considering the subject of the home from a secular point of view—and, conversely, examining religion from the conventional context of theology and the ecclesiastical institution—I am dealing with domestic art and devotion from the perspective of contemporary lay practices of religion. Incorporating methods recently used in the fields of Renaissance history and religious studies that are

⁶⁸ See the editors’ introduction to the volume: Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer, “Defining the Holy: the Delineation of Sacred Space,” in *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), esp. 22.

⁶⁹ These essays include: Diana Webb, “Domestic Space and Devotion in the Middle Ages,” 27-48; Jeanne Nuerchterlein, “The Domesticity of Sacred Space in the Fifteenth-Century Netherlands,” 49-80; Lisa A. Banner, “Private Rooms in the Monastic Architecture of Habsburg Spain,” 81-94; Richard L. Williams, “Forbidden Sacred Spaces in Reformation England,” 95-114; Annabel Ricketts with Claire Gapper and Caroline Knight, “Designing for Protestant Worship: the Private Chapels of the Cecil Family,” 115-136.

based largely in anthropology, gender studies, and social history, I reconsider religion, art, and the home from a standpoint of personal faith, ritual, and daily customs.

To understand how the Venetian family experienced the sacred in their personal environment is, however, a difficult task. As mentioned above, documents directly related to domestic devotion are virtually nonexistent as it was an activity performed with such regularity and so fully integrated into daily existence that it did not need to be recorded or codified.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, a large body of primary sources survives from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries from which to draw conclusions regarding the character of domestic religion and its visual components. First and foremost are household inventories, which provide the most accurate record of the contents of homes in Renaissance Venice. For this study, I have surveyed the aforementioned inventories in the *fondo* of the Cancelleria Inferiore, Miscellanea Notai Diversi, a large collection of various types of notarial documents today housed in the State Archives of Venice. The vast majority of the household registers maintained in this *fondo* date to the sixteenth century. I also examined several fifteenth-century inventories preserved amongst the trust papers of the Procurators of San Marco, the central administrators of the Republic who were often charged with overseeing the holdings of private individuals.⁷¹ All of

⁷⁰ One rare exception is the memoir of the fourteenth-century Florentine merchant Giovanni Morelli. See Richard Trexler, "In Search of the Father: The Experience of Abandonment in the Recollections of Giovanni di Pagolo Morelli," in idem, *Dependence in Context in Renaissance Florence* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1994), 178; idem, *Public Life*, 188-193; and Evelyn Welch, *Art in Renaissance Italy*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 125, 148, 284, and 309-311.

⁷¹ Fifteenth-century inventories survive among these trust papers, also located in the Archivio di Stato of Venice. Because these documents are indexed according to name of the trust, rather than grouped together by date as they are in the archive of the Cancelleria Inferiore, they are more difficult to find. The 1408 inventory of the Aleardi family from Verona is published in C. Cipolla, "Libri e mobili di casa Aleardi al principio del sec. XV," *Archivio Veneto* 24 (1882): 28-53. Portions of inventories are recounted in Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, "*Sopra le acque salse*": *espaces, pouvoir et société à Venise à la fin du Moyen Age*, 2 vols. (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1992), I: 373-462, and 527-566. Several sixteenth-century inventories are transcribed in Molmenti, I: 508-518, and II: 475-489. They have also been discussed by: Alison Smith, "Gender, ownership and domestic space: inventories and family archives in Renaissance

these inventories are post-mortem documents, and were drawn up by notaries of the city either when someone died intestate (without heirs of legal age), or at the request of the deceased or the executors of the estate (known as *commissari*), in order to establish a legal record of one's personal possessions before they were sold or distributed amongst beneficiaries. The quantity and diversity of these documents—over 700 from the households of nearly all economic classes—offer an amplitude of evidence necessary for my project which seeks to explore trends and practices across the social spectrum.⁷²

As essential as inventories are to my thesis in confirming both the presence and diversity of sacred goods in the Venetian household, they have their limitations. Because they are normally post-mortem documents, the owner of the objects registered, while he or she may have ordered the document to be drawn up, had no voice in the way the record was constructed or how the objects are described. Compiled at extraordinary moments in the lifecycle of the household—at times of death or to settle a financial dispute—they might not accurately reflect the day-to-day realities of the home, not do they account for the fluidity of goods both within interior spaces and beyond. Objects to be inventoried may have been taken from their normal locations and placed together in an effort to ease the task of the notary and thus one cannot be sure that these representatives of the city saw the household in the same way that its inhabitants normally did.

Descriptions of items registered in inventories are often vague. Size, for example, is characterized simply as “piccolo” (small) or “grande” (large). Notaries normally listed

Verona,” *Renaissance Studies* 12 (1998): 375-391; Palumbo Fossati, “L’interno della casa,” and “La casa veneziana”; and Patricia Fortini Brown, “Behind the Walls,” and *Private Lives*. Another large body of inventories is preserved in the *fondo* of the city’s Office of Wards, known as the Giudici di Petizion. I did not consult this archive as heavily as the others because the documents contained here date mainly from the very late sixteenth century and seventeenth century, and are thus beyond the scope of my study.

⁷² For an overview of these *fondi*, see Andrea da Mosto, *L’Archivio di Stato di Venezia. Indice generale, storico, descritto ed analitico*, vol. 1 (Rome: Biblioteca d’Arte Editrice, 1937), esp. 7, 225-229.

the subjects of works of art, but at times they are ambiguous on this point, as well, listing a painting, for example, as “un quadro con molte figure” (“a painting with many figures”). The values of the articles itemized are also usually missing, since the purpose of these documents was to confirm patrimony rather than appraise goods for sale. Inventories are often divided by room, which is exceptionally useful in determining the distribution of household articles throughout the domestic environment, but this structure is not always consistent. Sometimes the register is one long list, or the notary organized the document by material; in other words, all household items made from wood are grouped together, followed by linen, wool, bronze, etc. In these instances, one has no idea in which rooms objects were typically kept. While the presence of sacred objects in household inventories demonstrates that Renaissance Venetians conceived of their dwellings as a setting for devotion and sacred ritual, the visible shape that this domestic religious culture took is more difficult to evaluate. To be most effective, therefore, inventories must be used in conjunction with additional documents from the period.

Testaments offer another important piece of evidence in this study. Like inventories, these documents are plentiful in the archives of Venice; while I reviewed hundreds of wills from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, my investigation only scratched the surface of the thousands of these documents that exist.⁷³ Surviving testaments constitute a broad segment of the population, as well. At times, testators specified particular household items and personal articles—many of them religious—to

⁷³ The bulk of the testaments preserved in the Venetian archives form the *Archivio Notarile*, or the archive of the notarial acts. Originals and copies of testaments can also be found in a number of other *fondi* at the Archives, including in the aforementioned trust papers of the Procurators of Saint Mark’s, the Cancellaria Inferiore, and confraternal and ecclesiastical collections. Venetian wills are so numerous because law required each Venetian notary to make two “original” copies of a will and deposit one with the government. James Cushman Davis, *The Decline of the Venetian Nobility as a Ruling Class* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962).

be bequeathed to various family members, friends, and institutions. Testaments are a useful source in the context of this study because they offer additional evidence not only as to what people owned, but also how and to whom goods were transferred, revealing the power that objects held in the Renaissance mindset and how relationships could be secured and maintained through material goods.

Also relevant to this dissertation are the treatises on the family and household written during the Renaissance, which emerged from the *economica* tradition of classical authors such as Aristotle and Xenophon. Written by both lay and religious scholars, these discourses addressed a broad range of topics, from the relationship between husbands and wives to the proper education of children and the qualities of good and bad mothers.⁷⁴ Although prescriptive literature, these tracts were widely popular because they contained rather practical information on the maintenance of the household and the rearing of children and were updated to address contemporary concerns. They also were one of the few forms of writing that addressed family life, which was the reality for large segments of the population.⁷⁵ Some Renaissance Venetians even wrote family memoirs, yet only a handful has come down to us as compared to the dozens of surviving *ricordanze* and *memorie* written by Florentines. Although these texts provide more insight into the lived experience of families and individuals, they were often written with

⁷⁴ Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 196. The literature that dealt with issues such as nobility and manners often considered the topic of the household management, as well. One example is Sabba Castiglione's *Ricordi over ammastramenti di Monsignor Saba da Castiglione cavalier Gerosolimitano, ne quali con prudenti, e christiani discorsi si ragiona di tutte le materie honorate, che si ricercano a un vero gentil'huomo. Con la tavola per alphabeto di tutte le cose notabili* (Venice: Paulo Gherargo, 1554), which addresses subjects from warfare to ornamenting one's house.

⁷⁵ On the tradition of the *economica* in the Renaissance, see Daniela Frigo, *Il padre di famiglia: Governo della Casa e Governo Civile nella Tradizione dell' 'Economica' tra Cinque e Seicento* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1985). On the relationship between Renaissance treatises on household management and actual practice, see Marta Ajmar, 'Toys for Girls: Objects, Women and Memory in the Renaissance Household,' in *Material Memories*, ed. Marius Kwint, Christopher Breward and Jeremy Aynsley (Oxford: Berg, 1999), esp. 82-87; and Dennis Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, Chapter One.

the purpose of recording and preserving family history for future generations, and thus paint the lineage in a particularly positive manner. Nonetheless, conceptions of the home and the place of religion in the family can be gleaned from some of them.

While genre painting was a relatively unknown art form in Renaissance Venice, painters from the area were fond of setting their religious stories into contemporary interior spaces. Such images may offer clues into the appearance of actual domestic environments. Using contemporary images as evidence is risky, of course, because while they might portray environments that recall contemporary surroundings, they are rarely representations of reality. The parallels, however, between written descriptions of household contents and painted representations of domestic interiors are sometimes so striking that they demand attention, and while artists may not have always painted reality, we cannot dismiss the possibility that they did inject aspects of the real into their images from time to time. I have also restricted myself to using examples of works that belong to a class of paintings executed in a manner that Patricia Fortini Brown has labeled the “eyewitness style,” a mode of representation employed by artists working in the Veneto region around 1500 intended to create believable portrayals of sacred events through a naturalism of execution and an attention to the details of figures and setting.⁷⁶

Renaissance devotional literature provides another piece in this larger puzzle of domestic religion. The texts that became popular in the Renaissance detailed the life of the Madonna, the Passion of Christ, and the mysteries of the faith in strikingly realistic fashions and guided readers on how to meditate. During this period, text and image worked off of each other under the influence of an incarnational theology, which gave

⁷⁶ Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

precedence to the visual and material in both art forms. This body of literature comprised newly written works as well as medieval tracts with an enduring reputation that were increasingly translated into the vernacular and printed for wide distribution.

The objects and images of domestic devotion, of course, offer the most critical pieces of evidence. A good portion of the sacred visual culture of the Renaissance Venetian household is, unfortunately, lost or unknown to us today. Articles made from more ephemeral materials, like gesso, papier maché, wax, paper, and sometimes even wood, have a low survival rate. Other goods, such as jewelry and articles that utilized precious gems and materials, fell victim to fashion and were often recycled into something new. As paintings began to be classified as “works of art” they were often stripped of their accoutrements, such as frames, curtains, cabinets, and devices of illumination—items that were an essential part of the original viewing experience—by dealers and later owners. Nevertheless, there are still a good number of surviving objects from which to work. Because of their elevation in status over the centuries, paintings are perhaps the most plentiful of Renaissance household goods accessible today, and as a result, they constitute the bulk of my visual evidence. One of my aims in this study, however, is to introduce the full panoply of sacred goods present in the homes of the Republic, items such as sculpture, prints, books, and religious jewelry. When I have been unable to locate specifically Venetian examples due to a low survival rate, I present items from elsewhere in Italy and Europe, since some devotional objects, like the rosary, were fairly standardized in terms of forms and—as revealed in the inventories of their households—Venetians avidly acquired both sacred and secular works from around the world.

In examining the art forms utilized in domestic devotion, traditional art historical methods, such as iconography and formalism, can help to answer some of the most basic questions surrounding a study like this, and complement approaches derived from other disciplines, like anthropology and social history, as discussed above. Why were particular subjects so popular in the Renaissance Venetian home? What meaning did they have in the domestic environment as opposed to the ecclesiastical context? How were these subjects and the ways in which they were depicted related to texts popular during the same period that often told the same stories? How can we know whether a work of art was originally intended for the residential setting based solely on structure and style? Formal elements, such as size, scale, composition, color—even texture—all played a role in how images were received and used. In fact, as will be seen in Chapter Two, certain stylistic trends emerged and thrived in the domestic sphere in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Venice precisely because of the effectiveness they lent to the image for personal devotion.

Just as today families and households are complex and varied, so too they were in the Renaissance, and particularly in Venice, a city full of immigrants and visitors from both Europe and the East. In this study, however, I am limiting myself to a specific kind of domestic space and situation. My project is concerned principally with the lay Christian household and with what in today's terms we may call the nuclear family, but which, as will be explicated in Chapter Four, often consisted of many more members than simply parents and their offspring. Other domestic environments of Renaissance Venice, however, should be noted. These included monasteries and convents, hospitals and

orphanages, and sometimes, even civic buildings.⁷⁷ Certainly, the Jewish domestic experience in Venice was yet another in which faith and religion played a dominant role, and that undoubtedly took on different visible expressions than the Christian household. Research into this subject could provide a fascinating point of comparison in a larger project on domestic space in the Republic, but which is beyond the scope of this particular study.

Structure of the Text

In order to address the topic of household religious arts within a comprehensive framework, and highlight its multifaceted functions in Venetian homes throughout the Renaissance, my dissertation is organized thematically. Chapter One acquaints readers with the Renaissance Venetian interior utilizing the contents and organization of household inventories, contemporary descriptions of homes by both visitors to the city and local residents, and paintings from the period that display domestic spaces. I present the structural layout and overall appearance of the typical *casa* in the Republic, and devote specific attention to the wide variety of pious objects that could be found in these spaces, from painting, sculpture, and prints to books, sacred jewelry, and other portable artistic goods. My goal in this chapter is to enable readers to visualize the spaces in which household devotion took place, and to dispel the notion that sacred art in the domestic sphere consisted solely of paintings of the Madonna hung in bedrooms, which has been the persistent characterization in the literature on the Renaissance interior.

⁷⁷ The Procurators of San Marco, for example, took up residence in the municipal buildings that line the north side of Saint Mark's square, redesigned after a fire in the sixteenth century by Mauro Codussi. Juergen Schulz, *The New Palaces of Medieval Venice* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 106, note 9. "Hospital" was a general term for hospitals proper, asylums, and hospices serving both transient and long-term residents.

The five remaining chapters address the functions that the arts of domestic devotion served for the familial audience. Chapters Two and Three take up the issue of lay piety during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance and its integration into the domestic context. The first of these two chapters looks at the role of material goods and images in assisting personal devotion, while the second examines the ritual environments fashioned within the *casa* through their accumulation and display, from a picture hung on a wall to an altar furnished with the appropriate vessels and linens for mass. I focus on traditional art historical concerns, such as style, to demonstrate how the exterior form of images greatly affected the interior spirituality of the beholder, but also expand the notion of a work of art's formal elements beyond the panel and canvas to include its original display context. The spaces constructed within the home for devotion—both real and imagined—were often just as important in creating a prayerful mindset as the sacred objects and images that were typically the focus of veneration.

The fourth chapter looks at the matter of bodily and spiritual protection and the use of sacred images and objects as talismanic devices against disease and a host of other misfortunes commonly faced by residents of this sea-faring city. I re-examine the iconography of some of the most popular saints from the period—Christopher, Sebastian, and Roch—within the context of the domestic setting in which their cults thrived, and also consider objects, like amulets and prayer beads, that incorporated gemstones and other natural substances believed to possess thaumaturgic properties, thus serving the same objectives as images of prophylactic saints. The juxtaposition of images and objects in this context may seem like an odd combination, but these seemingly disparate items served common apotropaic objectives.

Chapter Five focuses specifically on the function of a religious visual culture in shaping the spiritual and moral character of the family, which included the role of women in the home as holy leaders, the religious formation of children, and the preservation of the household for future generations. Books formed a vital part of this didactic piety, but they were just one means by which members of the household ascertained their faith. Images visualized tenets and stories of Christian belief while the use of sacred objects in domestic devotions, like rosary beads, altars and liturgical vessels, meant that the body became a means by which these messages were taught and reinforced. Portraiture, an art form normally classified as “secular,” also participated in the creation and continuation of a holy household. The likenesses of members of the household, many of whom had long since departed, hung in the spaces with—and sometimes side by side—religious images. The proximity of portrait with the divine may have provided stimulus for the beholder/worshipper to keep loved ones in his or her prayers.

While this dissertation argues for a reconsideration of the Renaissance domestic interior as sacred space, one cannot overlook the vibrant expressions of lay communal devotion within Venice, which took the form of civic festivals, involvement in the city’s *scuole*, and the cult of public images. The final chapter, therefore, looks at the connections between personal and communal worship made possible through a shared visual culture, addressing topics such as the marketplace and the bequest of pious household objects to ecclesiastical venues. I also investigate the notable and curious absence of a characteristically Venetian saint, Saint Mark, from the homes of the Republic and what this signals about the relationship between household and state.

Chapter 1: The Sacred Venetian Household

Before even entering the interior of Renaissance Venetian home, the visitor to or occupant of the house would have been aware that he or she was crossing the threshold into sacred space. Holy images and devout inscriptions were frequently carved onto the exterior surfaces of residences.¹ Figures of saints, the Madonna and Child, and the letters IHS displayed on a sunburst—the monogram of the holy name of Jesus Christ² (fig. 3)—amongst other representations, all served for passersby as enduring public markers of the pious character of both the space within the walls of the homes, and the inhabitants who dwelled there. Over entrance portals, households displayed their coats of arms together with heavenly figures (fig. 4), signaling the divine protection under which the family lived.

These visual statements continued as one moved from the civic arena deeper into the personal—but never fully private—spaces of the household. Ca' Foscolo Corner in the Dorsoduro section of Venice is one example of a domicile where sacred images mark the progression into the domestic interior (fig. 5). Above the entryway on the facade of the *palazzo* that faces Campo Santa Margherita is the mid-fourteenth-century coat of arms of the Corner family—the original owners of the building—displayed in the embrace of an angel (fig. 6). On the wall that frames the exterior staircase of the courtyard, situated just past this main portal and visible from

¹ For more on exterior sculpture in Venice, see Antonio Rizzi, *Scultura esterna a Venezia: corpus delle sculture erratiche all'aperto di Venezia della sua laguna* (Venice: Stamperia di Venezia editrice, 1987).

² IHS stands for the Greek letters *Iota, Eta, Sigma*. This monogram was said to have been first employed by San Bernardino of Siena to promote the public devotion of the Holy Name of Jesus.

the *campo*, is a relief sculpture of the Madonna and Child (figs. 7 & 8).³ Strategically positioned along the route that leads inside the home, these images would have left no doubt in the mind of the visitor to Ca' Corner that the members of this household regarded their dwelling as a hallowed place.

The visual reminders of the moral and spiritual reputation of the Republic's residences did not cease once one passed indoors. In fact, it was in this space where religion and its visible expressions flourished, articulated in a multiplicity of artistic forms and ritual spaces created through the display and use of sacred goods. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of Venetian conceptions of the home, the basic layout of the interior, and its contents, with a specific focus on the religious objects that filled these spaces. It is my intention to present the wide variety of pious goods that could be found in the Venetian home, from painting, sculpture, and prints to books, sacred jewelry, and other portable artistic items. As my principal focus is on the ways in which religion was manifested in the home, this chapter is not an exhaustive analysis of Venetian houses and *palazzi*; for more on this subject, I refer the reader to the exceptional work of Isabella Palumbo Fossati and Patricia Fortini Brown who have examined the households of the Republic from a more "secular" point of view.

Defining the Venetian Ca'

Venetian domestic architecture had little in common with the fortress-like palaces typical of other early modern Italian cities and towns. The built-in defense of the sea and the complex system of canals that wove their way through the island's

³ Rizzi, 502, cat. 297.

urban fabric enabled the homes of the Republic to quite literally open up, with large windows and sometimes porticoed facades.⁴ A comparison of two of the most famous palaces constructed in fifteenth-century Florence and Venice—the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi designed by Michelozzo di Bartolomeo and completed in 1460 (fig. 9) and the Ca' d'Oro situated along the Grand Canal and built for the Contarini family (fig. 10)—highlight the distinctiveness of architecture in the lagoon. With rusticated masonry occupying the ground level and a heavy pronounced cornice, the Florentine structure imparts an impression of weight, strength, and security. The effect is quite unlike its Venetian analog, with its overall sense of lightness. Large windows take over more than half of the building's facade, while the organic Gothic tracery over the portico appears like a delicate lace veil. Renaissance Venice was an international commercial center and an open port that welcomed traders, visitors, immigrants from all around the world; the outward character of the city's architecture reflects the realities of the Republic's economic and geographic position.⁵ At the same time, Venice's built environment mirrored the myth that the Republic projected of itself and perpetuated for centuries: *la Serenissima*—or “The Most Serene Republic,” as Venetians commonly referred to their island—was a divinely protected city and a site of concord and civil peace.⁶

The “myth of Venice” also sanctioned the class structure that dominated life in the society. Venice took pride in its status as an independent Republic, with an

⁴ Deborah Howard, *An Architectural History of Venice*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 34. Richard J. Goy, *Venetian Vernacular Architecture: Traditional Housing in the Venetian Lagoon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 149.

⁵ Crouzet-Pavan, “*Sopra le acque salse*,” I: 383.

⁶ On the “Myth of Venice,” see David Rosand, *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), esp. 6-46; and Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, *Venice Triumphant: The Horizons of a Myth*, translated by Lydia G. Cochrane (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 2002).

elected figure head—the *doge*—and a parliamentary system of government based on a constitution of checks and balances.⁷ Although the Republic aimed at projecting an egalitarian society, the reality was quite the opposite. The hereditary nobility, constituting the top five percent of the city’s population, controlled the branches of government. Unlike aristocrats elsewhere in Italy and Europe, however, Venetian patricians, at least until the early sixteenth century, obtained their wealth through maritime trade rather than from landed property. Nobles were thus involved in the world of business and practical affairs, tying them financially and socially to an intermediate class of citizens called the *cittadini*. More dynamic than the closed ranks of the patriciate, the majority of *cittadini* were merchants, as well, but members of this class also took up professions such as medicine and law. Many acquired wealth on par with or even surpassing that of the most prominent noble families. The largest and most varied class of the city, however, was the *popolani*, or ordinary people, who comprised ninety percent of the population; they ranged from middle-class artisans and retailers to the city’s poorest residents.⁸

It was within this geographic and social context that the Venetian chronicler Francesco Sansovino proudly stated in Book Nine of *Venetia città nobilissima* that although his city had more palaces than any other European locale, only one of the Republic’s dwellings was designated as such, and that belonged to the *doge*. Out of modesty, residents of the Venice instead referred to their homes as *case*—often abbreviated to *ca’* and followed by the name of the family who lived there—abiding

⁷ Alvise Zorzi, *Venice 697-1797: A City, A Republic, An Empire*, translated by Judyth Schaubhut Smith (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 2001), 82.

⁸ Peter Humfrey, *Painting in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 27-28; and Zorzi, 52.

by the Venetian principle of *mediocritas*, a conservatism and perceived equality that were the essence of this Republican state.⁹ Inventories and other evidence suggest, however, that Venetians largely overlooked this ideal; over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the city's palaces became increasingly grand and extravagant spectacles that were designed and outfitted less in accordance with the principles of moderation than the tenets of *magnificentia*. This latter theory, rooted in the philosophy of Aristotle and later Saint Thomas Aquinas, argued that the patronage of architecture and other visible forms of expenditure, including the domestic, were a condition of virtue—and even a social obligation—for the noble and wealthy classes.¹⁰ Building and the ornamentation of these structures benefited not only the patron who could claim ownership over the edifice or space, but also the public who would take pleasure in the beauty such largesse lent to the city. “Magnificence” was also considered a symbol of peaceful times, for the noble was free to devote his attention to making his house grand.¹¹

In Venice ostentatious patronage was at odds with the city's strong communal ethic.¹² Residential construction nonetheless boomed during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as it did in other Italian urban centers, and the houses themselves

⁹ In fact, the word “casa” or “ca” became synonymous with other metaphors of the family and its lineage. Grubb, “House and Household,” 119.

¹⁰ For more on Renaissance theories of *magnificentia*, see A.D. Fraser Jenkins, “Cosimo de’ Medici’s Patronage of Architecture and the Theory of Magnificence,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 162-170; Marina Belozerskaya, *Luxury Arts of the Renaissance* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 2; and Alison Cole, *Virtue and Magnificence: Art of the Italian Renaissance Courts* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), esp. Chapter One.

¹¹ Cole, 19.

¹² Fortini Brown, “Honor and Necessity: The Dynamics of Patronage in the Confraternities of Renaissance Venice” *Studi Veneziani* 14 (1987): 179-212: 189.

became not only larger, but increasingly filled with material splendor.¹³ In fact, Sansovino followed his caveat about the *ca'* with descriptions of the appearance and ornamentation of some of the city's finest homes, chronicling spaces that would have dazzled visitors with the excess of gold and brilliant colors, as well as paintings and other "excellent artifices," like the tapestries, *spalliere*, and cloths of silk that lined the walls.¹⁴

The Milanese friar Pietro Casola described a situation similar to Sansovino's depiction of mid-sixteenth-century Venetian homes when he visited the Dolfin family palace during his tour of the Republic in 1494. He wrote: "The fireplace was all of Carrara marble, shining like gold, and carved so subtly with figures and foliage that Praxiteles and Phidias could do no better. The ceiling was so richly decorated with gold and ultramarine and the walls so well adorned, that my pen is not equal to describing them... There were so many beautiful and natural figures and so much gold everywhere that I do not know whether in the time of Solomon... in which silver was reputed more common than stones, there was such abundance as was displayed there."¹⁵ Casola's account of this opulent residence closely matches the room portrayed in the canvas painted about a decade later by the Venetian artist Giovanni Mansueti, titled *The Miraculous Healing of the Daughter of Ser Nicolò Benvegnudo of S. Polo*, a scene that was once a part of the cycle of the Miracles of the True Cross and commissioned by the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista (fig. 11).

¹³ The tension between the desire to express wealth yet maintain at least the appearance of equality was felt continually during the course of the Republic, with the repeated passage of sumptuary laws, some of which placed restrictions on displays of material goods within the private home. Fortini Brown, "Behind the Walls." The subject is also one of the main themes of Fortini Brown's most recent book, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice*.

¹⁴ Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare, descritta in XIII libri* (Con privilegio in Venetia appresso Iacomo Sansovino, 1551), book nine.

¹⁵ Quote from Fortini Brown, *Art and Life*, 125.

Although Mansueti's painting is, in essence, fiction, not representing any actual space of which we know, he did create a sumptuous space of colored marble, gilded furniture, and elaborate architectural details—including the carved fireplace and golden coffered ceiling—much like the shining gold and marble features described by Casola in the Dolfin household, and the accounts of the households of Venice as narrated later by Sansovino.

The domestic environment Mansueti represented is also not far afield from the image of the Venetian *casa* that one can piece together from the contents of contemporary household inventories. As will be seen below, many of the Republic's homes were full of decorative wall hangings, rich textiles, paintings, ancient and contemporary sculptures, gilded furniture, and luxury items from all over the world and made from costly materials such as glass, marble, ivory, silver and gold. The term "camera d'oro," or "chamber of gold," was even used by Venetians to describe particularly opulent rooms in some of the city's palaces. The situation was not restricted to members of the patrician class, either. Particularly during the Cinquecento, a large percentage of the city's *cittadini* and wealthy merchants—including foreigners—lived just as grandly as the nobility. As the city's economy became less and less dependent on maritime activity and turned increasingly inward, families and individuals across social classes concentrated their attentions on the home and increasingly acquired a variety of material goods to fill their day to day environments.¹⁶ In a city with no court, one's house and its contents became an important mechanism by which to construct and promote family identity, virtue, and

¹⁶ Palumbo Fossati, "La casa veneziana," 444.

power, particularly for those who were denied access to the *libro d'oro*, the official register of the city's nobility.¹⁷

As a place where work and family life often mixed, the Venetian *casa* was regularly full of people. In terms of actual inhabitants, households generally consisted of the nuclear kin and resident servants, as well as extended family members. Large palaces were sometimes broken down into multiple apartments, with several generations living under the same roof.¹⁸ At the same time, a number of family members shared a single residence. Brothers often co-resided after the death of their father, in fact, sometimes even forced to do so by the terms of the patriarch's will. Young women and children usually lived with their marital families after the death of a husband, and if the children were grown, widows normally remained with them. Stray family members, like uncles or cousins, usually elderly, were also regularly welcomed into homes. Households of patricians tended to be the largest and most complex, with multiple nuclei living together, and a greater number of domestics.¹⁹

The house, or *casa*, was both the physical structure and as the kindred who resided there; the edifice itself, therefore, was never a neutral fabric. In the Venetian Republic, for example, the construction boom in residential architecture during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—in addition to the coats of arms, inscriptions, and other forms of familial insignia emblazoned on the facades of these new dwellings of

¹⁷ To own a house in Venice was also a way in which immigrants integrated more fully into the society of the lagoon city. See Blake De Maria's dissertation, *op. cit.*, esp. 280. Similar ideas are expressed in Palumbo Fossati, "Il collezionista Sebastiano Erizzo," 202.

¹⁸ Fortini Brown, *Private Lives*, 63.

¹⁹ Grubb, "House and Household," 123-125. For more on servants in the Venetian household, see Dennis Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*.

the city's nobility and wealthy merchants—epitomized this concept.²⁰ Testaments recorded in the Cinquecento often urged heirs—sometimes with the threat of retraction of inheritance—to maintain possession of the *casa* as a means to sustain the *famiglia*. In his testament drawn up in 1570, the patrician Zuan Matteo Bembo, whose principal family residence was in the *sestiere* of Cannaregio, requested that all of his real estate, which included houses, land, silver, and furnishings, stay in perpetual *fedecommesso* with his four sons—Lorenzo, Alvise, Marc'Antonio, and David—and their legitimate male descendants; the *casa di statio* in Cannaregio was to be divided into four residences to accommodate his heirs under one roof.²¹ In this way, the primary residence remained the physical and symbolic *embodiment* of the Bembo clan.

Many of the inventories preserved today also describe households of just one or two rooms, and modestly adorned. Smaller houses and *palazzetti* filled the streets and *campi* of the city, interspersed amongst the city's grand edifices; the architect Vincenzo Scamozzi, in his *Idea dell'architettura universale* from 1615, wrote that he

²⁰ This association between family and domicile in Venice can also be characterized by the Querini-Tiepolo conspiracy of 1310. Following a failed attempt to overthrow Doge Pietro Gradenigo by two patricians, Marco Querini and his son-in-law Baiamonte Tiepolo, the State responded with punishment to both the guilty individual who survived the insurrection, Tiepolo, as well as his household. Tiepolo was not only exiled, but his house was stripped of three sculpted reliefs of Greek marbles on its exterior wall and the wooden doors and jambs from the main portal; all were reinstalled in the church of San Vito in the Dorsoduro section of the city. The house itself was razed to the ground. The Querini palace, held in common by three brothers, was also subject to devastation. But since only two of the brothers were involved in the conspiracy, the state demolished two-thirds of the building and purchased the remaining portion, subsequently transforming it into the public slaughterhouse. The destruction and appropriation of the physical residences were acts intended to destroy the memory of the individuals and the spirit of their families. For more on this story and the ties between family and architecture, see Brown, *Private Lives*, 24-26.

²¹ Bembo's testament is discussed in greater detail in Brown, *Private Lives*, 191-195. Despite Bembo's wish, the will was disputed after his death by his son Pietro—who had entered the Church and by this time was Bishop of Veglia—on the basis that Venetian legal principle allowed “absolute equivalence” among brothers. The court determined that the house in Cannaregio could not accommodate four households and divided it into two living units, assigning the lower residence to Zuan Matteo's eldest son, Lorenzo, and the upper apartment to Pietro, along with additional properties in the city.

saw in Venice “infinite case di mediocre grandezza,” or “infinite houses of modest size.”²² A number of housing projects—sometimes large scale—were built specifically as rentals, whose tenants included well-to-do business men, tradesmen or *maestri* in specialist guilds.²³ The more modest of them were planned to house the working poor or those with some means to pay their own way, such as artisans, widows and the elderly.²⁴ Sometimes referred to as terrace housing, they generally consisted of a row of attached houses situated either along either side of a street or around a communal courtyard (fig. 12).²⁵ Orphanages, hospitals, and hospices also existed in large numbers—over one hundred of these institutions documented at the end of the sixteenth century—to care for the sick and non-working poor.²⁶ Despite emphasis on ideals of *mediocritas*, housing was thus closely tied to class and economic rank in Renaissance Venice.²⁷ In most cases, it was only when a family—noble or non-noble—had perceived that it had achieved a certain social and financial standing that they expressed this publicly through the acquisition or new construction

²² Palumbo Fossati, “La casa veneziana,” 453; Vincenzo Scamozzi, *L’idea dell’architettura universale*, (Venice 1615), pt.1, vol. III, cap. VI: 243.

²³ The developers of such buildings were usually either affluent patricians or institutions, such as the *scuole* or the many wealthy religious houses, Goy, 167. Over seventy percent of the property in Venice was owned by the patrician class, which constituted only five percent of the Republic’s population; thus, the majority of Venetians rented, including members of the nobility. Tax records show that approximately half of the city’s 1,230 patrician families lived in rental housing. Many rented by choice, preferring to invest elsewhere, or because in some cases renting was more economical. Appearances and living *nobile* seems to have been more important than owning property itself. For these statistics, see Fortini Brown, *Private Lives*, 197. For more on lower-class housing and rental property in Renaissance Venice, see also *Dietro i palazzi: tre secoli di architettura minore a Venezia, 1492-1803*, eds. Giorgio Gianighian and Paola Pavanini (Venice: Arsenale, 1984).

²⁴ Fortini Brown, *Private Lives*, 201.

²⁵ Howard, *The Architectural History of Venice*, 97.

²⁶ About sixty percent of these institutions were private foundations, although some were run by the Church, the state, and the city’s confraternities. Fortini Brown, *Private Lives*, 205.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 201.

of a residence. Venetians used the term “*casa di station*,” to denote these family palaces considered to be superior to the ordinary house.²⁸

In terms of the layout of the city, however, status boundaries were less distinct. With the exception of the Jewish ghetto and some districts of terrace housing,²⁹ the homes of the nobility were spread throughout all the *sestieri* and parishes on the island, intermingled with those of the *cittadini* and *popolani*.³⁰ Unlike in Florence, ties to a particular neighborhood or parish were not exceptionally strong in Venice.³¹ Families often moved about the various areas of the city, and therefore even members of the same noble household were not confined to a single district.³² In this way, the distribution of wealth and class across the island is entirely in keeping with the Venetian ideal of *mediocritas*: the image of civil harmony and a unified Republic, despite strict social divisions.³³

Inside the Ca'

To a large extent the urban landscape dictated the architectural plan of the Venetian domestic interior. In a cramped city segmented by canals and a chaotic network of narrow streets, space for building was limited; palaces and houses often

²⁸ On the *casa di statio*, see Juergen Schulz, “The Houses of Titian, Aretino, and Sansovino,” in *Titian: His World and His Legacy*, ed. David Rosand (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 81; Grubb, “House and Household,” 120; and Fortini Brown, *Private Lives*, 191.

²⁹ All residences in the Ghetto were rental units, as Jews were forbidden to own property. Fortini Brown, *Private Lives*, 213.

³⁰ It would have sometimes been difficult to tell the difference between patrician and non-patrician residences. As mentioned above, a number of *cittadini* and wealthy merchants lived in palaces, and they acquired the same kinds of goods as the nobility of the city to furnish them.

³¹ Studies of Venetian testaments from the fifteenth century have shown that requests for burials in parish churches were relatively low; most individuals desired to be buried in the city’s major churches, especially those under the supervision of mendicant orders. Bequests to parishes also declined during the fifteenth-century, but the frequency of ordering parochial masses actually rose over the long term. Grubb, “House and Household,” 127-129.

³² Crouzet-Pavan, “*Sopra le acque salse*,” 390-91.

³³ *Ibid*, 409.

ran right into each other, limiting wall space available for windows. Architects thus developed ways in which to increase access to natural light in residential spaces. Four parallel spine walls, running from front to back and dividing the ground plan into three axial spaces oriented perpendicular to the facade, provided the load bearing structure. The design allowed both the front and rear elevations to be pierced liberally with windows (figs. 13 & 14).³⁴ A cluster of glass openings—anywhere from two to four and typically located at the midpoint of the facade—provided illumination for the *portego*, a long, central circulation space that occupied the entire central axis of the plan on each floor, while from the exterior the design strategy contributed to the sense of openness that was typical of buildings in Venice (fig. 15).³⁵ The diarist Marin Sanudo commented that glass windows were so characteristic of the architecture of the city that in every district there was a glazier's shop where the craftsmen operated around the clock.³⁶ Despite the fact that a majority of the city's edifices have undergone centuries of remodeling, this original, tripartite arrangement is still visible today on the facades of Renaissance domiciles, even on the more modest homes that once belonged to the city's artisans and *popolani*.³⁷

Situated in the wings that flanked the *portego* to either side were smaller rooms where daily life unfolded, including *camere*—or areas that served as bedchambers and sitting rooms—the kitchen, and the occasional study. Depending on the size of the *palazzo* or *casa*, this basic plan could occupy one or more floors.

³⁴ Howard, 36.

³⁵ Palumbo Fossati, "La casa veneziana," 448.

³⁶ Sanudo quote from David Chambers and Brian Pullan, eds., with Jennifer Fletcher *Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: B. Blackwell, 1992), 5.

³⁷ Goy, 63.

The *portego* on the ground level normally functioned as a storeroom, whether related to work or home, while additional bedrooms, offices, and storage spaces were located in attics (*soffitte*) and mezzanine levels (*l'ammazzato* or *mezà*). Courtyards and gardens, too, were frequent components of the home; normally positioned at the rear or along one of the side wings, these exterior environments provided another point at which light could enter the interior spaces.

Whether arriving by boat or from the street, the first room one entered upon reaching the family's living quarters was its largest—the *portego*. Situated both physically and conceptually in between the outside world of work and public life and the more personal spaces of the family, it was not an area of the home where daily household activities normally took place, and as a result contained fewer objects. In fact, when not in use, it was sometimes used as additional storage space; for example, the upstairs *portego* of the bricklayer named Lazzarini contained not only a cabinet full of glasses and *masserizie di casa*, but also various instruments for making bread and a container full of flour.³⁸ Given its ample size, the *portego* served as an area for entertainment, and undoubtedly the room would have been transformed for such occasions. Banquets, receptions, and musical concerts frequently occurred in the hall and were likely grand spectacles, given the repeated passage of sumptuary legislation in the sixteenth century on the part of the Venetian government to try to restrict such displays of consumption in private residences and to prevent any moral disorder.³⁹

³⁸ Palumbo Fossati, "La casa veneziana," 474.

³⁹ Fortini Brown, "Behind the Walls." Musical instruments appear with great frequency in Venetian inventories. According to one study by Isabella Palumbo Fossati, while less than a third of wealthy *cittadino* merchant families owned books, all had at least two musical instruments; the same held true for artisan families, while patrician homes had at least that many, and often times more. "La casa veneziane di Gioseffo Zarlino," op. cit., 636.

According to Patricia Fortini Brown, as a privileged space that defined the family, “the function of the *portego*, first and foremost, was display.”⁴⁰ Since not all visitors to the *casa* would be invited into the more personal chambers of the owner, the *portego* operated as a kind of receiving room and thus there was always the potential that it would be seen.

Despite the lack of everyday use of this room, as the most public of the interior spaces appearance mattered, and the decoration and form of the *portego* would have undoubtedly impressed those who experienced it. The sets of large windows situated at either end of this long hall filled the space with light, producing a glittering and brilliant effect that would have been further enhanced by the room’s abundance of reflected surfaces, most notably the highly polished *terrazzo* floors, and in some cases the mirrors and arms and armor that were exhibited here. Wooden beams typically ran across the ceiling, sometimes decoratively painted or even papered, and on rare occasions the highest portion of the walls, referred to as the *soffitto*, was ornamented with painted and sculpted friezes. Despite the *portego*’s more modest furnishings in terms of numbers, one could almost always find chairs and benches on which to sit, and occasionally this central hall included chests and/or a *credenza*, a piece of furniture typical in the Renaissance interior on which the family’s expensive tableware, often made of glass and silver, were both stored and displayed.⁴¹ Walls were adorned with fabrics and tapestries, referred to by names such as *tapetti*, *arazzi* or *razzi*, *spalliere*, and *antiporte*, which not only protected

⁴⁰ Brown, *Private Lives*, 171.

⁴¹ Two papers on the *credenza* were presented at the first part of the “A casa” symposium at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London: Allen J. Grieco, “Dining Rituals, the Credenza and the Birth of the Dining Room,” and Beth Holman, “The Credenza in Early Modern Italy: *Vas quasi corpus*.”

domestic spaces from the cold, damp winters characteristic of the lagoon, but also contributed to the beauty and visual splendor of this interior hall. Inventories consistently listed paintings amongst the goods of the typical Venetian *portego*, as well. These pictures comprised family portraits, moralizing religious narratives, and traditional devotional images, including the Madonna and Child, Christ, and various saints, all of which will be discussed below.

The *camera* was the other principal room of the Venetian home, and it was here where the family principally spent its time. In the Renaissance these rooms often were the site of activities that included not only sleeping, but also: eating; domestic chores, such as sewing and lace-making; leisure activities; and sometimes even business transactions if the visitor or client was privileged enough to gain access into these more personal spaces. Inventories seem to reveal a hierarchy of *camere*; the number and kinds of goods kept in rooms—along with the person or people who principally used the room—often determined the “rank” of a space. Lesser rooms, such as those reserved for servants and children, were referred to by diminutive names such as *camerette*, *camera piccola*, or *sopraletti*, and generally consisted of not much more than a bed and a chest or two in which objects of various sorts could be stored. The main bedroom belonging to the male head of the household, on the other hand, was full of both practical goods and items meant to astonish the viewer. These chambers were given appellations such as “camera del testador,” “camera dove morì...,” “camera dove dormiva e viveva...,” and sometimes the impressive “camera d’oro,” or “room of gold,” a term that likely pertained to the gilded ceilings, wall hangings, and furniture covered or accented with gold, as well as some of the smaller

details of the room, including paintings. For example, the *camera d'oro* of Gerolamo Bianco, son of the notary Francesco, seems to have been named as such partially because of the gilded picture of the Madonna and a mirror that it contained.⁴²

The walls of the typical *camera*, like those of the *portego*, were lined with tapestries and fabrics, ranging from simple solid colors to wall hangings ornamented with figures, coats of arms, and floral patterns. Red and green were the dominant colors in Venetian homes, particularly in more modest households, but it was not uncommon to find shades derived from more costly pigments, such as violet and turquoise, in addition to the gold that frequently adorned furniture and architectural ornaments. Animal pelts and *cuori d'oro*, or gilded leather, also hung along the walls, adding to the sumptuous character of these residential spaces (fig. 16). Carpets are recorded, too, but more often they were placed on top of tables, chairs, and chests rather than on the floor, a custom demonstrated in the 1537 inventory of Domenico Formento, who had both tapestries and a carpet “da tavola,” or “for the table,”⁴³ as well as in Lorenzo Lotto’s portrait of his landlord Giovanni della Volta and his family (1547), which portrays an expensive Turkish carpet is draped over the table around which the father, mother, and children are seated (fig. 17).⁴⁴

The principal component of the *camera* was, of course, the bed, or *letto*, and rooms of this type frequently contained more than one. Beds in sixteenth-century Venice were sometimes referred to as *lettiera*—a term that refers to a bed of considerable dimensions—or *caviola*, which alludes to a bed with wheels that could

⁴² ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 40, n. 66, 23 June 1560.

⁴³ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 49.

⁴⁴ According to the statistics of Isabella Palumbo Fossati, in the second half of the sixteenth century, 60% of the inventories that record carpets designate their placement on surfaces like tables and chests, while only in the remaining 40% were they found on the floor, “La casa veneziana,” 467.

be moved out of the way during the day.⁴⁵ Some *letti* are described as “a colonne” and complete with a “cielo” or “pavion,” words that indicated a canopied structure, perhaps not dissimilar to the bed depicted by Vittore Carpaccio in his *Dream of Saint Ursula* from the cycle of paintings he completed for the Scuola di Sant’Orsola in 1495-1496 (fig. 18).⁴⁶ An example of one of these more elaborate canopied beds is recorded in the 1557 inventory of Francesco Vedova, who owned “una lettiera gra[n]da de nogara in colone co[n] il suo ciel et do[n]na nuda,”⁴⁷ in other words, a large covered bed made from walnut, with an image of a female nude, presumably displayed on the underside of the canopy. The erotic picture, kept largely out of normal view, perhaps served as a fertility talisman through its placement directly over the bed.⁴⁸

Beds were furnished with mattresses (*materassi*), pillows (*cussini*), sheets (*linzuoli* or *ninzuoli*) and covers (*coperti* or *coltre*); additional linens were stored in chests and constituted some of the costliest items of the domestic interior.⁴⁹ Like most Venetian furnishings, including tables and chairs, beds were typically constructed from wood, the favored type being *noghera*—the Venetian word for *noce* or walnut—although few notaries do record some constructed from iron (*ferro*).

⁴⁵ Palumbo Fossati, “La casa veneziana,” 469. Not all inventories, however, record beds in the *camere*. This may be because some beds were built into walls; not considered movable goods, they were thus omitted from these household registers. Fortini Brown, *Private Lives*, 77.

⁴⁶ *Cielo* (*capocielo*, or *baldacchino*) and *pavion* (*padiglione*). Palumbo Fossati, “La casa veneziana,” 469-470.

⁴⁷ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 39, n. 6.

⁴⁸ It has been conjectured that the nudes painted on the backs of the lids of Florentine *cassone*, or marriage chests, also functions as reproductive talismans. Ernst H. Gombrich, “Apollonio di Giovanni: A Florentine *cassone* workshop seen through the eyes of a humanist poet,” in *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London: Phaidon, 1966), 11-28: 21.

⁴⁹ In those few inventories in which monetary values are given, linens were even more expensive than works of art. They also typically comprised part of the dowry, and on occasion were amongst the few domestic goods that testators specifically singled out in their wills to be handed down to family members or other benefactors, further indication of their financial and sentimental worth.

Regardless of the material, it was not uncommon for beds and other domestic furniture to be gilded or painted,⁵⁰ thus adding to the opulent effect of interior spaces of which visitors to the lagoon city, like Fra Pietro Casola, frequently took note.

As touched upon above, chests, or *casse*, were multi-purpose pieces of furniture that were plentiful in nearly all rooms of the standard Venetian residence, and their abundant presence indicates a kind of orderliness desired within domestic spaces (fig. 19). Frequently found in these containers were linens and attire for men, women, and children. Books, too were commonly stored in chests and trunks, and sometimes even paintings, either as a means to protect certain precious and potent images, or to store old ones that were broken, worn, or simply fell out of favor; the latter was probably the case for the painting of the Annunciation, described in the inventory of the *cittadino* Angelo Savina as “vecchia,” and stowed away in a *cassa*.⁵¹ During the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance, chests served as both storage and seating, but as furniture became more specialized in the sixteenth century and chairs more frequent in household spaces, this latter function quickly became obsolete. *Casse* of the Cinquecento were thus more decorative than chests of preceding centuries (fig. 20), incorporating figures, coats of arms, and other decorative elements in both painted and sculpted form.⁵²

Armoires and cabinets were another common component of Venetian homes, holding everything from clothing and dishes to painting and documents. Smaller

⁵⁰ Palumbo Fossati, “La casa veneziana,” 469,

⁵¹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 38, n. 40.

⁵² Brown, *Private Lives*, 99. The changes in the appearance of chests during the Renaissance are occasionally reflected in inventories where *casse* are often described as painted with figures and emblematic devices. For example, in the *camera granda* described in the 1573 inventory of Marieta Dandolo, wife of the nobleman Andrea Bragadin, there was a chest painted green with the Bragadin arms. ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 44.

chests and boxes are also recorded—with names like *cassetta*, *cassettina*, *scatolo*, *cofanetto*, and *stipetto*—and they typically stored precious goods such as money and jewelry. These tiny containers were probably as prized as the possessions they held; some were decorated using techniques of *pastiglia*, *intarsia*, and *gilding* (fig. 21), incorporating fine woods, leathers, or expensive materials such as ivory and ebony. Chests and boxes made from a Middle Eastern method of embossed metal, referred to in the inventories as *alla damaschina*, were also widespread in households of the lagoon.⁵³ This decorative technique was applied to other domestic items, as well, like pitchers, water basins, lamps, and perfume burners (fig. 22). Thus, even in the smallest details of the household interior, Venice’s position in an international trading network could be observed.

The *studio*, or study, was also sometimes a part of the Venetian *casa*, and they became increasingly more common in the sixteenth century when domestic spaces moved away from their multi-purpose nature and became increasingly reserved for dedicated purposes.⁵⁴ The study was a space dedicated to intellectual pursuits and the showcasing of collections of artistic objects and other material rarities. In Venice, such an area was closely associated with the bedchamber of the male head of the household and given notations in the inventories, such as “il studio del ditto camera,” it is logical to conclude that the study was located within or directly adjacent to this room. As places of retreat, studies were personal environments yet conceived of with a particular “public” audience in mind; access to this room was thus restricted to the

⁵³ Fortini Brown, *Private Lives*, 86.

⁵⁴ For more on the role of the study in the Renaissance, see Dora Thornton, *The Scholar in His Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997); and Fortini Brown, *Private Lives*, chap. 8, “Theaters of the World.”

privileged few. In addition to scholarly pursuits that the *studio* served, it was intended as a quiet haven where meditation and prayer took place, an aspect of the study that will be discussed in greater detail in the Chapter Three.

Merchants were apt to conduct business from their residences, adding to the activity of day-to-day household life. In the early Renaissance the name *casa-fondaco* was applied to those palaces that served as both living quarters and centers for commerce, deriving from the Arabic word *funduq*, or trading post;⁵⁵ this dual function continued to affect the character of Venetian domestic architecture into the Cinquecento. Rooms on the ground floor, particularly the *portego* with its generous dimensions, served well as stockrooms, and were sometimes given the name *caneva*, or cellar, to indicate this function. Shops and *botteghe* were also situated on the street level, while the offices of merchants were typically located on the landing leading up to the first floor allowing the businessman to move easily between the places of commerce and the family's living quarters above.⁵⁶

Access to the personal chambers of a family's living quarters was limited to people outside the household, but far from restricted, and such visits were carefully orchestrated encounters on the part of both caller and host. Depending on the size or structure of a domicile, as well as the personality of the patron, business might be conducted within the bedchamber, but privileged guests were often invited into these spaces with the primary purpose to view the prized possession of the owner. The sixteenth century was a period that Patricia Fortini Brown has characterized as the

⁵⁵ Howard, 36.

⁵⁶ Offices are not always given a name in inventories, but are instead referred to in terms of their location in the house—"in meza"—the Venetian word for mezzanine. Thornton, *Scholar in His Study*, 77; and Palumbo Fossati, "La casa veneziana," 477.

“advent of the civic minded collector.”⁵⁷ Many wealthy families and individuals began to actively acquire objects of aesthetic beauty and an academic scope, including antiquities, paintings by particular artists, medals, books, gems, and “curiosities” from around the world. Although these collections in many instances became an integral aspect of the familial environment—usually a part of the *studio*—they were often devised with a broader public in mind, consisting of distinguished guests and intellectuals. Using the house of Giacomo Contarini as an example, Francesco Sansovino described this phenomenon as the *casa aperta*, or “open house.” A member of Venice’s patrician class Contarini’s apartment was constantly filled with guests to see his famed library, collection of paintings by the city’s greatest artists, and “other things made by hand.”⁵⁸ Another example of a *casa aperta* was the home of the patrician and prominent numismatist Sebastiano Erizzo. A letter by Erizzo testifies to the visit of the architect Piero Ligorio to the nobleman’s prized collection of more than 1900 medals.⁵⁹ Although it could serve as a site for personal sanctuary, between servants and extended family, business dealings, and social gatherings, the Venetian home was, for the most part, a busy place where true privacy was scarce.⁶⁰ The position of the *casa* between communal and individual thus influenced the visual culture that took shape within its walls, including that of religion and its related concerns.

⁵⁷ Brown, *Private Lives*, 243.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁵⁹ Palumbo Fossati, “Il Collezionista Sebastiano Erizzo,” 211.

⁶⁰ Grubb, “House and Household,” 125.

Il quadro

One of the most notable aspects of sixteenth-century Venetian household inventories is the predominance of the *quadro*, or painting, amongst the contents. In addition to the tapestries and coverings that adorned the walls of the Venetian *casa*, few partitions would have been bare of paintings. In Venice, the growing rate of paintings in the domestic environment—in terms of quantity and the range of types—was a phenomenon that flourished in the Cinquecento, but with roots dating back to the preceding century, if not further. Paintings are listed in the inventories from the Quattrocento, although rarely did a family own more than one. In the fifteenth century, domestic pictures normally were recorded simply as “una ancona,” a term that designated a holy image, either painted or carved in low relief, that was placed above an altar or in a domestic space for devotional purposes; the use of this word thus indicates—along with its interchangeability of the term from ecclesiastical to household setting—that the emphasis was on the functional status of the image rather than appearance or subject alone. *Ancone* often maintained an architectonic character in terms of their framing, and according to inventories from fifteenth-century Venice, they were commonly kept inside cabinets, much like the small *ancona* listed amongst the domestic goods in the 1459 inventory of a woman named Barbarella Michiel, wife of Nicolò, from the district of San Antonio: “1 armaruol co[n] 1^a anchoneta.”⁶¹

The presence of paintings in the homes of Venetians increased at a rapid rate during the sixteenth century, and it was not a trend felt only in the homes of the city’s patrician class. Almost 90% of homes owned at least one “quadro.” According to

⁶¹ ASV, Procuratori di San Marco (hereafter PSM), Atti Citra, b. 103. An “armaruol” is a Venetian term for *armadi*, which means cupboard or cabinet. Giuseppe Boerio, *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano*, 2d ed. (Venice: G. Cecchini, 1856).

statistics provided by Isabella Palumbo Fossati based on her research of more than 800 Venetian inventories from 1550 to 1610, paintings were present in seventy percent of non-noble households, and many of these families possessed several of them;⁶² sixty percent of merchant homes owned more than fifteen paintings, and fifteen percent had more than thirty.⁶³ The occurrence of painting collections in the households of Venice was recognized even in its own time; the patrician Marcantonio Michiel, for example, went to considerable lengths to record the captivating images displayed in the homes of the region's most prominent families, taking specific note of who owned what by whom.⁶⁴ The subjects of paintings compiled in both Michiel's notes and inventories from the period spread the gamut, but it is safe to conclude that sacred subjects, by far, were the most numerous. Even if a household owned only one painting, this picture was undoubtedly religious. While this fact is commented upon by scholars, sacred domestic images are nonetheless the very works that escape their concern, the majority choosing to focus their attention instead on mythologies, allegories, and portraits.⁶⁵

Despite the commonness of holy pictures in household interiors, Venetian interests in works of art were varied, and the secular subjects that would have been

⁶² Palumbo Fossati, "La casa veneziana," 478.

⁶³ Amongst the patrician classes, 30% had only 5 or 6, another 35% between 6 and 20, while another 30% owned more than twenty paintings. *Ibid.*, 480-481.

⁶⁴ Theodor von Frimmel, *Der Anonimo Morelliano: Marcanton Michiel's Notizie d'opere del disegno* (Vienna: Graeser, 1888).

⁶⁵ Michel Hochmann, for example, in a paper he delivered in September 2003 on paintings in sixteenth-century Venetian collections, presented the most popular themes that could be found in households of the Republic and the number of times they appear in inventories. While religious images topped his list, he cited the presence of profane subjects as "more significant." Michel Hochmann, "I soggetti pittorici nelle collezioni veneziane del Cinquecento," paper presented at the conference titled "Il collezionismo a Venezia e nel Veneto ai tempi della Serenissima," Venice, 21-25 September 2003. Discussions of sacred images in the work of the two scholars most dedicated to the subject of the Venetian Renaissance interior—Patricia Fortini Brown and Isabella Palumbo Fossati—are very brief. Fortini Brown, *Art and Life*, 128-129, and *Private Lives*, 176; Palumbo Fossati, 'L'interno della casa,' 131-132, and 'La casa veneziana,' 478-479.

found within these spaces are exceptionally intriguing. After religious themes, which will be discussed in greater detail below, portraits were probably the most popular of the genres of domestic paintings. The dwellings of the Republic housed not only the likenesses of family members, but on occasion, prominent figures of both past and present. For example, Nicolò Franceschi, a member of the city's patrician class, possessed a large collection of works of art, which included a portrait of Doge Andrea Gritti (1532-1538), Emperor Charles V (1515-1556), and "il Re Christianissimo," or "the most Christian king," perhaps a reference to either another Holy Roman Emperor, or Charles V's successor, Philip II of Spain (1556-1598).⁶⁶ Giovanni Paolo Sommariva, who died in 1539, possessed a portrait of Petrarch,⁶⁷ while a barber from the district of Sant'Angelo, named Filippo, was the owner of a representation of a different bard, the Emilian poet Ludovico Ariosto.⁶⁸

Allegories and more generic figural types—like female nudes, beautiful women, warriors, and eastern personages—also were common in Venetian residences. The home of Giacomo dalla Vedova (the contents of which were recorded in 1544), contained a very nondescript painting with a head; a picture of a woman writing; an armed man; and a portrait of the "Gran Turcho," perhaps an image similar to the portrait of the Sultan Mehmet II (1432-1481) painted in 1480 and attributed to Gentile Bellini, who traveled to the court of the sultan in Constantinople

⁶⁶ ASV, Canc, Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 35 (1577). Another curious example is that of Giovanni Mini, whose inventory was drawn up on September 8, 1533. Mini owned "una figura di Papa Julio" presumably referring to Julius II, but the use of the phrase "una figura" rather than "un quadro" suggests that the portrait was three-dimensional, either a sculpture or some kind of holy doll bearing the resemblance of the pope. ASV, Canc, Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 35, n. 55

⁶⁷ ASV, Canc, Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 80.

⁶⁸ ASV, Canc, Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 43, n. 6 (1589).

the year prior (fig. 23).⁶⁹ Gasparo Segezi, a miniaturist who lived in the parish of S. Barnaba and whose inventory was compiled in 1576, also owned a number of interesting figural types; he had in his possession: four portraits of ancient emperors, two identified as Caesar Augustus and Hadrian, and another described as a gesso relief; a portrait of a woman “in camisa,” or an undergarment, perhaps similar to the female beauties wearing loose fitting dressing gowns painted by a number of prominent artists working in the Veneto during the first half of the Cinquecento (fig. 24); a female nude; a portrait of a woman dressed *alla squizzara* [?]; a large painting of the Roman emperor Nero; a small painting of a nude woman with a snake in hand—presumably a picture of Cleopatra—; and two paintings of “vecchi,” or figures representing old age, calling to mind Giorgione’s famous painting that bears the image of an elderly woman and the inscription “col tempo,” a visual and textual reminder of the inescapable effects of time (fig. 25).⁷⁰

Landscapes, too, became ever more prevalent in Venetian households as the century wore on, corresponding to the emergence of this pictorial type as an independent genre in European art. Amongst numerous other works of art, the nobleman Alvise Bragadin of Venice had a landscape painting in a walnut frame in a *camera* that overlooked the street, as well as four other landscapes that were exhibited in the *portego* of his palace, which were described as “grandi” and “de fiandra,” indicating that these were large pictures painted in the Flemish style.⁷¹ The *portego* of another Venetian resident, Michele Melchiorre, also displayed “diese quadri de paesi in carta,” or “ten pictures of landscapes on paper,” an indication that they were

⁶⁹ ASV, Canc, Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 37, n., 1.

⁷⁰ ASV, Canc, Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 32.

⁷¹ ASV, Canc, Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 40, n. 45 (1566).

probably prints rather than paintings.⁷² There is even evidence that genre scenes were collected at this early date; the 1534 inventory of the nobleman Nicolò Zorzi, son of Bernardo, records a small painting on canvas of a tavern and described as “d[i]ponente,” meaning from the West, nomenclature used in Venice to describe works from the Flemish school, which specialized in such paintings of everyday life.⁷³

Also frequently displayed in the homes of the Republic were maps and cartographic images. Perhaps the most famous surviving examples of these in Venice are the canvas paintings by Jacopo Gastaldi of geographic maps that decorate the *Sala dello scudo* in the Palazzo Ducale. Those displayed in the average Venetian *casa* were, naturally, more modest in scale. Generally referred with vague terminology like “cosmografia” or “mappi,” these pictures could have included world and country maps, or views of capital cities, like Rome, Paris, or London. Globes, called *mappamondi*, also appear with regularity. Andrea Baretta, for example, owned one globe, as well as four paintings of “Asia, Afrecha, et Europa, et Peru,” images that may have been allegorical figures representing the four quadrants of the world.⁷⁴ As the example of Baretta suggests, cartographic images reflected the mercantile lifestyle that had long been a tradition in Venice. They became popular in the domestic context at an ironic moment in the mercantile history of the Republic, a period that saw the simultaneous expansion of the known world through discovery of new lands and the retraction of Venice’s commercial empire due to the loss of trading posts in the East to the Turks and the rise of foreign competition. Perhaps the placement of

⁷² ASV, Canc, Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 4 (1577).

⁷³ ASV, Canc, Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 35, n. 48.

⁷⁴ ASV, Canc, Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 43, n. 48 (1587)

such images around the house served as a reminder of both past glories and present, yet unattainable, desires.⁷⁵

As varied as the pictures that hung in the Venetian *case* were, religious paintings by far dominated wall space of all social classes, in all districts of the city. The Madonna—protectress of the city of Venice—was the most ubiquitous image found in the family quarters. Even in those few residences where only a handful of pious objects are listed, an image of the Virgin was almost always present. The numerous panels of the Madonna and Child executed by Giovanni Bellini and his workshop were principally produced and acquired for the domestic sphere. Two inventories actually mention works purported to be the creation of the Venetian artist; one specifically identifies the subject of the painting as that of the Madonna, while the other is more vague, listing the item as, “uno quadro doro el qual si disse esser d[i] ma[no] d[i] Zuanbelin” (“a gold [i.e. gilded] painting which is said to be by the hand of Giovanni Bellini.”)⁷⁶ The series of notebooks compiled by the Venetian connoisseur and collector Marcantonio Michiel in the 1520s and 1530s also recorded images by the hand of Bellini in the homes of the region’s wealthy nobles and merchants, like the half-length image of the Madonna and Child that was once in the house of Antonio Pasqualino.⁷⁷

More than a third of the surviving paintings attributed to Giovanni Bellini and his workshop are devotional in scope, representing the half-length Madonna and Child, and the dozens of panels and canvases that today survive in museums and

⁷⁵ Federica Ambrosina, “‘Descrittioni del mondo’ nelle case venete dei secoli xvi e xvii,” in *Archivio Veneto* n. 152 (1981): 67-79.

⁷⁶ ASV, Canc, Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 37, n. 14 (Vettore, segador di legno dell’Arsenale, i.e. woodcutter of the Arsenale. 1543); and b. 39, n. 18 (Francesco Bernardo, cavaliere, 1556).

⁷⁷ Frimmel, 94.

private collections—such as the so-called Alberetti Madonna in the Gallerie dell’Accademia in Venice, completed by Bellini himself in 1487 (fig. 26)—testify to the artist’s success as a painter of devout images.⁷⁸ It is not merely numbers alone that speak to Bellini’s reputation in the lagoon; the lines and colors on the panels themselves reveal the popularity of certain designs. Working in a manner that considered the practical demands of the marketplace in combination with artistic intellect and creativity, Bellini’s studio repeated successful compositions with slight deviations through the use of cartoons, or the model served as a point of departure for a more varied composition. The reutilization of drawings can be seen in two versions of the same composition of the Madonna and Child, one located in the church of Santa Maria dell’Orto until its unfortunate theft in 1993 (fig. 27)—originally the personal devotional painting of the merchant Luca Navagero before he bequeathed it to the church in 1485—and its near-replica in the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort-Worth (fig. 28).⁷⁹

Bellini’s achievements prompted many followers outside his studio to produce images that mimicked the master’s subjects and compositions. One example is the *Madonna and Child in a Landscape*, produced by an unknown artist of the Veneto school at the beginning of the sixteenth century, today part of the collection of Giorgio Franchini housed in the Ca’ d’Oro in Venice (fig. 29); the horizontal format, the posture of the Virgin and her infant son seated in the countryside as a sign of humility, and the saturated colors all call to mind the *Madonna of the Meadow* by

⁷⁸ Christiansen, “Giovanni Bellini e la maniera devota,” 125.

⁷⁹ Through careful examination of paintings with the use of x-rays and reflectography, Keith Christiansen has determined the artist and his shop frequently recycled cartoons for figures or parts of figures. Christiansen, “Giovanni Bellini e la maniera devota,” 126-127; and Rona Goffen, “Icon and Vision,” 511-512.

Giovanni Bellini now in London (fig. 30). Successful devotional images could thus be accessed by an audience of consumers that extended beyond the city's affluent and noble classes. Nearly all of the well-known painters working in and around Venice during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—like Antonello and Bartolomeo Vivarini (fig. 31), Cima da Conegliano, Jacopo Palma il Vecchio, and Titian (fig. 32)—generated pictures of the Madonna and Child, as well.

In addition to works by the aforementioned painters—artists who would come to epitomize Venetian Renaissance painting—inhabitants of the Republic were ardent admirers of the Byzantine manner. Throughout the Cinquecento, Venetian inventories regularly list paintings—normally of the Madonna—described as “alle greche,” or in the Greek style (figs. 33 & 34). Beginning in the second half of the fifteenth century, a market for these Byzantine Madonnas rapidly expanded in the West, and it remained strong in Venice over the next century and a half, long after the style fell out of favor elsewhere in Italy and Europe. Icons of the Virgin were imported by the hundreds from Crete, which had been under Venetian occupation since the sack of the Eastern capital. For example, in a document dated to 1499, a Venetian and Greek dealer ordered from three painters in Candia a total of 700 icons of the Madonna in both Latin and Greek styles to be prepared in only 45 days, intended for Western export.⁸⁰ Devotional panels executed in a Byzantine style were also produced locally by artists from the large Greek community that had formed in

⁸⁰ Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, “Taste and the Market in Cretan Icons in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” in *From Byzantium to El Greco: Greek Frescoes and Icons*, ed. Myrtali Acheimastou-Potamianou (Athens: Greek Ministry of Culture: Byzantine Museum of Athens, 1987), 52; and Thalia Gouma-Peterson, “The Icon as Cultural Presence after 1453,” in *Icon*, ed. Gary Vikan (Washington, DC: The Trust for Museum Exhibitions: Baltimore: The Walters Art Gallery, 1988), 52.

the Republic—numbering fifteen thousand by 1580.⁸¹ The term *madonnero* was even adopted in the lagoon area to distinguish the painters of religious icons from other artists practicing there.⁸²

Following images of the Madonna in terms of popularity were representations of Christ. Sometimes references are ambiguous as to the exact form such depictions took, mentioning these pictures simply as “un Christo” or “un quadro di Christo.” Other times the notary is more specific with the subject matter, citing crucifixions and *pietàs*, the “Christo passo,” or “Dead Christ,” and the “Salvator Mundi,” as well as scenes specific to the Passion of Jesus, like the Agony in the Garden, and Christ at the Column. The small painting of *Christ Blessing* from around 1512-1515 by the Bergamese artist Andrea Previtali (fig. 35) and the *Dead Christ Between Two Angels* by Giovanni Bellini from 1468 (fig. 36), are two examples of the kinds of Christocentric devotional images that could have adorned the walls of Venetian *case* in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Although two very different images of Jesus—one triumphant, the other lifeless—both artists utilized compositional strategies popular in Venice during the period, such as solid backgrounds and the half-length figural format, to make Christ more immediately present to the beholder. The popularity of Passion imagery dealing with the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus had much to do with contemporary currents in lay piety that centered on Christ and the Eucharist, perpetuated through both oral and written channels. Christo-

⁸¹ Nano Chatzidakis, “Icon Painting in Crete during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” in *From Byzantium to El Greco*, op. cit., 48; and Gouma-Peterson, 53.

⁸² Eunice D. Howe, “Madonnero,” in *The Dictionary of Art*, in 34 vols., ed. Jane Turner (New York: Grove’s Dictionaries, 1996) vol 20: 51-52.:51; and Brown, *Art and Life*, 128-129. See also Manolis Chatzidakis, “La pittura des ‘madonneri’ ou ‘vénéto-crétoise’ et sa destination,” in *Venezia centro di mediazione tra Oriente e Occidente, secoli XV-XVI: Aspetti e problemi*, vol. 2, ed. Hans-Georg Beck et al., (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1977), 675-690: 675.

centric imagery and personal devotion is a subject that will be taken up in greater detail in Chapter Two.

Saints, too, figured heavily in the visual culture of the majority of residences of the Republic. As miracle-working persons who had achieved the special favor of God and, sometimes, the Church, saints served as divine intercessors on behalf of humankind, affording protection and well-being to his or her devotees, in addition to providing didactic models of morality and pious behavior.⁸³ The more popular household saints were those that had gained the reputation as the most successful advocates before God, effectively responding to the physical and spiritual needs of families and individuals.⁸⁴ At times the relationship was especially personal for a member of the household, as name saints and patron saints of professions were commonly invoked for their assistance, and this connection was expressed and reinforced through visual means within the domestic environment. For example, hanging in the *camera* of the home occupied by the surgeon Giorgio Agazi, were two *spalliere* that portrayed Saints Cosmos and Damian, the patron saints of medical professionals.⁸⁵

Saints common throughout Europe during the Renaissance, such as Jerome, Sebastian, Roch, Christopher, George, Mary Magdalene, John the Baptist, Francis, Barbara, and Catherine, were also amongst the most popular in the households of the Republic, and as will be demonstrated in Chapter Four, some of these holy figures

⁸³ For general references on saints in medieval and Renaissance culture, see: Peter Brown, *The Cult of Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity (The Haskell Lecture Series on History of Religions)*, new ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Thomas Head, ed. *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 2001); and Mary Ann Stouck, ed. *Medieval Saints: A Reader* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1998).

⁸⁴ Irene Vaslef, "The Role of St. Roch as a Plague Saint: a Late Medieval Hagiographic Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1984), 138.

⁸⁵ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 40, n. 72 (1560).

had specifically Venetian connections, which motivated their acquisition. More obscure saints also appear from time to time, like Saints Eustachio and Giustina (fig. 37). By far, Jerome was the most popular household saint, appearing at least one hundred times in Venetian inventories, followed closely by Mary Magdalene. There thus seems to be a clear correlation between the popularity of these two pious personages in the domestic sphere and the large number of surviving pictures created during the period by artists throughout Europe and in the Veneto, in particular, which bear their image. The tiny panel of St. Jerome in a landscape painted by Cima da Conegliano (fig. 38) dating to the first decade of the sixteenth century is one example of many from the region featuring the scholarly saint and its small dimensions (32.1 x 25.4 cm) imply that it was made for more personal viewing rather than to adorn an altar or a church. Titian's multiple versions of the Magdalene (fig. 39) from the mid-sixteenth century were created at the request of some of Europe's most prominent figures. One inventory describes a picture of the Magdalene much like the sensual and ecstatic versions of the Magdalene produced by Titian and his workshop beginning in the mid-Cinquecento. The 1526 register of household goods once belonging to a potter named Bernardino di Redaldi records a large canvas with "una madalena destesa," or, a Magdalene "aroused" or "awakened."⁸⁶ Since Redaldi's inventory dates to several years before the first known work of this type by the Venetian master, there may have been precedents to Titian's pictorial invention.

The Holy Family, a subject compatible with the domestic environment, was another well-liked theme for household spaces. An interesting example of such an image is the *Madonna and Child with Saint Joseph*, painted by Bartolomeo Montagna

⁸⁶ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 34, n. 32.

and today in the Museo Correr. In many ways the head of Saint Joseph positioned in the lower right-hand corner seems like an afterthought, perhaps painted in later at the request of a buyer who had a particular devotion to this holy personage, or who wanted a picture of the entire family unit to serve as a paradigm for his household. During the Counter Reformation, the Catholic Church promoted Saint Joseph as the ideal father, the head of the household on earth, and the specially-appointed protector of Mary and Jesus. His cult flourished in Venice and Northern Italy, however, as early as the late Quattrocento, evident in the localized initiation of the celebration of his feast day and the foundation of altars, chapels, churches and religious confraternities in his name,⁸⁷ as well as devotion in the home, expressed in part through the display of images of the saint and the Holy Family.

The *sacre conversazioni*, or “holy conversations,” which were so popular on church altars in Venice also made their way into domestic spaces during the sixteenth century. Such images became a staple of the workshop of the Venetian artist Palma Vecchio, and a number of them are recorded in the inventory of the artist’s studio taken after his death in 1529.⁸⁸ One of the images assumed to be part of this inventory is the *Holy Family with Saint Catherine and another Female Saint*, dated to the years 1515-16 and today in the collection of Fürsten von Liechtenstein in Vaduz (fig. 40).⁸⁹ Of the many paintings registered in the painter’s studio, only a handful

⁸⁷ Carolyn C. Wilson, “The Cult of St. Joseph in Early Cinquecento Venice and the Testimony of Marino Sanudo’s *Diaries*” *Studi Veneziani* XLVII (2004): 287-312.

⁸⁸ The inventory is preserved in ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 34, n. 88. The entire inventory is transcribed in Philip Rylands, *Palma Vecchio* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), appendix N: 346-350.

⁸⁹ This canvas corresponds to painting number 37 in Ryland’s transcription of the inventory of Palma Vecchio’s studio. In addition to the similarities in subject, the seemingly unfinished state of the right side of the canvas, including the figure of Joseph, have led scholars to conclude that this was one of the paintings left in the artist’s workshop at the time of his death.

appear to have been attached to specific commissions; the remainder presumably were made on speculation for the market, and thus constitute the kinds of pictures that people would have purchased for their homes.

While the household *sacre conversazioni* clearly borrowed from the imagery popular in the ecclesiastical context, artists made formal adjustments to suit domestic viewing. In contrast to the regal, full-length vertical compositions typical of Venetian altarpieces, like the famous *sacra conversazione* from the church of San Giobbe painted by Giovanni Bellini and today preserved in the Gallerie dell'Accademia (fig. 41), the majority of “holy conversations” intended for the domestic sphere assumed a horizontal orientation. Artists presented figures in the half-length format used in much of the Passion imagery designed for personal devotion in order to bring the protagonists represented on the panel or canvas visually closer to viewer. One example is the *Madonna and Child with the Infant Saint John the Baptist, Saint Jerome and Saint Peter* attributed to an artist known as Filippo da Verona and painted in the early sixteenth century (fig. 42). In Filippo’s painting, the background is a simple green cloth, which reduces the space the figures occupy, forcing them into the viewer’s realm. Their presence is also enhanced through their subtle actions. Saint John the Baptist offers a spider as food for the goldfinch that the Christ child holds on a string. Although the goldfinch was a traditional symbol of Christ’s Passion, in early modern Europe they were also kept as pets. In the household context, the small bird reflects not only the impending sacrifice of Jesus, but also typical youthful play and interaction, a visual element that would have resonated with family members viewing the image in their daily environment.

As the first few decades of the Cinquecento wore on, more and more artists of these domestic *sacre conversazioni*, like Titian and Palma Vecchio, began to place full-length, *seated* figures in sun-drenched landscapes. This was a compositional adjustment that allowed the retention of the broad format that had achieved such success with private patrons as well as the incorporation of greater interactivity amongst the figures represented, a quality already present in many of the half-length domestic images of the Holy Family and saints, like Filippo's painting discussed above. One example of this new approach to the *sacra conversazione* is the *Aldobrandini Madonna* painted by Titian around 1532 (fig. 43). The painting portrays the Madonna and Child seated in a relaxed manner in a landscape with the infant Saint John the Baptist and Saint Catherine. All of the figures are shown in a state of motion, but the focus is on Saint Catherine who reaches over the Virgin's lap to embrace the Christ child, her bridegroom. Many scholars conjecture that this painting once belonged to the great Venetian collector Andrea Odoni, best known to us today by his famous portrait executed by Lorenzo Lotto (fig. 44).⁹⁰ The casualness of the figures' poses, along with the intimacy between the figures, makes it likely that the destination of a painting such as this was in a home rather than over a church altar.

Other religious subjects common in the household include scenes related to Christ's birth: the Annunciation, Nativity, and Three Magi; the popularity of the latter

⁹⁰ Odoni's inventory can be found in ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 39, n., 58 (1555). This painting is not specifically mentioned in the inventory, although it may be of the 11 paintings (seven small and 4 large) referred to in a general manner in Odoni's *portego*. A painting matching the *Aldobrandini Madonna* is described by Michiel, however, in his account of Odoni's collection. For more on the collecting practices of Odoni, see Schmitter., "The Display of Distinction," and "Virtuous Riches."

is perhaps owed to Venice's unique position between east and west (fig. 45).⁹¹ Also notable amongst Venetian inventories are references to Old Testament subjects and New Testament narratives, many with moralizing themes. *Adam and Eve*, *Judith and Holofernes* (fig. 46), *The Judgment of Solomon*, *The Conversion of Paul*, *Christ and the Adulteress*, *The Prodigal Son*, and *Christ and the Woman from Samaria*, were all subjects popular in the sixteenth-century Venetian home. *The Conversion of Paul*, painted by Andrea Schiavone around 1542 (fig. 47), and *Christ and the Woman of Samaria*, from around 1514-1516 and attributed to Palma Vecchio (fig. 48) are probably close to the types of pictures that appeared in the residences of Venice; such narratives only increased in popularity as the sixteenth century progressed.

Images of the Virgin, Christ, and saints were dispersed throughout the household setting. While pictures of the Madonna were closely associated with bedchambers in Florence, Venetians did not favor one location over another when it came to their beloved patroness; instead, they seem to have preferred to inundate their living environments with her image. References to “quadri di nostra donna” are just as common in the *portego* as in the *camera*. The inventory of the spice merchant Pietro Paolo Sinistri, recorded in 1555, demonstrates the typical distribution of holy images throughout the home. In the “camera nova” he hung a gilded painting of the Madonna and an image of Mary Magdalene; the *camera* next to the stairs contained another gilded painting of Mary and a *Corpus Domini*; and in the *portego* there were two more pictures: a large painting of the Virgin with a gilded frame and *Christ in Agony in the Garden*.⁹² Two other sparsely-furnished rooms in Sinistri's home,

⁹¹ Palumbo Fossati, “La casa veneziana,” 478.

⁹² ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 39, n. 12.

however, along with the kitchen, storage area, and his workshop near the Rialto, did not have any pictures at all, religious or otherwise. From time to time, however, devotional images did appear in these spaces associated with work. The kitchen of the spice merchant Giovanni Ambrogio Perlasca, for example, contained a small painting of the Madonna with Saint Catherine in a walnut frame, in addition to two small—but broken—iron basins for holy water,⁹³ while the workshop of an artisan named Simone contained three paintings of the Madonna: two large, and one small.⁹⁴ The distribution of pious images throughout interior spaces meant that sacred markers permeated the residence and allowed devotion to occur in multiple locations.

Certain religious subjects, however, appeared more commonly—and sometimes almost exclusively—in the *portego*. The moralizing narratives mentioned above are the kinds of paintings that were displayed overwhelmingly in the *portego* rather than other rooms of the *casa*, along with images of the *Last Supper*. Although not an area for regular domestic activity, the *portego* was a space continually accessed by both members of the household and its guests. It was off of this *sala* that the other rooms of the house were situated, and stairs from the street, courtyard, or canal entrances all were directed into this large hall.⁹⁵ Since not every guest to the *casa* would be invited into the family's main living quarters, the *portego* acted as a kind of receiving area. Its large dimensions also made it a common site for entertaining, further adding to the outward character of this interior space. Given the structure and uses of the Venetian *portego*, the moralizing narratives that adorned its walls would have simultaneously communicated didactic, Christian messages to

⁹³ Ibid, b. 43, n. 49 (1587), 20r-22v.

⁹⁴ Ibid, b. 42, n. 47 (1573), 2r.

⁹⁵ Fortini Brown, *Private Lives*, 71.

members of the household and acted as emblems of the honorable character of the family to those who called on the home from the outside world.

The *Last Supper* was an appropriate theme for a room where formal meals took place on occasion, similar to the common display of these images in the refectories of monasteries throughout Italy.⁹⁶ Images of the *Last Supper* also permeated the churches of Venice, adorning both the main altars of churches, like Tintoretto's masterpiece that frames the one side of the choir of San Giorgio Maggiore, and chapels maintained by confraternities dedicated to the Eucharist. Households of the Republic also displayed their devotion to the theme. One surviving Venetian *Last Supper* that can be traced back to an original owner is the painting by Jacopo Bassano ordered by the nobleman Battista Erizzo (1522-1586) in 1546-7 and now in the Borghese Gallery in Rome (fig. 49).⁹⁷ The design is based on Tintoretto's *Last Supper* in San Marcuola (fig. 50) and on Marcantonio Raimondi's print after Raphael with the same theme (fig. 51). Bassano slants the table to offer emphatically the wine and bread to the viewer. Christ's fixed gaze on the beholder, and his emphatic gesture—one hand on his chest and the other presenting the Paschal lamb—further underscore the Eucharistic significance of the piece.⁹⁸ In addition to providing Erizzo and his household with a paradigmatic meal, Bassano's *Last Supper*

⁹⁶ On the display of Last Supper scenes in refectories, see: Luisa Vertova, *I cenacoli fiorentini* (Turin: ERI, Edizioni RAI Radiotelevisione italiana, 1965); Creighton Gilbert, 'Last Suppers and their Refectories,' in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion: Papers for the University of Michigan Conference*, ed. Charles Trinkhaus and Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 371-402; and Cristina Acidini Luchinat, Rosanna Caterina, and Proto Pisani, ed., *La tradizione fiorentina dei cenacoli* (Florence: Cassa di risparmio di Firenze, 1997).

⁹⁷ He was a patron with particular intellectual and spiritual interests. He is most likely the Giovanni Battista Erizzo who bought a Saint Jerome from Lorenzo Lotto in 1546, which was originally intended for one of the master's other patrons; the painting is probably the small work in the Galleria Doria Pamfilj in Rome. Bernard Aikema, *Jacopo Bassano and His Public: Moralizing Pictures in an Age of Reform, c. 1535-1600*, trans. Andrew P. McCormick (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 69.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

may have also served as a visual statement of his beliefs, an issue that became increasingly important in Venice—a city with many residents that either fully embraced or were sympathetic to Lutheran and Evangelical ideals—during the second half of the sixteenth century.

In general, the descriptions of paintings in household inventories lack vivid detail; sometimes the accounts are so stark that all one can find is the brief notation: “un quadro,” or “a picture.” Notaries were consistent, however, with certain particulars. They often noted things like the support of the picture—canvas, panel, or sometimes, paper—and usually recorded if an image was displayed in a frame, referred to in Venetian as *soaze*. Paintings and frames were also commonly described as *dorado* or *indorado*, indicating that they were gilded. Notaries usually provided vague dimensions, using terms such as *piccolo* (small), *medio* (medium), and *grando* (large).⁹⁹ Standard adjectives were also employed to indicate quality, not so much in reference to the painter’s execution, but the physical condition of the painting itself. Pictures are described as *nuovo* (new), *vecchio* (old), and *antico* (“antique”). The use of both *vecchio* and *antico* implies a distinction between the two terms, *antico* meaning old yet revered, while *vecchio* was an expression with more negative implications, indicating something old and well worn. There is even the occasional use of descriptors like *rotto*, *triste*, and *da poco momento* to described items either broken, in poor condition, or of little value.

In rare instances, notaries listed monetary values for household goods, including devotional items. In contrast to expectations based on today’s standards,

⁹⁹ The use of the word *grando* to describe a masculine noun, like *quadro*, rather than *grande*, which is invariable, is unique to the Venetian dialect, and it appears countless times in Venetian inventories. Boerio, 314.

paintings were generally worth less than other household items such as clothing and bed linens. For example, after the 1556 death of Benedetto Agnello, a Mantuan citizen and Gonzaga ambassador to Venice, his wife, Lucrezia, sold most of his portable items on consignment at the Rialto before returning to Mantua. She sold men and women's clothing, gilt leather hangings, along with two wooden angels and an "image of the Holy Nativity." While Lucrezia's black velvet gown fetched 18 ducats, the Nativity sold for only 3 lire and 8 soldi.¹⁰⁰ Religious objects made from gold, silver, and valuable jewels on the other hand—all of which will be discussed in further detail below—naturally carried a high price tag.

While the names of specific artists are almost never mentioned, notaries were able to discern stylistic schools of paintings; descriptors such as *alla greca*, *alla fiandra*, *fiandrese*, *al todescho*, and *al ponente* were all employed to designate artwork either produced by Flemish or German artists, or executed in that manner. A small *Crucifixion* painted by a follower of Jan van Eyck, most likely for a Paduan patron (fig. 52), is just one example of the many Netherlandish works that made its way to the Veneto during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Descriptors like these indicate the Venetian fondness for goods from distant lands, and confirm the Republic's role as a hub in the vast trading network of the Cinquecento. There are even a few instances of paintings described as "moderno" or "veneziano," like the "quadro de la madona venezian" listed in the 1538 inventory of Francesco Gerado.¹⁰¹ Perhaps such verbal depictions referred to the increasing naturalism and landscape

¹⁰⁰ Evelyn Welch, "From Retail to Resale: Artistic Value and the Second-Hand Market in Italy," in *The Art Market in Italy: 15th -17th Centuries. Il mercato dell'arte in Italia (secc. XV-XVII)*, eds. Marcello Fantoni, Louisa C. Matthew, and Sara F. Matthews-Grieco (Modena: F. C. Panini, 2003), 261-276: 288.

¹⁰¹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 68.

settings incorporated into devotional images executed by artists in the Veneto region, like the above mentioned *Aldobrandini Madonna* of Titian (fig. 43), or Bellini's *Madonna of the Meadow* (fig. 30).

Throughout the Cinquecento, it was not uncommon for domestic images to be kept within tabernacles, cabinets, or behind curtains, similar to the manner of storage and exhibition that was typical during the preceding century, implying the special reverence accorded to individual pieces, and the power that these images held for their owners. For example, Ettore Aurio, a Venetian admiral in Candia whose inventory was drawn up in 1531, kept two small paintings and one larger image of the Madonna together inside a cupboard.¹⁰² Much like sacred icons exhibited in ecclesiastical spaces, holy pictures in the home, particularly those that bore the image of the Virgin, were often illuminated with candles or small oil lamps, referred to as *cesendelli*, to mark their distinctive status.¹⁰³ The display of religious goods within the domestic interior and its relation to devotion is a topic that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Beyond the quadro: Sculpture, Prints, and Books

Despite the greater integration of the *quadro* into the Renaissance Venetian interior, the sacred visual culture of domestic spaces was not expressed solely in painted form, and pictures were viewed and utilized in conjunction with other pious objects, including sculpture, prints, books, prayer beads, and religious charms. The Marian relief—utilizing a variety of media such as marble, gesso, stucco, and

¹⁰² ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 41, n. 40, fol. 4v.

¹⁰³ These lanterns often assumed an elongated form and other details typical of an Eastern style, not surprising given Venice's long standing ties with the Middle East; they have often been compared to lamps in mosques. Palumbo Fossati, "La casa veneziana," 473.

terracotta—has been described as a central Italian phenomenon, executed in the workshops of great Renaissance masters that include Donatello, Desiderio da Settignano, and Luca and Andrea della Robbia.¹⁰⁴ Evidence suggests, however, that reliefs and self-contained sculpture of holy figures and narrative scenes were present in the homes of the Republic, as well. For example, recorded in the inventory of the ducal secretary Giovanni Soro is a small, gilded image of the Madonna described as “antiga” and “de relievo.”¹⁰⁵ Much like the production of Marian reliefs in Florence and its surrounding region, Venetian relief panels and other forms of domestic sculpture were commonly made from inexpensive materials. In the room above the court of his home, Zuan Marco Trevisano displayed a gesso relief of the Madonna within a gilded frame,¹⁰⁶ while the priest Domenico de Tauris owned a terracotta head of Christ in addition to a crucifix “de relievo.”¹⁰⁷

Domestic sculpture was a commonly produced item in the workshop of the Venetian sculptor Jacopo Sansovino. The artists utilized not only “high” art materials like marble, but also cheaper substances that allowed for serial production from molds, and thus their rapid diffusion, making images of the Madonna increasingly accessible to a wider segment of the population during a period in Venice when Marian devotion was thriving.¹⁰⁸ Conserved in the Museo Correr in Venice is an

¹⁰⁴ For more on Florentine Marian reliefs of the Quattrocento, see Kecks, *Madonna und Kind*; Johnson, “Art or Artifact?”; “Family Values”; and “Beautiful Brides and Model Mothers”; as well as Jolly, *Madonnas by Donatello and His Circle*.

¹⁰⁵ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 37, n. 12 (1543).

¹⁰⁶ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 37, n. 10 (1537).

¹⁰⁷ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 40, n. 29 (1566).

¹⁰⁸ We know that Sansovino’s friend, Pietro Aretino, owned one of the sculptor’s Marian reliefs, for it was admired by a number of visitors to the poet’s home, including Francesco Marcolini and Monsignor Beccadelli, who described in as a work “santa et divina.” For more on the mass-produced reliefs of Jacopo Sansovino, see Antonio Foscari, “Un altro ‘gran quadro di basso relievo’ di Jacopo Sansovino,” *Venezia Cinquecento* 22 (2001): 5-16, esp. 10 and 12.

example of a relief of the Madonna and Child by Sansovino incorporating polychromed stucco and papier-mâché dating to the mid-sixteenth century (fig. 53). The colors and three-dimensionality of the work enhance the presence of the represented figures and allow the image to coexist in the same space as the beholder.¹⁰⁹ This work was once part of a tabernacle in the court of the Scotti family near Campo San Luca in Venice; its exterior location may account for its large scale, but the style and medium are likely similar to those Marian reliefs once displayed in interior spaces. Another example of Sansovino's Madonna and Child reliefs is today preserved in the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth (fig. 554) while the colors and painted background design vary from the Correr example, the similarity in the pose of the Virgin and her son suggest that it was created from the same mold. Sansovino and his workshop also produced independent sculpture from these less expensive materials. At a little over a foot in height, a painted terracotta group representing the Madonna, Christ Child, and the young Saint John the Baptist in the Detroit Institute of Art (fig. 55), attributed to Antonio Calcagni from the school of Sansovino, was likely once displayed in a domestic setting.

Sacred sculpture for the household sphere took on a variety of forms, from carved marble statues to holy dolls. Gerolamo Britti, whose goods were kept in his sister's residence on the island of Murano, owned an image of Christ praying in the garden in "piera viva," a generic term used to describe stone.¹¹⁰ The cloth merchant Zuan Antonio Rubbi, exhibited an alabaster statue of the Madonna holding Christ in

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, "Beautiful Brides and Model Mothers," 142.

¹¹⁰ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 34, n. 80 (1528).

her arms in his *portego*,¹¹¹ Giuseppe Ceffi, a window maker from Santa Maria Formosa had a bronze *pietà*;¹¹² and the woodcarver Andrea Fosci, originally from Faenza, owned multiple ivory images of Christ, along with a terracotta figure of the Savior, perhaps similar to the works being produced by Sansovino and his followers in the sixteenth century.¹¹³ Crucifixes carved from wood were a common image displayed throughout Venetian *case* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Notaries usually are not specific about their manner of exhibition, but the simplicity of the cross form allowed for multiple manners of exhibitions, from mounted on the wall, like the cross that hangs over the doorway in Antonio da Fabriano's *Saint Jerome in His Study* from 1451 (fig. 56), to freestanding objects, similar to the crucifix portrayed in Lazzaro Bastiani's version of Jerome's study, executed in the late 1400s and originally in the Bishop's Palace at Empoli (fig. 57). In this latter instance, the crucifix is displayed upon a shelf in the saint's *studio*, surrounded by holy books and is thus an integral part of the saint's meditation and sacred intellectual activity.

An assortment of sculpture worthy of note can be found in the inventory of another ducal secretary, Leonardo Massari, who died in 1538. In the *camera grande* of his *casa* in the district of Santa Marina, he had an image of St. Christopher in *piera viva*, a carved wooden figure of St. Jerome, and polychromed statues of a nymph and an angel, that were clothed and adorned with small pearls and "bisinelle"[?].¹¹⁴ While not a component of a majority of Venetian households, three-dimensional representations of holy figures donning real attire appear in the inventories with

¹¹¹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 40, n. 7 (1561).

¹¹² ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 43, n. 45 (1582).

¹¹³ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 53 (1582).

¹¹⁴ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 71.

notable frequency. Usually no specific personage is identified as they typically are in paintings and more traditional forms of sculpture; instead, they are referred to simply as “una santa” or “un sancto” of wood. Perhaps the identity of the saint could change based on the clothing and attributes it was given. Giovanni Maria Albano owned one of these “sante de legno,” which was described in his inventory as old and dressed in garments made from silk but “senza altro,” or “without anything else.”¹¹⁵ A holy figure belonging to Gerolamo Giorgio was identified as “una sancta cu[m] uno puto in brazo, vestida de veludo, cremesin et doro”; in other words, a female saint dressed in velvet, crimson and gold, with an infant in her arms, most likely the Christ Child.¹¹⁶ Inventories from Venetian churches and confraternities have verified the presence of clothed figures of the Madonna, saints, and the Christ child, so it seems likely that similar versions—perhaps on a smaller scale—were brought into the domestic setting, as Venetians were apt to incorporate what they had seen in the ecclesiastical setting into their own everyday environments, an issue that will be taken up at greater length in the final chapter.¹¹⁷

Works on paper, the majority of which were almost certainly religious prints, were also displayed in Venetian domiciles, yet based on inventory descriptions, the exhibition of these objects for personal devotion is more difficult to assess than

¹¹⁵ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 39, n. 31 (1557).

¹¹⁶ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 35, n. 12 (1530). There are also numerous references in inventories to the “homo de legno,” which Patricia Fortini Brown has interpreted to be a wooden mannequin. The fact that on several occasions these figurines are specifically called “homo de legno da veste” suggests that that were sometimes clothed, as well, perhaps even to represent holy personages. Paolo Pavanini argues the opposite; she contends that the “homo di legno” is secular sculpture, because when it represents Christ or a saint, the subject is specified. “Abitazioni popolari e borghesi nella Venezia cinquecentesca,” *Studi Veneziani* 5 (1981): 63-126: 97. The clothing, however, could transform the doll from “secular” to “sacred.”

¹¹⁷ On clothed statues of the Madonna in Venetian churches, see Riccarda Pagnozzato, ed. *Madonne della laguna: simulacri da vestire dei secoli XIV-XIX* (Rome: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 1993).

painting and sculpture. Inventories sometimes record prints in frames, or as *quadri* and *quadretti*, suggesting pictures that were hung on the wall. The 1580 inventory of Polissena Coracina from the district of Santa Maria Magdalena lists “doi quadreti in carta à stampa della Madallena,” (“two small pictures printed on paper of the Magdalene”),¹¹⁸ and a barber named Filippo, whose inventory was prepared after his death in 1589, had three small pictures “soazadi,” or framed, “de carte in stampa de rame miniade” on display in the room of his *casa* situated over the *campo*, the subjects of which are not identified; the use of the phrase “de rame miniade” indicates that these were engravings made from copper plates.¹¹⁹

A portrait of a woman praying by Petrus Christus, today in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC (fig. 58) and most likely once the wing of a small devotional triptych, offers an idea of how such images may have been exhibited. In the background of the domestic space in which the woman prays is a print bearing the image of Saint Elizabeth (fig. 59)—perhaps the patron of the devout female in the painting—that is attached to the wall with red sealing wax. Although the work was painted by a fifteenth-century Flemish artist, and may reflect devotional practices in the time and place in which he worked, the practice of tacking a picture to a wall would have been common throughout Europe as the production of prints increased and images became more diffuse. At times, illuminated miniatures were framed and exhibited like paintings, as well. Two inventories from the 1580s illustrate this practice: Giovanni Giacomo Gratarol, originally from Bergamo and described by the notary of his inventory as a “causidico,” or a pettifogger, displayed two small pictures

¹¹⁸ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 1.

¹¹⁹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 43, n. 6.

“in charta miniada”—one of the Annunciation, and another of Saint Jerome—in his *camera*.¹²⁰ The artisan Lorenzo Fondi also had a small illuminated image of the visit of the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, which he hung in his workshop.¹²¹ Another painting by Petrus Christus, this time of a male donor with a hand-painted portrait of Christ (fig. 60) hanging on the wall behind him, again, suggests that this practice of displaying pictures may have been fairly widespread across the continent.

Because they could have been stored in tomes and chests, escaping individuation by the notary—as was often the case with books and other written documents in the household—collections of works on paper were probably more extensive than the inventories reveal. For example, recorded amongst the goods in the “*Inventarium Infrascriptorum*” of the aforesaid ducal secretary Giovanni Soro, was “una stampa della Madonna de piombo,” or an engraved print bearing the image of the Madonna. There is no indication that Soro’s print was framed, but was probably stored with the other documents listed in this account of his writings. We know this was the case with the prints collected by Jacobus de Ruberiis, a notary who was born in Parma around 1430 and settled in Venice in 1478. Ruberiis pasted a group of forty six woodcuts, four engravings, and one dotted print into a set of papers now in the Biblioteca Classense in Ravenna, thereby forming a tome of sacred images that was meaningful to the patron in ways that could not be captured by viewing each image separately.¹²²

¹²⁰ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 43, n. 12 (1587).

¹²¹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 43, n. 30 (1589).

¹²² Two additional woodcuts once owned by the notary are preserved, in the Biblioteca Oliverianca in Pesaro. David Landau and Peter Parshall, *The Renaissance Print, 1470-1550* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994). A dissertation by David Areford titled, “In the Viewer’s Hands: The Reception of the Printed Image in Late Medieval Europe, ca. 1400-1500” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2001) examines the use of devotional prints that often resulted in the owner’s

Given the relatively inexpensive nature of the medium and its widespread distribution, prints were probably a common item in Venetian households. In addition, their portable nature, as well as their flexibility in terms of presentation, made them well suited to personal devotion. The fifteenth-century theologian Nicolas of Cusa advocated a religious print in every house, attesting to the devotional function this medium was seen as being able to serve.¹²³ As one of the leading centers of the printing industry in Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Venice produced several masters who worked almost exclusively in the medium, such as Giuliano Campagnolo (fig. 61). Printmaking also proved to be a lucrative enterprise for artists who normally worked in paint. Titian, perhaps best known today as the master of sixteenth-century Venetian painting, created a number of designs specifically for the medium of the print; one such example is the *St Jerome in Penitence* (fig. 62), from around 1516, a chiaroscuro woodcut in two tones. The monochromatic shades of gray, along with the lack of details beyond slight suggestions of a rugged landscape environment, are fittingly employed to underscore the sincere atonement of the ascetic saint, a message intended to resonate with the laity in their penitential devotions. Prints were also a means by which recognizable monumental religious images could be translated into a scale and medium more easily adaptable to one's everyday environment.¹²⁴ The sixteenth century witnessed an

manipulation of the original image; Areford examines the case of Jacobus de Ruberiis as one of several examples of this phenomenon.

¹²³ Stephanie Leitch, "Seeing Objects in Private Devotion," in *Pious Journeys*, 55.

¹²⁴ Musacchio, "The Madonna and Child," 153. As the taste for prints increased, painters increasingly sought out printmakers to replicate their works in this mass-produced medium.

explosion of the reproductive print, which became a staple of the workshops of engravers like the Republic's own Agostino Veneziano (fig. 63).¹²⁵

Venice was also a center for the production of books. Beginning in the second half of the fifteenth century and for many decades to follow, the Venetian Republic dominated the printing industry in Europe.¹²⁶ Evidence suggests that in the fifteenth-century people bought books more often via the auction sales of the Procurators of Saint Mark's rather than through booksellers,¹²⁷ but by the Cinquecento the Venetian fondness for books allowed printers and bookshops to establish shops all over the island, with the heaviest concentrations in the districts of Castello, Cannaregio, and San Marco.¹²⁸ The printing industry in *la Serenissima* was a truly capitalistic enterprise, dependent on market forces rather than the patronage of a ruler or the church for its success. Many traveled to Venice to make their living in the business, and the city produced books in large quantities and distributed them farther a field than any other European center.¹²⁹ Even when the Venetian Inquisition sought to tighten its grip on the book trade under pressure from the Church during the mid-to-late sixteenth century, a powerful lobby of the city's bookmen managed to persuade the government on several occasions to withdraw indices of banned books that stemmed both from Rome and, on occasion, the Republic itself.¹³⁰ In fact, the

¹²⁵ Landau and Parshall, *The Renaissance Print*, 120-145.

¹²⁶ Venice is accountable for almost one-eighth of all books printed in during the fifteenth century. Leonardas Vytaitis Gerulaitis, *Printing and Publishing in Fifteenth-Century Venice* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1976), xi.

¹²⁷ Susan Connell, "Books and Their Owners in Venice, 1345-1480," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 35 (1972): 163-186, 164.

¹²⁸ Jane A. Bernstein, *Print Culture in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 12.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁰ In 1549 the Venetian government compiled and printed a list of prohibited works that book lobbyists convinced the State was too vague; they also forced the withdrawal of lists of "heretical

apex of printing and publishing in Venice occurred during the period from 1540 to 1575, simultaneous with the moment when efforts at censorship from Rome were at their highest. In an era of unbroken peace that came to an end with the ruinous plague of 1575-76, Venetian presses produced close to 35,000 individual editions, the majority of which were vernacular religious works.¹³¹

While the residents of Venice had ample opportunities to access to printed texts, the success of the city's book industry locally is not always readily apparent in the records of the households of the city's populace. References to book collections do appear in most inventories, even in the homes of artisans, but are designated in imprecise ways, with notations such as, "libri de diverse sorte," or a description of a chest "pien de libri." An image of a chest brimming with books, a detail from a fresco of the Evangelist in the church of San Sebastiano in Pecetto (fig. 64) seems to reflect how early modern Italians actually stored their tomes and written documents. A few registers, however, do specify individual books and reveal that Venetians were well read in diverse subjects, including philosophy, science, law, and in particular in the realm of religion and theology. Certain titles appear with notable frequency, like Books of Hours, the Divine Office, Breviaries, Psalters, missals, hagiographic literature, and the Bible (fig. 65)—all of which consistently ranked amongst the "best-sellers" of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance—and Venetians owned both printed and illuminated versions of these texts.¹³² The fact that these tracts were listed

books" compiled by Dominicans and sent from Rome in 1554 and 1555. In 1559 the Index of Paul IV was accepted in Venice after long negotiations, but soon after the Pope died and the Index was no longer enforced. Brian Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 140-41.

¹³¹ Bernstein, 11 and 18.

¹³² Anne Jacobson Schutte, *Printed Italian Vernacular Religious Books 1465-1550: A Finding List* (Geneva: Droz, 1983), 321-323.

amongst everyday household items, distinct from the general references to larger book collections, implies that they were not normally stored away but habitually used by members of the household in prayers and devotions.

The inventory of Bernardo da Muggia, drafted in 1401, reveals the kinds of books that were collected in the early Renaissance. Da Muggia owned two copies of the Epistles of Saint Paul; writings of Saint Jerome, which were bound in leather; another book of Saint Paul; and a Bible swathed in velvet described as “puella,” perhaps to indicate that this particular version of the Holy Scripture was geared toward or belonged to a young girl.¹³³ Personal libraries could be quite extensive, as exemplified by the exhaustive book collection of the Venetian nobleman Antonio da Pesaro that was recorded in the inventory of his household made after his death in 1526. In addition to the writings of popular authors like Ovid, Aristotle, Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, and books on subjects that ranged from the art of war to treatises on wine and palm reading, there was a broad collection of religious works, encompassing theological texts, standard prayer books, and popular hagiography. The list included: several works by Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Saint Jerome, including Jerome’s commentaries on the psalms of David; the Epistles of Saint Paul; the legend of Saint Helen; a book of Saint Prospero; a book of the prophets; a breviary; *The Art of Dying (Ars Moriendi)*; writings of Beato Josephat; the epistles of Saint Catherine of Siena; the Revelations of Saint Bridget; three offices of the Virgin; psalters; a manuscript on the beauty of the Virgin; orations to the Virgin

¹³³ PSM, Atti Citra, b. 135. For more on private libraries in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Connell, “Books and their Owners.” Connell’s assessment of book collections from this period is based on inventories and bequests of books from the period that can be found in the notaries’ records in the *fondo* of the Procurators of Saint Mark, preserved in the Archivio di Stato in Venice.

and the Trinity; the lives of Saints Martha and Mary Magdalene; a compendium of San Bernardino, written by hand; a martyrology, in addition to a separate book on the Martyrdom of Saint Matthew; a sermon on the life of Jesus Christ; and a book dealing with the same subject, but printed in Germany.¹³⁴

Sacramentals and Devotional Goods

Other items of religious import assembled in domestic spaces were objects that today we commonly refer to as sacramentals. These pious artifacts dwelled largely outside of the context of the liturgy, and converted the idea of a sacrament—one of the seven key rites of the Catholic Church that served as entries to the mysteries of the faith—into a daily activity.¹³⁵ As objects intended to assist the devout in his or her personal devotions, they were often small enough that they could be either carried or worn on the body, operating as talismans to protect the physical and spiritual well-being of the individual who donned them. Rosary beads or paternosters were amongst the most popular of religious objects found in the domestic spaces of Venice. In their earliest forms, paternosters were simple strings of beads that served to mark off the prayers of the devout, normally the “Our Father,” as the name suggests, one of the more commonly known prayers amongst the laity. As Marian devotion grew throughout Europe beginning in the twelfth century, so too did the popularity of “Ave Maria.” Although they often retained the name “paternoster,”

¹³⁴ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 34, n. 25.

¹³⁵ Sacraments took place on a limited basis, and some sacraments, such as Baptism, Confirmation, and Extreme Unction, theoretically occurred only once during a person’s lifetime. Servus Gieben, *Christian Sacrament and Devotion*, Institute of Religious Iconography series, sec. XXIV, Christianity, fasc. 5 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), 15.

prayer beads soon came to be used most frequently for rosary devotion. During the fifteenth century, their form transformed into the modern rosary, a loop of beads divided into sets of ten, or decades, to correspond to the series of prayers—ten “Ave Marias” punctuated by one “Our Father”—that comprised the devotion.¹³⁶

The paternosters recorded in Venetian inventories were made from a variety of materials, including amber, coral, crystal, bone, ivory, jet, quartz, and wood. Few rosaries from the early modern period can be found today, particularly Italian examples; the low survival rate is not uncommon for goods made centuries ago from precious stones and other valuable natural substances as the materials were frequently recycled for other items, particularly when fashions changed. Nevertheless, their once plentiful existence is hard to doubt, given the rapid spread of rosary devotion throughout Europe and particularly in Venice, with the formation of a confraternity there in the late fifteenth century, in addition to evidence provided from the documents of household goods. A few sets of rosaries from elsewhere in Europe have survived, and considering the great interest Venetians had in foreign goods, as well as the relative standardization of rosary devotion itself, they may be comparable to kinds that residents of the Republic owned. One example is a set of fifteenth- or sixteenth-century rosaries made from bone, and today preserved in the Erzbischöfliches Diözesamuseum in Cologne, Germany (fig. 66). Ten round beads, each representing a Hail Mary to be recited, are interrupted by larger, oblong beads that correspond to the Our Father and mark off each decade. A more elaborate string

¹³⁶ Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); and Ronald W. Lightbown, *Mediaeval European Jewellery: With a Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria & Albert Museum* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1992), 342.

of paternoster beads from France is preserved in London's Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 67); dating to around 1525-1550, this set consists of carved ivory pieces, the larger ones bearing images of the Virgin Mary, Saint John the Evangelist, the pope, and the joined heads of a man, woman, and death, while the ten smaller beads—upon which repeated decades would be recited—depict kings and figures in aristocratic dress. The expensive material and fine craftsmanship of this rosary demonstrate that the boundary between devotional apparatus and luxury item was often blurred.

Other popular household items included crucifixes wrought in precious metals and ornamented with gemstones, as well as medals and plaquettes bearing sacred subjects. A number of artists working in the Veneto—like Galeazzo Mondella, also known as “Il Moderno” (Verona 1467-1528), Andrea Briosco called “Il Riccio” (Padova 1470-1532), and Valerio Belli (Vicenza 1468-1546)—produced small bronze pieces that were actively acquired by the laity for their artistic skill, sacred subjects, and ease of portability.¹³⁷ Surviving medals and plaques by these artists and others range in size, from a tiny *Deposition* designed by Il Maderno today in Ca' d'Oro and measuring slightly over an inch in height and about half an inch in width, to *The Deposition of Christ* by Valerio Belli (fig. 68), a round gilded plaque of approximately 5 inches in diameter. The ornamented cornice that surrounds Belli's plaque today in Ca' d'Oro suggests that it was probably intended for display,

¹³⁷ For more on these three artists, see: Douglas Lewis, “The Medallic Oeuvre of ‘Moderno’: His Development at Mantua in the Circle of ‘Antico’,” *Studies in the History of Art* 21 (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1987), 77-97; idem, “The Plaquettes of ‘Moderno’ and His Followers,” *Studies in the History of Art* 22 (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1989), 105-141; Howard Burns, Marco Collareta, and Davide Gasparotto, eds. *Valerio Belli Vicentino: 1468c.-1546* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2000); and Valentino Donati and Rosanna Casadio, *Bronzi e pietre dure nelle incisioni di Valerio Belli vicentino* (Ferrara: Belriguardo, 2004).

unlike Il Maderno's that could have easily been carried in a pocket or the body like a badge. Sometimes small medals and plaquettes were stored away with coins and money. The aforementioned barber, Filippo, from the district of Sant'Angelo, owned a number of "monede diverse," or varied coins, which displayed images of the Passion, Saint Alwise, Saint Paul, and Christ, which he stored in a small sack with other money.¹³⁸ Many of these surviving tablets have small holes or hooks at the top, which indicates that they were employed for decorative purposes; they were utilized in bookbinding and on furniture, hung on the wall, and sometimes incorporated into clothing or worn on the body.¹³⁹ The surfaces on many of the extant models have been worn down, as well—such as a small bronze featuring a Madonna and Child between two small angels created by a Paduan artist at the end of the fifteenth century or early sixteenth century, also today preserved in Giorgio Franchetti Collection in Venice—which suggests that these miniature objects were frequently subject to touch and handling.

Sometimes these bronze plaques took the form of a *pax*, often referred to in inventories as a *pace*. A *pax* is small wooden tablet or metal plate, typically of silver or gold, which bore a sacred image, such as the Madonna, the crucifixion, or a patron saint, on its front, and a handle on the reverse side (fig. 69). It was used during the liturgy at the moment shortly before the Eucharist when the celebrant and participants offer one another salutations of peace. Originally actual kisses were exchanged between members of the same sex (hence the name, "kiss of peace"), but at some

¹³⁸ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 43, n. 6.

¹³⁹ On the display of these bronze plaquettes, see Alison Lee Palmer, "The Walters' Madonna and Child Plaquette and Private Devotional Art in Early Renaissance Italy," *The Journal of the Walters Art Museum* 59 (2001) 73-84; and R. H. Randall, Jr. "An Image de Chevet," *Bulletin of the Walters Art Gallery* 20 (1968).

point this physical exchange was substituted with the use of this tablet. The *pax* was first kissed by the celebrant of the mass, then cleansed with a cloth, and carried to others to be kissed by them, as well.¹⁴⁰ In the domestic context, the imagery normally exhibited on these objects provided a focus for individuals and family members when carrying out their devotions, while the handle on the back allowed for the object to be held and brought near to the devout for closer visual and tactile connections. The ducal secretary Giovanni Soro, discussed above, owned a *pax* that was quite intricate and presumably quite valuable. Kept in a small case, this gold instrument featured a scene of the *Pietà*, and was adorned with a “camino,” or mantel, above, eight pearls, and diamonds and rubies totaling eight, as well. It was acquired through a Frenchman called “el Tesorier,” or “the Treasurer,” a title which may have referred to the man’s ability to get hold of precious objects, like Soro’s *pax*.¹⁴¹ As mentioned above, items normally used in churches were frequently obtained by individuals for their household settings, and imitative rituals were likely carried out, absent any priest, perhaps as a way to legitimize household spiritual activities. Through the custody of ecclesiastical objects, like the *pax*, families and individuals could possess and access the sacred within their everyday spaces.

The Agnus Dei, a medallion of wax from the Paschal candle that bore the image of the Lamb of God and was blessed by the pope during Holy Week, was another item a majority of the households in Venice owned. Despite the fact that they

¹⁴⁰ They could also be as simple as boards pasted with woodcut images of holy subjects, Melissa R. Katz, ed. *Divine Mirrors: The Virgin Mary in the Visual Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 78. This practice does not appear in the Catholic liturgy today, except in very rare instances. See “Kiss of Peace,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., 15 vols. (Detroit: Thomson/Gale, 2003), vol. 8: 185.

¹⁴¹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 37, n. 12 (1543).

were incredibly common in Renaissance Venetian homes, few Agnus Deis from the period survive today, the ephemeral materials either destroyed or recycled for other purposes.¹⁴² To protect the delicate wax and add visual brilliance, Agnus Deis were usually encased in silver or gold, or sometimes stored in fabric pouches, and were typically worn on the body like a pendant, as described in the 1575 inventory of Giovanni Battista Ceriolo: “una mando[r]la, over agnus dei d’oro da portar al col[l]o co[n] filli no quatro d’oro.”¹⁴³ A handful of Agnus Dei containers survive, probably dating to the second half of the fifteenth century or the early sixteenth century, which offer examples of the appearance of these commonly owned items, such as a silver container with nielloed plaques from the British Museum (fig. 70) that shows the kneeling lamb on one side and a crucifix and the letters IHS—the name of Jesus—on the reverse.¹⁴⁴

While rarer than the Agnus Dei, relics, too, were brought into the domestic context. For example, the theory developed during the Middle Ages that the wood of the True Cross was self-replicating and resulted in countless remains of this holy relic, enabling lay people to possess authentic fragments.¹⁴⁵ Venetians held a particular devotion to this sacred remnant of Christ’s sacrifice because of the miracles it was purported to have performed within their own urban environment. Both the nobleman Antonio Gradenigo, whose inventory was prepared in 1538, and the

¹⁴² F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 26.

¹⁴³ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 51, 3r.

¹⁴⁴ British Museum, MME AF 2892. For a discussion of this Agnus Dei container, and other Italian examples in the British Museum (MME AF 2896, MME AF 2898, and MME AF 2899), see John Cherry, ‘Containers for Agnus Deis,’ in *Through a Glass Brightly: Studies in Byzantine and Medieval Art and Archaeology Presented to David Buckton*, ed. Chris Entwistle (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2003), 171-182, esp. figs. 19.1-19.8. See also Lightbown, 228-30.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Norman Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215-1515* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 159.

clothier Giacomo Antonio de Pizzoni whose inventory was recorded in 1570, possessed crucifixes that contained putative pieces of this sacred artifact.¹⁴⁶ The notaries who compiled the inventories of Gradenigo and de Pizzoni were not specific about the nature of these crucifixes, such as their size and manner of exhibition. The fact that Gradenigo's crucifix was stored in a chest suggests that it was probably a pendant reliquary cross rather than a larger item hung on a wall or set out for display on a tabletop or makeshift altar, like reliquaries in churches and chapels.

Reliquary pendants, most of which stored the wood of the True Cross, were commonly worn jewels in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, and they often took the form of crucifixes, a literal and symbolic reference to the relic stored inside.¹⁴⁷ An early Italian example of gilt silver and enamel, dating to the mid-fourteenth century, demonstrates how these pendants operated (fig. 71). A hinged front lifts to reveal a case for the relic, while the hole pierced in the center of the front and back of the cross may have been intended for a bar to fasten the relic in place. On the front-face is Christ on the cross, flanked by Saints Francis (left) and Jerome (right), with God the Father above and Mary Magdalene holding her jar of unguent below. A seated Virgin with the Christ Child occupy the reverse of the cross, and they are surrounded by Saint Dominic (right) and an unknown bishop saint (left); above is Saint Paul and Saint Dominic appears again below the central figural group.¹⁴⁸

An unusual item likely connected to domestic religious activities mentioned in Venetian Cinquecento inventories with notable frequency is the "banca da predica." It is probable that this domestic fixture corresponds to a specialized piece of furniture,

¹⁴⁶ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 63 (Gradenigo) 11r; and b. 41, n. 40 (Pizzoni) 4v.

¹⁴⁷ Lightbown, 202-203.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 470, pl. 280.

the kneeling bench—commonly known as the *prie-dieu*—that stemmed from the practice of personal devotion in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. Beginning in the early sixteenth century, these kneeling benches begin to appear in inventories from both Venice and Florence, which implies that their use in household devotion was fairly widespread. Images of the Annunciation from this period suggest this, as well.¹⁴⁹ Examples of this type of furnishing can be found in the myriad of early modern representations of the Madonna at home, in the midst of her prayers, when the angel Gabriel approaches her to announce that she will bear the son of God, as can be seen in the example by Lorenzo Lotto painted in around 1527 (fig. 72). Although they could range in terms of elaborateness, the basic form of the *prie-dieu* consisted of a low platform upon which the worshipper would kneel, which was attached by a pedestal or wooden front to a small shelf or table top to support prayer books and other devotional aids. In Venetian inventories, *banche da predica* are often recorded in the midst of other sacred goods, and the combined objects likely constituted a complete devotional environment. Nicolosa Sattina, the widow of Alessandro, kept one of these prayers benches in a *camera* that accommodated several religious paintings.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Maria Gracimanis, daughter of Gerolamo, had in her place of residence a “bancha da predica,” in addition to a number of pious goods that included paintings of the Madonna, Saint Lucy, and Saint Jerome, paternosters made of chalcedony, and an office of the Virgin.¹⁵¹

To understand the diversity of the sacred artistic objects—from traditional paintings to items that would fall under the category of decorative arts—accumulated

¹⁴⁹ Lydecker, 179.

¹⁵⁰ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 39, n. 26 (1556).

¹⁵¹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 31 (1535).

in a single household, the inventory of Gerolamo Zon, from 20 June 1545, provides a fitting example. The notary who compiled Zon's inventory provided few details about his life. We do know that his father's name was Piero, and that he lived in the district of San Gregorio. No wife or children are mentioned in the inventory, only his mother, who resided in her son's house. Although his profession is not known, Zon must have possessed substantial wealth, however, considering the amplitude of goods—both sacred and secular—in his home.

Gerolamo principally resided in a *camera* located over the garden. He displayed four paintings in this space, two religious in scope, and two secular. There was a large canvas that depicted the Madonna with Saints Sebastian, Roch, and other unnamed saints with a gilded background; a painting of Christ carrying the cross on His shoulder, with a gilded frieze; an image with the figure of Laura, the beloved of the famed fourteenth-century poet Petrarch, painted on walnut; and another small painting of the bard himself, with walnut “fornimenti,” a word which in this context likely meant some kind of frame.¹⁵² Zon also kept an Office of the Virgin in his room, and although the notary described it as “old,” the wear and tear of the book might indicate that the patron used this tome regularly, perhaps in conjunction with the holy pictures that adorned this space. In the *camera granda*, which in this instance it was not the room where Gerolamo normally resided, there was a large image of the Holy Family, painted in oil and described by the notary as “bello.” Such an affirmative description is rare to find in these inventories, so it must have been an exceptional painting for the notary to have taken note. Also kept in this room was a

¹⁵² I have come across one other mention of a painting depicting Petrarch in Renaissance Venetian inventories, which was a small painting representing only the head of the poet, which was owned by Giovanni Paolo Sumanpa, ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b., 36, n. 80 (October 29, 1539).

painting which bore the head of Christ in majesty, a crucifix, and altar cloths—one of black wool and worked “a dragoni”—and two others described as “tovagie,” or tablecloths, “da altar.”

The room of Gerolamo’s mother, Dionara, contained all religious paintings: one of Saint Stae “alla fiamenga”; another Flemish painting that depicted the Madonna; three small pictures that portrayed Christ, the Madonna, and St. Jerome; a medium-sized wooden Christ on the cross; and a seated figure in copper of Saint Helen. The *portego* of the Zon home, displayed sacred pictures, as well, which included a Byzantine icon of the Madonna and Child and the Last Supper, but alongside these pious subjects was a painting on canvas of the Flemish school, with what appears to have been a bathing scene, given the notary’s description: “...cu[m] certi figure nud[e] in aqua.” Although religious paintings dominate in the domestic setting, Zon’s inventory is not the only one to list both sacred and secular subjects in the same space; it seems that within the more personal context of the family *casa*, the juxtaposition of these seemingly disparate images was not considered irreverent, at least for the owner. In addition to all of these varied images and objects, Zon also owned what is perhaps one of the most intriguing works in all of the inventories I have come across: stored in his studio, along with books and money and other items that Zon held dear, was a *presepio*, or Nativity scene, with figurines made from silk and gold, adorned with small pearls and placed under a crystal cover.¹⁵³ The notary was not specific with regards to the dimensions of this work of art, but presumably it was not large, given the costly materials utilized. Although no works like this from

¹⁵³ “Un presepio cum certe figurine lavorade d[i] seda e doro cu[m] alguna perlete cu[m] coverxhio cristallo,” ASV, Canc, Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 37, n. 49.

the Renaissance survive today, at least to my knowledge, Zon's *presepio* does call to mind those small, three-dimensional, Nativity scenes that many families today display in their homes during the Christmas season.

Renaissance Venetian homes also contained objects that could have a strictly utilitarian domestic function, but were either incorporated into ritual use or were acquired specifically for a devotional function. For example, there is a differentiation in the inventories between metal basins for regular use—in which to wash hands and so forth—called the “sechiello di rame da lavar i mani,” and those that contained holy water, or the “sechiello di aqua santa.” These small bowls for “aqua santa” appear countless times in inventories of all social classes. Items such as candles, candlesticks, bells, and linens could also take on sacred functions. Usually, however, notaries indicated the ritual status of items with descriptors such as “da giesia” or “da altar”; these kinds of goods appear even in households in which there is no clear indication of the existence of an altar, like the example of Gerolamo Zon discussed above. The 1531 inventory of the nobleman Domenico Capello, for instance, records a “una bacinetta giesia,” or a small church basin, ornamented with the Capello arms, and due two candlesticks “da giesia.”¹⁵⁴ Antonio Rosso, whose inventory was drafted in 1544, had two “pani da altar,” or altar cloths,¹⁵⁵ and a woodcutter named Vettore, who worked at the Arsenale and lived in the parish of San Moisé, owned two turquoise “tovagie,” or tablecloths, “da altar,” in addition to another altar covering.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b., 35, n. 27.

¹⁵⁵ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 37, n. 2. One of the altar cloths was green, an unusual choice for such an item that the Church nowadays dictates must be white, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1: 318. The altar cloths recorded in Venetian inventories are of a variety of colors and materials, including cotton, velvet, and even leather.

¹⁵⁶ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 37, n. 14 (1543).

The incorporation of these liturgical goods into the household context, specifically those associated with an altar, could suggest a number of things. First, these domiciles may have contained altars, but ones that were built into the architectural fabric of the home, known as an *altare fixum*; these kinds of altars would have passed the scrutiny of the notary who only recorded movable goods. Second, families and individuals could have been acting as the custodians of such goods, which presumably would have been reserved for liturgical use, although one cannot be sure of such compliance. There is evidence from twelfth- and thirteenth-century Venetian testaments that ecclesiastical items were bequeathed by members of religious orders to lay persons for their safekeeping, which in the process bestowed upon the family a certain prestige, and the practice may have continued well into the succeeding centuries.¹⁵⁷ Third, these items described as “da altar” and “da giesia” could have been employed even without the presence of an altar, to transform ordinary furniture, like tables and benches, into ritual setting, a practice not sanctioned by the church, but nonetheless performed. Regardless of the actual situation for each household, the notary’s designation of particular items as for a church or altar makes clear that these were not everyday serviceable goods, but objects specifically reserved for sacred ceremonial use, either in the home or the ecclesiastical context.

¹⁵⁷ The inventory of a chaplain of San Marco, named Romano, from 1151, entrusted a silver chalice, a missal, a psalter, and other religious apparatuses to Leone Bonoaldo, and the wealthy nobleman Andrea Zeno of San Canciano, left to his son, Giovanni, in his will of 1285, reliquaries that he had received from a priest, with special orders to care and venerate them, never to transfer or lend them to others, and to continue to pass them down to make descendants of the family. Fernanda Sorelli, “Oggetti, libri, momenti domestici di devozione. Appunti per Venezia (secoli XII-XV),” in *Religione domestica*, Quaderni di Storia Religiosa (2001), 55-78: 56-57.

In addition to the aforementioned items that had connections to liturgical practice, inventories do confirm the presence of an altar in some households of the lagoon region. Notaries referred to household altars as *altare* and *altarette*, as well as *portatile*, and *piere sagrade*, terms which indicated an altar of a movable type; sacred stones or altar cloths, large enough to hold the host and chalice, could be inserted into or placed on the surface of a table that answered the purpose of an altar when an entire structure was not consecrated.¹⁵⁸ The register of Antonio Gradenigo, drawn up in 1538, is quite clear about the use of this patrician's altar, when the notary described it as “uno altaruol da dir mes[s]a sopra,” or “an altar upon which to say mass.”¹⁵⁹ The functions of fixed and portable altars were the same—a table upon which the Eucharist was celebrated—but the differences arose with regards to location. While churches were required to have a fixed altar, a portable altar could exist in other places intended as sites for the liturgy, including the home.¹⁶⁰ Few portable altars from the early modern period survive—perhaps the result of the greater scrutiny they received by the Church following the Council of Trent—but fortunately, they are not obsolete. A beautiful fourteenth-century portable altar of jasper and mother-of-pearl (fig. 73), believed to have been executed in Venice and today in the Museo degli Argenti in Florence, is considered by scholars to be the altar stone recorded in the

¹⁵⁸ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, I: 314-317. The stone itself symbolizes Jesus, as expressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:4: “The rock was Christ.” The accouterments of the altar complete the Christocentric imagery; the cloth laid on the table is his vestment, while the chalices and containers hold not merely wine and bread, but the body and blood of Christ. Robert Farris Thompson, *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas* (New York: Museum for African Art, 1993), 26.

¹⁵⁹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 36. Gradenigo's inventory also contains other liturgical items that were probably used in conjunction with his altar; these goods include a chalice (*calese*) and a corporal.

¹⁶⁰ Once an altar was blessed, its status as a consecrated object did not change despite a change of location. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, I: 314.

1456 and 1463 Medici inventories.¹⁶¹ The dimensions of the stone, 35 by 33 centimeters, make clear that portable altars were not generally large. Nor did they have to be plain; in addition to the different colored stones, ten small panels frame this portable altar, which depict: the Crucifixion, the Virgin and Child, SS. Peter, Paul, Lucy, Catherine, Agnes, Helen, and the Four Evangelists. Another, much later Medicean example in the Palazzo Pitti offers an idea of how the appearances of these transportable sacred apparatuses may have changed over time; this seventeenth-century *portatile* could literally be folded up into a carrying case and moved not only from one space to another within the residence, but also between edifices.

While the commercial culture of the Republic fostered new conceptions of domestic settings, reflected in the goods acquired for and activities performed within these spaces, religious observance persisted and thrived in the residences of all social levels throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and expressed itself in a variety of visual formats. The arts of domestic devotion in the Venetian interior cannot be summarized by a single religious subject, stylistic mode, or artistic object. Holy items, of an extensive range of types and distributed throughout the Venetian interior, created sacred environments within the household setting that took on a multiplicity of forms, from a painting hung on a wall before which prayers were regularly said, to an altar furnished with consecrated items that brought the ritual of liturgy into the realm of the household. Just as the types, appearances, and quality of pious goods were vast, so to were the functions they served within the household

¹⁶¹ Antonio Morassi, *Art Treasures of the Medici* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale d'Arte, 1963), plate 37.

context. The succeeding chapters will examine some of the roles that this visual culture fulfilled for the familial audience, which ran the gamut from aids in worship and spiritual meditation to talismanic devices, didactic instruments, and luxury goods that operated as outward expressions of the family's devoutness and honorable reputation.

Chapter 2: Domestic Devotion. Part I—Images

In the Renaissance painting galleries of the Metropolitan Museum of Art hangs a charming painting of the Madonna and Child, completed around 1510 and today attributed to a follower of Giovanni Bellini (fig. 74). The holy mother and her son are seated in a verdant landscape; a castle occupies the far left background while a hint of water appears on the right, perhaps a reference to the Venetian lagoon, where this artist—although unknown—undoubtedly worked. The Virgin looks down at her son in a somber manner, and the Christ Child glances attentively out to the side of the painting, as if also aware of his impending fate. Despite the melancholic manner of the figures, the colors—green, blue, red, salmon, and violet—are a harmonious blend of warm and cool that draw the eye into this carefully executed picture. Even a novice of Venetian painting would be able to recognize the influence of Giovanni Bellini on the artist—evident in the setting, composition, mood, and color. Although, generally overshadowed by paintings directly linked to the great master and his workshop, anonymous works like the Met's *Madonna and Child* are plentiful in museums throughout the world. Their abundance speaks to their initial success, which in turn raises questions about the artistic and functional significance they held for their original audiences. Why did images like these become so popular in Venice during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries? What factors allowed for the retention of certain pictorial formats over a prolonged period of time, simultaneously with innovations of form? In other words, what made pictures like this anonymous Met painting so conducive to domestic devotion?

The religious visual culture of the Renaissance Venetian residence attended to a variety of needs for families and individuals; first and foremost amongst these obligations—although not entirely disconnected from the others—was spiritual fulfillment. In order to construct a more complete picture of domestic devotion in Venice during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the following two chapters investigate this primary function of sacred household goods. In the current chapter, I examine the role of images in early modern Christianity, for they constituted the bulk of the sacred visual culture of Venetian homes. By the sixteenth century, a visual system of faith had been well established, and it held particular relevance in domestic environments where intimate relationships with pictures were fostered. Because a complete discussion of all household pictorial subjects is beyond the scope of this study, I concentrate my attention on Marian and Christological themes, which, as we have seen, were the most popular images acquired for personal dwellings. Various formal and stylistic strategies established particular kinds of relationships between the divine figures represented and the individuals who habitually used these images. The second part of this discussion—which picks up in Chapter Three—concentrates on the display of images, and the sacred spaces created in the household for domestic devotion through the accumulation of holy goods. But to understand why the home became such an important site for spiritual activity, I begin with a look at the broader context of lay piety in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, when personal spirituality assumed paramount importance in both Europe and Venice.

Lay Piety in the Middle Ages and Renaissance

The phenomenon of domestic devotion in Renaissance Venice can be securely situated in the larger religious context of period, in particular, the expansion and strengthening of lay piety over the course of several centuries throughout Europe. Simply stated, beginning in the twelfth century and continuing well into the Quattro and Cinquecento, Christian art and life underwent a fundamental shift away from theologized, “objective” piety toward ever more “subjective” and interior observances of religious faith.¹ A number of factors contributed to this profound transformation in lay spiritual life, all occurring nearly simultaneously, including the rise of mendicant orders in urban centers, an emerging middle class, the widespread availability of sacred goods, and the growing disillusionment amongst the laity with their traditional spiritual leaders.

To understand what led to these developments, however, it is necessary to look back briefly at the structure and operations of the Church in the patristic era and early medieval period. As Christianity became an established religion, a hierarchy based on sex and status was quickly established in the Church, giving male priests almost complete spiritual and social authority. Widespread illiteracy and the high price of manuscripts meant that the Bible and other sacred texts remained largely out of reach for the masses of the faithful. The assertion of a sacramental doctrine—part of the Gregorian reforms of the eleventh century—bolstered and sustained clerical hegemony as only priests and bishops could administer these salvific rites; this included the liturgy, the sacrament considered to be the most fundamental to the

¹ Timothy Verdon, “Introduction,” in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, eds. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 10.

individual's attainment of spiritual deliverance.² The performance of the mass in Latin in addition to the erection of rood screens that physically and visually separated worshippers from the officiant and the Eucharistic sacrifice meant that the laity was compelled to behave as spectators rather than participants in Christianity's official and public ritual. In fact, people did not regularly receive communion more than once a year, and were not encouraged to do so by Church officials until the Counter-Reformation.³

Although they were not authorized to dispense sacraments, monks, too, were considered of a status superior to the laity. Their ascetic and celibate lifestyle and immersion in a world of meditation and spiritual learning elevated monks to a higher moral rank; true prayer, and thus true salvation, took place within the monastery walls, physically and spiritually isolated from ordinary life.⁴ Under this spiritual and social hierarchy, the lay population was effectively removed from not only theological and institutional matters, but from any kind of devotional life, both at the communal and individual level.⁵

An overall sense of crisis in Europe during the late Middle Ages intensified an already rapidly growing rift between the religious and the laity. The dispute between the French royalty and Rome, which ultimately resulted in the Great Schism of the

² The Gregorian reforms also placed a large amount of wealth into the hands of the religious, due to the restoration of tithes and churches. Despite the clergy's power, most priests were not distinguished by an especially high level of culture; most had only a scant knowledge of both Latin and the Bible. André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Belief and Devotional Practices*, ed. and intro. Daniel Bornstein, trans. Margery J. Schneider (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1993), 10 and 20.

³ Swanson, 138; and Vauchez, 10.

⁴ Atkinson, 65-66.

⁵ Richard Keickhefer provides an excellent summary of the spiritual life of the laity in "Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Bernard McGinn and John Meyerhoff (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 75-108.

late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, was an inherently divisive series of events that cultivated a climate of animosity and conflict within an institution that claimed to be a center of unity and peace. The laity regarded the Schism as a threat not only to their earthly welfare, but also their prospects of eternal redemption.⁶ Furthermore, the growing perception of the clergy as corrupt and materialistic left the devout disheartened with the very people in whom they were expected to place their faith.⁷ The deadly bubonic plague that ravaged the European continent only compounded existing fears and anxieties as the pandemic was universally believed to be the wrath of God condemning the sins of humanity. It was in the midst of this tumultuous period that the character of lay devotion at once shifted and made itself felt more deeply in society. Believing that the pre-existing system of spiritual dependency was failing, as the medieval period wore on the lay community sought greater control over religious matters and their own salvation. Despite some institutional efforts to reform the Church, more and more the once essential clerical intermediaries between the faithful and God were bypassed for direct means by which an individual could connect with the divine. As stated by John Bossy: “Christians of the late medieval West did not need reformers to tell them who their savior was: not the pope, nor the learned Fathers of the Council of Constance who finally settled the Schism in 1417; not even, in the end, the hierarchical Church itself, but Christ.”⁸

The establishment of mendicant orders in the thirteenth century was another circumstance that transformed piety in profound ways, and the swift growth of these

⁶ John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*, OPUS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3.

⁷ Carlo Ginzburg, “Folklore, magia, religione” in *Storia d’Italia I. I caratteri originali*. (Turin: Einaudi, 1972), 603-676: 611.

⁸ Bossy, 3.

religious groups across Europe coincided directly with the laity's growing disenchantment with the Church hierarchy. In contrast to the monks of the earlier Middle Ages, mendicants were forbidden to own property and theoretically lived a life of begging. They elevated the impoverished position to one of great humility and sanctity, and thus they removed many of the financial and social barriers that previously had restricted ordinary persons from the spiritual life. In addition, these groups did not withdraw from society like the majority of monastic orders until that point but rather chose to settle in the growing urban centers of Europe as part of their missions of teaching and public charity, thereby bringing their views into the general cultural consciousness.

The presence of the mendicants was felt not only in their benevolent activities, but also in the large-scale churches that they constructed in cities—funded principally through private donations—to accommodate the massive congregations who came to hear the preaching for which they quickly became renowned. Mendicants addressed their audiences in the vernacular, employing a language and a style that was less dogmatic and more vivid than the academic manner of some clergy.⁹ As their numbers grew, these orders expanded their constituency to include women, and spawned tertiary orders to accommodate the lay society who were dedicated to their form of spirituality, charity, and preaching but did not want to take formal vows and/or live in a monastic community.¹⁰ The lifestyle, piety, and charitable acts of mendicants thus proposed a new model of and mode for sanctity—the apostolic life—

⁹ Vauchez, 22.

¹⁰ Tertiaries embraced a more formal commitment than most other laity, but they remained non-regular; in other words, they did not live in convents or monasteries. Third, or tertiary, orders became common for a number of religious orders across Europe as more and more of the lay population sought an active role in religion. Swanson, 113-114.

and it allowed the faithful the freedom to retain their lay status and take concrete spiritual action in this world.¹¹

The devotional activity that had once been the territory of the monastery now infused society at large.¹² As they became less and less dependent on the institutional church, the faithful created outlets to meet growing demands for spirituality, both at the communal level and through individual pursuits. Para-liturgical devotions, expressed in vernacular formulas and observances, assumed chief importance for the laity as a more attainable means of accessing the mysteries of the faith and gaining divine favor. To some extent this shift was “anticlerical” in that it challenged the traditional privileges of the religious, yet the impetus for lay spirituality stemmed not from a desire for alienation, but from belief. As men and women came to comprehend their faith, they pursued greater participation and command in local religious life, which, as one scholar has described it, “laicized” late medieval and early modern Christianity.¹³ Many cities, like Venice, called for the election of parish priests, affording the laity at least partial influence over the liturgy and the foundational unit of the Church. Confraternities sprang up in urban areas all along the Italian peninsula and elsewhere in Europe. These lay religious brotherhoods, some of which generated from guilds and occupational groups, offered individuals a community of devotion through which to perform penitential rites, like flagellation, and practice acts of charity, such as the establishment of hospitals and prayers for the

¹¹ Vauchez, 18.

¹² Kurt Barstow, *The Gualenghi-d'Este Hours: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Ferrara* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000), 13.

¹³ Peter G. Wallace, *The Long European Reformation: Religion, Political Conflict, and the Search for Conformity, 1350-1750* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 67. This increased influence of the lay population may have also been the result of an expanding urban middle class, who, with increasing wealth, were able to exercise varying degrees of authority in both social and spiritual matters.

dead. The endowment of chapels, altarpieces, and liturgical articles in churches by confraternal groups as well as private families was another means by which the laity asserted not only their piety, but also control and ownership on par with those who typically occupied these ecclesiastical spaces.¹⁴

At the same time that the laity looked to their communities for spiritual fulfillment, they also turned increasingly inward to experience religion on a profoundly personal level. Several factors fueled the appetite of the laity for a spirituality felt more directly. On top of their public vocation, mendicant orders—in particular the Franciscans—and other religious groups that emerged in the late medieval period emphasized an incarnational theology expressed through devotion to Christ and Mary. In particular, they promoted meditations on the *human* suffering of the Madonna and her son so that the devotee could identify with their pain as a means of building intimate relationship with the divine.¹⁵ Such messages were further advanced through the circulation of devotional texts that advocated more direct and personal bonds with the sacred that in effect eliminated the need for recourse to priestly authority. *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis—the classic text of the *Devotio Moderna* movement—is just one example of the many popular devotional texts in broad circulation across Europe. A group of spiritual treatises, it was designed to engage the soul in an intimate and tender dialogue with Christ.¹⁶ By

¹⁴ Swanson, 123.

¹⁵ Each religious order had its own approach to the doctrine of the incarnation. For example, the Dominicans tended to take a more mystical and intellectual approach to devotion, while the Franciscans placed greater emphasis on the humanity of Christ, the Virgin, and saints, thus using assimilation as a means to build a rapport with the divine.

¹⁶ The *Devotio moderna*, a lay religious movement that called for the revitalization of spiritual life, originated in Holland during the fourteenth century and quickly spread into France, Germany and Italy; this renewal called for, amongst other things: an inwardness of faith, the examination of one's

drawing Christ near, familiarity would yield deeper bonds of love with the divine and a desire to imitate his life.¹⁷ Printing and the relatively rapid translation of religious tracts into the vernacular meant that broader segments of the population could access the messages of these texts with particular mass appeal.

During this period of intense lay involvement in spiritual life, the cult of saints assumed particular importance; in fact, the period between 1200 and 1500 marked the pinnacle of the dissemination and popularity of saints within the Church.¹⁸ The extraordinary spiritual accomplishments of saints and *beati* elevated them to the status of intercessor and exemplar for large segments of the population.¹⁹ The laity became avid consumers of apocrypha and hagiography, like Jacopo da Voragine's *Golden Legend* from the late thirteenth century, which recast and told anew stories of holy personages with a fresh vividness and psychological intensity. The details of the everyday rather than remote theology emphasized the humanity—and sometimes common origins—of these saintly characters and brought them close to the laity as real flesh and blood persons.²⁰

The emerging concept of purgatory in the late Middle Ages was another factor that propelled individuals to take action in this world for their future in the next.

Purgatory was a nebulous state of the afterlife that provided the possibility of eradicating sins, but it was a dreaded “place” not so dissimilar from hell, and where

conscience, and the belief that knowledge of God lay open to all Christians, regardless of education or class. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 398. See also Vauchez, 25.

¹⁷ Van Os, 164.

¹⁸ Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

¹⁹ Brigitte Cazelles, “Introduction,” in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, edited by Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Tímea Szell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 1-17:2.

²⁰ Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 411.

one could potentially spend unbearable—not to mention inconceivable—quantities of time before the soul was purified and made ready for paradise. The anxiety over purgatory presented new inducements to prepare properly for the afterlife. Concerns over salvation and the impending state of the soul thus motivated most expressions of medieval and early modern piety.²¹ The Church, perhaps recognizing the growing unease—and force—of its lay constituents, added to the apprehension over the afterlife while simultaneously offering an incentive for increased devotional activity; through its offer of indulgences, the Church allowed the individual the possibility to reduce his or her time in purgatory with devout and moral actions here on earth.

At the outset indulgences granted only short periods of remission based on real periods of time in this world, such as five, ten or twenty years. During the years of the Black Death, however, the number of indulgences distributed increased and the length of pardoned time was made longer by nearly incalculable amounts—up to 30,000 and 40,000 years or more.²² Indulgences were typically connected with particular images and objects, as devotion itself in the early modern period was intimately tied to a visual and material component, as will be discussed in further detail below. For example, prayers before the Holy Face—also known as the *vera icon*—and the Man of Sorrows, two subjects considered to be particularly sacred, fetched astonishing sums that varied between 33,000 and 224,000 years.²³ In 1476 the system of salvation widened when Sixtus IV officially declared that indulgences could be extended to include the souls of the dead. The pressure to acquire indulgences thus expanded to involve living family members now responsible for

²¹ Swanson, 37-38, 137.

²² Swanson, 217-221.

²³ Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 23-25.

praying for the soul of a departed loved one.²⁴ Although the “mechanization” of religion that was often the result of the desire to obtain indulgences was criticized by Protestant reformers, the practice did not necessarily promote superstitious or insincere religion; by and large, individuals were motivated by faith, and the ritual aspect tied to the acquisition of indulgences—such as repetition and the adherence to a set of particular actions and methods—assured the efficacy of the process.

The growing movement of lay piety coincided with increased wealth among an emerging middle class that afforded average persons with the ability to become active consumers of religion. Within the context of an intensified involvement in spiritual life on behalf of the laity for which new modes of personal and affective religiosity were discerned, household images and religious objects, like prayer beads and sacred amulets, provided a “plastic mode of perceiving the religious world using direct sensory experience” unlike the abstract conceptions of and approaches to the sacred that had characterized religion in past centuries.²⁵ Individuals apprehended their relationship with the divine largely in relation to the incarnation, the fundamental doctrine of Christianity. In his analysis of the *Vita Christi* by Ludolph of Saxony, Charles Abbot Conway has argued that this doctrine allowed for certain theological approaches towards material objects at the same time that it permitted a kind of meditation that presented spiritual ideas in a concrete manner.²⁶ Artifacts, therefore, offered a highly desired aesthetic and tangible component in a religion that is, at its root, materially oriented. The growing appetite for a profoundly personal

²⁴ Swanson, 217-224.

²⁵ Belting, 7.

²⁶ Charles Abbot Conway, *The Vita Christi of Ludolph of Saxony and Late Medieval Devotion Centred on the Incarnation: A Descriptive Analysis* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1976), 17.

relationship with God thus prompted the laity to acquire goods for personal use in order to claim ownership over aspects of the sacred experience that had traditionally been kept out of reach.²⁷ Artists and artisans responded to the spiritual needs of the lay community with not only an increased output of devotional images and objects, but also new styles, compositional formats, and production techniques to make the divine both financially and psychologically accessible. With the introduction of devotional goods to the marketplace, institutions could no longer claim complete control over images and relics; instead the sacred could belong personally to families and individuals.²⁸

Venice and Devotion

Renaissance Venice was an environment ripe for the flourishing of new approaches to lay piety, largely due to its inhabitants' conception of the lagoon city as uniquely sacral. Venetians referred to their city as *la sancta città*, and believed that their Republic arose—and survived—in such an improbable location through holy means.²⁹ According to legend, Venice was founded on the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25) in the year 421, a date that instituted a bond between the incarnation of Christ and the origins of the city as well as the State's special affinity with the Virgin Mary, its holy protectress.³⁰ Urban spaces, as they do today, abounded with churches, monasteries, and confraternal meeting houses—all revered as shelters for relics and

²⁷ Craig Harbison, *The Mirror of the Artist: Northern Renaissance Art in its Historical Context* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 87.

²⁸ Belting, 409-10.

²⁹ Brown, *Art and Life*, 91; and David Rosand, *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), esp. 6-46.

³⁰ Kasl, 59.

other holy objects.³¹ Hundreds of outdoor shrines, bearing images of the Madonna and saints, were attached to bridges (fig. 75) and the facades of buildings, or suspended across walkways (fig. 76), tying together the city plan with sacred sites.³² As will be discussed in the final chapter, members of Venice's *scuole*, or lay religious fraternities, collectively pursued salvation through the performance of charitable activities and by seeking to secure the intercession of the Virgin and saints on behalf of the city. *Campi* and *calli* were transformed into ritual areas during the feast days that saturated the Venetian calendar, when relics and sacred images were processed through the urban environment, an occurrence memorialized in Gentile Bellini's *Procession in the Piazza San Marco*, from 1496 (fig. 77).³³ Even foreigners remarked on Venice's sanctity and its presumed favored position in the eyes of God. The French historian and statesman Philippe de Commines (c. 1477-1511) was amazed not only by the placement of the city and its many churches and monasteries on the water, but also the tribute Venetians paid to God and the Church:

“... In the neighborhood of the city within a radius of less than half a French league there are some seventy monasteries and all of them are on islands... not including those which are within the town, which comprise four mendicant orders, some seventy-two parishes, and many confraternities; and it is a very strange thing to see such beautiful and large churches constructed in the sea...

³¹ The Republic also went to great lengths to acquire and preserve relics of particular saints to whom the city was especially devoted, including their patron, Saint Mark. Denys Hays, *The Church in Italy in the Fifteenth Century, The Birkbeck Lectures, 1971* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 68.

³² Most of the Virgins and saints on the exterior walls of buildings were the result of neighborhood or private devotions rather than the encouragement of religious orders or parish priests, Edward Muir, “Virgin on the Street Corner,” 25. See also Antonio Niero, ‘Il capitello nella società della religiosità popolare veneziana,’ in *I capitelli e la società religiosa veneta: atti del convegno tenutosi a Vicenza dal 17 al 19 marzo 1978* (Vicenza: Istituto per le ricerche di storia sociale e di storia religiosa, 1979), 21-60.

³³ Every year, public festivals in Venice honored 65 saints' days and ten movable feasts, in addition to entries of foreign dignitaries and ambassadors, the coronations and funerals of doges, and the commemorations of victories and public treaties. Deborah Howard has postulated that at least every five days, every year, Venice was engaged in an elaborate public ritual. Deborah Howard, “Ritual Space in Renaissance Venice” in *Scroope: Cambridge Architectural Journal* 5 (1993/4): 4-11. esp. 4.

It is the most sumptuous city which I have ever seen and the one that treats its ambassadors and foreigners with most honor and the one that is governed most wisely and the one in which the service of God is celebrated most solemnly. And although they may well have other faults, I do believe that God helps them for the reverence which they bring to the service of the church.”³⁴

The sacred and profane were inextricably tied in nearly all aspects of Venetian life, including governmental systems and policies. Matters normally regarded as under the realm of ecclesiastical rule—such as the appointment of bishops, jurisdiction over local clerics and churches, censorship and the management of heresy—were regarded by Venetians as falling within the domain of the temporal authority of the state. Conversely, the enactment of laws and the “secular” affairs of the Republic took place—literally and figuratively—under the guidance and protection of the Virgin and a host of divine figures in the chamber of the *Maggior Consiglio* in the Palazzo Ducale. This room was richly decorated with images of the Madonna, Christ and saints, both before and after the devastating fires that destroyed parts of the palace in 1577; Tintoretto’s enormous painting of *Paradise* (fig. 78), executed between 1588 and 1594, still hangs on the wall behind the ducal throne.³⁵ The doge was simultaneously *princeps in republica* and *princeps in ecclesia*; he was the pinnacle of the Venetian political and social hierarchy, but embodied the sanctity of the city, as well.³⁶ His sacral role was made visible in public ceremonial acts and

³⁴ Philippe de Commines, *The Memoirs of Philippe de Commines*, 2 vols., ed. Samuel Kinsler (Columbia, SCL University of South Carolina Press, 2969-73), Book Seven: 489-90.

³⁵ Prior to the fire, a fresco of the *Coronation of the Virgin* by the Paduan artist Guariento adorned this wall; there were additional canvases and frescoes by artists such as Gentile da Fabriano, Antonio Veneziano, Michelino da Besozzo, Alvise Vivarini, Jacobello del Fiore, and Michele Giambono, all of which were nearly destroyed. On the painting campaign after the fire, see Norbert Huse and Wolfgang Wolters, *The Art of Renaissance Venice: Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting, 1460-1590*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 303-307, and 318-322; and Humfrey, *Painting in Renaissance Venice*, 255-265.

³⁶ Hays, 69.

through the location of his residence (fig. 79) next to St. Mark's basilica, the city's spiritual core and the resting place for its patron saint.

Beginning in the first half of the mid-fifteenth century Venice grew into an active center of reform, and this tendency toward change persisted for generations. Kurt Barstow has described the influence on Venetian piety during this period as reading "like virtual encyclopedias of the melting pot of late medieval devotional currents"; Bernard of Clairvaux, the Franciscans, and the *Devotio Moderna* were just a few of the influential figures and groups behind the "Venetian reform-minded spirituality of the Quattrocento."³⁷ In general, the Republic's reformers pushed for a decentralized and purified church that redirected its mission towards more spiritual goals, as well as the greater involvement of the laity in the fulfillment of these objectives.³⁸ While there was a call for a transformation in the outward form of religion, of perhaps greater concern were the interior life and tendencies of the individual. As elsewhere in Europe, the overall current of spirituality in Venice was one that was subjective and penitential, involving the examination of conscience, personal prayer, and the interiorization of the mysteries of the faith.³⁹

One of the best known advocates for reform of the church, as well as personal improvement, was Gasparo Contarini, a Venetian statesman and cardinal.⁴⁰ In his call for transformation, Contarini united the need for a personal and contemplative

³⁷ Barstow, 105. Ludovico Barbo (1381-1443) founded a community of regular canons at San Giorgio in Alga and they operated as Venice's own analogue to the *devotio moderna*, William Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 82.

³⁸ Bouwsma, 82-83.

³⁹ Barstow, 105 and 108.

⁴⁰ On Gasparo Contarini, see Elizabeth Gleason, *Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome, and Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and David Curtis Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings: from Geiler von Kayersburg to Theodore Beza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 23-31.

piety with a life of service. For this Venetian nobleman, true faith and love of God began at home. In a tract from 1530 in which he offered prescriptions for dealing with Protestantism. Contarini wrote:

“We do not need councils, disputations, syllogisms, and excerpts from Holy Scripture to quiet the agitation of the Lutherans, but good will, love of God, and neighbor, and humility of soul, as we put aside avarice and pride in our possessions and splendid domestic establishments, and *convert our households to what the Gospel prescribes*. This is necessary to extinguish the errors and tumults of the Lutherans. Let us not bring against them heaps of books, Ciceronian orations, subtle arguments, but uprightness of life and a humble mind cleansed of pride, only desiring Christ and the good of our neighbor....”⁴¹

While Contarini may have employed the term “households” metaphorically to refer to one’s interior self, his directive can also be interpreted literally within the context of domestic life in Renaissance Venice. Venetians had long conceived of their dwellings as environments in which to pursue the sacred and better the soul. As religion became more personal and emotive, the home provided one of the most salient settings in which intimate communication with the divine could take place. As discussed in the previous chapter, this found visible expression in the religious images and objects that families and individuals acquired, in conjunction with the devotional acts performed in domestic sphere. Unlike works of art made for churches, where the interests of religious orders, clergies, and their congregations entered into the choice of image, within the walls of the home the patron’s own interests and spiritual needs determined his or her visual choices.⁴² While often connected to and inspired by institutional and communal piety, these items were firmly rooted within the personal and familial environment, which affected, at times,

⁴¹ Italics are mine. From *Confutatio articulorum seu quaestionum Lutheranorum*. Quote from Bouwsma, 125-126.

⁴² Kent, 248.

their physical and formal characteristics. Likewise, individual responses to these items were unconstrained by the physical structures and/or rules of decorum often imposed by an ecclesiastical context.⁴³ Through the acquisition, display, and use of devotional images and goods, lay Venetians were active agents in shaping their spiritual and domestic lives.

Image Devotion

It was within a material Christianity, as outlined above, that images came to play a fundamental role. In many ways, pictures formed the core of medieval and Renaissance piety that was based on the principals of visualization and imitation. With paintings comprising the substantial portion of the visual religious culture of the average Venetian home in the Cinquecento, it is likely that family and individuals oriented their domestic devotions largely around the image. Pictures took on new forms, contexts, and roles in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, yet the Church's position on their function remained relatively stable; at their most fundamental level, images served to instruct the unlettered, to aid memory, and to stimulate feelings of devotion. Renaissance art theorists reiterated this last principle, arguing for the affective nature of images. In his fundamental treatise, *De Pictura*, written in 1435, Leon Battista Alberti called painting "...a great gift to men, in that it represents the gods we worship, for painting has contributed considerably to the piety which binds

⁴³ Swanson, 161.

us to God and to filling our minds with sound religious beliefs...”⁴⁴ Almost a century and a half later, Giovanni Battista Armenini expressed similar sentiments in his *De veri precetti della pittura* from 1586. Armenini wrote that images move individuals “to true piety, and thereby drawn to devotion and reverence—all of which are remedies and excellent means for their salvation.”⁴⁵

Many in the Church expanded further on the role of images within the specific framework of devotion, adopting rather academic approaches. Medieval and Renaissance theologians, such as Saint Bernard, Nicolas of Cusa, Jean Gerson, and later, Pietro Alcantara and Fulvio Androzio, offered a multileveled theory of images and prayer, which was first introduced by Saint Augustine to explain human sight. The theorists divided contemplation into three realms, each one advancing on the previous: the corporeal, or meditating before actual images; the spiritual, when images are formed in the mind; and the intellectual, the state at which there is no need for images, either real or imagined.⁴⁶ Corporeal images were considered useful in that they eventually led to contemplation of God, but ideal devotion—the domain of the true mystic—dispensed with physical and mental pictures for it was imageless, like the divine.⁴⁷ For example, in deliberating on the gaze of God, Nicolas of Cusa wrote:

“O Lord my God, the longer I look upon Thy face the more keenly dost Thou seem to turn the glance of Thine eyes upon me! Thy gaze causeth me to consider how this image of Thy face is thus perceptibly painted, since a face cannot be painted without color, nor can color exist without quantity. But I

⁴⁴ Quote from David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 44.

⁴⁵ Quote from Freedberg, 2.

⁴⁶ Johnson, “Beautiful Brides and Model Mothers,” 143. According to the Jesuit Fulvio Androzio, there were four stages involved: “preparatione, rappresentatione, consideratione, & oratione,” Aikema, 59.

⁴⁷ Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 16; Kasl, 73.

perceive, not with my fleshy eyes, which look on this icon of Thee, but with the eyes of my mind and understanding, the invisible truth of Thy face, which therein is signified, under a shadow and limitation. Thy true face is freed from any limitation, it hath neither quantity nor quality, nor is it of time or place, for it is the Absolute Form, the Face of faces.”⁴⁸

Given the pervasiveness of images in Renaissance religious culture, both in the ecclesiastical and lay contexts, contemporary practice seems to have circumvented theological prescriptions. A hand-written note in the margin of a surviving copy of the *Miracoli della Vergine Maria*—a book of Marian miracle stories of which there were at least thirty-two Italian editions by 1500—asserts: “I have read, seen, and heard this miracle.”⁴⁹ The statement captures how the sacred was received by this particular owner, but it also encapsulates devotion for the majority of the faithful in the Renaissance. Proof of the divine came not only through words read and heard, but also through sight, and household images offered daily confirmation of this. As described by David Morgan, seeing, like reading, is “an act of worship, an observation of awe, but also a constructive act that transforms the spiritual into the material.”⁵⁰ The laity of early modern Venice desired relationships with the divine that were rooted in their own realities and sensory experiences. This is not to say, however, that the physical world was deemed to have value solely in and for itself; rather, in this mode of theology, the material was regarded as a possible means of grace precisely because God had entered into it. Ludolph of Saxony, for instance, who wrote a popular *vita* of Christ in the fourteenth century, asserted that if taken in its own terms, the world will lead to death, but if one recognizes divine

⁴⁸ Nicolas of Cusa, “The Gaze of God,” from *The Vision of God*, 1453. Excerpt from *An Anthology of Devotional Literature*, comp. Thomas S. Kepler, foreword by James Earl Massey (Nappanee, IN: Jordan Pub., 2001), 229.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Kasl, 79.

⁵⁰ Morgan, 20.

action within human nature and brings his or her life to conform to that knowledge, then the experiences of earthly existence can be used as a means for achieving true salvation.⁵¹

The repeated assertions by Church leaders that images were worthy of veneration only as representations of a divine model is an unspoken acknowledgement that the boundaries between presence and representation were often blurred. Siena's Saint Bernardino, for example, complained that when people entered a church, they "went first and foremost to some figure near and dear to them and nowhere else."⁵² At nearly all levels of religious practice images were invested with powers that were dependent upon the real and direct presence of who or what was represented.⁵³ Accounts of miraculous working images circulated throughout Italy, and Venice was no exception. Such stories of rescue, healing, and protection prompted the explosion of local cults that manifested themselves in a variety of ways, including: the erection of shrines, the proliferation of ex-votos, pilgrimages and processions to and from the sacred site, and reproductions of the potent object itself—a subject that will be examined in greater detail in the final chapter. These physical and ritual markers honored the holy image as both acts of thanksgiving and entreaties for continued divine favor. As substitutes for the divine personage represented, miraculous images required no "advancement" to the intellectual level of contemplation for the holy was immediately present in the lines, colors and forms on the depicted surface.

⁵¹ Conway, 14-15.

⁵² Kasl, 75.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 75.

The laity also had numerous examples of saintly figures whose spiritual visions of and experiences with the sacred were prompted by images, thus further advancing vision as a central component of religious experience. Saint Catherine of Alexandria's mystical marriage to the Christ child, for example, came about as a result of her private prayers before an image of the Virgin, a gift that she had received from a hermit. The story of Saint Catherine—one of the most popular female saints in Venetian homes—was well known amongst Christians during the Renaissance both through her legend and the countless images that depicted the steps undertaken by the virginal saint to achieve her encounter with Christ. Two side-by-side miniatures from a Bolognese manuscript (fig. 80) illustrate the series of events in a clear and straightforward manner. On the left Catherine receives from the hermit a small, portable panel, which she displays within a private oratory assembled in her bedchamber, as seen in the right-hand miniature. The figures of the Madonna and Child stand within this domestic space as a demonstration of the rewards of Catherine's devoted nature: the direct transformation of the visual into the visionary.⁵⁴ Stories like that of Catherine persisted into the Middle Ages and Renaissance and they told how images not only prompted mystical experiences but they also served to commemorate them. Rose of Viterbo used a small painting of the Madonna to convert sinners, while Maria of Venice, a Dominican Tertiary, commissioned a painting of herself in the act of offering her heart to the crucified Christ.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Kasl, 75-76, Victor M. Schmidt, "Painting and Individual Devotion in Late Medieval Italy: The Case of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, in *Visions of Holiness*, 21-36.

⁵⁵ The subject of the painting was a reference to Saint Catherine of Siena, to whom Maria was particularly devoted, who offered her heart to Jesus and received his in exchange. In fact, Maria's

As the example of Saint Catherine demonstrates, the domestic environment was one context in which images were permitted greater authority and influence in the realm of devotion. This was certainly true in sixteenth-century Venice, where there was an overwhelming proliferation of holy pictures in the majority of households across the island. Images acquired for and displayed in the everyday environment afforded their owners close contact—both physically and emotionally—with visual embodiments of the divine. The protocol of ecclesiastical spaces, as well as the cerebral dictates of theological discourse, did not apply in the somewhat habitual and informal spaces of the home. Any distinctions and boundaries between presence and representation were harder—and perhaps less desirable—to maintain. Personal possession of holy images allowed for direct and intimate exchange with familiar representations of holy personages meaningful to the patron.⁵⁶ The encounter did not necessarily need to extend beyond the level of images as it did with ideal devotion posited by contemporary theologians, for true spiritual engagement could, and did, occur within the realm of vision, both real and imagined.

The styles and formal elements of the religious art adopted for domestic spaces attest to the active engagement with images in devotional activity. Given the appearance of the holy images that have come down to us from the households of Renaissance Venice, and what is known about lay spirituality and devotion in the Republic during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it appears that two principal pictorial modes were operative in approaching the sacred, one stemming from long-

spiritual director, Tommaso Caffarini, described Maria's desire to buy a "portrait" of Saint Catherine from one of the painters who displayed his wares at the Venetian parish of Saint Luke. Maria was unhappy, however, with the outcome because the painter had depicted her presenting her heart with only one hand. Kasl, 76.

⁵⁶ Kasl, 75.

standing visual and religious traditions, and the other from more contemporary trends in lay piety.⁵⁷ On the one hand, images emphasized differences between the divine and the beholder as a means to heighten the sacral quality of the depicted figure or mystery that functioned as the object of devotion; this was achieved through the adoption of the icon from the Eastern Orthodox Church. Inhabitants of the Republic remained ardent consumers of the Byzantine manner long after the style fell out of favor elsewhere in Italy and suffered the disparaging remarks of art theorists like Giorgio Vasari and Giovanni Battista Armenini.⁵⁸ The Basilica of San Marco, an opulent blend of East and West in its form and interior decoration, presented the residents of and visitors to Venice with a constant visual reminder of the deep rooted cultural and religious ties between the Republic and Byzantium, and which remained at the core of the city's spiritual life. Such bonds were also maintained on a more personal level. As mentioned in Chapter One, Venetian inventories list hundreds of paintings—normally of the Madonna—described as “alle greche,” or in the Greek style (figs. 33 & 34). Such a manner of representation was considered neither exotic

⁵⁷ By highlighting these two pictorial modes, I do not mean to preclude other visual means employed for devotional art during this period. Varied contexts and functions of images necessitated diverse artistic styles and forms, and would have provoked multitudinous encounters.

⁵⁸ According to Vasari, the Tuscan painter Cimabue rescued Italian painting from the “rude” manner of the Greeks. Armenini reiterated such sentiments with the deprecatory remarks he made about Greek icons that he had seen in Northern Italy. Palaces and houses in that area of the peninsula were splendidly adorned, he noted, “except for the paintings of holy images which for the most part consisted of little panels of certain figures *alla greca*, very coarse, unpleasing and entirely sootblackened; and apt to anything but to excite devotion or to be an ornament to the place. And it is, indeed, a great shame that we, though Christians and true Catholics, spend so much on various kinds of pomp and that beyond measure; while in the rooms where we rest and spend most of our lives in sweet rest, we should not lack images with grace and good design. For whereto do we turn every day and pray to God if not to such beautiful images?” Quote from Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 34-35.

nor arcane for Renaissance Venetians, but a familiar style of inherent value, for Venice identified Byzantium and its cultural production with the sacred.⁵⁹

In the East, the function of the icon was liturgical; occupying a more or less fixed position in the iconostasis in the church, the image in the icon constituted a persuasive theological presence, and was considered the memory of Christ's incarnation.⁶⁰ As icons traveled to Europe following the sack of Constantinople in 1204, their function and setting became more fluid. In the West, icons were typically displayed on altars, but as their popularity increased—often the result of their purported authority to perform miracles—they soon began to appear non-ecclesiastical contexts, such as the home. Unlike elsewhere on the Italian peninsula, the Venetian admiration for Greek icons never waned as the centuries passed; many of the miracle-producing Madonnas esteemed throughout the Republic were either from Byzantium or executed in that style, and they continued to appear regularly amongst the belongings of the city's households all throughout the sixteenth century.⁶¹

The value of the icon rested in its resemblance with the original.⁶² Since the seventh and eighth centuries, legend has maintained that Saint Luke the Evangelist

⁵⁹ Rona Goffen, "Icon and Vision," 487-88. Many devotions and rituals popular in the Republic derived from Byzantine religious traditions, as well. For example, the ritual of the baptism of the cross, which took place in Saint Mark's Basilica, originated in the Eastern Church, and became unique to the Republic in the West. The blessed water that resulted from this sacred act was then brought into homes for diverse uses, usually of an apotropaic nature. Venetians also adopted Byzantine military saints, like Theodore, George, and Demetrius, and avidly sought relics from the East. For more on the influence of Byzantine piety in Venice, see Antonio Niero, "Influsso della pietà bizantina sulla pietà italiana," *Il Vetro* 1-2 anno XXXVII (Jan-Apr 1983): 155-169.

⁶⁰ Maria Pia di Dario Guida, *Icone di Calabria e altre icone meridionale* (Soveria Mannelli, Italy: Rubbettino, 1993), 18-19.

⁶¹ The Madonna Nicopeia in the Basilica of San Marco is perhaps the most famous example. is just one example. Others include the Madonna Ortocosta, which arrived from Laconia and the Mesopanditissa from Candia, which became the Madonna della Salute in 1670. Niero, "Influsso della pietà bizantina," 160.

⁶² Goffen, *Giovanni Bellini* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 25.

painted the first icon of the Madonna and Christ Child; therefore, all subsequent icons were considered to be a special form of revelation, with an authority rooted in a shared historical origin and authorship.⁶³ Icons held a sacredness intrinsic to their style and form that replication was able to perpetuate. Through the faithful reproduction of the “givens” of potent Byzantine images, replicas were believed to be as powerful as the original.⁶⁴ Of course, variations in icons did develop over time, but certain visual consistencies persisted that acted as a mark of authenticity. The heavy use of gold symbolized the divine realm while the stylized, sometimes flattened and pattern-like forms assured the purity of the image. The half-length format consistently used for these images added to their effectiveness. Even in the absence of naturalism, the focus lay on the upper half of the person, that portion of the body considered to be more spiritual. Tracing their origins back to Saint Luke’s representation of the Madonna, these images of saints and holy figures were thus intimately tied to the function of a portrait: the transformation of the absence of an individual into presence through artistic means.⁶⁵

Considering the importance of imitation in the efficacy of the icon, the *madonne alle greche* repeatedly listed in Venetian inventories may have been replicas of highly visible and highly effective cult images or, at the very least, would have called to mind these more public pictures.⁶⁶ The Madonna Nicopeia, the Republic’s most revered representation of the Mother of God brought to the Basilica of San

⁶³ For an interesting discussion on the legend of Luke and its relationship to the act of seeing, see Morgan, 15-21. See also Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies: Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁶⁴ Guida, 22.

⁶⁵ Goffen, *Giovanni Bellini*, 25-26.

⁶⁶ Rona Goffen, *Piety and Patronage in Renaissance Venice: Bellini, Titian, and the Franciscans* (New Haven, 1986), 142.

Marco from Constantinople in 1234 and still honored there today, is one such example (fig. 81).⁶⁷ Tradition held that this icon was painted by Saint Luke, and its display in the city's central ritual space on major feast days, as well as its procession around the Piazza S. Marco during times of disease and war, meant that that its form was well-known in the Republic.⁶⁸ In this image, the Madonna is presented frontally, holding her infant son, in a manner that highlights her role as Theotokos, or "Bearer of God." The gilded and jeweled panel that supports her image was enhanced even further by the frequent supplement of additional jewels—more ephemeral and shifting—that mark the Madonna's status as heavenly queen as well as the eminence of the object itself. Personal possession of a copy of the Madonna Nicopeia—or any other miracle-producing image throughout the Republic—brought about increased and more intimate participation in the icon's institutionalized veneration, while the repetition of its subject and style assured the legitimacy and truth of the replica.

The Greek works captured divinity through abstracted figural forms and golden surroundings, as if reversing the tripartite theory of contemplation outlined above by making visually manifest that which is intellectual and imageless. At the same time that Venetians were avidly acquiring Byzantine pictures for their households based on these sacral qualities of difference, artists' workshops

⁶⁷ The name "Nicopeia" means victorious; the image's title derived from the unique role the icon had played in Asia Minor, where it had been carried in battle in a manner meant to recall the Hebrews who carried the ark of Moses when they fought the Canaanites. The Venetians expected it to bring similar blessings of victory to the Republic. The icon was taken from Constantinople by Doge Enrico Dandolo in 1204 and presented to S. Marco in 1234. James H. Moore, "Venezia favorita da Maria: Music for the Madonna Nicopeia and the Santa Maria della Salute," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 37 (Summer 1984): 304; and Rona Goffen, *Piety and Patronage*, 142.

⁶⁸ When the Procurators of Saint Mark's assembled before Doge Giovanni Bembo in 1617 to present a plan for a new permanent altar dedicated to the Madonna Nicopeia, they described the icon as "the miraculous image of the Blessed Virgin Mary painted by the hand of Saint Luke the Evangelist..." Quote from Moore, 304.

throughout the city and the Veneto region were creating increasingly naturalistic paintings of holy figures that quickly rivaled their Eastern counterparts in the context of domestic devotion. The Madonna, Christ, and saints began to be represented as tangible, living beings—a mirror of the beholder—oftentimes set within domestic locales or landscapes that, while frequently idyllic and imaginary, were convincing in their naturalism. In pictures by artists like Giovanni Bellini, Giorgione, Titian, Jacopo Bassano and many others dedicated to a new vision of painting, holy figures and the details of their surroundings were made all the more real not only to appeal to the aesthetic tastes of a sophisticated class of patrons, but to meet their spiritual demands. The artistic methods employed by these artists collapsed the tripartite system of contemplation as icons did, but in an opposite manner; in these instances, the naturalism of the images brought the divine to the human level.

The devout certainly would have had a different relationship with his or her Madonna “*alla greca*” versus a Madonna executed in the manner of Titian, such as one of the artist’s earliest works, painted around 1510 and today in Bergamo (fig. 82). Titian’s Virgin, with her soft, ample form, appears like a real woman in an intimate moment with her infant, occupying three-dimensional space and grounded in the terrestrial world, quite unlike the frontal, elongated and almost disembodied figures of the Madonna hovering above a gold ground. Whereas icons highlighted the presence of the divine through difference, in works like Titian’s Madonna, assimilation functioned as an equally effective tool to help navigate and overcome any barriers between the earthly and the celestial. Through an emphasis on the humanity of Christ, the Madonna, and other holy personages, the beholder and the

sacred figure depicted relate to each other mimetically. In the effort to assimilate oneself to the represented person, the beholder requires the same qualities of aliveness that he or she possesses in return.⁶⁹ As the Dominican Domenico Cavalca stated in his enormously popular *Specchio di Croce*, first published in the late fifteenth century and repeatedly printed over the following century and a half, one of the principal reasons for the incarnation and the death of Christ was to illuminate man, to show the way of truth and life.⁷⁰ Naturalism, therefore, assumed a new significance in images as an equalizing force, for it became an essential means by which the beholder was to identify with the depicted world of the sacred, just as God's becoming human was necessary for salvation.⁷¹ As devotion became increasingly "subjective" during the course of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, and more dependent on the power of emotions rather than theological reasoning, such images came to play a prominent role.

The naturalistic style of Quattrocento and Cinquecento religious art and the popularity of particular subjects corresponded to the growth across the European continent of affective devotional literature that emphasized the humanity of Christ. The repeated publications of late medieval texts, newly created Passion tracts on the Italian peninsula in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and a renewed emphasis on eucharistic devotions in Catholic Europe perpetuated an already well-established Christocentrism.⁷² Literary works such as Saint Bernard's contemplation of the Passion, the aforementioned *Specchio di croce*, and the numerous "vitae" of Christ by

⁶⁹ Belting, 16 and 57.

⁷⁰ Cavalca, *Specchio di Croce* (Venice: Enea de Alaris, 1575), 89v.

⁷¹ Belting, 16; and Barstow, 14, and 117.

⁷² Aikema, 59.

authors like pseudo-Bonaventure, Ludolph of Saxony, Thomas à Kempis, and Antonio Cornazzano, all focused attention on the life of Christ and his death, the very essence of the Incarnation and Christian salvation.⁷³ By dwelling on humanity in its most perfect form—in other words, in the appearance, words and actions, and life events of Christ—one directed the physical senses rather than suppressed them to a reality that was simultaneously comprehensible and highly spiritual.⁷⁴

Countless devotional tracts were published that guided the devout through the process of spiritual contemplation. The authors of these texts encouraged meditations on the life of Jesus to be performed regularly and carried out in accordance with a specific system in order to make Christ familiar, and subsequently develop bonds of love. The love that is derived from meditation, as explained by the pseudo-Bonaventura, changes into desire to imitate Christ's way of life; *meditatio*, therefore,

⁷³ Grubb, *Provincial Families*, 185. Pseudo-Bonaventure's *Meditationes vitae Christi*, Jacopo da Voragine's *Golden Legend*, and the *Imitatio Christi*, by Thomas à Kempis were amongst the best-selling titles between 1455-1500, while best-selling authors during these years included Jean Gerson and Bernard of Clairvaux. Michael Milway, "Forgotten Best-Sellers from the Dawn of the Reformation," in *Continuity and Change: The Harvest of Late Medieval and Reformation History. Essays Presented to Heiko A. Oberman on his 70th Birthday*, eds. Robert J. Bast and Andrew C. Gow (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 113-142: esp. tables 141-42. See also Giles Constable, "The Popularity of Twelfth-Century Spiritual Writers in the Later Middle Ages," in *Renaissance: Studies in Honor of Hans Baron*, eds. Anthony Molho and John A. Tedeschi (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971), 7-28; and Schutte, 100-104, 149, 212-213, 364-366. A list of *Vite* printed in Venice in the late fifteenth and sixteenth century include: *Vita di Gesu Cristo*: Benedetto degli Alessandri, *Meditazione et contemplatione sopra la vita del nostro Signore Iesu Christo* (Florence, 1487); Natalino Amulio, *Vita, passione e resurrettione di Jesu Christo* (Venice, 1544); Pietro Aretino, *Della humanita di Christo, tre libri* (Venice, 1535-1545); *La passione di Giesu* (Venice, 1534-1545), and *La vita di Maria Vergine* (Venice, 1541-1545); Girolamo Casio de' Medici, *Vita e morte de Iesu Christo; Epistola di Lentuolo, officiale in Giudea, agli Senatori romani, de la effigie, statura, vita, e miracoli di Christo* (Bologna 1525?, 1532); Lodovico Filicaia, *La vita di nostro Signore....tradotta in verso* (Venice 1548); and Teofilo Folengo, *La humanita del figliuolo di Dio* (Venice, 1533). Schutte, 34, 38, 52-53, 118, 178, and 179. While largely late medieval texts, their popularity endured into the Renaissance, evidenced by repeated editions. For example, Venice's Francesco Sansovino published an edition of the *Vita Christi* by Ludolph of Saxony—one of the most popular devotional texts of the Middle Ages—in 1570. Aikema, 109.

⁷⁴ Conway, 11-12.

transforms into *imitatio*.⁷⁵ As later explain by Vincenzo Bruni, this was only possible through identification with the humanity of those figures who had achieved divine status. Bruni stated that God had come to earth as man because it was difficult for us “...l’imitarlo come Dio nelle sue divine operationi, lo potessimo imitar come huomo, facendo in terra opere humane; quando finalmente con fare una vita degna di CHRISTO, ci vestiremo dell’istesso Christo...” (“...to imitate him as God in his divine operations, we can imitate him as man, doing human works on earth; when finally making a life worthy of Christ, we will clothe ourselves in Christ himself...”).⁷⁶ A detailed and naturalistic style in both text and image became essential so that the worshipper could make him or herself a witness to the events while reading and beholding the story, and more readily imitate these exemplars made real through word and image.⁷⁷

Marian Devotion

The Madonna was the instrument of the incarnation. Her role as the Mother of God became the subject of intense devotion throughout Europe during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, and especially in the households of Venice where her image surpassed all others in terms of popularity. For many Italian cities, the Virgin performed as patron and protectress, but in the lagoon, she was synonymous with the Republic itself.⁷⁸ As mentioned above, legend claimed that Venice was founded on

⁷⁵ Van Os, 164.

⁷⁶ Vincenzo Bruni, *Meditationi sopra i misterii della passione et resurrattione di Christo N. S. Con le Figure, & Profetie del vecchio Testamento, & con i Documenti, che da ciascun passo dell’Evangelio si cavano*, (Venice, i Gioliti: 1586), not numbered.

⁷⁷ Van Os, 12.

⁷⁸ Rosand, 13.

the feast of the Annunciation in the year 421; thus, the Virgin's acceptance as the mother of God was seen as her consent to tend especially to this favored and sacral locale. The public cult of the Virgin in Venice was of extraordinary importance. In his funeral oration for Doge Francesco Foscari at the Frari in 1475, Bernardo Giustiani proclaimed that twenty-one churches, three hundred altars, and two *Scuole Grandi* on the island were dedicated to her.⁷⁹ The feasts associated with the Madonna, including the Annunciation (March 25), the Assumption, (August 15), and Purification (February 2), were celebrated as both religious and civic rituals. A reciprocal affection between the Virgin and the devoted residents of the Republic resulted in numerous miracles associated with her image. The efficacy of these images assured their perpetuation in all contexts of the city, from churches and the meeting houses of the *scuole* to street corner shrines and domestic residences. In an era of war, disease, social and economic disparity, the Virgin Mary provided devoted Venetians with protection and compassion that they often could not find via terrestrial means.⁸⁰ Through acquisition and ownership of the image of the Madonna, Venetians could now bring this important civic cult into their personal sphere.

For theologians and the ordinary devout alike, the image of the Virgin and Child communicated the mysteries of the Incarnation through the process of vision, somewhat analogous to the doctrine itself. While Greek artists worked busily to fulfill demands for pictures of the Madonna, this conventional subject also lay at the center of the artistic production of many Venetian workshops, including that of Giovanni Bellini (fig. 83). The Madonnas executed by Bellini and his workshop

⁷⁹ Kasl, 60, Goffen, *Piety and Patronage*, 138.

⁸⁰ Ruth Chavasse, "Latin Lay Piety and Vernacular Lay Piety in Word and Image: Venice, 1471-early 1500s," *Renaissance Studies* 10 (1996): 319.

throughout his long career deserve special consideration in this context, for this artist played a particularly critical role in spawning a new style of the sacred in Venice—what Keith Christiansen and other art historians have labeled the *maniera devota*—and making it accessible in the everyday environments of wider segments of the Venetian population.

Bellini's reuse of successful compositions to meet the growing demands from residents of the Republic for naturalistic representations of the Madonna and Child has already been discussed. But even when Bellini did not replicate previous works, he still adhered to a standard compositional formula. The majority of Bellini's Madonnas assume a vertical orientation to accommodate a half-length, largely frontal, figural format. Normally depicted before a swath of fabric or a landscape, Mary either embraces the Christ Child or adopts a posture of devotion before his sleeping body laid out on a parapet. The artist's adherence to compositional strategies that imply portraiture indicates that he consciously chose to situate his paintings within Eastern pictorial conventions.⁸¹ At times the connections are overt, such as his *Madonna Greca* from about 1465-70, where Greek letters float over what once was a blue sky (fig. 84).⁸² More often, however, the correlations are subtly implied, even in imagery that places great emphasis on a controlled but deliberate naturalism. I disagree with Keith Christiansen's assessment that we can only draw connections between Eastern icons and the art of Bellini when the artist made a conscious reference to his source, such as the Greek script in the painting mentioned above.

⁸¹ This is one of the central arguments of Goffen in "Icon and Vision."

⁸² The painting has suffered great damage, but a technical examination of the panel at the time of its last cleaning in 1986 revealed that this original sky was gilt over by a later generation, Christiansen, "Giovanni Bellini and the Practice of Devotional Painting," 33.

According to Christiansen, the differences between naturalism and abstraction in the images are too great; he sees Flemish art as a greater influence, with its emphasis on a descriptive style and empathetic response. Associations with Eastern painting, however, would have been understood by an audience steeped in the Byzantine visual tradition, and which displayed their Bellinis—or works in the artist’s manner—alongside their Greek Madonnas.⁸³ This concept of resemblance with the original was the principal force behind Byzantine conceptions of the value of the icon, and through strong formal similarities, despite the emphasis on an overall naturalistic style, Bellini made a similar claim for his images, as well.⁸⁴

This is not to say that Bellini’s compositions remained static throughout his career. The painter consistently adjusted details of his designs and transformed entire compositions over the course of his long career, moving from the more traditional half-length compositions to horizontal panels—sometimes with full-length figures—like *The Madonna of the Meadow* (fig. 30), that forecast the sacred imagery of artists like Titian and Palma Vecchio in the sixteenth century.⁸⁵ In addition, his emphasis on emotion, although often understated, combined with the believability of his painted figures, offered an image of affective piety based on assimilation quite unlike Byzantine icons that emphasized stylization and visual difference between viewer and viewed.⁸⁶ While formal elements remained largely the same, the character of the Madonna changed from image to image, along with her relationship to her infant son;

⁸³ For example, the Bellini owned by a man named Vettore, a woodcutter at the Arsenale, is recorded directly after two small, old, gilded paintings of the Madonna, suggesting that they may have hung in close proximity to one another. ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 37, n. 14, 12 September 1543.

⁸⁴ Goffen, *Giovanni Bellini*, 24.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸⁶ Christiansen, “Giovanni Bellini e la maniera devota,” 137.

her countenance moved from severe to soft, from sorrowful to hopeful, with variations in between (fig. 85).⁸⁷ It was in the role as painter of personal devotional images that Bellini consciously exploited the potential of format and style in order to make the divine accessible for daily contemplation.⁸⁸

Bellini's contemporaries, as well as writers and critics from Venice who lived during the century following the artist's death, commented on the particular quality of sanctity that saturated his religious *oeuvre*. Andrea Squarzola bemoaned a poorly painted image of Christ, saying that if it had only been painted by Bellini, it would have been "much more human and divine" (*assai piu umano e piu divino*).⁸⁹ A little later, Francesco Sansovino expressed similar sentiments when he described Bellini's Madonna and Child paintings as "very beautiful and devout" (*molte belle e devote*). The common use of words like *devoto* and *divino* in reference to paintings by the Venetian artist integrate the images' artistic style and character with their function.

Contemporaries of Bellini and the generation or two following his death who avidly collected his works admired this devout style because it eliminated any excesses of personal *maniera*, like extreme foreshortenings, complex posing of figures, and bizarre colors. Instead the *maniera devota* employed by Bellini was a style that consisted of naturalism, above all, but also a gentile air, sweetness and holy manner possessed by the figures themselves. All of these formal qualities were tied to their effect on the viewer, who before one of Bellini's paintings in the context of

⁸⁷ Goffen, *Giovanni Bellini*, 28.

⁸⁸ Only Luca della Robbia invested as much of his artistic activity in the production of domestic devotional images. Keith Christiansen, "Giovanni Bellini and the Practice of Devotional Painting," 8-9.

⁸⁹ From Christiansen, "Giovanni Bellini and the Practice of Devotional Painting," 22.

his or her household simultaneously becomes the worshipper.⁹⁰ The use stone slabs and parapets upon which the Christ Child sometimes sleeps or stands enhances the connections made between image and beholder. It is a motif that dates back to late antique portraits carved on funerary monuments, where bust-length images of the deceased and living appear in window-like recesses.⁹¹ The formal structure was revived by painters in the Renaissance—and in Venice in particular—as a way to increase illusion and a sense of three-dimensionality on a two-dimensional surface. These painted frameworks act as thresholds, marking the edge of the picture plane and serving as the spatial and temporal bridge between the natural and supernatural spheres. At the same time, the parapet is symbolic of the altar, another surface at which the sacred and terrestrial worlds meet, and upon which Christ’s presence, like in the so-called Davis Madonna at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 86), becomes symbolic of the Eucharistic.⁹²

Bellini’s achievements prompted many followers outside his studio to produce images that mimicked the master’s subjects and compositions. The numerous copies and variations of Bellini’s Madonnas by artists working throughout the Veneto attest to the success of his invention for personal devotion. Marco Basaiti, Lazzaro Bastiani (fig. 87), Giovanni Cariani and Jacopo Palma (fig. 88) are just a few of the known artists who adopted Bellini’s half-length figural format, as well as his landscape backgrounds, use of parapets, and solemn yet naturalistic rendering of figures. Dozens of panels in a similar style by unknown artists exist, as well, such as

⁹⁰ Ibid., 22-30; and Christiansen, “Giovanni Bellini e la maniera devota,” 132-134.

⁹¹ Jodi Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 38.

⁹² Goffen, *Giovanni Bellini*, 28.

the panel from the Met that introduced this chapter. While the quality of these images certainly ranged, the great quantity in which these Madonnas were produced enabled Venetian households from a broad social spectrum to acquire not only a picture bearing the image of the holy Mother of God, but executed in a style that enhanced its sacral nature.

Christocentric imagery and the visualization of devotion

To bring the devout closer to the divine, artists adjusted style and compositional formulas in a way that visually mimicked literary strategies employed to encourage a devotional response. In addition to relating a story, many of the textual accounts of the life of Christ and the Virgin offered stations at which the narrative slowed or stopped altogether in order to allow meditation to linger on a particular event or detail. As early as the thirteenth century, the suspension of the narrative progression into points of contemplation was already a literary principle in the *Meditationes*. These textual tactics continued to be employed by devotional writers in the Quattro and Cinquecento. The *Zardino de Oration*, for example, a handbook of meditation for young girls written in 1454, advised the faithful to pause and take advantage of these stations so as to arrive at an “inner vision” of the Passion.⁹³

Artists working in the Veneto during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries translated these rhetorical principles into visual form; they became well-known for their use of half-length and close-up formats to portray suspended moments in the narrative intended to direct meditation on particular events in the life and death of

⁹³ Belting, 47-48.

Christ and on the mysteries of the faith. Subjects that enjoyed immense popularity in this region for their spiritual messages and their adaptability to these innovations of form included the *Man of Sorrows*, or *Dead Christ* (fig. 36), the *Ecce Homo* (fig. 89), and *Christ Carrying the Cross* (fig. 90). Not only do a number of works featuring such scenes survive from the period, but the subjects are repeatedly mentioned in Venetian household inventories throughout the sixteenth century. In an era when illness and death were ever-present certainties, images that focused on the Passion and death of Jesus in many ways mirrored the real experiences tolerated by the lay population and served as a reminder of the suffering that Christ had endured for the salvation of humankind. Empathy thus further bridged the divide between human and divine.

It was not merely subject matter, however, that generated appeal for pictures like these; formal elements played an equally influential role. Inherent to the half-length figural format is a concentrated focus on the protagonists of the image. Figures are brought closer to the beholder, giving the encounter with the image an intimacy and immediacy much like a conversation; thus, through formal means the agony and mystery of Christ's Passion were made present in the realm of the everyday. With the elimination of most or all narrative context artists accentuated emotions rather than action, corresponding to the characteristics of late medieval and early modern piety.⁹⁴ Further stylistic approaches, such as heightened naturalism, direct gazes, and thickness of paint, fostered the visual and physical connections between human and divine, made possible through the medium of the image.

⁹⁴ Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 48.

In pictures of the *Man of Sorrows*, also referred to as the *imago pietas* or the *Christo passo*, the body of the dead Christ—normally depicted in half-length—is presented for the beholder’s consumption and contemplation. Sometimes the mourning Virgin or angels support the figure of Christ, or he is surrounded by instruments of the Passion, like the crown of thorns and the nails of the cross.⁹⁵ Often, too, portions of the sarcophagus appear as a means by which to reinforce further Christ’s death and subsequent resurrection (fig. 91). Thematically, the *Man of Sorrows* is associated with the events of Christ’s Passion—the Crucifixion, Deposition, and Lamentation—but unlike them it was not a specific event; the typical *en buste* representation and portrait-like quality equally relate it to images of Christ as Pantocrator.⁹⁶ The form and iconography of the image have been traced back to a mosaic icon of the Man of Sorrows in the church of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome (fig. 92), where Pope Gregory the Great was purported to have experienced a miraculous vision. While saying Mass, the actual body of the crucified Christ

⁹⁵ Erwin Panofsky wrote the first seminal essay on the *Man of Sorrows* and its representations during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. He differentiated two types of images with this theme: the *kultisches Repräsentationsbild* (a cultic representational image) and *Andachtsbild* (a devotional image), the latter which lent itself to for contemplative meditation. “*Imago Pietatis: Ein Beitrag zur Typengeschichte des ‘Schmerzensmanns’ und der ‘Maria Mediatrix’*,” in *Festschrift für Max J. Friedländer zum 60. Geburtstage* (Leipzig, 1927), 261-308. The discussion of the *Man of Sorrows* has continued ever since. Henk van Os disputed Panofsky’s claim that images of the *Man of Sorrows* intended for private devotion, or *Andachtsbilder*, showed secondary figures and a humanized Christ by pointing out a thirteenth-century Franciscan prayerbook from Genoa in which a *Man of Sorrows* is depicted in the same manner that Panofsky claimed was restricted for the cult image. Van Os, “The Discovery of an Early Man of Sorrows on a Dominican Tryptich,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 41 (1978): 65-75. Hans Belting further corrected Panofsky by tracing the “origin” of the image in the West back further than the mosaic icon of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome—the archetype according to Panofsky—and reconstructing the function of the image in Byzantium and its reception in the West. See *The Image and its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle, NY: A.D. Caratzas, 1990). For a summary of the literature on the Man of Sorrows, and a reading of the image as “metaphorical”—in other words as the rhetorical visualization of antithetical theological concepts—see Bernhard Ridderbos, “The Man of Sorrows: Pictorial Images and Metaphorical Statements,” in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, eds. A.A. MacDonald, H.N.B. Ridderbos, and R.M. Schlusemann (Gronigen: Egbert Forsten, 1998), 145-181.

⁹⁶ Ridderbos, 158.

appeared on the altar, blood streaming from his wounds and filling the chalice, to signal the doctrine of transubstantiation: the host and wine of the Eucharist becoming the body and blood of Christ. As a result, Gregory granted indulgences to the faithful who venerated the icon and the cult attracted thousands of pilgrims in addition to stimulating the production of numerous copies of the image. But because the icon in Rome was made in Byzantium around 1300, in reality it had no connection to the historical figure of Saint Gregory.⁹⁷ The standardization of images of the *Man of Sorrows*, expressed in the generally static nature and frontal disposition of the body of Christ, simultaneous with the variety of ways in which these conventions were depicted allowed for multiple interpretations, particularly in the domestic sphere where it was primarily consumed. Its form could hark back to the famous icon of Santa Croce in an attempt to harness the holiness of the “original,” at the same time that transformations to this “archetype” could focus attention on particular moments of Christ’s passion, such as his suffering on behalf of the faithful, or the theological tension between his human and divine natures, expressed visually in his ambivalent state between death and resurrection.

By 1300 the *Man of Sorrows* was a familiar image in Venice, where it became known as the *Christo passo*.⁹⁸ It first appeared in miniatures and small-scale reliefs, but it also began to be featured in altarpieces in the region after Paolo Veneziano first privileged the theme in his altarpiece in San Marco (fig. 93). In particular, the *Man of Sorrows* thrived in the Franciscan context. The offering of the suffering body of the

⁹⁷ Ridderbos, 145.

⁹⁸ This term was used exclusively in the Veneto region, William Barchman, “The *Christo Passo*, Franciscan Devotions and Fiscal Politics in Quattrocento Venice and the Veneto” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the College Art Association on 25 February 2006).

Savior conformed to Franciscan ideals of poverty and humility, charity and compassion. In fact, it soon became the emblem of the order's chapter of the *monti dei pietà*, charitable organizations established throughout Venice to provide dowries for poor girls.⁹⁹ The subject also shows up countless times in Venetian household inventories compiled through the sixteenth century. The 1532 inventory of Ariano Barbaro, for example, lists two images of the “xpo passo,” amongst other holy works, in bedchambers in his house nearby the church of the Angel Raphael.¹⁰⁰ The first item listed in the 1589 inventory of Angelo Bergognin, spice merchant in the district of San Basso, is a painting of a “Christo passo” framed by a gilded frieze; this was just one of many paintings of Christ that the retailer had in his home.¹⁰¹

Like their counterparts across Italy, Venetian artists largely did away with the extreme emphasis on Christ's suffering that was characteristic of Northern representations of the subject (fig. 94), but nevertheless they created moving images designed especially for personal devotion. Despite the canvas's damaged state, the *Dead Christ* attributed to Antonello da Messina (fig. 95) and today preserved in the Museo Correr in Venice—also referred to as a *Pietà*—is an exquisite rendering of the subject, and captures the control with which artists working in the Veneto region approached the subject. Three wailing angels support the slumped body of Jesus, which is brought close to the picture plane and rests on the stone slab that once covered his coffin. Christ's body spills over into the beholder's space. He seems as if asleep, somewhere between death and resurrection. This ambiguous state is enhanced by the naturalistic rendering of his body, barely marred by wounds. The

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Canc. Inf.. Misc. Not. Div., b. 35, n. 57.

¹⁰¹ Canc. Inf.. Misc. Not. Div., b. 43, n. 51.

landscape in the background, although imaginary, clearly sets the scene in the terrestrial world, and anticipates Christ's resurrection amongst humanity.

Images of the *Dead Christ* and related scenes constituted a considerable share of the *oeuvre* of Giovanni Bellini and his workshop. His *Dead Christ with Mary and John* (Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan), from around 1470 is an emotional rendition of this subject (fig. 96). The inclusion of the Madonna and Saint John ground the subject historically, but the half-length format and the unidentifiable landscape background, largely consumed by a cold gray sky that match the pallor of the faces of Christ and his mother, isolate the figures from any narrative context. The image is at once dreamlike and convincingly realistic, allowing for meditation on both the divinity and humanity of Jesus. Mary and John, with clear expressions of grief, hold up Christ's body for the beholder's contemplation. Bellini strategically placed the pierced hands of Jesus parallel to the picture plane and in plain view as an unavoidable reminder of Christ's sacrifice. Sixten Ringbom has eloquently described how Bellini's compositional format turns "a pictorial exposition of theological doctrine to an emphatic rendering of motherly grief where every dispensable accessory and attribute is left out. The image is built up from three human figures, nothing else, and the import of the image rests solely with the appearance and bearing of the persons."¹⁰² Even in images where the three figures are supplemented by additional protagonists, thereby adding dramatic narrative content, as in Marco Basaiti's *Lamentation* in Berlin (fig. 97), the retention of the half-length format and the "close-up" treatment of the figures maintain the intimate tone of the devotional image.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 108.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 109.

Like the Dead Christ, scenes representing *Christ Carrying the Cross* and the *Ecce Homo* employed stylistic features to invite contemplation on Christ's sacrifice in direct and deeply personal modes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, *Christ Carrying the Cross* was a common devotional subject in Venetian households. A late fifteenth-century Milanese woodcut (fig. 98) may have been the source for these images that gained popularity in the Veneto beginning in the early sixteenth century. In the print, one sees the half-length figure of Christ presented nearly in profile and fully garbed, with a strikingly small cross that functions little more than an attribute. The message of the image is summarized in the inscription at the bottom: *Qui volt post me venire, abneget semetipsum et tollat crucem suam et sequatur me* ("If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me," MT. 16:24).¹⁰⁴ The formal relationships between this woodcut and an image like Giovanni Bellini's *Christ Carrying the Cross* (fig. 90), executed in the early sixteenth century, are clear. Bellini, however, turned Christ ever so slightly towards the viewer; his eyes, although tired under heavy eyelids, nonetheless glance out of the picture plane into the space of the worshipper. Christ is palpable and lifelike; each hair on his head is carefully executed, the folds of his garment fall realistically around his figure, and his body casts a shadow across the cross, an additional sign of his humanity and real presence. The cross has been given realistic dimensions and by occupying nearly half of the canvas, it functions equally as a protagonist in the painting. All details of the story of Christ's journey to Calvary have been eliminated so there is nothing to distract from the beholder's encounter with Christ. It is truly a

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 147-48.

suspension in the narrative upon which the viewer can contemplate, as described in contemporary devotional texts.

The relationship between Christ and the beholder becomes even more pronounced in Lorenzo Lotto's version of the subject from 1526 (fig. 99), probably painted while the artist was in Venice for a local patron. Lotto added figures of Christ's tormentors to create the drama of a full-length narrative but maintained the closeness of the half-length format and the visual focus on Christ. While the body of Jesus buckles under the weight of the cross his head turns fully frontal to look out into the viewer's space, establishing a close emotional link with the spectator.¹⁰⁵ His parted lips suggest his voice uttering directly the words imprinted at the bottom of the Milanese print: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." *Christ Carrying the Cross*, which enjoyed immense popularity in Venetian households during the sixteenth century, functioned as a reminder not only of the suffering of Jesus, but also of the cross that all Christians must bear. As part of the *imitatio* devotions that were popular during the period, the way of the cross was understood as enduring the evils and hardships of this world with the same humility and patience that Christ exhibited during the events of his Passion.¹⁰⁶

The *Ecce Homo*, or "Behold the Man," was another suspended moment in the narrative of Christ's Passion translated into an autonomous pictorial format; the subject featured the moment after the scourging and crowning of Jesus, when Pilate

¹⁰⁵ David Alan Brown, Peter Humfrey, and Lauro Lucco, *Lorenzo Lotto: Rediscovered Master of the Renaissance* (Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art, 1997), 159-160.

¹⁰⁶ Walter Gibson, "Imitatio Christi: The Passion Scenes of Hieronymus Bosch," *Simiolus* 2 (1972/73): 83-93, esp. 86.

presented him to the crowd to determine his guilt or innocence. Although the scene is taken from the life of Christ, the image that became popular in Northern Italy derived visually from the *Man of Sorrows*. While still alive, Christ's suffering and tortured body are again offered to the faithful for contemplation, but the image's more direct narrative quotation places the viewer in the position of the crowd, a reminder that humanity's sins were the cause of Christ's death. One of the earliest surviving examples from the Veneto region is a work attributed to Andrea Mantegna or his workshop (fig. 100), probably painted sometime in the 1460s. In this image, the artist utilized the *en buste* figural format and presented Christ as humble victim, with downcast eyes, bound hands and a rope around his neck. He is flanked by figures compositionally similar to Mary and John who often appear in images of the Dead Christ, but in this context they become the hecklers of the crowd, thereby contrasting good and evil in a single image.

Even in the second half of the sixteenth century—long after the landscape pastoral dominated painting in Venice and during a period in which mannerist styles had been adopted in workshops throughout the region—the half-length compositional format that had become the hallmark of early Cinquecento Venetian devotional images persisted and was consciously employed by the city's most renowned artists, perhaps in an attempt to situate themselves and their work in a venerable tradition of sacred imagery. Like Giovanni Bellini, Titian was an artist whose devotional images were in great demand. His *Ecce Homo* (fig. 89) from around 1560,¹⁰⁷ and his *Christ*

¹⁰⁷ Other known versions include now lost paintings for Pope Paul III and Pietro Aretino, datable to 1545-46 and 1547 respectively; one on slate for Charles V and now in the Prado; another, also lost, sent to Cardinal Granvelle in 1549; another painted shortly before the Dublin version and now in Sibiu, Romania; and a late picture painted for the duke of Urbino in the mid-1560s, its present whereabouts

Carrying the Cross from around 1565 (fig. 101) are just two of many examples of these subjects painted by the Venetian master over the course of his long career for patrons both within the Republic and abroad. In these devotional images, Titian removed all narrative details and maintained the portrait-like quality of the picture by focusing attention on the upper portion of the suffering body of Christ. Never a mere imitator, however, Titian employed rough brushwork—especially evident in his later versions of the subjects—that become the sweat, blood, and lesions that mar Christ’s form and call attention to the surface of the image that his figure occupies. Vision mingles with the sense of touch in the meditative process as Jesus is brought visually and tangibly before the viewer through Titian’s artistic process. Although the term *maniera devota* may seem incompatible when used to describe the art of Titian—an artist renowned equally for his portraits, mythologies, and religious paintings—it is perhaps applicable when his works for private devotion are considered. While different in appearance from the tightly modeled and static figures of Giovanni Bellini and his *bottega*, Titian also employed a particular style as a vehicle to incite devotion in the worshipper and collapse the boundaries between earthly and divine.

It was not just images that focused on the suffering and death of Jesus that stirred Christocentric devotion in Venetian households. Pictures that presented Christ as the triumphant savior were nearly as popular as Passion imagery. Busts portraits of Christ, usually shown frontal and with the right hand raised in an act of blessing were more popular in north-east Italy than anywhere else on the peninsula during the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento. *Christ Blessing* by Andrea Previtali (fig.

unknown. Susanna Biadene, ed., *Titian, Prince of Painters*, exh. cat. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1991, cat. 201 and 223.

35), a Bergamese artist who spent time working in Venice, painted in the second decade of the sixteenth century, is an example of these many surviving works bearing the “portrait” of Jesus. Nearly all represented certain standardized features, such as Christ’s golden-brown hair, and these elements that today may appear like pictorial conventions were actually intended to enrich the devotional experience of the viewer.

Popular devotional tracts from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries advocated reflection on the details of the appearance of Christ and the Virgin. For example, Vincenzo Bruni’s text about the meditations on the seven principal feasts of the Blessed Virgin begins with intensely vivid descriptions of the physical features of Christ and the Virgin, from their height and build to the shape of their faces and all of their features. The following verbal depiction of Christ’s hair, to which Bruni compares in color to the golden insides of a ripe walnut, is just one fragment of a lengthier and densely illustrative text and corresponds precisely with the images of Christ produced in Venice during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: “...i capelli lunghi di color flavo, cioè del color dell’oro simile alla corteccia interiore delle noci maturi, divisi in mezo al capo, non molto densi; ma piani insino all’orecchie; & dall’orecchie in giù al quanto crespi, & rilucenti...”¹⁰⁸ Bruni’s description of Christ’s hair and other physical characteristics is nearly identical to the account of his features in the letter believed to have been written by Publius Lentulus, the Roman governor of Judea during the time of Christ, to the emperor and the state. The passages from the letter often accompanied portraits of Jesus in manuscripts and diptychs, and the meticulous literary descriptions must have provided inspiration for

¹⁰⁸ Vincenzo Bruno, *Delle Meditationi sopra le sette festività principali della beata vergine le quale celebra la chiesa et sopra il commune de santi*, 2d ed. (Venice: i Gioliti, 1597), viii r.

artists creating autonomous images.¹⁰⁹ Even the controlled countenance that artists imparted to Christ captures the verbal sketches of his demeanor. Authors depicted the Son of Man with “...a brow smooth and very calm... a face without a wrinkle... a full beard the color of his hair, not long, but a little forked at the chin... the eyes grey...” They went on to say: “...sometimes he hath wept, but never laughed.”¹¹⁰

Because both artists and authors paid particular attention to nearly all aspects of the appearances of Christ and the Virgin, their images could be contemplated either whole or piecemeal. A range of benedictions and instructions in devotional guides provided suggestions on the practical execution of prayers that took as their focus very particular features of holy figures. Contemplation of the five wounds of Christ and the limbs of the Virgin were among the most popular of these devotional undertakings.¹¹¹ For example, in the *Decor puerallum*, a fifteenth-century treatise written for young girls before marriage, Giovanni di Dio recommend a series of prayers dedicated to the Virgin Mary to be said over a period of eight days; on each day, a different prayer was devoted to a different part of the body of the Madonna so that over the span of little more than a week, the worshipper built a complete mental image of the Mother of God. Images may have assisted in this kind of directed meditation. The enlarged and meticulously placed hand and fingers of Bellini’s

¹⁰⁹ In 1500, Pope Alexander VI sent this letter as an illuminated text to Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony. The text is also found, together with a portrait of Christ, in a Netherlandish diptych of around 1500 and in engravings made by Hans Burgkmair dating close to 1515. In Venice, a transcription of the text, accompanied by a drawing after a painting of Christ said to be by Giovanni Bellini, opens the manuscript catalogue of the early seventeenth-century collection of Andrea Vendramin, The letter is now considered a forgery, Nicholas Penny, *The Sixteenth Century Italian Paintings*, vol. I: *Paintings from Bergamo, Brescia and Cremona.*, National Gallery Catalogues (London: National Gallery Company, distributed by Yale University Press, 2004), 300.

¹¹⁰ Montagu Rhodes James, trans. and ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1924), 477-478.

¹¹¹ Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 48.

Madonna in Fort Worth (fig. 28), for instance, shown embracing the standing Christ child, not only add to her physical beauty and ethereal nature, but may have served as a focal point for the beholder to contemplate. Details of sacred images and symbolic motifs—many with Eucharistic significance—played similar roles. For instance, the Christ child asleep on an altar-like slab, or pieces of fruit that symbolize the Passion, provided further locales for consideration and prayer.¹¹²

Not all domestic devotional paintings followed the above described compositional or stylistic strategies. The Venetian love for religious art executed in the Byzantine style has already been discussed. Inhabitants of the Republic admired paintings from Northern Europe—in particular Flanders—almost as equally as those that came from the East. While northern artists also produced half-length devotional images of the type created in Venice—Albrecht Dürer’s *Christ amongst the Doctors*, a work executed in 1503 (fig. 102) is just one of many examples of this type—residents of the Republic also acquired religious works from this region because of their rich, and perhaps excessive, detail. Northern artists often set the stories of Christ’s life and death in contemporary settings, full of convincingly executed vignettes that the beholder could appreciate for the technical skill as well as their symbolic and pious resonances. The great Italian artist Michelangelo commented on the appeal to devotion that Flemish pictures were able to generate: “On the whole Flemish painting will satisfy any religious person, more than any other Italian picture... It will appeal to women, especially the very young and the very old, to

¹¹² Kasl, 79-81.

monks and nuns, and to a few noblemen who have no feeling for true harmony.”¹¹³

The last few words of the quote of Michelangelo reveal the pejorative nature of the artist’s overall point regarding the allure of Northern works, but many from the period found this quality of the less educated to be a strength rather than a detriment. In his *Praise of Folly*, for instance, Erasmus argued for the religious purity and intensity of the unlettered, the very people who Michelangelo maintained were the target audience of Flemish paintings; they were the ones who took the greatest delight in the sacred, a result of their “natural instinct.” Italian reformers made similar claims for the “docta ignorantia,” and advocated clear and didactic images that fostered personal viewing experiences.¹¹⁴

Flemish artists often did just that; they cloaked the messages of the doctrines of faith in narrative, a device, which, with its attention to detail and naturalism, in many ways was deemed closer to the actual miracle or incident in Christ’s life described in liturgical texts.¹¹⁵ The lifelike potential of narrative—exploited to its fullest by artists of northern Europe—could also bring the biblical event into the present. For example, Pieter Brueghel the Elder’s version of the *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 103), today in the Oskar Reinhart Collection in Switzerland (1567), is an embellishment of the story of Christ’s modest birth in a stable. Brueghel set the miracle in the wintertime in a crowded village where people go about their daily routines, perhaps reflective of the small towns in sixteenth-century Flanders with which Brueghel would have been familiar. The Holy Family and the Magi who have

¹¹³ Francisco de Hollanda, *Four Dialogues on Painting*, Hyperion reprint ed., trans. Aubrey F. G. Bell (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1979), 30.

¹¹⁴ Aikema, 68.

¹¹⁵ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 261.

come to pay homage to the Christ child are barely visible in the lower left corner of the panel amidst all of the busyness that dominates the canvas. In addition, Brueghel executed the work in a manner that is not dissimilar to the refined craft and skill required in miniature paintings, thereby drawing the spectator in for close and intimate viewing. Given Brueghel's penchant for infusing his images with strong moralistic messages, the contrast between the sacred event and mundane activities may have been intended to serve as a warning to viewers not to allow the diversions of the everyday distract from that which is of true importance.

Throughout the sixteenth century, many Venetian artists embraced the styles and narratives of Flemish art. For several decades Jacopo Bassano and his extensive workshop produced images of sacred events taking place in landscape and interior environments full of lifelike elements and activities, which are oftentimes commonplace and extraneous to the original story, but not necessarily to the meaning of the image.¹¹⁶ Painting for an increasingly diverse audience of private patrons, Bassano introduced new subjects into domestic spaces taken directly from the Old and New Testaments that had never transpired as principal themes in late medieval art. Common to Bassano's pictures is an emphasis on the antithesis between a sincere spirituality and a hypocritical or even indifferent attitude toward religion, much like his northern counterparts. Bassano's *Supper at Emmaus* from around 1576-77 (fig. 104) is a typical example of the artist's approach to biblical subjects in his later career. The story comes from the gospel of Luke; two of Christ's disciples were traveling to Emmaus after the Crucifixion when they encountered Jesus, but did not recognize him. At supper that evening Christ "took the bread and said the blessing;

¹¹⁶ Aikema, 59.

then he broke the bread and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight.”¹¹⁷

Bassano rendered the sacred meal discreetly on the right, subordinating it to the elaborate kitchen scene on the opposite side, complete with pots and pans, a hearth, fowl to be cooked, women making the meal, and a curious stout, older gentleman—labeled by Bernard Aikema as the *uomo carnale*—who physically and visually links the two sides of the composition. While Bassano accentuated the preparation of the supper, an event that is not narrated in the gospel account, his antithetical pictorial strategy makes clear that the real focus is the disciples who are engrossed in Christ’s words and realize his holiness. Bassano’s juxtaposition of true piety with crass materialism creates a strong moral message that accentuates the opposition between good and evil.¹¹⁸ The dichotomy, however, is not so absolute that it cannot be overcome; the man seated near the center of the canvas—the epitome of lust and greed with his portly dimensions and expensive clothes—turns away from the chaos of the kitchen in the direction of the holy meal, fixed on what is taking place. Despite his flaws, like the apostles, he too appears to have witnessed Christ’s revelation, and reminds the viewer that even the most sinful of humankind can be saved.

The variety of sacred pictures that Venetians collected for their homes demonstrates that while a new breed of images emerged in the Middle Ages and Renaissance to assist personal devotion, the potential for domestic meditation was limitless. Whether artists maintained and elaborated upon the details of the story, or

¹¹⁷ Luke 24. 13-35.

¹¹⁸ Aikema, 105-109.

stripped down the particulars to the essence of the miracle or event, they brought the beholder closer to it through the medium of vision. Venetians did not encounter sacred images solely in painted pictures, either, but in a variety of visual media, including sculpture, medals and plaquettes, and book illustrations, as discussed in Chapter One. And an object did not have to contain a representation of the divine for it to be considered holy. While images dominated the devotional experiences, they were not the only means by which residents of the Republic felt religion in their daily lives. As will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Four, a number of objects, like prayer beads and crucifixes, were also deemed holy by virtue of their materials, their consecrated status, and/or their symbolic form. As articles that were worn, touched, and handled by the devout, they enacted spiritual transformation through direct contact with the body and added a tangible and material element to devotion that was highly desired.

In a period and a city in which religion infused all aspects of public and private life, and the laity assumed greater control over their own salvation and spiritual needs, the Renaissance Venetian home served a critical site in which to fulfill these goals. Sacred goods were a primary means by which religion entered into the household sphere, and they shaped the prayers and rituals that took place there. Images assumed a principal role in negotiating the boundaries between heaven and earth. Devout consumers in Venice admired equally pictorial modes of difference and assimilation in representations of divine figures; the former captured divinity in

its own terms, so to speak, sustaining religious ties to the East, while the latter brought the sacred squarely into the human realm, in keeping with contemporary trends in lay piety. In the Venetian home, paintings were not viewed in isolation, however, but as part of carefully constructed environments to encourage and assist the devotional experience and a pious attitude. The following chapter continues to explore the devotional function of the household's religious visual culture, but from the perspective of display and sacred space.

Chapter 3: Domestic Devotion. Part II—Spaces and Display

The environments fashioned for prayer in the home were just as important as the objects employed to generate them. Pictures were hung in frames that ranged from the simplest enclosures to elaborate, architectonic structures; they were often adorned with candles, oil lamps, and holy water stoups. Each element influenced the communicative process with the divine as much as the style and form of the image itself. The sites could grow well beyond the image and its framework, to an assemblage of sacred items, a shrine, or a self-contained oratory. This chapter continues to explore the devotional function of the household's religious visual culture, but from the standpoint of setting and display. In particular, I examine domestic altars and chapels, as well as the *studio*, or study, a space designated for intellectual and spiritual pursuits that became an increasingly common component of sixteenth-century Venetian homes. I also consider the use of popular devotional images to visualize sacred space when the actual domestic sites were unavailable or unattainable. The amassing of pious goods and the creation of environments conducive to spiritual betterment and communication with God sanctified the households of a city believed to be divinely sanctioned and renowned far and wide for its holiness.

Display

Inventories suggest that Venetians exhibited religious works in a manner that underscored their sacred nature and highlighted these objects as the religious and artistic focus of a space. Items listed one after the other in the registers imply that they may have

been grouped together in a room, creating a denser and more complex ritual setting. Articles such as bells, prayer books, beads, and receptacles for holy water recorded directly before, after, or in the midst of religious paintings and sculptures were likely used in conjunction with images for personal devotion. The inventory of Nicolò Salomon, for instance, drawn up in June, 1535, suggests a grouping of religious goods in one area of his home; documented one after the other are: three paintings of the Madonna, gilded and ‘antique’; another painted ‘alla greca’; a small image of the Dead Christ; a little metal basin for holy water; a painting of Saint Barbara; and a bronze bell.¹

Portrait of a Widow at Her Devotions (fig. 105), painted by Leandro Bassano, son of the painter Jacopo Bassano, around 1588-1600, demonstrates how multiple items may have been used simultaneously in household devotions. Today in a private collection, it is a lesser known late Renaissance Venetian painting. A somberly dressed older woman is shown in the act of prayer, with all of the accoutrements of devotion prominently displayed. While her prayers are directed toward a sacred painting on the wall before her—what appears to be a representation of *The Birth of the Virgin*—they are not shaped by the image alone.² She kneels at a *prie-dieu*, conforming her body to a posture of reverence, and appears to be in the midst of counting off her prayers on the rosary beads strung across her hands. Vision is reinforced by touch, and vice versa, in ensuring the efficacy of her spiritual appeals. A prayer book rests on the *prie-dieu* and while closed, it is present within this ensemble of holy goods, and readily available for use.

¹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 19, fol. 2r.

² It could also represent the Birth of Saint John the Baptist, but the figure of Zaccariah, who is usually present waiting outside the room, is not depicted. For more on this portrait of a widow see Peter Humfrey, Timothy Clifford, Aidan Weston-Lewis, and Michael Bury, eds., *The Age of Titian: Venetian Renaissance Art from Scottish Collections*, exh. cat. National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, 2004, cat. 75.

As mentioned in Chapter One, religious paintings in the Venetian home are regularly described with *fornimenti*, or ‘furnishings’, sometimes referred to more specifically as a candle or an oil lamp that hung in front of or nearby the image. Giovanni Mansueti’s *Miraculous Healing of the Daughter of Benvegnudo of S. Polo*, from ca. 1502-6 (fig. 11), and Vittore Carpaccio’s *Dream of St Ursula*, from 1495 (fig. 18), both depict domestic interiors in which sacred pictures are displayed. Each portrays a half-length Madonna and Child, before which is placed a votive candle or lamp, as well as a small metal container that presumably would have held holy water, similar to descriptions in Venetian inventories (figs. 106 & 107).

On a practical level, these embellishments shed light on pictures in dark, pre-electric environments, but such illumination also added another visual and symbolic level to images already layered with sacred meaning. Candlelight would have created a shimmering effect when reflected off gilded panels and frames, and enhanced the rich colors and *chiaroscuro* of the paintings typical of artists working in the Veneto during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Accoutrements like these marked the image’s holy status and served as votives to honor the divine figures represented. Furthermore, they confirmed that although not altarpieces from a liturgical point of view, pious pictures in the domestic context functioned as unofficial focal points for religious meditation,³ transforming ordinary space into an area in which interaction with the divine occurred. Such display strategies corresponded to the counsel of Silvio Antoniano on creating appropriate environments for prayer in the household. He argued that because humans, especially children, learn through their external senses, the settings for a family’s devotions are just as influential as the pictures displayed in them. Holy images,

³ Lydecker, “The Domestic Setting,” 179.

therefore, should be exhibited in a “non-confusing” manner and in dedicated locales throughout the house, like small oratories or other properly-ornamented sites—complete with burning lamps—in order to stimulate respect, direct one’s attention and energies to the devotions performed in this space, and act as “spiritual gardens for the regeneration of the soul.”⁴

There are numerous accounts of pictures kept within tabernacles, cabinets, or behind curtains, implying the special reverence accorded to individual pieces, and the power that these images held for their owners.⁵ For example, Ettore Aurio, a Venetian admiral serving in Candia whose inventory was drawn up in 1531, kept two small paintings and one larger image of the Madonna together inside a cupboard.⁶ Images sheltered behind doors and curtains also allowed for a process of concealment and revelation and demonstrate the ability of pictures to participate in the structuring of ritual time. Other items frequently found in the Venetian interior, such as Books of Hours, prayer beads, and bells, likewise helped to organize prayers and domestic rituals around regular intervals throughout the day. Some of these goods were normally kept out of view in chests and coffers, unveiled only when needed by the family or individual for worship or prayer.

Frames, too, enhanced the holy nature of devotional works. Although few Renaissance paintings and reliefs remain with their original enclosures intact, inventory

⁴ Antoniano, *Dell’educazione cristiana*, 151 and 316.

⁵ The phenomenon was not restricted to religious images, however, as evidence shows that secular pictures, on occasion, were stored in similar manners. Lorenzo Lotto’s *Venus and Cupid*, for example, was once furnished with a gilt frame and black drape (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Purchase, Mrs Charles Wrightsman Gift, in honor of Marietta Tree, 1986). An image that was likely painted to celebrate a wedding (Venus may be a portrait of the bride), it is full of symbolism relating to the conjugal union and fertility; therefore, it also possessed a potency that necessitated its shielding from normal view. Peter Humfrey, *Lorenzo Lotto* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 139-140.

⁶ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 35, n. 19, fol. 2v.

descriptions, surviving frames—now unattached—and contemporary paintings depicting domestic interiors provide some evidence about the relationship between the image and its border. The use of *aedicular*, or tabernacle, frames (fig. 108) for religious pictures in households was, for example, clearly intended to recall church altarpieces. As opposed to the *cassetta* frame—a simple rectangular enclosure where vertical and horizontal edges meet flush in the four corners (fig. 109)—the parts of a tabernacle frame are derived from architecture and consist of elements like friezes, columns, and architraves. The complete frames themselves visually reflect a post-and-lintel construction system. Paintings in Venetian inventories are frequently described as being embellished with columns, like the Greek Madonna kept in the bedroom of the nobleman Gerolamo Contarini, son of Pietro, which was described as being “fornido in collone.”⁷ Like paintings, frames were commonly gilded, and sometimes surmounted by an arch. The Madonna paintings represented in the domestic interiors depicted by Carpaccio and Mansueti are framed in such a manner (figs. 106 & 107). In addition to the votive candles and holy water basins, these golden borders—with their elaborate arched pediments and pinnacle embellishments—further added to the sacred aura projected by pictures themselves. Even in the context of the home, depicted visions of the divine were “framed in representations of the spiritual Church.”⁸

In his dissertation on the uses of prints in the fifteenth-century, David Areford has effectively argued for the importance of contextualizing early modern printed images and expanding our conceptions about the creators of the formal elements of a work of art to include users as well as producers. Printed images were often colored and written on by

⁷ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 37, n. 26, 1542.

⁸ Paul Mitchell and Lynn Roberts, *A History of European Picture Frames* (London: Paul Mitchell Ltd., in association with Merrell Holberton, 1996), 15.

their owners, cut down, pasted into manuscripts adjacent to other images or over ones that had lost appeal, and tacked onto walls—all acts that transformed the appearance of the “original” picture, and in turn affected the viewing experience, as well as the meanings produced and received.⁹ Areford’s case for characterizing fifteenth-century prints as composite works of art can be extended to include nearly all forms of artistic objects from the early modern period, most of which have been long removed from their original settings. This is especially true in the domestic environment, where images were rarely viewed in isolation, even the so-called “gallery” or “cabinet” pictures that are said to have originated in Renaissance Venetian homes. Instead, images hung on the walls of the household in relation to other images; they were adorned with elaborate frames and marked and illuminated by candles and lamps, and were viewed while the beholder read holy books or counted their prayers on a string of beads, acts that conflated the senses of vision and touch. Conversely, rather than being the focus of display, images were sometimes kept out of sight, stored in chests or behind curtains and cabinets, exposed and used only when needed.¹⁰ This was especially true for precious items like crucifixes, medals, and rosary beads, as will be discussed below.

Conservation records have shown that many of Renaissance paintings that today hang in museums have been cut down from their initial dimensions or were partially repainted at the command of either their original or subsequent owners. An ambiguous saint, for instance, could be re-identified through the addition of an attribute, or perhaps even cut out of a picture completely. Technical examination of the *Portrait of a Lady with the Attributes of Saint Agatha* attributed to Sebastiano del Piombo, for example, now

⁹ Areford, esp. his introduction and Chapter Two.

¹⁰ Katherine McIver, “Moving About: Manipulating Gender Inside and Outside the Renaissance Palazzo” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the College Art Association, 23 February 2006).

in the National Gallery of London (fig. 110), has shown that the attributes of the third-century martyr—breasts, shears, halo, and palm of martyrdom—were later additions to what was probably originally a portrait.¹¹ These kinds of transformative actions to the image—whether additive or subtractive—tended to emphasize the authority invested in the image as an object of devotion.¹² In the context of the home, the family became the active agent in shaping the viewing—and in turn, the spiritual—experience. Through the possession and manipulation of religious articles, faith and spirituality fully entered into the personal realm.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, religious goods infiltrated all areas of the Venetian domestic interior, suggesting that there were no clear or strict demarcations between sacred and secular space in the home. Nevertheless, the various display strategies described above were intended precisely to direct attention to the power, beauty, and status of particular images and places within this setting, signifying that they were somehow more spiritually significant. Just as the architecture of a church and its embellishments—including paintings, sculpture, stained glass, and liturgical vessels—pronounce sacred space and function to effect a change in the behavior and attitude of those who cross the threshold into the edifice, the amassing of diverse yet meaningful objects and materials fashioned areas in the household designed to foster communication between individuals and the divine.

¹¹ National Gallery, London, NG24.

¹² Areford, 25.

Domestic Altars in Venice

Informal ritual spaces, like the ones depicted in Mansueti and Carpaccio's paintings, were typical in Venetian dwellings. Inventories reveal, however, that in some households more official environments were created where the liturgy could be performed, made possible through the presence of an altar. As mentioned in Chapter One, there is evidence that Venetian homes contained both fixed and portable altars. If a residence contained an *altare fixum*—one that presumably would have been integrated into the architectural fabric of the house—it may have escaped the notice of the notary who only recorded the *beni mobili*, or the movable contents of a dwelling. Nonetheless, entries of other goods, such as altar cloths and candlesticks “da altar,” strongly suggest that certain households in the Republic possessed the liturgical apparatus. Portable altars, however, are specifically identified in several inventories. Because they could be moved from space to space, *altari portatili* did not exist in discrete rooms that we could call a chapel, but were situated in the normal spaces of the *casa*, like bedchambers and studies, which was also the case in Florence until the Tridentine rulings on domestic altars in 1562 placed greater restrictions on their use and display.¹³ While the overall percentage of homes that contained altars in Renaissance Venice is probably fairly small, the possession of this fundamental liturgical object—whether contained within separate chapels or more portable in nature—clearly indicates that the home was considered to be sacred space, a place where even the most central ritual of the Catholic faith could be performed.

¹³ Mattox, Chapter 5, “Ducal Florence: The Counter-Reformation and the Problem of the Domestic Chapel.”

The subsequent renovations of Venetian *case*, as well as the dispersal and ruin of many domestic goods, make it nearly impossible to reconstruct with precision the appearance of both the self-contained and more makeshift household chapel. The listings of altars and altar furnishings in inventories give some sense, however, of their appearance in the home during the Cinquecento; they seem to range from elaborately decorated areas to more modest constructions that provided the basic necessities for the eucharistic ritual to be achieved. One example of a household altar comes from the 1529 inventory of Gasparo Turlon, a member of the city's *cittadino* class, from the San Polo area of Venice. Recorded in Turlon's residence, along with religious paintings, prayer books, and rosary beads, was a chest that contained articles for a portable altar. These items included: a consecrated altar stone; a corporal; a silver chalice and a gilded silver paten; an old, green altar cloth with painted gold markings; handkerchiefs; a pair of candlesticks; a small pillow; and a hand-written missal.¹⁴ The description of the items for Turlon's altar calls to mind the domestic altar represented in Carpaccio's painting of the vision of St Augustine from around 1502 (fig. 111). Located along the back wall in a niche in the saint's study (fig. 112), Augustine's altar is furnished not only with a statue of the resurrected Christ, but stored below are linens, candlesticks, books, and other vessels, similar to the sacred goods kept in Turlon's "altar chest." The consecrated items contained within his chest could be placed upon a table or another surface, thus transforming an ordinary piece of furniture into a setting for sacred ritual. Unfortunately, there is little information about Turlon that would help to determine why he owned a portable altar; his inventory does not reveal his occupation, nor does it indicate that he had property elsewhere that would have possibly accounted for owning an altar chest that

¹⁴ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 34, n. 77, fol. 10r.

could be transported from place to place. While certainly not conclusive evidence, the fact that Turlon owned two paintings of Saint Christopher does make it tempting, however, to speculate that he was a merchant or traveler of some sort.

Another intriguing register of household goods is that of Angelo Savina, a *cittadino* from the parish of San Pietro in Castello, recorded in 1550. In addition to an account of Savina's Venetian domicile, it also included an inventory of his villa along the Brenta canal in the district of Padova, a site where many of the wealthiest families from the Veneto constructed their summer residences. Savina's inventory intimates that he was a devout man who sought to surround himself with the sacred; nearly every room in both his principal residence and his villa contained at least one religious image. Unlike his house in Venice, however, Savina's villa contained a chapel. The notation in the inventory 'in la giesiola,' or 'in the small church,' designates that this was probably a self-contained space.¹⁵ The chapel possessed all of the items necessary for the observance of mass. It included: an altar; candlesticks; a missal on a podium; a book of songs; a bell; a metal vessel that contained incense; an altar bag; a small coffer with handkerchiefs for the chalice; a holy doll clothed in garments ornamented with small pearls; altar cloths; two glass vessels; and an alms-box. A wooden *tondo* depicting the Madonna hung above the altar, and a metal oil lamp was placed in front.¹⁶ Some surviving examples of villas with chapels nearby Padova—most of which date to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—indicate that Savina's estate was not a unique case.¹⁷ Amanda Lillie has demonstrated that due to their distance from parish churches,

¹⁵ Boerio, 166 and 303.

¹⁶ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 38, n. 40, fol 8v.

¹⁷ These include the Villa del Doge Pisano (eighteenth century); the Villa delle Rose (church reconstructed in 1700); Ca' Borini (separate oratory constructed in 1710); and the Villa Duodo at Monselice. The Duodo

Tuscan villas constructed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries typically either incorporated a chapel into the architectural fabric of the house, or they were situated directly next to one.¹⁸ Inhabitants of the Veneto, faced with the situation of physical separation from communal houses of worship, responded in comparable ways, and the example of the Savina family of Venice suggests that such practices date back to at least the mid-Cinquecento.

The display and appearance of household altars typically mimicked that which would have been found in churches, although often on a smaller scale, and perhaps with a more provisional appearance. With the variety of altars and altar-like settings came a diversity of ritual scenarios that were enacted in these areas of the home. The presence of an altar, of course, suggests the rite of liturgy, which to be valid required a priest to officiate. Finding a cleric to celebrate private masses may not have been a difficult task in some Venetian households. The often meager incomes of parish priests caused many to supplement their earnings by saying special masses or becoming personal chaplains.¹⁹ Priests could also be found within the family. While some sons took religious vows for vocational reasons, others were pressured to do so as part of the political and social machinations of particular families, or they saw few other options since efforts to keep

family constructed their villa—designed by the architect Vincenzo Scamozzi (Verona 1552—1616 Venice)—next to a pre-existing church dedicated to San Giorgio. In 1592, Clement VIII granted destruction of the old church for a new one to be built on the same site, thereby maintaining its position next to the Duodo residence. Seven other small chapel structures—in imitation of the seven basilicas of Rome—were also constructed along the hill that ascends to the Villa Duodo, also designed by Scamozzi in the early seventeenth century. Bruno Brunelli and Adolfo Callegari, *Ville del Brenta e degli Euganei* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1931), 85-103; 185-195; 252-253; and 264-277.

¹⁸ Lillie, “The Patronage of Villa Chapels and Oratories,” 21-22.

¹⁹ Christopher F. Black, *Church, Religion and Society in Early Modern Italy* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004): 90-92.

the family patrimony intact often meant that only one male son could marry.²⁰ Familial alliances amongst the noble and upper classes of Venice would have also secured access to priests even for those households that could not claim one as a blood relation. These kinds of relations between kin and clergy determined to a large degree the scale and organization of religion in a domicile. Clerical family members could perform mass within the home, as well as offer private guidance and confession. Personalized liturgies were highly desirable as they locked in and directed divine power through celebration for a specific purpose, or for particular individuals, usually deceased family members.²¹

Even in households without priests or altars, the possibility of imitative rituals cannot be ruled out. R. N. Swanson notes that so-called “dry masses,” or masses devoid of consecration, while ill-documented and little discussed in the scholarship, may have been a frequent devotional exercise because they allowed the devout to participate in religious celebrations similar to the liturgy, but which were not dependent on a priest.²² While an altar may not have been present in most Venetian dwellings, a good number of households did possess items that paralleled the consecrated apparatuses utilized in the celebration of the Eucharist, such as linens, candles, plates, and goblets. A kind of makeshift altar could thus be fashioned through the combination of ordinary household items and furniture with spiritually charged images and objects. For example, the French poet and author Christine de Pisan (1363-1430)—in recounting a birth at the home of a wealthy merchant—described how when moving through the spaces of the house to reach the birthing room, “one passed through two other very fine chambers, in each of which

²⁰ Ibid, 90; and James C. Davis, *The Decline of the Venetian Nobility as a Ruling Class* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), 62-72.

²¹ Swanson, 124.

²² Swanson, 139.

there was a large bed well and richly hung with curtains. In the second one there was a large dresser covered *like an altar* and laden with silver vessels...”²³ As will be explicated in further detail in Chapter Four, the early Renaissance Dominican Giovanni Dominici advocated simulated altars in the home as a kind of devotional exercise to teach young boys and girls about the mass, as well as proper disciplined behavior. Women, too, were encouraged to decorate and maintain domestic altars as a devotional activity that combined the dignity of work with spiritual pursuits.²⁴ Authentic altars or not, these transformations of forms and space converted the common and mundane into sacred environments that facilitated prayer and pious behavior.

Domestic altars—particularly those of a portable nature—came under the scrutiny of the Church during the second half of the sixteenth century. The 1562 rulings of the Council of Trent established initial guidelines for the regulation of laymen’s chapels, which were further clarified by the *Congregatio Sacri Concilii* as the sixteenth century advanced. The Tridentine decrees, enforced by this advisory council, stipulated that mass was not to be celebrated in private houses nor outside of churches or oratories dedicated solely to divine worship unless in extreme circumstances, such as illness. The Council fathers further attempted to limit the regular use of the portable altar in favor of the *altare fixum*, set in a well-defined location approved by authorities that could be easily closed-off from visitors, with access restricted to immediate family and staff.²⁵ Mattox’s research has shown that Tridentine strictures had a profound effect on domestic spaces

²³ From *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. Translation from Jacqueline Murray, ed., *Love, Marriage and Family in the Middle Ages: A Reader* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2001), 407.

²⁴ This was something stressed in Giovanni di Dio’s *Decor puellarum* (Venice, 1471). See Kasl, 70-73.

²⁵ These rulings came out of the Twenty-Second Session of the Council, 17 September 1562. Rev. H. J. Schroeder, O.P., *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (St. Louis, 1941): 151-152. See also Chapter 5 of Mattox’s dissertation.

and rituals in Florence. While in the fifteenth century the household altar, normally portable in nature, functioned as a mark of a Florentine family's influence and status, during the time of the Medici dukedom and the assertion of ecclesiastical supremacy over the laity, domestic chapels became a symbol of increased orthodoxy and a rigid hierarchical structure of power.²⁶

The 1562 regulations of the Council of Trent with regards to altars seem to have had less of an effect in Venice. The Venetian Republic was renowned for its independence from papal control. Having endured two papal interdicts in the span of a single century—in 1509 and 1606, and the threat of a third in 1573—it saw many of the reforms issued from Rome in the wake of the Council of Trent as mechanisms of political domination rather than offerings of spiritual guidance. Matters normally regarded as under the realm of ecclesiastical policy—such as the appointment of bishops, jurisdiction over local clerics and churches, censorship and the management of heresy—were regarded by Venetians as falling within the domain of the temporal authority of the state. In the face of objections from the papacy and its defense of a centralized Church, the Republican government continued to defend its command over these areas.²⁷ Given that Rome could not assert power over ecclesiastical property on the island of Venice, it is doubtful it would have been able to exercise much influence over the personal spaces of the city's residents.

Nevertheless, Venetians firmly believed that the success of the Republic was dependent on combating sin, and the government did assert its power in domestic

²⁶ Mattox, 339-349.

²⁷ For more on the relationship between Rome and Venice, particularly during the Counter-Reformation, see Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*; and John Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies: Italian Heretics in a Renaissance City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

residences when it came to the suppression of heresy.²⁸ The Venetian Inquisition brought to trial—and even condemned—several of its own citizens for evangelical meetings that took place in private homes or for the use of domestic items, some of them religious, in rituals of magic. These events were called into question, however, not because religion was being carried out in personal quarters, but because the practices themselves were considered heretical.²⁹ Although patriarchs of Venice periodically banned domestic altars because their popularity was seen as damaging to ecclesiastical control, it was done more out of fear that the wealthy would abandon the city's churches, a prospect that would have devastating consequences for the financial welfare of these institutions and was seen as inconsistent with the Republican ideals of prudence and frugality.³⁰ The recurrence of these prohibitions, however, suggests that the rules were frequently violated. As expressed by the Patriarch Lorenzo Priuli (1590-1600) in a letter to Cardinal Mutti dated 28 September 1593 requesting the authority to grant privileges to Venetians

²⁸ Paul Grendler offers an alternate perspective of Venice's relationship with the Church in *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540-1605* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

²⁹ Conversely, while the Venetian government at times did critique the possessions of Venetians and passed laws restricting ownership of particular goods and their display, these enactments had nothing to do with misuse of sacred articles or the intermingling of the sacred and the profane; instead they were attempts to curtail excessive exhibitions of wealth that conflicted with the Republic ideals of *mediocritas*, as discussed in Chapter One. For more on evangelism in Venice, and the Inquisition trials aimed at censoring the movement, see John Martin, "Salvation and Society in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Popular Evangelism in a Renaissance City," *The Journal of Modern History* 60 (June 1988): 219-220, 227-228. On the relationship between domestic goods, magic, and the Church, particularly with regards to love rituals, see Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 210-213. As the highest ranking ecclesiastical office in the city, the Patriarchate was linked both to the Venetian state and the Papal See in Rome; nevertheless, by the mid-sixteenth century the task of choosing the Patriarch was appropriated from the monastic orders by the Venetian nobility who ensured that laymen rather than clerics held this important post. Thus, always a native of *la Serenissima* from the patrician class, the Patriarch often had the interests of the Venetian aristocracy in mind. Joanne Ferraro, *Marriage Wars in Late Renaissance Venice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 20-21, 26, and 38.

to celebrate the mass in their own homes when conditions deemed necessary, possession of a domestic altar was a tradition in Venice “from time immemorial.”³¹

Despite Venice’s aversion to many of the policies issued from Rome following Trent, and its citizens’ apparent dismissal of some of the regulations that emerged from local church authorities, the Republic remained intensely devout, continuing to express its religious fervor in a variety of arenas, such as the city’s rich confraternal life, its civic festivals, and, of course, the home. Altars and altar furnishings continue to appear in the inventories of the Republic’s residences during the sixteenth century, and often with no indication that they were either fixed or located in self-contained spaces. The 1582 inventory of the patrician Donato Da Lezze, for example, reveals that his family palace contained a small altar in a studio adjoining the bedchamber, above which hung a carved wooden crucifix and a small painting of the Magi.³² Similarly, Ortensio Amulio, whose register of household goods was drawn up in 1590, had not only a tiny chapel in his villa that contained sacred furnishings, such as a pair of candles, an altar cloth, and a new missal for mass, but also a little altar with a figure of Christ on the cross located in the study off of the main bedchamber in his home in Venice.³³ The persistent, and even increased, presence of pious goods within the domestic sphere throughout the Cinquecento offers testimony to the resilient faith of the people of Venice.

³¹ Priuli, unfortunately, does not specify what these conditions are. A transcription of the letter can be found in Giambattista Galliccioli, *Delle Memorie Venete antiche profane ed ecclesiastiche*, 4 vols (Venice: D. Fracasso, 1795), III: 213.

³² ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 66, fol. 7v. For a more detailed discussion of the Da Lezze family, their palazzo, and its contents, see Brown, *Privates Lives*, Chapter Three.

³³ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 43, n. 58, fol. 1r and 33r.

The Studio and Domestic Devotion

Sacred environments within the *casa* encompassed the public expressions of familial piety to the more personal and secret. The moralizing narratives that tended to be found in the *portego*, for example, were statements to all who entered the house of the virtue of those who dwelled there. The distribution of religious goods throughout the Venetian household provided multiple points within the daily environment for devotion and other spiritual expressions, with various degrees of openness that were constantly shifting. The *studio*, or study, however, was a space designed especially for spiritual retreat and contemplation, devoid of the onuses of daily life. Scholarly discussions of the *studio* in the early modern period have tended to be limited to the context of intellectual pursuits and the phenomenon of collecting, in particular, antiquities and other “curiosities” from around the world.³⁴ It is true that the *studio* was enjoyed as a scholastic environment—complete with books by the great ancient, medieval and contemporary authors—as well as a setting that afforded both the protection and exhibition of rare and valuable treasures.³⁵ Conversely, it was also utilized in an especially practical manner as an office or work space; the lists of account books and other business records as standard items in these rooms suggests such a function. But in

³⁴ Some major studies on the *studio* include: Wolfgang Liebenwein, *Studiolo: storia e tipologia di uno spazio culturale*, ed. Claudia Cieri Via, trans. Alessandro Califano (Modena: Panini, 1988); Olga Raggio, *The Gubbio Studiolo and its Conservation* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999); Luciano Berti, *Il principe dello studiolo: Francesco I dei Medici e la fine del Rinascimento fiorentino* (Pistoia: Maschietto & Musolino, 2002); and Stephen Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros: Renaissance Mythological Painting and the Studiolo of Isabella d'Este* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004). For recent discussions on the artist's “studio” as “study,” see *Inventions of the Studio, Renaissance to Romanticism*, eds. Michael Cole and Mary Pardo (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). On the *studio* in Venice, see Brown, *Private Lives*, chapter 8 and Thornton, *Scholar in His Study*. Thornton is one of the few scholars who considers the study as a religious environment, although her focus is on it as a space of work and secular pursuits.

³⁵ It is probably no coincidence that the emergence of domestic spaces dedicated to contemplation and intellectual pursuits coincided with both the increasing book ownership across Europe and Italy and the rising culture of collecting that became a major vehicle for the enhancement of social status in the sixteenth century.

addition to these activities, the studio was an important site for spiritual reflection, prayer, and moral improvement.

The debate that took place throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance over the active and contemplative lives had deep effects on the laity and their religious development. Despite the fact that average men and women began to assume greater control over their spiritual lives, the celibate, monastic lifestyle, removed from the trappings of the mundane world, continued to be perceived as the ideal and most holy existence. Even after the Council of Trent reinforced the sacred nature of marriage and the contributions of family life to the Catholic community were increasingly extolled, monastic institutions and religious orders continued to set the framework for all expressions of piety.³⁶ This can be seen in the prayer books that were common in most homes in Renaissance Venice and throughout Europe. The Divine Office and Book of Hours originated from the breviaries of monks; with the use of these texts in the home prayer thus became structured around canonical time and modeled after monastic behavior.³⁷

In addition to appropriating a regularized routine of prayers, many of the faithful sought the periods of seclusion that the monastic context provided to aid intellectual growth, meditation, and self-reflection. The *studio* made the ideal of retreat and contemplation an achievable reality for some, and the space became, as characterized by Dora Thornton in her publication on the Renaissance study, a “laymen’s cell.”³⁸

³⁶ Gabriella Zarri, “Living Saints: A Typology of Female Sanctity in the Early Sixteenth Century,” in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, eds. Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, trans. Margery J. Schneider (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 220-221, and Vauchez, *Laity in the Middle Ages*, xvii-xviii. This topic will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

³⁷ Barstow, 12. This schedule of prayer may have coincided with the concealment and exposure of images, as discussed above.

³⁸ Thornton, *The Scholar in His Study*, 9.

Monasteries in the Middle Ages and Renaissance were centers of scholastic activity; thus, there was an inherent connection in the early modern mentality between studious pursuits and sacred space. These associations were only reinforced by the imagery of saints, such as Jerome, Augustine, and the Evangelists, in their studies surrounded by religious and secular instruments, which became immensely popular during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (figs. 56, 57 & 113). The principle of privacy and isolation to carry out one's meditations goes back to the Bible and the story of Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus warned against the vanity and spectacle of exterior devotion, and told his disciples instead to pray in secret:

“And when you pray, you shall not be like hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men... But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your father who is in the secret place; and your father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” (Mt. 6:5-6)³⁹

Medieval and Renaissance writers continued to promote—sometimes subliminally, sometimes overtly—seclusion as a devotional paradigm. Saint Bonaventure (1221-1274) wrote that prayers are something that “...each one performs in secret and according to his own personal inclinations...”⁴⁰ In his *On the Solitary Life*, composed in 1346, Petrarch articulated the ascetic cravings of the contemporary layman; a Christian existence, he argued, required detachment and meditation.⁴¹ Simone Porzio, author of *Modo di orare christianamente con la espositione del Pater noster*, published in Florence in 1551, also emphasized the act of oration as a personal affair and reiterated Christ's

³⁹ From Schmidt, 23.

⁴⁰ Saint Bonaventure, “The Speculation of the Poor Man in the Wilderness: On the Degrees of Ascension to God, and the Beholding of Him through his Footsteps in the Universe from the Soul's Progress to God,” in Kepler, 140.

⁴¹ Thornton, *The Scholar in His Study*, 9.

message in the Sermon on the Mount when he argued that prayer is best executed in a secret place. He wrote:

“Quando tu ori cioè, quando tu deliberi far tal cosa, entra dentro a la tua camera cioè, ne la più secreta parte de la casa tua; et dove sei solito et consueto di ascondere, et riporre i tuoi tesori, e le tue cose più pretiose, riponi anchora l’oratione tua, la quale è di gran lunga più pretiosa di qual si voglia altro tesoro, et vuole significare in questo luogo il maestro nostro, il tuo più sicuro et secreto luogo, et quivi riponi il cuore tuo...”⁴²

The site that Porzio advocated for prayer closely matches contemporary descriptions of the *studio*, the part of the house “most secure and secret” (“più sicuro e secreto”), and a place where one stored his “treasures” (“tesori”) and “most precious” things (“cose più pretiose”). He later went on to equate the physical space of prayer with the heart and the cherished objects contained within such rooms to a person’s spiritual treasures, both of which must be kept locked and protected from outside harm.⁴³ Two decades later, Silvestro da Rossano expressed nearly identical sentiments in his *Modo come la persona spirituale che ora, si habbia a disporre nella Oratione verso Iddio*:

“[A]ltri luochi sono particolari nelle case, dove le persone hanno commodità di farle; et così adorano quelle stanze con divotissimi adornamenti [...]. Ma parlando del luogo spirituale dell’oratione, dico, che è li cuore, et la volontà nostra, che poco ne gioveranno i luoghi santi, et le chiese adornate, gli oratorii secreti, come il cuore è pieno di vanità, et non ora con diligenza. La onde bene dissi il Salvatore nostro Christo Giesù, quando tu vuoi orare, entra nella tua camera secreta, et serrato l’uscio, ora là tuo padre. La camera secreta è il nostro cuore, nel quale secretamente habita Iddio: l’uscio serrato è il nostro appetito, il quale dever essere serrato ad ogni passione, et sensualità maligna. Questo è il luoco, dove si ora Iddio.”⁴⁴

⁴² Quote from Giorgio Caravale, *L’orazione proibita: censura ecclesiastica e letteratura devozionale nella prima età moderna* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2003), 35-36.

⁴³ Porzio’s metaphor of the private chamber as the heart is an unmistakable allusion to the commentary on the Sermon on the Mount by Saint Augustine, who made the same comparison.

⁴⁴ Quote from Caravale, 84-85. Full title: *Modo come la persona spirituale che ora, si habbia a disporre nella Oratione verso Iddio e li suoi santi; per tuttu li giorni della Settimana tanto la mattina come la sera detta Consonantia Spirituale. Composta da Fra Silvestro da Rossano Cappuccino, mentre predicava a San Salvatore di Venetia, nell’anno MDLXXII. Divisa in due parti, nella prima si tratta di quelle cose che sono necessarie da sapere, e nella seconda il modo che si ha da tenere.*

Again, the author likened a secret chamber, one that is adorned with pious embellishments (“con divotissimi adornamenti”), to the heart, the most personal and interior point of one’s being, where God dwells. Thus, it must be kept closed and well guarded against passions and other vices.⁴⁵

These writers not only encourage a secluded place in which to carry out one’s prayers, they also assumed its existence in the average home. As talked about in Chapter One, privacy was hard to find in the typical Renaissance *casa*, as the home was normally a place where work, entertainment, and daily life converged; nonetheless, one of the most noteworthy developments of the Venetian domestic interior during the Cinquecento was the increasing specialization of household spaces, including the *studio*.⁴⁶ By the middle of the century, treatise writers were ardently proposing the arrangement of the domestic residence to guarantee greater seclusion.⁴⁷ Theory and practice seems to have coincided on this point, as inventories attest to the presence of a *studio* not only in the homes of the patricians of Venice, but also a good number of households of the city’s *cittadini* and middle classes. While it was not a feature of the majority of residences, the *studio* no longer remained the exclusive domain of the peninsula’s courts and nobility.⁴⁸

A study could be an independent room, perhaps something not unlike the study of Saint Augustine vividly executed by Carpaccio in his canvas for the Scuola degli Schiavone (fig. 111), or a cabinet-like piece of furniture, referred to as a *scrittore* in the Veneto region.⁴⁹ Complete with shelves, writing tables, drawers, and locked

⁴⁵ Caravale, 85.

⁴⁶ Fortini Brown, *Private Lives*, 218.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴⁸ Thornton, *The Scholar in His Study*, 9.

⁴⁹ In fact, the words *studio* and *scrittore* were used interchangeably. Elsewhere in Italy, this cabinet was referred to as a “scrittoio.” For more on the etymology, Renaissance usage, and subsequent development of

compartments, these large-scale cabinets allowed for the organization and safeguarding of papers, books and other cherished possessions, just as the detached room did.⁵⁰

Similar to the structure and routine ascribed to the monastic lifestyle, cabinets and other similar pieces of furniture provided an order that was highly desired in the sixteenth century, both in terms of the goods kept in one's environment and the actions evoked by their use.⁵¹

Dora Thornton has suggested that the *scrittore* was similar to the *studio* of Saint Jerome in Antonello da Messina's brilliant image of the scholar at work from around 1475-1476 (fig. 113). Within a large Gothic interior upon a platform, Jerome sits at a sizeable wooden carrel that serves as both a desk and a storage unit for the paraphernalia of the saint's intellectual pursuits.⁵² Similar kinds of structures are suggested in Venetian inventories. In the *camera* of Andrea Morosini, for example, there was "uno studio di nogera con le due casselete da salvar scripture." In this context, the word "studio" probably refers to one of these cabinet studies, given that the notary made mention of its material (*nogera*, or walnut in Venetian) and its added pigeon holes or drawers to store writings.⁵³ Alvise Bon also had a *scrittore*, but this one was located on the lower floor of his house in the "magazen," or warehouse, so presumably it was where the silk merchant carried out his business affairs. Bon's *scrittore* was a site for devotional activity, as well. Inside the writing cabinet, he stored a painting of the Nativity, one that was normally kept

the term "studio" and related words, see Cole and Pardo, "Origins of the Studio," in Cole and Pardo, 3-6, and 12-16..

⁵⁰ Thornton, *The Scholar in His Study*, 53 and 74.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 17. The painting was first recorded in 1529 by Michiel in the house of Antonio Pasqualino. Frimmel, 93.

⁵³ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 38, n. 38 (1547).

hidden by small doors but presumably was unveiled at moments during the work day designated for prayer.⁵⁴

In Venice, therefore, the study was not always a separate and self-contained space within the home but quite often was situated in a corner of a room, usually the bedchamber of the male head of the household. Even studies of an improvisational nature took shape, created through an amalgamation of domestic goods like desks, writing utensils, and chests and coffer in which to store items. Carpaccio's *Dream of Saint Ursula* (fig. 19), provides an example of the possible arrangement of such spaces. Set into the corner of the saint's bedchamber (fig. 114) are a table with a writing desk on top, an open bookchest, and writing implements such as an inkwell and quiver. The *camera* and *studio* of the ducal secretary Giovanni Soro may have been similar to Carpaccio's vision. In a chamber located over a canal, Soro had an intarsia desk full of precious items, mainly silver goods, but also rosary beads of crystal and pearls, and an Agnus Dei, described as having been made from pearl and embellished with silver, a reference to the container rather than the Agnus Dei itself. Nearby this desk was a chest for books and other articles, and another small coffer where Soro kept jewelry, gemstones, and the gold, pearl, and ruby *pax* described in Chapter One that he had acquired from the Frenchman known as "el Tesorier."⁵⁵ Visual examples, like the paintings of Carpaccio and Antonello, corroborated by evidence from the inventories, provide a fairly clear picture of how many Venetian individuals and families integrated pursuits of learning, spirituality, and self-improvement into their daily environments. While the size and elaborateness of a *studio* undoubtedly brought a certain amount of

⁵⁴ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 27, (1535).

⁵⁵ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 37, n. 12 (1543).

prestige for the owner, alternatives were available so that individuals of more modest means could create similar kinds of spaces within their own homes.⁵⁶

As an environment designed for intellectual and spiritual betterment, the study provided the framework for the refinement of moral integrity, derived from both classical and Christian tradition, which was one of the defining features of Renaissance culture.⁵⁷ The honor associated with study that was bestowed upon its owners was communicated not simply through the space or structure itself, but also through the objects kept within as the example of Giovanni Soro suggests. Books by ancient, medieval, and contemporary thinkers, collections of small-scale antiquities like coins and cameos, and anthologies of natural and man-made curiosities were just some of the wide assortment of highly valued items that Renaissance individuals acquired for their *studio* environments. Religious goods, too, played a particularly crucial role in these spaces dedicated to contemplation and self-improvement. Sometimes, these items were openly exhibited in the study, for the enjoyment and deliberation of the owner, but also to display to others. While the studio served as a personal area of retreat, it was by no means a private space. Patricia Fortini Brown has compared the Venetian *studio* to a “theater of sorts,” where one would exhibit his calculated and refined amassing of the rare and the beautiful.⁵⁸ In fact, many civic-minded collectors opened their houses to distinguished visitors—what Renaissance contemporaries named the *casa aperta*—and/or donated their collections to the state after death.⁵⁹ The objects collected within this sphere to assist devotions and

⁵⁶ Thornton, *The Scholar in His Study*, 33 and 69.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁸ Brown, *Private Lives*, 217.

⁵⁹ One of the most famous examples of this kind of private largess to benefit the public community is the donation by Cardinal Domenico Grimani of his marbles to the Republic in 1523. Brown, *Private Lives*, 243. Another example is that of Sebastiano Erizzo, a nobleman who resided in the Venetian parish of San

intellectual betterment functioned equally as statements of the wealth, piety, and intellect of the owner to those privileged guests who could gain access.

Like other spaces in the Venetian households, studies commonly contained religious paintings and sculptures. Giovanni Maria Albano's *studio* was modestly adorned with a small gilded painting of the Madonna,⁶⁰ while that of the nobleman Zuan Marco Trevisan was a bit more elaborate. In addition to a balance, compass, and a collection of books that included two Offices of the Virgin and a volume by Petrarch covered in green leather with the arms of the Capello and Soranza families, Trevisan's study contained paintings of the Old Testament heroine Judith kept in a walnut case and a Nativity with "fornimenti" of gilded wood.⁶¹ More frequently found in *studio* spaces in Venetian households, however, were articles made from precious materials, like the medals, crucifixes, and prayer beads discussed in Chapter One. These smaller objects were generally kept in coffer, sometimes locked with a key, along with other esteemed goods such as jewelry and money, and on occasion, family documents. Benedetto Franceschi, for example, kept several sets of paternoster beads made from precious metals and stones, like gold, chalcedony, and pyroxene, in an iron chest with money and a pair of silver salt cellars worth four lira, eleven denari.⁶² The paternosters that Franceschi stored in his coffer were valuable not only for their expensive materials but also because they likely would have been blessed by a church official and perhaps were tied to the conferral of indulgences. The safeguarding of such objects, therefore, signaled not only their high monetary value, but also their holy status.

Moisè. A letter written by Erizzo testifies to the visit of Piero Ligorio to see his collection of more than 1,910 medals. Palumbo Fossati, "Il Collezionista Sebastiano Erizzo," 211.

⁶⁰ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 39, n. 31 (1557).

⁶¹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 37, n. 10 (1537, m.v).

⁶² ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 59 (1538).

The equation between financial and spiritual value is also made clear in the 1573 inventory of the nobleman Angelo Contarini, steward and procurator of the nuns of the convent of San Zaccaria, and in whose residence there was a self-contained chapel.⁶³ In addition to liturgical items that Contarini stored in a chest below his altar, he also deposited a bag of money—416 ducats in gold and coins—intended for his beneficiaries. While this act may seem like an inappropriate conjunction of the sacred and profane, Contarini must have considered this holy location in his residence to be the most fitting and secure place to store his monetary legacy. Since most households did not possess autonomous chapels or oratories, the *studio* or similar spaces offered the safest locale for treasured goods. Secrecy and security were synonymous not only with the *studio* space, but also with the most precious of pious goods kept there. In fact, in its earliest forms, the *studio* was closely associated with the treasury or sacristy of the church, where writings and precious goods were deposited not only by the clerics associated with the institution, but also rulers who saw this site as the most secure.⁶⁴ Such acts recall Alberti's famous treatise on the family, when the interlocutor Gianozzo pronounced: "I kept my records at all times not in the sleeves of my dress, but locked up and arranged in order in my study, almost like sacred and religious objects."⁶⁵ While studies were spaces of display aimed at well-chosen guests, they were simultaneously intimate spaces and not available to all, including some members of the household. Many studies—both the self-contained rooms and the cabinets and desks that served the same function—were closed with locks that by nature served to control admittance as well as to declare the

⁶³ The phrase "nella giesola" suggests some kind of separate chapel or oratory. ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 41, n. 59.

⁶⁴ Cole and Pardo, 25; Liebenwein, 6, 9-11.

⁶⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *The Family in Renaissance Florence*, translation of *I libri della famiglia*, trans. Renée Neu Watkins (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1969), 209.

importance of the space itself and the items deposited inside. The boundaries between restriction and access were thus in a constant state of flux. The seemingly contradictory messages regarding the private and the public hark back to the previously stated quote from the Sermon on the Mount; Jesus himself told his disciples that those who pray in secret will be rewarded openly.

With or without a *studio*, other visual means within the household reinforced the message of the contemplative life, and perhaps served to create more intangible notions of sacred retreat as a state of mind rather than a defined, physical space. Images of Saint Jerome may have been one such method. Saint Jerome (AD ?347-420) was a monk and a scholar who composed the standard Latin translation of the Bible. During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, artists portrayed Saint Jerome in several guises: as a cardinal, the post to which he was posthumously “promoted” for his service as papal advisor; as a scholar in his study, surrounded by books and instruments of learning; and as a penitent hermit alone in the wilderness and often before a crucifix striking his breast with a stone.⁶⁶ Henk van Os has asserted that there are few surviving works of art that feature the saint, and on this basis alone concludes that personal devotion to Jerome must have been minimal.⁶⁷ But evidence suggests the quite opposite, that it was precisely within the domestic context that devotion to the saint flourished, at least in the Venetian Republic. Jerome’s cult was advanced in the late Middle Ages by the Bolognese jurist and humanist Giovanni d’Andrea, who wrote a *vita* of the saint, the *Hieronymianus*, shortly after 1342; this text was copied numerous times and was later printed. In the *vita*, Giovanni

⁶⁶ The oldest preserved representations of Saint Jerome in his study as a separate iconographical theme – in other words, apart from other Church Fathers – were painted in Italy during the late trecento. For more on the development of the iconography of Saint Jerome in Venice, see Bernard Ridderbos, *Saint and Symbol: Images of St. Jerome in Early Italian Art* (Groningen: Bouma’s Boekhuis, 1984), esp. 15.

⁶⁷ Van Os, *The Art of Devotion*, 34.

bemoaned the fact that Jerome's feast day was not celebrated on the peninsula, as well as the lack of churches in Italy dedicated to the erudite saint while there were many devoted to the other three Church Fathers, Ambrose, Augustine, and Gregory. In Giovanni's praise of the life of Saint Jerome, he proudly declared his own personal devotion to the saint that took shape within his home. He wrote: "In my own house, visible to everyone, I have had his entire life-story painted;" he went on to mention that "...for my part, I keep at home, with special reverence, a likeness of Saint Jerome plucking out the thorn from the lion's paw."⁶⁸

Like Giovanni d'Andrea, households in Venice also kept images of the penitent scholar. Inventories reveal that Saint Jerome was the most popular saint in the dwellings of the lagoon. In nearly any museum that houses a collection of Renaissance art, one can find an image of the saint, many of which were executed by artists from Venice and the surrounding area, like Alvise Vivarini (fig. 115), Giovanni Bellini (fig. 116), Lorenzo Lotto (fig. 117), and Titian (fig. 62), not to mention the Northern European artists of whom Venetians were so enamored (fig. 118). Jerome was a frequent participant in the *sacre conversazioni* that adorned many church altars throughout the Republic, but few altarpieces survive that represent him as the lone subject. The numerous surviving paintings of the saint for which we have no early provenance information were thus likely intended for domestic spaces. A small panel by Alvise Vivarini at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, measuring just over a foot high, is one such example (fig. 115). Vivarini combined the two semblances of the saint—the scholar and hermit—by showing Jerome reading in a rugged landscape. Peering out from a cave on the left is a lion, Jerome's faithful companion after the saint extracted a thorn from its paw.

⁶⁸ Ridderbos, 19.

Images of Saint Jerome in his study engaged in intellectual and sacred pursuits—such as Antonello da Messina’s in London, or the *Saint Jerome in his Study* attributed to Jan van Eyck and today preserved in the Detroit Institute of Art (fig. 118)—thematize the function and value that the *studio* held for those individuals who had one in their homes. They were mirrors of the intellectual environments that Renaissance contemporaries had achieved in their own households. At the same time, these pictures provided perpetual models of how to shape such a scholarly and spiritual atmosphere within the home, and the virtuous activities that should be pursued in such spaces, even when a physical *studio* structure could not be attained. Jerome’s *studio* is complete with a desk, books, and other instruments of learning, but the saint pursues his scholarship before a crucifix, a reminder of the aims of all worldly learning. The activities of Saint Jerome’s *studio* were ultimately ones that transcended time and place. In a similar way, images of this space could move beyond the particulars of setting represented and offer the beholder a model of meditative repose.⁶⁹

Representations of the saint as the penitent hermit in the wilderness, like the Vivarini painting mentioned above, could serve similar purposes. The emphasis in these images is on a lack of worldly goods, almost the complete opposite of the bountiful environment in which the saint appears when in his *studio*. Jerome, wearing little clothing, is typically isolated in a rugged and craggy landscape, and his possessions are reduced to the essentials: a book and a crucifix. At times he is shown continuing to practice his academic studies, as in the painting by Vivarini, while in other images the saint beats his breast with a stone in penitence (fig. 117). The wilderness or desert was

⁶⁹ Walter S. Melion, “Benedictus Arias Montanus and the Virtual Studio as a Meditative Place,” in Cole and Pardo, 73-107..

the site of spiritual fulfillment for many early Christian ascetics. The ideal of isolation, solitude, and denial associated with these locales quickly became the model for the medieval monastery.⁷⁰ But for individuals living in the crowded city of Venice during the Quattro and Cinquecento, this physical setting was impossible to achieve. Instead, people had to find these sites of retreat within their own urban and domestic environments, and rather than reject the goods of their daily surroundings, they engaged the visual to stimulate analogous effects. Thus, the landscape that commonly surrounds Saint Jerome in Renaissance pictures translated into a trope signifying the eremitic ideal of contemplation—the commingling of aspects of learning with elements of penitence—for which one could still strive in his or her daily life.⁷¹ Viewing such an image could be a retreat of sorts, putting the viewer in the proper frame of mind for spiritual and intellectual pursuits.

Contemporary writers deliberated upon the association between the wilderness and the architectural space of the study as typified by paintings of Jerome. Angelo Decembrio, a pupil of the humanist Guarino da Verona from the ducal court of Ferrara during the mid-fifteenth century, discussed the connection in the context of the decoration of libraries in his *De Politia Litteraria*. He wrote: “We often see, too, some pleasant picture of St. Jerome at his writing in the wilderness, by which we direct the mind to the library’s privacy and quiet and the application to study and literary composition.”⁷² Although they were pursuits practiced communally in academies and confraternities, learning and repentance were also highly personal activities to be undertaken by the individual, and isolation—no matter how extreme—contributed to the

⁷⁰ Liebenwein, 16.

⁷¹ Ridderbos, *Saint and Symbol* 34.

⁷² Quote from Ridderbos, *Saint and Symbol*, 33.

success of their execution. In this way, representations of the penitent Jerome isolated in the wilderness were just as well suited as the physical structure of the *studio* itself in shaping an individual's relation with God.⁷³

The religious visual culture of Venetian households extended far beyond pictures; numerous articles, like books, prayer beads, small-scale sculptures, altars, liturgical items, and even specialized furniture, were all utilized in conjunction with each other to create a variety of ritual spaces—often visually and materially dense—throughout the domestic interior. Pious objects contributed to the structuring and efficacy of the home as sacred setting. They fashioned spaces that served as focal points for prayers and personal communication with the divine. Altars created more complex ritual settings where the liturgy could be performed, while the *studio* offered a site for spiritual retreat and security. This visual culture, however, did not function solely as an outlet for religious observance. Contemplation and devotion are just two of a variety of incentives behind the use of pious images and objects in everyday life.⁷⁴ Sacred objects and the spaces they formed operated within the household context to respond to a variety of domestic needs, such as security and reproduction, the education of children, the construction of the family's public image and its place in the larger religious community—all issues that will be discussed in further detail in the following chapters. These activities were not seen as separate concerns from spirituality; all were rituals performed within the domestic sphere to build and secure relationships between

⁷³ Ibid., 73 and 87.

⁷⁴ Morgan, 51.

individuals and with the divine, as well as to reinforce the Christian character of the familial dwelling.

Chapter 4. A Safe Haven: The Apotropaic Function of Holy Images and Objects

As emphasized in the introduction to this dissertation, the religious visual culture of the Renaissance Venetian dwelling did not serve the single function of devotion, but rather responded to a number of domestic needs. One such concern that shaped the ritual behaviors and aesthetics of the residential environment was security, not so much in terms of defensive measures taken to safeguard the physical structure of the house—although this would have been an important matter—but a protection that encompassed the bodies and souls of those who dwelled there. In the early modern period, nearly all tragedies and misfortunes were considered to be divine retribution for human transgression; thus, the heavenly sphere was implored for mercy and salvation in moments of suffering, and likewise duly honored when prayers were answered. This “contractual” relationship between the earthly and spiritual was given expression in a variety of artistic forms, many of which were displayed and utilized in the personal environments of families and individuals. Domestic objects, which included images of prophylactic saints, protective amulets, and thaumaturgic gemstones used singularly or collectively, worked to secure both the home and the well-being of the persons who lived within its walls, but continually faced the real and perceived dangers of the outside world. As expressed by Louise Marshall, religious art served as a vehicle to “articulate and manipulate” one’s situation in life; a person’s standing in the world of the living became especially important in the face of danger, disease, death, and the impending judgment of the

soul.¹ In early modern Venice, such concerns were a constant presence, partly the result of a steady stream of visitors to the city for a variety of purposes, as well as the travels of the Republic's own residents that constituted an essential component of their mercantile livelihood. While Venetians shared many of the same anxieties faced by individuals across Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, their concerns with personal protection were intimately tied to the unique geographic, economic, and social situation of the Republic.

This chapter will be directed towards examining the role of religious art within the household context as it responded to the requirements of personal and familial safety. Following a brief look at the plague in Venice—its perceived causes and the steps that were taken to combat its effects—I will discuss the three saints most commonly associated with the disease and who occupied an important place in Venetian homes: Christopher, Sebastian, and Roch. I will then move on to prophylactic objects used to fight disease and misfortune; these goods typically incorporated precious gemstones and natural materials deemed to possess various supernatural properties and were often worn on the body so that the wearer would directly benefit from its powers. The purpose of this chapter is to show how seemingly disparate household articles—images and objects—served a common purpose: to combat evil and secure the physical and spiritual welfare of those who filled their everyday environments with these holy goods.

¹ Louise Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred: Image and Plague in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (Fall 1994): 486-87.

“Death in Venice”

The bubonic plague has been described as the greatest single natural disaster in Europe, and it continues to be classified as one of the worst calamities in the history of the world.² For more than four centuries, from the mid-fifteenth century until the end of the eighteenth, the plague was a ubiquitous threat throughout the continent, disrupting life in every aspect, from the economics of agriculture and trade to social, political, and religious practices. In an era in which status boundaries were rigorously enforced, it was one of the most equalizing forces of the period, assailing all categories of people, regardless of sex, age, class, race, or place of origin. The bubonic plague was a true pandemic, striking and restriking areas with only the span of a decade or so in between. It was the cyclical nature of the disease that prevented recovery and generated confusion and panic amongst society, what one scholar has described as a “collective mental shock.”³ Between 1347/1348, the year of the most destructive epidemic known as the Black Death, and 1772, there were 51 outbreaks of plague in Europe, separated by 38 periods of remission that lasted on average 11-12 years.⁴ A single outbreak could result in the deaths of tens of thousands in any given city. Rarely did a generation escape the devastation. As a port city on the eastern coast of the Italian peninsula with strong economic and cultural ties to the Levant, Venice was particularly susceptible to syndromes with the frequent exchange of people and goods from all corners of the world through its streets and canals. The Republic suffered from numerous bouts of the plague throughout the Middle Ages

² Irene Vaslef, “The Role of St. Roch as a Plague Saint: a Late Medieval Hagiographic Tradition” (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1984), 8.

³ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

and Renaissance; a particularly distressing period spanned the half century from 1477/1478 until 1528, when pestilence struck the city every five or six years, but the most devastating outbreak occurred in 1576, when nearly 47,000 people died, the highest mortality rate of any city in the Veneto region affected by the disease.⁵

Little was understood scientifically about the disease to attack it on a microbiological level; nevertheless, a large body of literature was produced that attempted to explain pestilence, its causes and its prevention, while cities and communities undertook measures of a practical and spiritual nature to combat what had become an ever-present fact of life. There were a number of “inferior” causes assigned to the onset of plague, such as trade, pilgrimage, and the corruption of air, commonly referred to as miasma; the latter was believed to be agitated by conditions such as damp weather, extreme heat, and crowded spaces. The only reliable defense against plague promoted by those in the medical community was flight, but when such actions were not attainable, one could evade polluted air by avoiding damp places, refraining from hot baths, and consuming and wearing antidotes against these contaminated vapors.⁶ Other measures taken to avert the spread and contraction of the disease included fumigation, quarantine, and the establishment of rules for the collection and burial of the dead.⁷ In Venice, the government exploited the unique topography of the city to combat the plague with the creation of island isolation hospitals, known as *lazaretti*, to separate the sick from the heavily populated center.⁸

⁵ For the years of plague outbreaks in Venice, and its effects on the population, see *Venezia e la peste: 1348-1797*, exh. cat. Palazzo Ducale, Venice, 1979, 27 and 97.

⁶ Vaslef, 15-18; and Christine M. Boeckl, *Images of Plague and Pestilence: Iconography and Iconology* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University, 2000), 15.

⁷ Boeckl, 23.

⁸ Andrew Hopkins, “Combating the Plague: Devotional Paintings, Architectural Programs, and Votive Processions in Early Modern Venice,” in *Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague*,

The ultimate cause of the plague, however—as with all illness and natural disasters—was divine castigation against human wrongdoing.⁹ Science, astrology, and religion during this time were inextricably interwoven, and health was not regarded merely as the physical well-being of an individual. Preventive measures against the disease, therefore, extended beyond the “scientific” realm. In the early sixteenth century, at the same time that Venice was establishing a permanent magistracy of public health—the *Provveditori della Sanità*—devotion to plague saints like Sebastian, Roch, and Christopher intensified and manifested itself, in part, through the establishment of churches and increased participation in confraternities dedicated to these Holy Protectors.¹⁰ When the Republic was faced with such tragedy, its residents frequently invoked divine assistance through additional public acts, which included processions throughout the city, the commissioning of *ex-votos*, and the erection of provisional altars on street corners and in *campi* according to the commonly held belief that prayers nearby or in the same place of misfortune would expeditiously bring holy protection.¹¹ A monumental example of the Republic’s spiritual response to the devastation of the plague is the church of Il Redentore on the island of Giudecca (fig. 119). Designed by Andrea Palladio and built during the years from 1577 to 1592, it was commissioned as an act of thanksgiving for the end of the

1500-1800, eds. Gauvin Alexander Bailey, Pamela M. Jones, Franco Mormando, Thomas W. Worchester (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 137-152: 137.

⁹ Boeckl, xii.

¹⁰ One example is the formation of the Scuola di San Rocco in the Republic at the end of the fifteenth century; within twelve years after its founding, it reached the size that it could petition the Council of Ten to receive the status of Scuola Grande. See Brian Pullan, “The Scuole Grandi of Venice: Some Further Thoughts,” in Verdon and Henderson, 273-75. Paradoxically, the practical measures assumed by the *Provveditori* to contain the disease, which usually included restrictions on the movement of people and goods, clashed with the traditional remedy of devotion and supplication endorsed by both religious authorities and the state. Hopkins, 142.

¹¹ Antonio Niero, “Pietà ufficiale e pietà popolare in tempo di peste,” in *Venezia e la peste*, 287; and Boeckl, 60.

1576 epidemic, which extinguished an estimated one-third of the city's population.¹²

On a smaller scale, even the salves and remedies advocated in plague tracts were given names with spiritual overtones, such as “angelic syrup” or “precious little sack,” the latter referring to the small containers consisting of odiferous herbs and substances that people hung around their necks to protect themselves and purify the air around them.¹³

Beyond the incessant destruction of the plague, the residents of Venice faced additional dangers given their economic and geographical situation. Venice was a city of merchants, with far-reaching trade routes into Northern Europe and the British Isles, as well as Egypt, Turkey, and Middle East. While this economic livelihood brought great prosperity to the city, it also carried the added dangers associated with travel, such as theft, shipwrecks, frequent sickness, and even death, tragedies that were felt not only by the merchants directly involved, but also the family members who stayed behind, coping with separation and sometimes permanent loss.

Additionally, to maintain her vast monopoly on trade, Venice was in a constant state of war. In 1508, the most powerful players in Europe, including Pope Julius II and the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian, formed the League of Cambrai in an attempt to take back portions of northeastern Italy, which at that time were under Venetian rule; the League dealt the Republic a crushing blow that resulted in the brief loss of territory on the *terrafirma*. A more severe threat, however, were the Turks. From 1522 on the Ottoman Empire grew, overtaking Venetian trade routes in the eastern

¹² A later example came in 1630, when Venice was faced with another serious bout of the plague, and the Senate responded by commissioning of the church of Santa Maria della Salute from the architect Baldassare Longhena, as an *ex voto*, an offering to the Blessed Virgin Mary in her aspect as a giver of health.

¹³ *Venezia e la peste*, 56.

Mediterranean, and eventually seizing Cyprus in 1570. Daily life on *La Serenissima*—“the most serene one” as Venetians proudly referred to their island—was a challenge, as well; the city has always had a fragile physical framework, being built on the mud banks of a lagoon, susceptible to flooding and fires.

In her book on plague imagery, Christine Boeckl has described the disease as a crisis of community; epidemics affected entire cities and districts rather than select individuals, and therefore were considered to be the result of collective guilt. Large numbers of the population were afflicted with illness while those fortunate enough to have escaped the disease were left to care for the sick, bury the dead, and cope with the economic, social, and spiritual strain the contagion caused. The commissioning of religious art and the performance of rituals to implore divine protection, ward off future outbreaks, and give thanks for relief from epidemics were, according to Boeckl, typically the domain of corporate groups.¹⁴ While the recurrence of pestilence was undoubtedly a communal concern, such an assessment of the consequences of the plague as an overwhelmingly public affair does not explain the substantial numbers of domestic objects, like those recorded in Venetian household inventories, that were utilized in more personal environments but for similar purposes.

Death was a constant occurrence in the early modern household, not only as a looming threat in an era of elevated mortality rates, but in the presence of actual corpses of deceased family members awaiting removal and burial. People turned to their homes during times of disease, sometimes forced to do so when quarantined by the state, but also motivated by fear of the dangers and unknowns of the outside

¹⁴ Boeckl, 60.

world, and in search of a more stable and secure environment.¹⁵ Religious images and articles afforded protection for the home and those who dwelled there, defending the devout from evil, illness, and sudden death, a fate to be avoided at all costs for it meant dying without confession and last rites, and the threat of purgatory. Spiritual protectors permeated the home in a variety of visual formats, from paintings and sculptures that were openly displayed, to prints and amulets that could be worn on the body or viewed in more private moments. Men and women turned to such holy intercessors not just for the hope of being spared from harm, but also for alleviation, comfort, and guidance during times of great physical and emotional burden. Individuals would have utilized all means possible to protect their current state of life here on earth, as well as their future salvation. In addition to operating through communal channels like confraternities, public rituals, and the parish network, families and individuals of Venice took proactive steps within their day-to-day surroundings, commissioning and acquiring a visual culture to fashion the home as both a sacred and secure environment.

Holy Protectors

As mediators between God and man, saints fulfilled particular needs in people's everyday lives, called upon to deal with problems that ranged from a simple toothache to the dreaded fear of an unexpected death.¹⁶ During the early modern period, their most valued attribute was their power to heal and protect mankind, and

¹⁵ Thomas Worcester, "Saint Roch vs. Plague, Famine, and Fear," in *Hope and Healing*, 153-176: 169.

¹⁶ The literature on saints and sainthood in the Middle Ages and Renaissance is vast; some general studies include Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Tímea Szell, eds., *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991); André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints & Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

the invocation of saints as defensive intercessors reached great intensity during disasters such as the plague.¹⁷ An iconography related specifically to pestilence was essentially established in 1347 when the epidemic that would later be known as the Black Death mercilessly attacked Europe.¹⁸ Already existing subjects, such as the “Dance of the Dead” and the *Madonna della Misericordia*, or the Madonna of Mercy, were appropriated and adjusted to meet a new function in relation to the plague; for example, the cloak of the Madonna under which her followers huddle became the shield that deflected the poisonous arrows of the disease (fig. 120). Throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and even into the Baroque, there emerged a litany of plague saints, up to sixty of them by some scholars’ accounts. The more admired ones included Saints Sebastian, Roch, Anthony, Christopher, Nicholas of Tolentino and Charles Borromeo, and their popularity resulted in countless visual representations in nearly all artistic formats.¹⁹ These spiritual intercessors—for the most part invoked as a result of their own corporeal suffering—attended to the physical and spiritual health of an individual or a community, offering comfort and assistance during these frequent periods of crisis.²⁰

Interwoven into the Renaissance cult of saints were ideas regarding sympathetic magic and the belief in the influential power of particular images and objects. It is not surprising, therefore, that Saints Sebastian and Roch were amongst the most popular of the holy personages that appeared in Venetian homes, along with Saint Christopher, the saint most commonly invoked to defend the devout against the

¹⁷ Vaslef, 35-36.

¹⁸ Boeckl, 1 and 62. For a complete study on the Black Death and its relation to art, see Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951).

¹⁹ Vaslef, 38.

²⁰ Vaslef, 35-36.

perils encountered during travel. In addition to the protection Saint Christopher afforded travelers, it was believed that viewing his image prevented one from sudden death that day.²¹ Sebastian and Roch were more directly linked to the plague. Although serving a common goal, the two saints have been characterized as antitheses of one another. Sebastian was an early Christian martyr whose story is one of triumph over suffering, which came to be exemplified in his nearly untarnished, nude body. His legend related to the ancient Greek god Apollo but also drew parallels with the death and resurrection of Christ. The *Vita* of Saint Roch, on other hand, was more contemporary, a tale of travel, disease, and pilgrimage that was not unlike the experiences of many Venetians and those who came to the city. Because Roch himself had contracted the plague, imagery of this saint tended to emphasize the corruptibility of human flesh.²² Devotion to these three sacred figures was particularly strong in the Veneto during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and their images appear throughout the churches, meeting houses, and other public spaces of the cities in the region.

Although not displayed in every household, as was the case with the Madonna, the trio of plague saints rank amongst the most popular of the sacred figures in the Venetian domestic setting, and the repeated mention of their names in household inventories indicates the necessity and efficacy for divine intercessors against the tragedies of disease and other dangers in the everyday lives of the

²¹ Oftentimes images of Saint Christopher were accompanied by a short prayer that reinforced this role: *Christophorum videas postea tutus eas* or *Christofori sancti speciem quicumque tuetur, illo namque die nullo languore tenetur*. Dominique Rigaux, "Les couleurs de la prière. L'image saint dans la maison à la fin du Moyen Âge" in *Religione domestica*, 262.

²² Stefania Mason Rinaldi, "Le immagini della peste nella cultura figurativa veneziana," in *Venezia e la peste*, 215.

inhabitants of the lagoon city. They appeared as both solitary images and as participants in *sacre conversazioni* with the Madonna and other saints; in the latter instance, the thaumaturgic powers of one holy personage acted in tandem with other divine figures rather than alone. The imagery of these saints took on a variety of formats and mediums, which included painting, sculpted reliefs, free-standing sculpture in wood and stone, woodcuts, engravings, amulets, and medals. In the attempt to achieve the goal of physical health and spiritual security, pictures of Saints Sebastian, Roch, and Christopher placed around the home functioned as visual talismans to guard against harm, symbols of comfort during times of suffering, and acts of thanksgiving from having been spared the dangers so deeply feared. These guardian figures—accessed by families and individuals from every social class on a daily basis—were all a part of the myth of Venice that had been perpetuated by the inhabitants of the Republic since its inception: *la Serenissima* was a city explicitly chosen by God and under the tutelage of divine protectors, it endured and prospered.

Saint Christopher

Prayers and invocations addressing the concerns of the plague often functioned as more general entreaties for a host of other tribulations, usually dealing with issues of health and security, for which the saint's mediation was required. A holy personage who was invoked for his defensive role against multiple problems was Saint Christopher, one of the most popular saints in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Best known as the patron saint of merchants and travelers, he was also appealed to for his powers against storms, the dangers of the sea, demons, epilepsy,

toothaches, and a variety of other ailments, including the plague.²³ In addition, there was the commonly held belief associated with Christopher that if one looked upon his likeness, he or she would be spared sudden death for that day. Constant fear of an ill-prepared death and the resulting time spent in purgatory—considered by most individuals at this time to be the greatest threat to salvation—motivated to a large extent devotional actions here on earth, including the veneration of certain intercessory saints, like Christopher.²⁴ Pictures of the saintly giant therefore were true visual talismans. Saint Christopher was also connected to themes of Christian charity; he served as a symbol of new life in Baptism, and became a metaphor for the human soul, which must navigate difficult paths under the weight of sins to attain the ultimate goal of redemption. The saint's relation to travel and water held particular resonance in Venice, a city of merchants constantly voyaging to secure their livelihood, and whose residents traversed water on a daily basis. All of these reasons shed light on the popularity of Saint Christopher in the household interiors of Venice.

Although Christopher was one of the most beloved saints of Eastern and Western Christian traditions, nothing definitive is known of his life or death. The name “Christopher” means “he who carries Christ,” and the representations of the legendary saint most diffuse in the West worked as a kind of visual pun by depicting a Herculean figure holding the Christ child upon his shoulder while crossing a body of water (fig. 121). This standard image of Christopher derives principally from Jacopo da Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* of the thirteenth century, although the Greek tale of the saint may date back as early as the sixth century; by the ninth century it

²³ Vaslef, 39-40.

²⁴ Boeckl, 74.

had already spread through France.²⁵ Son of a heathen king, Offerus—as Christopher was originally known—was a man of extraordinary size and strength, and determined to serve only the strongest and the bravest. This quest led him in vain to a mighty ruler, as well as Satan, both of whom he found lacking in true courage. His search for a new master eventually brought him into contact with a hermit, who told him to offer his loyalty to God; the recluse then instructed him in the Christian faith, baptized him, gave him the name Christopher, foreshadowing the sacred task for which he would become best known. As part of his duty to God, the giant ferried people across a raging stream. One day he transported a child, who along the journey grew heavier and heavier, feeling like the weight of the world on Christopher’s shoulders. Upon the giant’s inquiry, the child revealed himself to be Christ and proved his proclamation by ordering Christopher to set his baton in the ground, which by the next day had bloomed into a palm-bearing tree; this portion of the story is the reason for the flowering tree in many representations of the saint, particularly those produced in Germany and Flanders (fig. 122). Christopher realized he had found his true master—one more powerful than himself—and the miracle resulted in the conversion of many to the faith. This fervor enraged the king, who had Christopher jailed, tortured, and subsequently beheaded.²⁶

²⁵ In the East, where the story of Saint Christopher originated, the saint was shown with the head of a dog or an ass; this zoomorphism may be explained by the fact that he was frequently compared with the donkey that carried Christ into Jerusalem. Loretta Mozzoni, “Introduzione,” in *In viaggio con San Cristoforo: pellegrinaggi e devozione tra medio evo e età moderna*, ed. Loretta Mozzoni and Marta Paraventi (Florence: Giunti, 2000), 13.

²⁶ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 3: 562; and Alban Butler, *Lives of the Saints*, ed., rev. and supplemented by Herbert Thurston and Donald Attwater (New York: Kennedy, 1956), vol. 3: 184-187.

One of the earliest known representations of Saint Christopher in Europe is a fresco dating to the tenth century in the Church of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome.²⁷ Initial images of the saint, like that in Rome, presented him in an iconic manner, placing emphasis on the mystical over the narrative, an immobile figure of the land, carrying in his arms and close to his heart the adult Christ (fig. 123). The highly influential *Golden Legend* spurred the growth of the cult of Saint Christopher, as well as the transformation of his iconography (fig. 124).²⁸ Images of Christopher soon placed greater emphasis on the key elements of his tale, and thus the saint came to be shown knee-deep in a stream, carrying the Christ child on his shoulders, and often with a baton in his hand that would become the miraculous flowering tree. While his colossal scale remained one of his most identifiable traits, representations shifted focus from the static and supernatural tendencies of previous imagery to an emphasis on Christopher's humanity and the intimate relationship between man and child.²⁹

The cult of Saint Christopher that developed during the early modern period is a classic example of one sanctified not by Church hierarchy, but spawned directly from the people with great force in an image and a legend that corresponded to a "collective psychological need."³⁰ As plague and disease continued to afflict Europe, and uncontrollable dangers remained ever-present for the increasing number of pilgrims and merchants traveling to neighboring countries and throughout the world, there was a growth in the number of churches and confraternities dedicated to the

²⁷ Mozzoni, 57.

²⁸ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, in 2 vols., trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), II: 10-14.

²⁹ Dominique Rigaux, "Une image pour la route: l'iconographie de saint Christophe dans les régions alpines: XIIe-XVe siècle," in *Voyages et voyageurs au Moyen Age: XXVIe Congrès de la S.H.M.E.S.: Limoges-Aubazine, May 1995* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996), 238-240.

³⁰ Mozzoni, 14. For more on "popular" and local sainthood versus official sainthoods, see Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, esp. 141-413.

saint all over the continent.³¹ During the medieval period, images of Christopher in painted and sculpted forms began to appear on the interior and exterior walls of churches, normally positioned either directly next to or above the entrance portal. Often the work of itinerant artists, these pictures have been described as “an art of the route,” for there was a great concentration of such imagery in and on churches along the alpine chain that led from the Italian peninsula into the European continent—a popular path for pilgrimage.³² Adhering to the legendary descriptions of the saint, artists represented Christopher as a figure of colossal proportions, thus increasing his visibility and constituting the first image pilgrims would see as they approached or entered the church. One example is the enormous fresco of Saint Christopher in the Church of San Nicolò in Treviso (fig. 125). Extending nearly the entire height from floor to ceiling, it immediately draws the visitor’s attention upon entrance into the church from all exterior doors.

Paintings and sculptures of Saint Christopher also appeared on city gates and bridges, structures that mark points of passage and transition in much the same way that the thresholds of churches denote the margin between sacred and profane space.³³ The placement of pictures of Saint Christopher by doorways, therefore, became a metaphor for the saint himself; he was the vehicle for Christ’s journey across the river and a man who crossed the boundary from disbelief to true faith.³⁴ Such concepts

³¹ Rigaux, “Une image pour la route,” 243.

³² *Ibid.*, 245. In the early Middle Ages, pictures of Saint Christopher were normally located on the interior of churches, but from the thirteenth century on his image was displaced to the exterior walls, yet still tied to the doorway.

³³ For more on the symbolic connotations of thresholds, including church portals, see Susan Kuretsky, “Rembrandt at the Threshold,” in *Rembrandt, Rubens and the Art of their Time: Recent Perspectives*, ed. Roland E. Fleischer and Susan Clare Scott (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 63.

³⁴ Rigaux, “Une image pour la route,” 247-248.

were integral to the idea of the traveler, a concept thoroughly embedded in Christian thought, for all life was regarded as a spiritual journey to salvation. Travel brought about a change of physical space but also a change of state and quality, a notion that pilgrimage reinforced.³⁵ Doorways and entrances, therefore, are the physical limit between points of both place and being, and images of Christopher as a marker and a symbol of the threshold—in addition to providing protection for pilgrims who viewed them—reinforced the sacred aspect of their journey.

Given their economic livelihood, it is not surprising that Christopher was a popular saint for residents of the Republic. Venice was a city of merchants and travelers, in addition to being a popular destination for pilgrims who were either on their way to Jerusalem or made *la Serenissima*—a city packed with relics and sacred sites—their principal destination. Members of the typical Venetian household were likely away at sea for extended periods of time, and devotion to saintly intercessors, whether officially sanctioned by the Church or not, was one means of maintaining a connection between home and travel, and keeping one safe on a voyage.

Venice had its own church and confraternity dedicated to this saint of merchants and travelers.³⁶ The church of the Santa Maria dell'Orto (fig. 126)—built in the mid-fourteenth century by Fra Tiberio da Parma and located on the northern edge of the island in the *sestiere* of Cannaregio—was originally consecrated to Saint

³⁵ Mozzoni, 19. A classic study of pilgrimage in Christian theology and practice is Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

³⁶ Throughout the region under Venetian domination, devotion to Saint Christopher appears to have been strong in the early modern period. For example numerous representations of the saint can be found in the nearby city of Treviso. The city's churches of San Nicolò and San Francesco both have large frescoes of the pious giant in their interiors, along with a number of other depictions of the saints. Frescoes of Saint Christopher can also be found in the Church of San Michele al Pozzo Bianco in Bergamo. He repeatedly appears in altarpieces from this area, often as a participant in *sacre conversazione*.

Christopher before a miracle-working statue of the Madonna and Child by Giovanni di Santi located in nearby gardens triggered the renaming and reconstruction of the building in the fifteenth-century. The community's continued allegiance to the saint, however, is attested to through visual references to him scattered inside and outside the ecclesiastical space. Above the entrance portal of this church a large statue of Saint Christopher, carved by Matteo Raverti in the Quattrocento remains (fig. 127), and inside are numerous other representations, which include: a painting by Cima da Conegliano over a side altar dedicated to the saint (fig. 128);³⁷ a Quattrocento stone relief bearing the image of the saint, also located in the apse of the church; and Tintoretto's canvas on the left-hand side of the apse, which was long believed to be the Beheading of Saint Christopher, an aspect of the saint's legend rarely presented as the subject of a work (fig. 129). Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi reidentified the painting as Saint Paul because of the saint's armor that has been discarded at the feet of his executioner;³⁸ the church still titles the painting as *The Martyrdom of Saint Christopher*.

Situated next to the house of worship is the seat of the Scuola Piccola di San Cristoforo dei Mercanti, the Republic's confraternity created to serve the religious and economic needs of the city's merchants under the patronage of this pious giant.³⁹ In 1570 this *scuola piccola* merged with another confraternity, S. Maria dei Mercanti, formerly located next to the Church of S. Maria dei Gloriosa dei Frari in the San Polo

³⁷ Today a copy of Cima da Conegliano's painting exists over this altar. The original is preserved in the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice.

³⁸ Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi, *Tintoretto: le opere sacre e profane* (Venice: Alfieri, 1982), 55.

³⁹ This *scuola* was especially preferred by merchants who dealt in luxury trades, and it could boast of several celebrated patricians among its members, including the Doge Cristoforo Moro. Jennifer M. Fletcher, "Bellini's Social World," in *The Cambridge Companion to Giovanni Bellini*, ed. Peter Humfrey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 24.

district of Venice. The meeting house in Cannaregio was originally built around the time of the church, but was reconstructed by Andrea Palladio between 1571 and 1572 (fig. 130) after the expansion of the *scuola*'s members. Over the doorway of the new structure, along the facade that faces the *fondamenta*, is another sculpture of Saint Christopher with the Christ child upon his shoulder (fig. 131), yet an additional example of the image of the patron of travelers exhibited by a threshold.⁴⁰

The Republic's devotion to Saint Christopher also took place outside of the ecclesiastical context, but it continued to be tied to the city's mercantile way of life. Before embarking on a journey, Venetian ships were blessed upon departing the port. In the journals he kept during his series of voyages between 1557 and 1562, the merchant Alessandro Magno recorded the holy protectors named in the ship's benediction: God, the Virgin Mary, Saint Mark, Saint Nicholas, Saints James the Apostle, John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, Christopher, Helena, Marta, Alvisè, Secondo, and all the other saints who could steer the ship on a secure and prosperous expedition.⁴¹ Similarly, a merchant galley that sailed from Venice to Alexandria in 1496, described by one its passengers, the German merchant Arnold von Harff, displayed a massive image of Saint Christopher painted on its mainsail; thus the holy protector was ever-present on the journey and safely transported von Harff and the rest of the fleet as they navigated across the seas.⁴²

⁴⁰ For more on the history of this church and its artwork, as well as the *scuola* dedicated to Saint Christopher, see Lino Moretti, *La Chiesa della Madonna dell'Orto in Venezia* (Venice, 1985).

⁴¹ *Diary of Alessandro Magno*, Folger Shakespeare Library MS V.A. 259 (= de Ricci 1317/1).

⁴² Deborah Howard, *Venice and the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture 1100-1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 26; and *The pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff, Knight, from Cologne through Italy, Syria, Egypt, Arabia, Ethiopia, Nubia, Palestine, Turkey, France, and Spain, which he accomplished in the years 1496 to 1499*, trans. and intro. Malcolm Letts (Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967), 73.

A merchant's devotion to the patron saint could also be articulated in more modest ways. In a portrait of an unknown gentleman painted by Moretto da Brescia in 1526 (fig. 132), the finely dressed sitter proudly displays an enameled badge of Saint Christopher on his hat (fig. 133). There are at least four Greek letters around the image of the saint: ψ at the top left, Λ lower left, δ (or possible $\acute{\alpha}$) top right, ω lower right, and possibly κ between the legs of the saint. Taken alone, the alpha and omega would refer to the godhead, but the other letters have not been explained. It has been conjectured, however, that if the initial Phi is the beginning of a word, it might refer to *philatte*, an invocation to the saint to protect the wearer.⁴³ It is reasonable to conclude that the man represented was perhaps a member of a confraternity dedicated to the saint, or a merchant who felt a particular connection to his holy sponsor. Either way, the inclusion of the brooch is no arbitrary detail in this rare full-length portrait for the period.⁴⁴ The sitter's devotion to the saint is an important aspect of both his personal and public identity.⁴⁵

⁴³ This hypothesis was put forward by Elizabeth McGrath, and quoted by Nicholas Penny in the recently published catalogue of sixteenth-century paintings from Bergamo, Brescia, and Cremona at the National Gallery in London. Badges and jewels for caps and hats became fashionable for men at the end of the fifteenth century in France, and the trend quickly spread into Italy, it is believed, due to the invading army of the French King Charles VIII. They may have originated as more expensive versions of pilgrims badges. Of the surviving badge caps, twice as many feature biblical or religious subjects as profane subjects; the ratio is higher amongst gold and enamel jewels that survive from the period believed to have originally been worn as badges. Penny, *The Sixteenth-Century Italian Paintings. Volume I: Paintings from Bergamo, Brescia and Cremona* (London: National Gallery Company, 2004), 154-157.

⁴⁴ The National Gallery in London, where this painting is preserved, conjectures that this may be the earliest example of a life-size full length portrait in Italy. Except for a brief occupation by the French from 1509 to 1516, Brescia—where both the artist and sitter of the portrait originated—had been under the rule of the Venetian Republic since 1426. Erika Langmuir, *The National Gallery Companion Guide* (London: National Gallery Company, 1997), 138.

⁴⁵ It should be noted that the name "Christopher" was among the more fashionable first names given to Venetian boys upon Baptism; it appears countless times in documents from the period, including household inventories, testaments, and registries of the cities *scuole*.

The domestic environment also became a site for expressions of piety to the Republic's favorite patron of travelers. The concern and enthusiasm over the journeys of Venice's merchants were collectively experienced by the family and other members of the community who stayed behind.⁴⁶ By placing images of Saint Christopher in the home, Venetians sought to secure the intercession of this holy protector to ensure the safe passage of travelers from their household, while providing themselves with a vision of comfort and reassurance. Listed among the contents of possessions of the nobleman Giovanni Badoer (c. 1465-1535) is "uno San Christophalo in portego."⁴⁷ While the medium—painting, sculpture, print—of the image of the saint is not clear from the notation, its visible presence in Badoer's household likely had particular resonance for this Venetian diplomat who traveled to countries such as Spain, France, England and Hungary.⁴⁸

In other Venetian inventories, notaries are more precise about the artistic form that representations of the pious giant took. Solitary images of the saint were conveyed through a number of different media, like the image of the Christopher in relief on a box owned by Bernardino de Redaldi,⁴⁹ or the "San Christophero di legno d'intaglio" that was one of a number of works on display in the *portego* of Francesco Vedova, whose inventory was recorded in 1557.⁵⁰ The description of the image being of carved or engraved wood could indicate either a sculpture or a woodcut. Paintings

⁴⁶ Howard, *Venice and the East*, 24-25.

⁴⁷ ASV, PSM, Citra, b. 121-122.

⁴⁸ For more on the life and career of Giovanni Badoer, son of Renier, see *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* 5 (Rome: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 1960-), 116-119.

⁴⁹ Another box features the image of Saint Sebastian: "Tre scatole, una con uno S. Christophalo de relievo, l'altra uno S. Sebastian de basso, l'altra con do figure, altre de basso." ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 34, n. 32.

⁵⁰ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 39, n. 6. In addition to the image of Saint Christopher, Vedova's *portego* contained another image that evoked the concept of spiritual transformation, the *Conversion of Saint Paul*.

of the saint were also quite common in households of the Republic; one example is the “quadro de S. xpofolo de nog[h]era,” or the “painting of Saint Christopher on walnut,” that hung in the first floor *portego* of the home of Benedetto Franceschi, whose inventory was drawn up in 1538.⁵¹

Although the Catholic Church has never denied the existence of an early Christian martyr named Christopher, beginning in the period of the Counter Reformation it did repudiate many of the purported miracles associated with the saint; this may account for the low survival rate of medieval and Renaissance images of Saint Christopher.⁵² His cult, however, remained strong in a number of areas, including Venice and the regions under her domain. Although they are not great in numbers, the few existing images from the Renaissance provide examples of the kinds of pictures Venetians may have possessed of this saint. One is a painting by an unknown artist from the Veneto school from the second half of the fifteenth century and today displayed in the Ca' d'Oro of Venice (fig. 134). Curators of the collection argue that the format of the painting—a vertical canvas measuring almost 160 by 80 centimeters—indicates that it was likely carried in processions, while the stiff, schematic depiction of the saint with his feet immersed in water and the more detailed landscape confirm its “vernacular use.”⁵³ The size of the canvas, however, makes it no bigger than other large scale paintings that were known to have hung in domestic spaces, and the lack of any imagery or decoration on the *verso* makes this hypothesis

⁵¹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div. b., 36, n. 59.

⁵² While the Church attempted to shift attention to other saints—such as James, Sebastian, and Roch—to fulfill the apotropaic needs that Christopher had traditionally served, it did not succeed in eliminating the underlying belief in the efficacy of this saint held by most believers; travelers today still pray to Saint Christopher, and he remains the unofficial saint of motorists throughout the world. Mozzoni, 17.

⁵³ Adriana Augusti and Francesca Saccardo, *Ca' d'Oro. Galleria Giorgio Franchetti* (Milan: Electa, 2002), 72, cat. D5.

less likely. Even if it had been used as a banner, it does not negate the prospect of its later incorporation into the household environment, for as will be explained in the final chapter, objects used in private and public contexts of devotion were often interchangeable. The focus on the features of the landscape, too, seems to work against the employment of this image in a public spectacle where they would not have been seen; instead, such details would have been better appreciated in a setting, like the *casa*, that allowed for close viewing.

We know that households of the Republic were frequently adorned with paintings *alla fiandra*. A small picture that portrays the story of Saint Christopher painted in the style of the Flemish Master of the Female Half-Length and today housed in London's National Gallery (fig. 135), may be similar to the images of the holy protector that Venetians acquired for their own personal spaces. In this exquisitely detailed painting, Christopher and the Christ child appear miniscule amidst an expansive river landscape. Rather than overshadowing the saint, the sprawling environment represented in this tiny horizontal panel reinforces the difficulty of Christopher's divine task.

Venetians were also likely to have possessed prints that depicted the saint, many of which could have been designed by Northern European artists, like the various engravings executed by Albrecht Dürer throughout his career (figs. 136 & 137), or Albrecht Altdorfer's woodcut from 1513 (fig. 138). The imagery in these examples is personal and intimate. In the direct language of the woodcut medium, Altdorfer, for example, eloquently captures humanity's weakness yet determination in the arduous journey of serving the Lord. Trees bend and droop in correlation to the

weariness of the saint under the weight of Christ. The artist places the viewer in the role of the Christ bearer, stimulating empathy with the saint's struggles as well as hope in the rewards that come with such a great task. The theme of Christian charity that Christopher embodied is thus aptly represented. As mentioned in Chapter One, religious prints like Altdorfer's could have been stored away and taken out for moments of individual viewing and devotion. At the same time, it is just as likely that the print would have been displayed on a wall in the home, perhaps even framed, in order to provide constant access by all members of the household and their visitors. In this fashion, Christopher's likeness would have afforded all who gazed upon it with a visual talisman against ill harm and a daily reminder to carry always Christ in one's heart.

One consistency revealed by the inventories with regards to images of Saint Christopher is his location in the home. With few exceptions, the saint is always listed amongst the goods of the *portego*, unlike images of the Madonna, Christ, or other saints, which were dispersed throughout the household setting. Although the notaries are not specific with regards to the actual placement of images of Christopher within this central hall, I would argue that they were likely positioned next to or in close proximity to doorways, similar to his display in the ecclesiastical context. The metaphorical associations of Christopher at the entrances of churches also apply to the domestic sphere. As explicated by Susan Kuretsky in her study on Rembrandt and his symbolic use of the threshold, the entrance to the residential dwelling suggests the parallel concepts of safety as a return to home and of salvation as a

return to God.⁵⁴ Doorways define boundaries, distinguish space, and communicate the relationship between arrivals and departures; in this way, they have long served as symbols for both physical and spiritual transformation.⁵⁵

The preceding chapters have demonstrated how the accumulation of a rich religious visual culture testifies to the fact that residents of the Republic conceived of their households as sanctuaries, much like the Dutch did in the seventeenth century. In addition, for a community of merchants, the Venetian *casa* was a perpetual site of coming and going: to and from the security of home and the perils of the outside world, as well as a place where visitors and business clients were continually received. As discussed in Chapter One, the *portego* functioned as an important locale in these interchanges. Given the design of the typical *casa* of Venice, any access into and out of the living quarters would have led through this central *sala*. It was off of this space that the other rooms of the house were situated, and stairs from the street, courtyard, or canal entrances all were directed into this large hall, making the *portego* and its contents continually visible, even when it was not being used as an area for social activity.⁵⁶ Representations of Saint Christopher, therefore, continued to be tied to architectonic structure of the entryway, obeying, what Dominique Rigaux has described as the “logic of place.”⁵⁷ They would have been the first and last image Venetian merchants and their associates saw when entering and exiting the home, and they provided a constant presence in the household for those members, notably the

⁵⁴ Kuretsky, 65.

⁵⁵ For example, in ancient Egyptian mastabas and on Greek and Roman sarcophagi and grave stele, the half-open door signified the passage from this world into the next. The symbolism of the door in a funerary context had a strong resurgence in Baroque tombs, perhaps the most famous of which is the tomb of Pope Alexander VII in Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome, designed by Bernini in 1671. For more on the notion of the threshold and its meaning in works of art, see Kuretsky, 61-67.

⁵⁶ Fortini Brown, *Private Lives*, 71.

⁵⁷ Rigaux, “Une image pour la route,” 247.

women, children, and servants, who remained *a casa* and prayed for their safekeeping.

The connotations of Saint Christopher and doorways were especially poignant in the households of *la Serenissima*, given its geographical situation. Venice itself was a kind of threshold, a transition point between East and West. As stated above, the island was a perpetual site of interchange, not only for the city's native merchants who regularly departed for distant lands, but the ambassadors, dignitaries, pilgrims and traders from around the world who arrived in the Republic daily.⁵⁸ As a port city situated in the midst of a lagoon and penetrated by canals, water was the primary mode of transportation. Like Saint Christopher, whose journey across the stream with the Christ child signaled his rebirth in the Christian faith, Venetians repeatedly crossed water, whether via boat, gondola or bridge.⁵⁹ As Deborah Howard has eloquently described, daily life in Venice involved the constant traversal of thresholds, moving from the domestic to communal spaces of the city's *campi* and parishes and back again, and the constant passage from land to water.⁶⁰

While it is impossible to witness examples of gallery-type pictures of Saint Christopher *in situ* in a Renaissance domestic situation, there are a few examples of domestic spaces in Italy in which mural paintings of the saint are preserved, and in

⁵⁸ Howard, *Venice and the East* 24.

⁵⁹ The role of water in the *Vita* of Saint Christopher gave the legend Baptismal connotations, as well. For centuries, water has been symbolic of the new life in the Christian faith one receives at the time of Baptism; as the giant journeyed across the river with the Christ child on his shoulder, his passage marked his rebirth in the Christian faith as a believer, also symbolized through the flowering baton. It was the moment in the story when the saint had his feet immersed in water—the moment of his conversion—that became the distinguishing image for this legendary saint. The positioning of pictures of Christopher near entryways further reinforced this analogy to Baptism, for medieval authors frequently compared the initiatory sacrament to a door that offers access to the community of the faithful. Rigaux, "Une image pour la route," 248.

⁶⁰ Howard, *Venice and the East*, 24.

each of these cases, his image appears directly by the threshold, thus strengthening the case for similar exhibition in the typical Venetian home. Christopher was not especially popular in Florence, but his image does survive there in the Palazzo Davanzati (fig. 139), as well as the famous Trecento palazzo in Prato that the merchant Marco Datini (fig. 140) had constructed as his principal residence upon settling in the Tuscan city in 1383. In the former example, the habitat of a wealthy merchant family constructed in the late fourteenth century, a full-length figure of Christopher appears over the doorway that leads into the principal residential quarters, clearly visible as one ascends the staircase to the first floor (fig. 141). In the latter example, Marco Datini commissioned the Florentine artist Niccolò di Pietri Gerini to paint a fresco of the saint in the entrance hall of his residence, directly adjacent to the main doorway into his home (fig. 142 & 143).⁶¹ Until he re-established himself in Prato in the last decades of the fourteenth century, Datini was a traveler, having left his native town to spend several years in the papal city of Avignon. For this merchant, therefore, the talismanic image of Saint Christopher painted in a large scale adjacent to his entryway, would have held particular meaning upon his return home.

In Venice, there is one surviving *in situ* image of the saint in a residential setting, and it is a household so grand and symbolic that it speaks to the eminent value that this holy figure held for the merchant society. Shortly after his election to

⁶¹ The picture of Saint Christopher in the Datini palace is located directly opposite a lunette bearing a half-length representation of Christ in the act of blessing outside the merchant's office door. Bruce Cole, "The Interior Decoration of the Palazzo Datini in Prato," in *Studies in the History of Italian Art, 1250-1550* (London: Pindar Press, 1996), 1-22, esp. 12, 20. I would like to thank Jacki Musacchio for bringing these two examples to my attention, and for sharing with me her knowledge about Christopher's popularity in Florence, based on her research of household inventories from that city.

the highest office of doge in 1523, the nobleman Andrea Gritti commissioned from Titian a painting of Christopher to adorn the ducal palace (fig. 121). This rare surviving fresco—both in terms of the artist’s *oeuvre* and artistic production in the Republic—can be found directly over the doorway at the end of the stairwell that leads into the private apartments of the doge (fig. 144);⁶² thus, everyday, as the doge walked up and down the stairs, moving between the civic spaces of the palazzo to conduct the affairs of the state and his more personal domain, he passed underneath this talisman and was assured the saint’s protection.⁶³ The safety of the doge was of the utmost importance for the security of the figurehead was equated with the well-being of the Republic. Titian makes this visual connection in his fresco by showing the saint traversing the Venetian lagoon with the Christ child, while *la Serenissima* is clearly demarcated in the background with its red brick church steeples and the domes of Saint Mark’s basilica. The artist also placed considerable emphasis on the extraordinary strength of the saint through Christopher’s large scale, extreme musculature, and forward stride, quite unlike Altdorfer’s version in which the saint struggles to support the weight of his divine passenger. In the context of the ducal palace, the physical might of the Herculean saint is likened to the force of the state, while the image itself is a visual assertion of the myth that Venice perpetuated of itself for centuries, of a city divinely sanctioned and protected against all adversity.

⁶² As these three examples of murals of Saint Christopher demonstrate, it is possible that frescoes of this holy figure were quite common in Venice, even more so than the inventories reveal, since these documents are only a record of movable goods. Given the damp conditions in the city, fresco was not a particularly popular medium in Venice, but it was not rare, either. The technique was used not only in the ducal palace, but also on the facades of the palaces of many wealthy and noble families.

⁶³ Stefano Zuffi describes the image specifically as a talisman against assassination. Zuffi, *Art in Venice* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002), 179.

Saints Sebastian and Roch

Sebastian and Roch were two other saintly figures in which Venetians placed their trust and focused their devotions in the hopes of protection against the traumas of plague and other misfortunes. Across Europe, Sebastian served as the patron saint for a number of assorted occupations, including crusaders, crossbowmen, archers, and iron merchants, in addition to lace and hose makers; his most important responsibility, however, was as guardian against disease. The story of the saint dates back to the time of Emperor Diocletian, for whom Sebastian served as an imperial bodyguard. When it was discovered that Sebastian's true loyalty was to Christ rather than the Roman Empire, he was condemned to death—forced to suffer a lethal barrage of arrows inflicted by Maurentianian archers. Left for dead, Sebastian miraculously survived the cruel assassination attempt and was discovered by a Christian who secretly went to find his body to provide him with a proper burial; later versions of the story identified Sebastian's caregiver as the widow Irene.

Sebastian continued to admonish emperors for their crimes against Christians and Christianity, an act which resulted in his second death sentence. This time, Sebastian was unable to endure a vicious beating with clubs, and his body was thrown into a sewer in the hopes that his relics could never be recovered. Nevertheless, the saint appeared in a dream to another Roman matron—who later became Saint Lucina—to disclose the location of his corpse.⁶⁴ He was given a proper burial in a cemetery outside the walls of Rome on the Via Appia, formerly the site of a temple dedicated to Apollo, the pagan deity responsible for plagues; it later became the

⁶⁴ Irving L. Zupnick, "Saint Sebastian: The Vicissitudes of the Hero as Martyr," in *Concepts of the Hero in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Norman T. Burns and Christopher J. Reagan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 242.

location of a church dedicated to his cult. The powers of the saint as protector against the plague were first attested to in the seventh century when Sebastian was credited with saving the northern Italian city of Pavia from a spate of plague that struck there in 680.⁶⁵ Although the original Acts of the saint's legend had survived into the Renaissance through a fifth-century manuscript copy,⁶⁶ the *Golden Legend* fixed the life of Saint Sebastian in the minds of most fifteen- and sixteenth-century Venetians.⁶⁷

The overall story of Sebastian is one of suffering and recovery—a theme that had acute resonance for those afflicted with disease and other physical ailments—but it was his arrow wounds in particular that connected him to pestilence. Sebastian's association with the infection likely stems from his relation to the ancient Greek god, Apollo.⁶⁸ According to classical writers, the perilous arrows of Apollo had the capacity to inflict plague, as well as to purify and heal, and Greeks prayed to the god to bestow reprieve from the deadly disease.⁶⁹ Similar traditions persisted in Judaic scripture; Psalm 91 draws relationships between the “the arrow that flies by day” and

⁶⁵ Louise Marshall, “Reading the Body of the Plague Saint: Narrative Altarpieces and Devotional Images of St. Sebastian in Renaissance Art,” in *Reading Texts and Images: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Art and Patronage in Honour of Margaret M. Manion*, ed. Bernard J. Muir (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 239-40; Zupnick, “Saint Sebastian,” 241-242. According to the Catholic Church, only the martyrdom of Sebastian is provable; the remainder of his story remains fiction. “Saint Sebastian,” *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12:853.

⁶⁶ This manuscript copy is attributed to the pseudo-Ambrose. It is preserved today, along with the *Life of Saint Agnes*, in the Laurentian Library in Florence. Luba Freedman, “Saint Sebastian in Veneto Painting: The ‘Signals’ Addressed to ‘Learned’ Spectators,” *Venezia Cinquecento VIII* (1998), 8.

⁶⁷ Freedman, 8; and Zupnick, 241-242. For the account in the *Golden Legend*, see de Voragine, I: 97-101.

⁶⁸ Marshall, “Reading the Body,” 240. In addition, the saint's body was buried in a crypt along the via Appia in Rome that was the site of a temple dedicated to the sun god. Freedman, 9-10.

⁶⁹ Boeckl, 35.

“the pestilence that stalks in darkness.”⁷⁰ The disease itself had long been considered humanity’s punishment for its sinful ways, and the arrow or lance was a traditional symbol of divine retribution. The martyr was invoked, therefore, as a form of apotropaic magic, for it was his body—which in the Renaissance was ideally expressed in the form of the young nude male—that received the onslaught of arrows and had the capacity to thwart impending pestilence.⁷¹

Sebastian’s connection with the Greek god renowned for his beauty accounts partially for the transformation of the imagery of this Christian saint around the middle of the fifteenth century. During the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance, Saint Sebastian most commonly appeared in art as a selfless martyr, with the focus resting heavily on the narrative of the story and the saint’s suffering; his body full of arrows, he was typically shown tied to a column or tree and surrounded by his torturers. A rare Trecento panel featuring the saint, painted by Giovanni del Biondo (fig. 145), closely matches the porcupine metaphor that was used in the *Golden Legend* to describe the figure of the martyr after the persecution he endured. While not as excessive, for the next hundred years Sebastian continued to be presented as the defenseless and tormented victim, his body marred and wounded with arrows, while he willingly accepts the fate dealt to him by the emperor’s malicious archers, as seen in a late fifteenth-century print by an anonymous Florentine artist (fig. 146).

Around the mid-fifteenth century, at the same time that the cult of Sebastian was intensifying, representations of this holy figure shifted concentration; artists

⁷⁰ Zupnick, 242-43. Psalm 91 became a commonly recited prayer in the Renaissance, known as the *Qui abitat*. The references to pestilence in the Psalm understandably made this verse popular in daily devotions.

⁷¹ Mason Rinaldi, 210.

began to portray the once helpless and mutilated martyr as the Christian Apollo, idealized and isolated from the story that perpetuated his popularity. As the century progressed, it became increasingly more common to see static depictions of the saint, modeled after classical statuary, nearly nude and flawless apart from the few carefully placed arrows that pierce his body in order to allude to his pious affliction. The Saint Sebastian by Cima da Conegliano (fig. 147), once part of an altarpiece in Mestre and now in Strasbourg, exemplifies this perfected image of the saint. All minutiae of the narrative have been eradicated and the full-length figure of the saint is set before the landscape of a medieval hill town, perhaps a symbol of a city spared under his divine protection. His youthful body, healthy and virile, dominates the vertical composition, spoiled only by the single arrow that has penetrated his thigh, a far cry from the pathetic “porcupine” of about a century earlier. Despite the fact that pictures of Saint Sebastian took on increasingly humanistic tones, his popularity made him one of the favored intercessor for Renaissance Venetians regardless of status, and the classicizing imagery soon became a standard component of the iconography of this saint.⁷² By the late fifteenth century, in fact, the nudeness of Sebastian had supplanted nearly all other representations of the martyr in Italy so that the seeming inappropriateness of Sebastian’s state of undress—along with the numerous references to antique statuary—was accepted even in the context of ecclesiastical art. One famous example is the altarpiece painted by Giovanni Bellini beginning in the late 1480s, a *sacra conversazione* that includes the Madonna and Child, Saint Job,

⁷² Marshall, 238. This assessment differs from Luba Freedman’s evaluation of the saint’s iconography in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. She sees the images as catering exclusively to a learned audience, Freedman, “Saint Sebastian in Veneto Painting,” 10. Given how popular Saint Sebastian was in all households of Venice, I agree with Marshall’s evaluation.

and Saint Sebastian, which was originally painted for the Venetian church of San Giobbe but today is housed in the Gallerie Accademia dell'Arte (fig. 41).⁷³

Sebastian's image permeated the Republic, and it was artists working in the Veneto region—like Andrea Mantegna (fig. 148) and Antonello da Messina (fig. 149)—who were principally responsible for spawning new images of the pierced and solitary saint that became some of the most iconic representations of Renaissance classicism. Such pictorial innovations may have been brought on due to the region's own suffering from plague epidemics during this time period—1447, 1464 and 1477-78 were three major epidemics—as well as his incorporation into household devotion.⁷⁴ Despite communal devotion to Sebastian and the diffusion of his image in public spaces, it was in the domestic environment where the cult of this prophylactic saint truly flourished in Venice.⁷⁵ The inventories of households from the Cinquecento confirm this claim; whether as a solitary images or featured as a participant in the *sacra conversazione*, in terms of popularity Saint Sebastian closely trails the most esteemed domestic holy figures, such as the Madonna, Christ, and Saint Jerome.

The most common domestic images of Saint Sebastian were painted ones. At times, there was a personal association between the resident of the house and the holy martyr, as was the case in the domicile of the notary Sebastiano Bondone, who hung a

⁷³ Zupnick, 251. Job was also considered to be an intercessor against the plague, and thus his inclusion in a *sacra conversazione* with Saint Sebastian is entirely appropriate. Such perfected images of the sacred martyr did not come without criticism, however, particularly from the Church, who disapproved of the depictions as being too pagan; Giovanni Andrea Gilio da Fabriano remarked to Cardinal Alessandro Farnese in one of his two *dialoghi* on the errors and abuses of painters from 1564 that, “it would certainly be a new and good thing to see [...] Saint Sebastian full of arrows, looking like a porcupine,” as he is vividly described in his *Vita* of the *Golden Legend*, Fabriano, *Degli errori e abusi dei pittori circa l'istoria* (1564). Quote from Freedman, 9.

⁷⁴ Freedman, 11.

⁷⁵ Mason Rinaldi; and Marshall, “Manipulating the Sacred,” 512.

picture of his patron saint in his *portego*.⁷⁶ Sebastian was honored, however, by a large segment of the population principally for his powers associated with healing. Of the many surviving pictures of Saint Sebastian from the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, some are of a smaller scale and presumably would have been used in personal devotion images, thus corresponding to the references that can be found in Venetian household inventories. One example is a small panel bearing the image the saint variously attributed to Antonello da Messina and Bartolomeo Montagna, and now assigned to the elusive Jacometo Veneziano, which is currently located in the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo (fig. 150). It dates to somewhere between the years 1470 and 1480, a period when the Veneto was suffering from another plague epidemic. The body of Sebastian tied to a tree is the clear focus of the painting, consuming the central axis of the composition; its small size, measuring only 34 by 26 centimeters, combined with the detailed background of a fortified village and landscape, demands close viewing and likely excludes its possibility as an altarpiece in an ecclesiastical space. Unlike the pictures of Saint Christopher where critical details of his narrative were increasingly incorporated into works of art, the narrative of Sebastian's martyrdom is abandoned; in its place, artists offered the body of the willing victim for the beholder's contemplation. The isolated images of Sebastian create access to the divine which is both direct and intimate, facilitating the more individual spiritual relationships that were so highly desired, particularly during moments of heightened emotional and physical stress, like periods of plague.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ This painting of Saint Sebastian appeared in this space along with a painting depicting the Old Testament figure Noah and his ark. ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 49.

⁷⁷ Marshall, "Reading the Body," 257.

In the Christian conception of martyrdom, to die for one's faith was seen as the ideal imitation of Christ. In addition to Saint Sebastian's more direct links with pestilence, part of the esteem of his cult was that as a story of "death" and resurrection; his *Vita* closely parallels the Passion of Christ, and thus his imagery followed suit.⁷⁸ The arrows associated with Saint Sebastian, therefore, were not only symbolic of the Greek god of Apollo and the plague he caused, nor was the depiction of the martyr tied to a tree or column simply an opportunity to depict the nearly nude body of this Christian hero, mimicking ancient sculptures and fragments of idealized classical human forms. As seen in the painting by Jacometo Veneziano, the Renaissance image of Sebastian was one that was compared to the exposed body of Christ as he experienced the events of His Passion, in particular the scourging at the column and the *Ecce Homo*. As explicated in Chapter Two, such subjects were common for household devotional images.⁷⁹ In the intimacy of the domestic setting, the devout could literally come face to face with the object of their petitions. Like the *imago Christo*, the *imago Sebastiano* evokes an affective viewing experience, inviting the beholder to participate in the "mute suffering" of the pious victim, brought on by physical torment and unjust condemnation.⁸⁰ The image is not merely one of empathy with the martyr's pain, however; Renaissance artists working in Italy employed both assimilation and difference to provide a portrayal of solace. Although in the midst of his torture and suffering, the perfection of his nude body, and the viewer's knowledge of the saint's miraculous survival, indicates that Sebastian has

⁷⁸ Marshall, "Reading the Body," 240.

⁷⁹ Jacques Darriulat, *Sébastien le renaissant: sur la marture de saint Sébastien dans la deuxième moitié du Quattrocento* (Paris: Lagune, 1998), 251-252.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

already attained deliverance. Through the beauty and purity embodied in the image of the martyr—a body triumphant rather than conquered—the spectator is equally distanced from the hardships and physical suffering, and offered a model of hope and salvation in order to face the torments and misery of diseases that afflicted one’s self, family, and community.⁸¹

In terms of artistic media, inventories reveal that the image of Sebastian appeared in many formats in the home. In addition to a polychromed head of Saint John and a carved wooden relief of Saint George, Gerolamo Croce, for example, from the parish of Santa Maria Formosa, possessed a marble statue of the saint.⁸² The nobleman Sebastiano Contarini—for whom Saint Sebastian presumably held special meaning as name saint—owned a representation of the martyr in a more unusual form. In a chest, along with other sacred items that included an office of the Virgin, a painting of the Madonna with three other figures that “opened and closed”—probably a portable devotional diptych—and a canvas with Adam and Eve, was “una brancha d coral roso co[n] un sebastian,” or a branch of red coral with the image of Saint Sebastian.⁸³ Coral, as will be discussed below, was believed to contain protective powers and it was often given to young children to wear to protect them during those first few vulnerable years of life. It was also symbolic of the blood Jesus shed in his sacrifice, and Renaissance images of the Christ child often portray the infant with a coral branch around his neck, as seen in Jacopo Bellini’s *Madonna and Child in Lovere*, as an allusion to his future crucifixion (fig. 151). Suspended from the painted frame of Mantegna’s *Saint Sebastian* in Ca’ d’Oro are coral beads (fig. 152,) which

⁸¹ Marshall, “Reading the Body,” 240.

⁸² “Un S. Sebastian de marmaro.” ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 48, (1573).

⁸³ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 35, n. 17, (1531).

reinforce the connections between the saint and Christ: both holy figures shed their blood for the sake of believers. The combination of an image of the guardian Saint Sebastian with the defensive properties of coral, makes it clear that the motivation for possessing such an item extended beyond the purely aesthetic or devotional; Contarini's coral branch functioned principally as an apotropaic object, with image and medium each reinforcing the prophylactic properties of the other.

While Contarini's inventory is the only mention I have found of such an object bearing the image of the saint, according to Antonio Niero, amulets of other types dedicated to Sebastian were not uncommon in Venice. Prayers to the martyr that had grown popular during the sixteenth century, particularly during outbreaks of plague, were disseminated by means of portable talismans. It was believed that one could secure preservation from the deadly disease by reciting the prayer every day and carrying it on oneself, the body thus becoming a conduit for its own protection.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, the ephemeral nature of these talismans has resulted in a low—if not nonexistent—survival rate.

According to a number of scholars, the most intense period of interest in Saint Sebastian was during the second half of the fifteenth century; as the Cinquecento progressed, the martyr's appeal began to wane, a result of greater censorship on the part of the Catholic Church with regards to decorum in religious imagery and the fast-growing cult of Saint Roch.⁸⁵ I have not come across one fifteenth-century inventory from Venice, however, in which the image of Saint Sebastian appears, and given the number of times the martyr is recorded in the households of the sixteenth-century it

⁸⁴ Niero, "Pietà ufficiale," 289.

⁸⁵ Zupnick even argues that the youthful beauty of the saint was distracting to worshippers. Zupnick, 244 and 248.

appears that devotion to this Christian Apollo remained strong in the Republic, at least in the context of personal devotion.⁸⁶ References to his image continue to be seen in inventories into the Seicento. For example, the first item listed in the *camera* over the garden in the house in Padova of Giovanni Tomasini, whose inventory was drawn up in 1610, is “un quadro de San Sebastiano dorado,” or “a gilded painting of Saint Sebastian.”⁸⁷ It is possible that the images of the martyr recorded in later sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century inventories, like Tomasini’s, were older types handed down from one generation or more to the next; the endurance of Saint Sebastian in the domestic context, however, regardless of when the actual picture was created, suggests that in the Venice, where plague and other diseases continued to strike, the need for the saint in everyday life remained strong.⁸⁸

It appears that rather than substituting one plague intercessor for another, Venetians simply operated under the theory that two is better than one. Saint Roch, therefore, whose cult grew at a rapid rate during the late fifteenth and sixteenth century, particularly in the Republic, was easily adopted into domestic devotion and became one of the favorite protectors of the household, in addition to Christopher and Sebastian. There are, however, only few recorded instances of Saint Roch as the

⁸⁶ The Church of Saint Sebastian in Venice also confirms the enduring veneration of this saint. Founded in 1464 as thanksgiving from the locals for deliverance from another epidemic of plague, it was rebuilt during the years 1506-1548, and the interior decoration of the church was carried out principally during the second half of the sixteenth century, including the *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* (1565) and *The Virgin in Glory with Saints Sebastian, Peter, Catherine, and Francis* (c. 1562), the altarpiece that adorned the high altar, both by Paolo Veronese. On Veronese’s representations of saint Sebastian, see Richard Cocke, “Exemplary Lives: Veronese’s Representations of Martyrdom and the Council of Trent,” in *Renaissance Studies* 10 (September 1996): 388-404.

⁸⁷ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 45, n. 10. The notary even lists the value of the painting ten ducats.

⁸⁸ In fact, according to Niero, there was a revival of Saint Sebastian in public devotion when plague hit Venice again in 1576. In the monastery of Santa Croce on the nearby island of Giudecca there existed a well where the water was claimed to combat the disease by virtue of the saint since 1464. The account of this miraculous well circulated through the city and its territories in 1576, causing many to congregate there to carry with them this protective water. Niero, “Pietà ufficiale,” 289.

solitary subject of a work of art exist. The widow of a Venetian magistrate, Orsetta, had a little painting of the saint displayed in a small room of the house.⁸⁹ Another example comes from the 1571 inventory of the villa of the cavalier Andrea Maioli; in the *portego*—in addition to a painting of Saint Christopher and amongst a number of other religious and secular works of art—was “un quadroto di San Rocco in carta,” or “a small picture of Saint Roch on paper,” presumably a print or drawing that the patron chose to display on the wall rather than store away.⁹⁰ Sigils of Venice’s Scuola di San Rocco also are mentioned in the registers of household goods from time to time; having reached the status of *scuola grande* in the late Quattrocento shortly after its establishment, membership was high throughout the city. Saint Roch’s inclusion in the *sacre conversazioni* that were hung in Venetian dwellings was so frequent, however, that a discussion of his role in Renaissance religion and his worship in the household warrants attention. He was a holy figure with particular resonance in Venice; the city went to great lengths to acquire his relics through pious theft at the end of the fifteenth century, and devotion to him endured for decades, resulting in, amongst other activities, the erection of a church and *scuola* in his name. Like pictures of Christopher and Sebastian, the emergence of Saint Roch in the domestic environments of Renaissance Venetians documents his efficacy in coping with death and disease.

Rather than stemming from directives from the church, Saint Roch, like Christopher, was the product of an epoch when the people created saints. In fact, although the anonymous *Vita* of Roch attests to his being canonized shortly after his

⁸⁹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 41, n. 32, (1570).

⁹⁰ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 41, fasc. 46.

death by the Holy See, no evidence exists that Roch was ever officially recognized as saint in the Roman Catholic Church. Nonetheless, the spread of his cult was rapid and far-reaching between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, although it was in Southern France and Northern Italy where devotion to the saint was most intense.⁹¹ Roch's canonization thus came from the people for whom he fulfilled a particular need.⁹² He was the manifestation of the fear and anguish people faced in their daily lives, and their desire for peace in body, mind, and soul.⁹³ Whereas Sebastian's connection with the plague was more indirect and intellectual, Roch contracted the disease himself, which was largely the stimulus for his popularity. It was Saint Roch who shared the destiny of many mortals, and through his physical weakness yet spiritual strength, he provided optimism by his example.⁹⁴ Even in the decades and centuries following the Council of Trent, when the Church vigorously promoted clerical saints, such as Charles Borromeo, as spiritual intercessors working on behalf of plague victims, well-established lay saints like Roch never waned in popularity.⁹⁵

The general details of the life of Saint Roch – most of which are legendary – stem from the two earliest legends of the saint, the anonymous *Acta Brevoria*, probably a Lombard text written around 1430 and first printed in 1483, and the *Vita Sancti Rochi*, written by Francesco Diedo, a Venetian professor of law at Padua, in

⁹¹ André Vauchez, "San Rocco: tradizioni agiografiche e storia del culto," in *San Rocco nell'arte: un pellegrino sulla Via Francigena*, exh. cat. Palazzo Gotico, Piacenza, 2000, 14.

⁹² Although a letter survives from July 14, 1590, in which Alberto Badoer, Venetian ambassador to the Vatican, pleads with the Doge of Venice to "send soon the witnesses and public documents of the life and miracles of the Blessed Roch, because our Lord [Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590)] is strong in his opinion either to canonize him or else to remove him from the ranks of the saints," there is no indication that this subject was ever taken up again by Rome. Vaslef, 138-140.

⁹³ Vauchez, "San Rocco," 13.

⁹⁴ Vaslef, 47.

⁹⁵ Worcester, 162.

response to the 1478 outbreak of plague in the region;⁹⁶ all subsequent *Vitae* of the saint were based on these two texts. Saint Roch was born in the French city of Montpellier in the fourteenth century, according to most sources. His parents could not bear children, and thus prayed to the Lord to grant them their wish, vowing to God that their heir would be a servant of Christ. Their prayers were answered and they gave birth to a son with the distinctive sign of a red cruciform birthmark on his chest.

Roch's parents died when he was of an early age, and by eighteen, he had sold his property, abdicated the principate and towns he had inherited, and set off on a pilgrimage to Rome. He visited the sick along his route, healing them through his touch and the sign of the cross. He expelled the plague from nearly every home in the Tuscan town of Acquapendente, liberated Cesena, and cured a cardinal from the Lombard town of Angera in Rome, who in a gesture of thanks presented him to the pope.⁹⁷ For three years Roch remained in Rome—a city ravaged by pestilence at this time—where he continued to perform healing miracles. Upon his return North, Roch himself contracted the plague in Piacenza and thus withdrew to the nearby forest for fear of contamination. After being cared for by a nobleman named Gottardo who lived nearby the woods, an angel of God appeared to Saint Roch and miraculously cured him. Nonetheless, more misfortune struck Roch on his journey back to his homeland. He was arrested in Angera and thrown in prison under the accusation of espionage; the local lord who charged Roch with the crime happened to be his uncle, but did not recognize this poor and disheveled pilgrim as his nephew. Roch died in

⁹⁶ While Venice's printing houses suffered greatly in that epidemic, there were five editions and two Italian translations of Diedo's *Vita* before 1500. Chavasse, 324.

⁹⁷ Worcester, 154.

prison five years later, but not before his sanctity was recognized by a guard who witnessed a miraculous light emanating from the saint. The story of Roch's purity spread, causing pilgrims to flock to the prison, and his identity was soon revealed to his uncle through the discovery of his birthmark. Roch's remains were buried in a church that bore his name.⁹⁸ Other accounts give Voghera as the location of Roch's death, for this was the city from which Venice acquired his relics.⁹⁹

Devotion to the saint expressed itself in the erection of numerous churches and basilicas in his honor, as well as the rapid multiplication of his *Vitae* and their translation from Latin into vernacular languages. In addition to his biography were the prayers that circulated dedicated to this saint, sometimes printed in books, but also on single sheets of paper bearing an image of the saint that could easily be disseminated and acquired.¹⁰⁰ An example of this kind of pictorial prayer is the engraving featuring the saint designed by Titian in the 1520s and distributed to raise funds for the Scuole di San Rocco in Venice (fig. 153). Around the central figure of the holy pilgrim are verses honoring and imploring the saint for his divine protection, along with vignettes illustrating episodes from his life. Despite financial gains served by Titian's broadsheet—a fact clearly pronounced by the alms box represented above the inscription in the lower left corner of the frame—it is easy to imagine that following purchase of the print, it would have been used in the home as an aid to personal devotion and for its talismanic properties, either stored in a book with other mementoes utilized for the same purpose, or cut down to emphasize the figure of Roch himself—much like the version in the collection of the Boston Museum of Fine

⁹⁸ Vauchez, "San Rocco," 13, and Vaslef, 47-54.

⁹⁹ Vauchez, "San Rocco," 13, and Vaslef, 147.

¹⁰⁰ Vauchez, "San Rocco," 15.

Arts (fig. 154)—and hung on the wall to provide a constant visible presence in domestic spaces, similar to the print that Maioli hung in his villa's *portego*.

In both Roch's biography and imagery, his particular power and appeal lay in his humanity.¹⁰¹ He has been described as “down to earth” and the “everyman's saint.” Standard representations show him dressed as a pilgrim, carrying a long staff and bag over his shoulder, and wearing the large brimmed felt hat and short tunic of a traveler, which he pulls aside to reveal his most important attribute, the plague bulbous on his upper thigh. Although he achieved divinity, Roch was susceptible to the same maladies of the flesh that the residents of Venice and elsewhere in Europe suffered. His image thus provided an alternative to the humble yet glorified body of his counterpart, Sebastian.¹⁰² Also common in portrayals of the saint are the dog that brought him food during his seclusion in the woods, and a set of rosary beads, a common portable devotional item carried from site to site by pilgrims, and which nearly every Venetian home contained.¹⁰³

Saint Roch was venerated not only for his miraculous cures against the plague, but also as a model of humility, selfless charity, and religious individualism, much like Saint Christopher. One of the most significant characteristics of the story of Saint Roch was his hermetic life, experienced through the renunciation of his inherited title and wealth, his pilgrimage, and his subsequent retreat from society both during his illness with the plague and his imprisonment. The spiritual success of

¹⁰¹ Pullan, “The Scuole Grandi,” 278.

¹⁰² It should be noted, however, that apart from the bubo, Roch shows none of the other symptoms that accompanied plague, like extreme fever, insomnia, vomiting, and blackened tongue and lips. Although artists aimed to evoke feelings of empathy in the viewer through the realistic depiction of Roch's plague bubo, hope for recovery was paramount in the representation, as was artistic decorum. Worcester, 157.

¹⁰³ Vaslef, 159.

Saint Roch, therefore, was not dependent on the institutional church.¹⁰⁴ The topos of the pilgrimage was one of asceticism, penitence, and the search for the divine; the pilgrim withdrew from the world of material possessions to take the arduous journey that would lead to the expiation of sins and the *loca sancta*, or sacred place.¹⁰⁵ The theme of spiritual retreat and contemplation within the domestic environment has been discussed in relation to Saint Jerome and the domestic *studio* (Chapter Three); other holy figures, like Saint Roch, provided similar models of the ascetic and pious ideal within the mundane environment of the household.

Although Saint Roch was admired throughout the European continent, he is rightly considered an expressly Venetian saint. As outbreaks of plague continued to strike the island during the last quarter of the fifteenth century, devotion to Saint Roch grew intense.¹⁰⁶ During the plague epidemic of 1478 a confraternity was formed in his honor in the Venetian church of San Giuliano.¹⁰⁷ In the tradition of older models of corporate devotion, this group performed public acts of flagellation, attended to the sick in hospitals, and buried the dead. Roch's devotees, most of whom were members of Venice's large community of transient foreigners and immigrants, promoted his cult with such vigor, that in 1485, one year after a particularly severe spate of plague left 30,000 dead in the Republic, they had his relics stolen from Voghera, an act that was rewarded with great pomp and ceremony, in addition to a directive of the doge and patriarch of Venice to construct a church in

¹⁰⁴ Vauchez, "Saint Roch," 18.

¹⁰⁵ Vaslef, 109-110.

¹⁰⁶ Venice suffered from five particularly severe plague epidemics between 1477 and 1528.

¹⁰⁷ Hopkins, 138.

his honor and a new *scuola* on the site of the old.¹⁰⁸ Already by 1486, the *scuola* had increased its membership to high enough numbers that they could petition the Council of Ten to obtain the prestigious rank of *Scuola Grande*.¹⁰⁹

A confraternity dedicated to a “specialist” saint—to use the terminology of Brian Pullan—and one of such recent origin was a relatively new phenomenon for Venice, where corporate piety had customarily been directed toward the Madonna and New Testament figures;¹¹⁰ devotion to Roch thus confirmed the city’s need for an intercessor who would provide solace from the plague. The *scuola* was not confined to a particular neighborhood or parish of the city, but was an organization that cast its net citywide. With solemn ritual, Saint Roch’s relics were transferred to their new home in the San Polo section of Venice on March 3, 1490, and the church was dedicated in 1508. Today the church and *scuola* of San Rocco are best known for their remarkable interior paintings executed by Jacopo Tintoretto between the years 1564 and 1587, testimony to the unrelenting prestige of the confraternity in the Republic during the sixteenth century, and well as the cult of this divine protector to whom they were dedicated.

As mentioned above, it was usually in the pictorial format of the *sacra conversazione* that Saint Roch entered the domestic setting. Sometimes it was just the two plague saints who were portrayed together, seen in a fifteenth-century engraving by Cristoforo Robetta (fig. 155). The nobleman Giovanni Alvise Bragadeno, for example, owned a painting of Saint Sebastian and Saint Roch in a

¹⁰⁸ Vaslef, 152.

¹⁰⁹ *Scuole Grandi* required at least five hundred members. They also had to be flagellant communities, which this confraternity already was. Pullan, “The Scuole Grandi,” 273.

¹¹⁰ Pullan, “The Scuole Grandi,” 277.

wooden frame, which he displayed in a room that overlooked the street, along with an image of the crucifixion. More often, however, Roch and/or his counterpart appeared with the Madonna or the Holy Family. Both Andrea Mascarino, whose inventory was drawn up in 1568, and the nobleman Nicolò Franceschi, whose inventory dates to 1577, owned paintings of the Madonna with Saint Roch, displayed in small rooms in their respective homes,¹¹¹ while the wine merchant Crisostomo Patti owned a painting of the Holy Family that included the popular pilgrim saint.¹¹² *Sacre conversazioni* that featured the Madonna and Child with both Sebastian and Roch were quite popular, as well. A small painting of the Virgin with the two protector saints was hung in a *camera* of the home of Paolo Emilio Cremona,¹¹³ and the widow Nicolosa Sattina had both an image of the Madonna and Child with the duo in her home in Brenta, and an image of just the Madonna with Saint Roch hanging in her residence in Venice.¹¹⁴ Such domestic *sacre conversazioni* may have been similar in appearance to the *Madonna and Child and Saints Roch and Sebastian with landscape background* by Bartolomeo Montagna that today is housed in the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo (fig. 156). An inscription on the *verso* of the panel records the date—1487—and that it was painted for a certain “prete Gerolamo” presumably for a private chapel. Its dimensions—62 by 61 centimeters—are smaller than the average altarpiece, and the rustic manner of the setting in which the saints are located—a

¹¹¹ The former was gilded with a canvas covering, while the latter was exhibited in a wooden frame with gold markings. ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 41, n. 12 (Mascharimo) and b. 42, n. 35 (Franceschini).

¹¹² ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 76.

¹¹³ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 43, n. 33 (1589).

¹¹⁴ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 39, n. 26 (1556).

country landscape—is typical of backgrounds employed by contemporary artists, like Giovanni Bellini and Andrea Mantegna, for private devotional pictures.¹¹⁵

A better known *sacra conversazione* featuring the Virgin and Child with Saints Roch and Sebastian is that by Lorenzo Lotto, now in the National Gallery of Canada (fig. 157). The vividly portrayed, and almost sensuous, figures are shown more in three-quarters rather than half-length, but Lotto maintained the horizontal orientation typical of domestic *sacre conversazioni*. The patron has recently been identified as the painter's friend, Battista Cucchi, also known as Battista degli Organi due to the fact that he played the organ part-time for the Consorzio della Misericordia in Bergamo. Cucchi was also a surgeon, which may explain why he expressly commissioned a image with these two saints so closely associated with disease.¹¹⁶

The Virgin Mary has traditionally been invoked as a protectress, and this aspect of her miraculous nature often took shape in the image of the Madonna della Misericordia, or the Madonna of Mercy. Because the image of the Virgin sheltering her followers with her mantle was an invention of the Cistercians in the thirteenth century, monks were originally the figures shown in prayer under her shroud. As indicated earlier in the chapter, the Black Death stimulated the adaptation of the iconography to show the Madonna as guardian of the laity, often against the dreaded arrows of the disease.¹¹⁷ It has been argued, however, that invocation of the Virgin in the semblance of the Madonna della Misericordia was the privilege of corporate

¹¹⁵ *Accademia Carrara di Belle Arti. Guida alla visita e catalogo delle opere esposte*, ed. Francesco Rossi (Bergamo: Associazione Amici dell'Accademia Carrara, 2003), 47.

¹¹⁶ Humfrey, *Lorenzo Lotto*, 62.

¹¹⁷ Mason Rinaldi, 203.

associations rather than families and individuals.¹¹⁸ Her image in this role was a popular one that adorned a number of confraternal meeting houses, like the sculpted reliefs on the facade of the Scuola dei Calerghi (fig. 158) in Venice, and the grouping of a crowd under her cloak suggests her role over a community rather than protection for an exclusive few. The Republic even had its own confraternity dedicated to the Madonna della Misericordia.

Whether or not she was strictly worshipped by corporate groups, however, is impossible to confirm or deny; notaries are too vague in their descriptions of images of the Madonna to make an assessment. Certainly, though, the Madonna would have been invoked in the household setting for her protective capacities, even if this was not expressed in the iconography of Madonna of Mercy, and aspects of communal devotion undoubtedly seeped into the household realm, a topic which will be taken up in further detail in the final chapter. The placement of the Madonna with the two most commonly invoked plague saints of the Renaissance—Sebastian and Roch—may have been executed especially with the purpose of invoking this defensive aspect of her sacred nature. Saints were frequently appealed to as a group in a variety of contexts. The litany of saints sung and recited in the Catholic mass, for example, or the grouping of saints on rood screens in churches and in religious poetry, reinforced the importance of a host of divine protectors in a period when uncertainty about this world and the next preoccupied the minds of most Christians. These “divine conversations” of thaumaturgic saints, along with the ultimate defender of humanity—the Virgin Mary—were efficacious images; their assemblage

¹¹⁸ Marshall, “Reading the Body,” 238.

strengthened their roles as holy protectors against illness and suffering.¹¹⁹ Taking on visual form, but in a variety of formats, the incorporation of such holy intermediaries made the divine obtainable to ordinary devotees and offered the family or individual the assurance of personal intercession.¹²⁰

Gemstones and the Power of Jewelry

While plague saints and other holy protectors played a critical role in the safety of the households of the Republic and their residents, Venetians turned to additional talismanic devices to ensure the welfare of their bodies and souls. Similar to the grouping of sacred figures in a *sacra conversazione* to increase their thaumaturgic powers, other articles of spiritual import were amassed in the domestic sphere for their purported healing and protective properties. Today falling under the categories of “decorative arts,” these objects consisted of the sacramentals discussed in Chapter One: crucifixes, paternoster and rosary beads, the Agnus Dei, medals and small plaquettes bearing images of sacred figures and holy subjects, and other forms of jewelry. Most were normally worked in metal and incorporated gemstones and other natural materials that were widely deemed to possess a number of influential qualities due to the perceived relation of these substances to the celestial sphere. As explicated in medieval and Renaissance lapidaries, which took classical writings and biblical exegesis as their primary sources, gemstones contained the power to ward off

¹¹⁹ Zupnick, 246. There are bilateral compositions of Sebastian in Northern European art in which a bound and tortured Sebastian faces either the Madonna, or another interesting juxtaposition, such as an image of the Resurrection, that would refer to the martyr's own remedial powers and his miraculous survival. Perhaps the same could be argued for the positioning of various pictures throughout the domestic interior.

¹²⁰ Peter Murray Jones and Lea T. Olsan, “Middleham Jewel: Ritual, Power, and Devotion,” *Viator* 31 (2000): 274.

evil, protect from disease, and prevent hemorrhaging. Coupled with these supernatural properties was the symbolism of their physical characteristics, which alluded to spiritual matters such the purity of Christ and the blood of his Passion. Gemstones, therefore, were worn and cherished for a number of reasons, none completely separate from the other, all bringing to the owner safety and prestige of both a physical and spiritual nature. Although different in form and appearance than the aforementioned paintings of prophylactic saints, on certain levels these jeweled objects would not have been seen as a separate category as they are classified today; both domestic items served the same purpose of safeguarding those who utilized them. In fact, it was believed that amulets and other forms of jewelry could gain greater strength for amuletic purposes by being kept near a holy image.¹²¹

While a picture can potentially be viewed by an unrestricted number of people, religious goods of the nature described above were, and still are, a distinctively personal devotional item, regardless of their ubiquitous use. Most of these objects were of a scale small enough to be held in one's hands during devotional acts or worn on the body, both actions providing direct contact between the devout and the sacral. Rosary and paternoster beads are one example, as exemplified in a little-known portrait by Lorenzo Lotto in Nivå of a man holding a set of rosary beads (fig. 159). While rosary devotion itself required no accouterments, it quickly became associated with the string of beads that represented it (fig. 160), lending to the prayers an aesthetic component and a concreteness that was highly desired in Catholic ritual; in Lotto's image the beads are entwined through the fingers

¹²¹ Or through the blessing of a church official. Winston-Allen, 116.

of this finely dressed gentleman, and one bead is held between his left thumb and forefinger, marking a particular prayer in his devotions.¹²²

The small beads not only assisted the devout in keeping track of prayers, but their size and portability allowed these supplications to occur at any place or moment—in front of the image of the Madonna in one’s bedchamber, in the parish church, or in the open spaces of the city. Both Arnold von Harff, in the sketches that accompany the account of his 1465 visit to Venice, and Cesare Vecellio, in his well-known woodcuts from 1591 depicting fashions typical of men and women from various social classes in the lagoon city, represented many of the women of the Republic with rosaries in hand. (figs. 161 & 162).¹²³ In the early modern era, it was also not unusual for rosaries to be worn on the body, as well. The Church advocated this public display, offering indulgences not only for reciting the prayers, but also for wearing the beads, as the act was seen as a reminder of one’s sins and a good example to others.¹²⁴ The Venetian nobleman, Alvise Bon, for example, owned a set of six paternosters combined with a crucifix, which were made from gold and were “da portar al collo,” or “for wearing around the neck.”¹²⁵ Rosary beads were also carried because of their purported capacity to ward off evil and cure illness. It was common for people to sleep with the beads around their neck so as not to be overtaken during the night devoid of this crucial bond to the Virgin Mary. Physical contact with the

¹²² Ibid., 111.

¹²³ Von Harff, 65; and Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo. Vecellio’s Renaissance Costume Book: All 500 Woodcut Illustrations from the Famous Sixteenth-Century Compendium of World Costumes* (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), 34, fig. 115.

¹²⁴ Winston-Allen, 116.

¹²⁵ ASV, Canc, Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 27, (1535).

beads became especially important in times of death, and many people held sets of rosaries in their hands as they passed from this world to the next.¹²⁶

As portable goods, prayers beads, along with crucifixes and consecrated amulets, could transform any area into a setting appropriate for ritualized activity. Whether visible or kept hidden from view, the actual performance of wearing such an item was considered a ritual itself. In their article on the fifteenth-century Middleham Jewel, a portable reliquary that is now preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Peter Murray Jones and Lea T. Olsan elucidate how the act of donning the charged object changed the social and spiritual status of the wearer, making him or her safe from the dangers of everyday life, and reaffirming the relationship between the human and the divine.¹²⁷ The same can be said for many of the pious goods utilized on a daily basis by Renaissance Venetians; the combination of particular forms, words, and images with effectual materials—in addition to the likelihood of consecration by a church official—created an object that moved beyond the ordinary, with an influential power that could be extended to those who utilized and wore it, invoking heavenly assistance in daily life outside the context of the liturgy.¹²⁸ One was not automatically guaranteed spiritual transformation and protection, however, simply by donning the sacred jewel. Many medieval and Renaissance lapidaries spoke of the powerful reciprocity between talismanic stones and their wearers; while the virtues of the natural substances could be imparted to those who wore them, the

¹²⁶ Winston-Allen, 116.

¹²⁷ Jones and Olsan, 285.

¹²⁸ Jones and Olsan, 262 and 281.

offenses of the carrier could likewise impair and weaken the stone.¹²⁹ Sincerity in faith and a virtuous heart were essential in eliciting the true effectiveness of the object.

The mystical authority ascribed to gems and other stones was based on the durability and rarity of these objects, as well as their relation to the heavens.¹³⁰ The hard surfaces of gemstones are generally impervious to wear and they retain their often brilliant colors, properties distinct from other media; additionally, unlike gold or silver—materials that can be melted down and recycled—precious stones cannot be recut without detriment to their value.¹³¹ Symbols of endurance and strength, their eternal nature could also be related to the everlasting quality of the divine. Anton Francesco Doni emphasized the importance of hard stones in one of his treatises when he said, “[this is an] art truly belonging to a prince who delights in immortal works.”¹³² The power of gemstones was closely linked to astrology, as well, which during the Renaissance played a key role in explaining the enigmatic aspects of particular human events, such as disease, death, and further misfortunes; gems, hard stones, and other natural substances, including medicinal herbs, were believed to receive their virtue from the stars and planets, all of which were ultimately created

¹²⁹ Joan Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Particularly in England* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1976), 64.

¹³⁰ Dora Liscia Bemporad, “Funzione e signifiato delle gemme e delle montature dal Medioevo al Rinascimento,” in *Cristalli e gemme: realtà fisica e immaginario simbologia, tecniche e arte*, ed. Bruno Zanettin (Venice: Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2003), 321.

¹³¹ Genevra Kornbluth, *Engraved Gems of the Carolingian Empire* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 7. The underlying idea of the eternal nature of stones also made their hard surfaces a common ground for portraiture, family arms, and other symbols of dynasty. For more on the use of stones for dynastic purposes, see Martha McCrory, “The Symbolism of Stones: Engraved Gems at the Medici Grand-Ducal Court, 1537-1609,” in *Engraved Gems: Survivals and Revivals*, ed. Clifford Malcolm Brown (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1997), 167.

¹³² McCrory, 162.

and controlled by God.¹³³ As naturally occurring objects of beauty, of which no two are alike, the stones themselves were impenetrable curiosities that harnessed the potential for magic in their inexplicable nature.¹³⁴

Although teetering on the edge of the profane, the association of jewels and talismans with astrology was not altogether dismissed by Church leaders; as natural creations of God, gemstones and the objects into which they were incorporated remained outside of the realm of superstition when employed in a pious manner and with respect to the divine.¹³⁵ Gems were also considered to be part of the celestial realm. The definitive biblical metaphor for jewels appears in Revelations (21: 9-21), when earth and heaven become one, and God is fully revealed in his heavenly city, which is described as resplendent in gold and glittering jewels.¹³⁶ The Biblical text is worth quoting here:

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me: 'Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.' And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. It has the glory of God and a radiance like a very rare jewel, like jasper, clear as crystal...

The angel who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls... The wall is built of jasper while the city is pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the city are adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates are twelve pearls, each of the gates is a single pearl, and the street of the city is pure gold, transparent as glass.

¹³³ Andreina Zitelli and Richard Palmer, *Venezia e la peste*, 23.

¹³⁴ Evans, 13.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 164-165; and Marina Belozerskaya, 50.

¹³⁶ Jones and Olsan, 269.

During the Middle Ages, praise of the stones of the celestial city circulated in a medieval lapidary hymn known as the “*Cives celestis patriae*.”¹³⁷

Gemstones also permeated ecclesiastical spaces through their integration into liturgical items such as processional crosses, monstrances, tabernacles, priestly vestments, reliquaries, and the covers of sacred texts, and in each case with the intended purpose of achieving the effect of divine magnificence. Renaissance Venetians need not have looked any further than the Basilica of San Marco for the ultimate expression of the church as the jeweled heavenly city (fig. 163); the golden mosaic walls and ceilings, the terrazzo floors of a variety of colorful hard stones, and the bejeweled reliquaries and altarpieces, like the *Pala d’Oro* (fig. 164) all contributed to this impression. Statues and icons in churches or other public spaces were frequently adorned with jewels as a sign of their sanctity, such as Venice’s Madonna Nicopeia (fig. 81), also in the Basilica of San Marco, perhaps the most venerated icon in the lagoon region, as discussed in the previous chapter. The resilience and splendor of precious stones corresponded to the eminence of the divine world, and thus were the appropriate sign of the godly within the world of men, particularly in environments that provided a spiritual havens from the mundane.¹³⁸ The jewels of Renaissance individuals may have been a means by which to bring this celestial majesty into their everyday spaces.

Little jewelry and other objects made from precious materials has survived from the Renaissance, as it was common practice to melt down metals and reuse

¹³⁷ Jones and Olsan, 269.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 269; and Belozerskaya, 50.

gemstones once fashions changed.¹³⁹ Fortunately, however, we have the preservation of a wide body of literature on gem-working and the traits of stone, also known as the lapidary, which dates back to ancient times. The two principal works from the classical period were *De lapidibus*, written by Theophrastus in 315 BCE and Pliny's *Natural History* from 77 CE.¹⁴⁰ By the ninth century, lapidary symbolism was well developed; utilizing Greek and Roman natural histories in combination with biblical exegesis, Western scholars, such as Saint Jerome and Rabanus Maurus, detailed both the physical and metaphysical qualities of stones.¹⁴¹ The tradition continued uninterrupted throughout the medieval period and into the Renaissance, with the content of these texts changing little until the end of the sixteenth century.¹⁴² By or during the sixteenth century, many ancient and medieval lapidaries had been published and were well-known, including work by Saint Isidore of Seville, Marbode, the eleventh-century bishop of Rennes, and the enormously popular Albertus Magnus, who wrote in the thirteenth century and was one of the leading authorities for writers on the subject for the next several hundred years.¹⁴³

One of the first Italian lapidaries published in the Renaissance was a section in Marsilio Ficino's *De triplici vita* of 1489, titled *De vita coelitus comaranda*. In this

¹³⁹ Jones and Olsan, 268 and 284.

¹⁴⁰ McCrory, 171.

¹⁴¹ Kornbluth, 16.

¹⁴² In fact, almost more than any other type of writing from the Middle Ages, medieval lapidaries were directly drawn from classical sources; consequently, in the Renaissance this literature was not heavily influenced by the new scientific and humanistic writings being produced at an ever-increasing rate because it was already considered to be based in the authority of the ancients. Evans, 140.

¹⁴³ McCrory, 171; Belozerskaya, 56-57; and Lightbown, 96-97. *De Lapidus*, the treatise on the virtue of stones attributed to Albertus Magnus, was one of the books that the Venetian Luca Sesto bequeathed to his cousin in his will of 15 July 1458: "Item lasso alberto magno de mineralibus et lapidibus preciosus amio cusin messer alouise beuanza." Cited in Connell, 175. The doctor of law Marcantonio de Anotali, whose inventory was drawn up on 22 December 1540, owned two copies of books by Albertus Magnus. One is referred to as "Alberti magni liber mettaurorx" and the other simply as "Alberto Magno in quarto." ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 37, fasc. 29.

work, the humanist ascribed the enigmatic power of gems to the authority of the stars and the planets affecting them.¹⁴⁴ Following Ficino was the 1502 publication of Camillo Leonardi's *Speculum Lapidarum Classimi Artium et Medicine Doctoris Camilli Leonardi Pisauensis*, which ascribed mostly magical properties to gems. Leonardi attributed a long list of virtues to gemstones, including their abilities to: give favor to princes; withstand fire; resist poison; grant victory; make the wearer beloved; bestow on him wisdom; make him invisible at will; deflect thunderbolts; calm storms; increase riches; cultivate love between a husband and wife; and cure disease.¹⁴⁵ This early Cinquecento work was taken over in its entirety by Lodovico Dolce in his *Libri tre di M. Lodovico Dolce ne i quali si tratta delle diverse sorti delle gemme, che produce la natura, della qualità, grandezza, bellezza e virtù loro*, published in Venice in 1565.¹⁴⁶ Giovanni Baptista Porta was another prominent Renaissance thinker to consider at length the supernatural qualities of gemstones. In his *De Miraculis Rerum Naturalium Libri IIII*, published in 1560, he argued for their medicinal qualities and advocated their uses as amulets that would affect the part of the body to which they are bound, a result of their natural and celestial merits, as well the faith of the wearer.¹⁴⁷ The tradition of lapidaries continued into the seventeenth century with Andrea Baccio's *De Gemmis et Lapidaribus preciosis* of 1603 and the most important lapidary of the seventeenth century, *Gemmarum et Lapidarum Historia* written by Anselmus Boetius de Boot and published in Lyons in 1636.¹⁴⁸ These works

¹⁴⁴ McCrory, 140.

¹⁴⁵ Evans, 142.

¹⁴⁶ McCrory, 171.

¹⁴⁷ Evans, 142.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 146-147, 154.

perpetuated long-standing beliefs in the mystical properties of stones and the influence of astrology and the heavenly sphere.

It was in this literary and cultural environment that Renaissance Venetians acquired gemstones and talismans. A large number of precious stones came to Italy from the East and Northern Europe—such as rubies that were heavily imported from India, sapphires from Arabia and Persia, and amber from the Baltic coast—and Venice was one of the main ports on the peninsula through which they arrived to be sorted and worked.¹⁴⁹ Venetian merchants, therefore, presumably had the first opportunity to choose from the finest selection of gemstones that came from distant shores, and they made these goods accessible to the city's inhabitants.¹⁵⁰ Arnold von Harff described the long streets leading from the Rialto as being full of merchant shops, and he noted in particular the “goldsmiths, and jewelers selling pearls and precious stones.”¹⁵¹ Venetian inventories are full of records of both loose gemstones and an assortment of goods made from these precious materials, and such items do not appear to have been the exclusive domain of the city's nobility. Commonly listed amongst the domestic goods in a large number of inventories are rosary and paternoster beads made from a variety of substances, like chalcedony, carnelian, amber, ebony, and coral, not to mention silver and gold. Additionally, there were

¹⁴⁹ Although the largest deposits of amber in the world—and the ones exploited the longest—come from the shores of the Baltic Sea in northern Europe (the Samland Peninsula has produced 90 percent of all the amber in Europe), amber can also be found along the Simeto and Salso Rivers in Sicily. David A. Grimaldi, *Amber: Window to the Past* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996), 42 and 47. See also McCrory, 168; Bemporad, 341, and Patty C. Rice, *Amber, the Golden Gem of the Ages* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1980), 54. Patty Rice provides a thorough and interesting account of the amber monopoly and guilds in Europe during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, chap. 3.

¹⁵⁰ Lightbown, 26.

¹⁵¹ Von Harff, 51.

crucifixes wrought in precious metals and encrusted with jewels such as diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and pearls.

Various other kinds of jewelry and decorative objects are also recorded, made from similar materials and likewise considered to have therapeutic powers.

Bernardino di Redaldi, for example, owned two gold rings—one of which had a quartz stone—and an image of Christ embedded in a piece of crystal; he stored all three items in a small bag for their safekeeping. He also was in possession of several sets of paternosters made from materials such as chalcedony, agate, coral, amber, and animal bone.¹⁵² Angela, the widow of Bartolomeo di Grigis, had rosary beads made from chalcedony that incorporated a silver crucifix, in addition to two more small silver crosses that would have been worn as pendants (“da metter al col[l]o.”)¹⁵³ Not surprising, the 1566 inventory of the jeweler Gaspare Crivelli contained many valuable items made from precious materials, like the gold crucifix with agate and other engraved stones that hung from a gold chain, one *brazo* in length and worth thirty ducats total. As was commonly done with items of such high financial and spiritual import, he stored this precious object in a small chest (*scrigno*) along with other pieces of jewelry for their safekeeping.¹⁵⁴

Much like today, diamonds were placed in the top tier of the hierarchy of gemstones, a conviction that goes all the way back to Pliny.¹⁵⁵ They were said to resist poison, nightmares, and witchcraft, drive away fear and insanity, and bestow

¹⁵² ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 34, fasc. 32.

¹⁵³ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 40, fasc. 18, (1564).

¹⁵⁴ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 40, fasc. 34.

¹⁵⁵ McCrory, 165.

victory on the wearer.¹⁵⁶ Some medieval lapidaries describe the stone as so commanding, that it also possessed negative properties, such as sorrow and trepidation. The diamond was especially praised in *Istoria delle pietre*, written in the sixteenth century by Agostino del Riccio, who portrayed it as the hardest of stones and one that did not succumb to fire or any other metal; he traced the name “diamond,” or *diamante* in Italian, to the Greek word for indomitable virtue.¹⁵⁷ Rubies, sapphires, and emeralds were believed to strengthen memory and create happiness. Emeralds in particular were alleged to increase riches, as well as prevent epilepsy and terror, stanch bleeding, repel demons, and cure a number of ailments, including dysentery and semi-tertian fever.¹⁵⁸ Sapphire, a symbol of the throne of heaven, was also purported to hold medicinal properties; Marbode assigned to it the capacity to reduce fever, cure ulcers, headaches, and defects of the tongue, and “lift dirt from the eye.” This stone also had the power to foster chastity, liberate one from prison, and it made the wearer attentive to prayer, and beloved by God.¹⁵⁹ Although not a gemstone, pearls, too, were highly valued for their beauty, rarity, and symbolic connotations. As described in the above quote from Revelations, the gates of the heavenly city were made of pearls, and they were also considered to be a sign of Christ himself.¹⁶⁰

The position and color of stones on an object carried visual and symbolic significance, as well. For instance, gemstones, such as rubies, placed on the four

¹⁵⁶ Evans, 145; Belozerskaya, 57; and Lightbown, 97.

¹⁵⁷ McCrory, 165.

¹⁵⁸ Evans, 144-145, and 153.

¹⁵⁹ Jones and Olsan, 268-270; Belozerskaya, 57; and Lightbown, 97.

¹⁶⁰ Bemporad, 325. As symbols of purity, pearls became associated with marriage in the Renaissance, and they are frequently listed about the items of a woman’s dowry in sixteenth-century Venice.

extremities of a crucifix were often symbolic of the wounds of Christ (fig. 165).¹⁶¹

Venetian inventories contain a number of examples of crucifixes with precious stones that could have been arranged in such an emblematic format. The medical doctor Carlo da Fano, for instance, kept in a small writing desk with other goods “una croseta doro zoielada cum 6 pezeti di diamanti 4 rubineti and cinque perle.”¹⁶²

Similarly, the nobleman Lorenzo Pasqualigo, who held the prestigious position of Procurator of San Marco, had in his collection of jewelry “una croseta doro co[n] quattro rubinetti, cinque perletti et uno diamanti ligadi in mezzo,” as well as “una croseta piccola co[n] cinque rubinetti, uno smeraldo et quat[t]ro p[er]let[t]e.”¹⁶³ The 1577 inventory of the aforementioned Nicolò Franceschi, also of the patrician class, records “una croseta d’oro con sie pietre bianche, quattro rosse e quat[t]ro perle.”¹⁶⁴

The rubies and red stones described on these aforementioned crucifixes—mentioned in groups of four or five—could have easily been arranged to mark the wounds of Christ, while additional stones, like the diamonds, emerald, and pearls may have also been positioned in ways that would have held symbolic meaning for the owners.

During the Middle Ages and Renaissance there was also the prevalent belief in the efficacy of hard stones—often referred to as animal stones—such as jasper, carnelian, agate, and heliotrope, among others. Sometimes dark and mottled, these stones are evidence that in early modern thought, efficacy was often more important than aesthetics when it came to gems. Evidence from letters reveals that bezoar stones and the “tears of a deer”—probably a stone close to the bezoar—were in use at

¹⁶¹ Bemporad, 323.

¹⁶² ASV, Canc., Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 29 (1535).

¹⁶³ ASV, Canc., Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 37 (1537).

¹⁶⁴ ASV, Canc., Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 35.

the Medici court as antidotes for poison or the plague.¹⁶⁵ Green heliotrope spotted with red, commonly known today as bloodstone, in the Renaissance was considered suitable for the carving of certain subjects; when worked in a particular way, the red spots would become the blood of Christ's wounds, similar to the use of rubies in the aforementioned Venetian crucifixes.¹⁶⁶ Stones from the quartz family, including chalcedony, agate, and carnelian, were also ascribed prophylactic properties, such as the assurance of health and safety, and the ability to staunch the flow of blood and heal wounds. As late as the seventeenth-century, objects made from carnelian were attributed with the powers to recreate the mind, eliminate sad dreams, expel fear, and preserve the carrier from witches and harm.¹⁶⁷

The prayer beads described in Venetian inventories were frequently made from these therapeutic stones, like those in the collections of Bernardino di Redaldi and Angela de Grigis. Organic gems or minerals, like coral and amber, were also a common medium used for these pious items. Except for wood, amber was perhaps the most common natural material incorporated into rosaries and paternosters, and the demand for it from the paternoster guilds across Europe was so great that the Teutonic Order—who established their chief stronghold in the Baltic region—vigorously controlled its supply; anyone in the area who found amber had to

¹⁶⁵ Mentions of these stones can be found in the letter of Tommaso de' Medici to Grand Duke Francesco I (27 November 1579, ASF MdP 729, cc. 107, 721) and the letter of Vincenzo Banchieri to Prince Francesco (27 June 1573, ASF, MdP 589, c. 159). In reality, bezoar stones were hard concretions found in the stomachs of certain ruminant animals such as goats and antelopes. In addition to their prophylactic purpose, hard stones assumed a symbolic meaning at the Florentine court, as a mirror of virtue and emblem of the strength of the ruler; these ideas pervaded the Italian courts in the sixteenth century. For more on these letters and the properties of the stones mentioned in them, see McCrory, 159 and 175, note 4.

¹⁶⁶ McCrory, 159.

¹⁶⁷ These properties are mentioned in Renodaeus, *Dispensatory*, first published in 1608. See Evans, 151.

relinquish it to the Knights for export.¹⁶⁸ Maria de Gracimanis, the daughter of Gerolamo, whose inventory was recorded after her death in 1535, owned paternosters of “black” amber “da cenzar,”[?] in addition to another sixteen sets of them made out of chalcedony.¹⁶⁹ Tommaso Catena, who died in 1549, had twenty-four paternosters of amber with “le sue stellette d’oro,” or “their little stars of gold.”¹⁷⁰ Despite their popularity, few amber rosaries from the Renaissance survive, although a set produced in South Germany and probably dating to the seventeenth century provide some sense of what Venetians possessed decades prior (fig. 166).

Although a resin rather than a stone, amber was highly valued for its beauty and unique properties, and since the time of Pliny it was thought to possess a number of curative powers in addition to being prized as protection against witchcraft.¹⁷¹ In 1502, Camillus Leonardus expanded on the virtues of amber as a medicine in his *Speculum Lapidum*: “Amber naturally restrains the flux of the belly; is an efficacious remedy for all disorders of the throat. It is good against poison. If laid on the breath of a wife when she sleeps, it makes her confess all her evil deeds. It fastens teeth that are loosened, and by smoke of it poisonous insects are driven away.”¹⁷² Its smooth polished surface and warmth made it particularly prized for objects to be handled or

¹⁶⁸ Marjorie Trusted, *Catalogue of European Ambers in the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1985), 10; and Rice, chap. 3.

¹⁶⁹ ASV, Canc., Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 31. “Black” amber frequently appears in Venetian inventories. Some Baltic ambers—called *stantienite* and *beckrite*—are opaque and either dull brown or black. Grimaldi, 53.

¹⁷⁰ ASV, Canc., Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 38, n. 2.

¹⁷¹ Rice, 120, 123. Several ancient myths attempted to explain the origin of amber. Sophocles believed that amber was produced in the countries beyond India from the tears shed for the hero Meleager by his sisters, who had been transformed into birds. The Roman poet Ovid also attributed its creation to a divine cause in his account of the Greek myth, the *Tears of Heliade*; here, amber was the result of the sun-hardened tears of Phaëton’s sisters, the Heliades, who also wept bitterly over his death.

¹⁷² Quote from Rice, 124.

worn against the skin, like rosary beads.¹⁷³ In a 1510 edition of his poem “Le Triomphe des Dames,” Olivier de la Marche wrote, “Moreover, my honored lady must have pater-nosters of jet or coral, or for even finer ornament of fine amber.”¹⁷⁴

Coral had the capacity to protect the wearer from harm, and was a commonly chosen material for prayer beads, as well. Gasparo Calvi, for example, whose inventory was written in 1574, had a *corona*, or six-decade form of the rosary also known as a chaplet, made from coral with seven “segnalli d’oro,” which may have referred to ornaments that frequently hung from rosary beads, or the beads used to mark the paternosters to be said between each decade.¹⁷⁵ In an era when infant mortality rates were high, it was common for small children to wear the protective material to safeguard them during the first few uncertain years, as exemplified in the portrait of the Venetian merchant Giovanni della Volta with wife and family painted by Lorenzo Lotto (fig.17) in which the small girl on the table dons a small pearl necklace with a red coral crucifix around her neck.¹⁷⁶ As mentioned above, medieval and Renaissance images often portrayed the Christ child with branches of coral around his neck much like della Volta’s daughter; these representations of the divine infant thus served as visual reinforcements for deeply held beliefs and practices aimed at protecting the most vulnerable and innocent members of the family.

In addition to the aforementioned materials, rock crystal was a substance highly valued for its spiritual connotations and was frequently incorporated into religious works of art. In a number of instances, the Bible links crystal to water that

¹⁷³ Grimaldi, 144.

¹⁷⁴ Quote from Grimaldi, 164.

¹⁷⁵ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 43.

¹⁷⁶ This portrait is described in Lotto’s account book between 1538 and 1547. No other portrait of a man, woman and two children by Lotto is known. Humfrey, *Lorenzo Lotto*,

formed a sort of hard and irreversible kind of ice; its qualities of transparency, luminosity and preciousness were thus appropriately used to define the vision of God—that is to say, a vision of the invisible.¹⁷⁷ The alleged natural formation of crystal and its untainted transparency became a symbol of purity of faith and innocence for Christian thinkers. A number of biblical exegeses from the medieval period mention rock crystal and its sacred characteristics. Jerome, for example, related the purity of these stones to the transformation one undergoes when in church. Similarly, Haymo of Auxerre, writing in the ninth century, compared the spotlessness of crystal to the clarity of faith one receives at Baptism. Haymo's successors continued to link crystal to Baptism, in addition to comparing it with the nature of angels, Jesus' Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection, and the conversion of Paul.¹⁷⁸ Gregory the Great equated crystal with the body of Christ; the natural substance was, he said, "...the perfection of incorruption, it grew hard just as crystal [hardens] from water... water was turned into crystal, since the weakness of corruption was changed into the strength of incorruption through his resurrection."¹⁷⁹ The notion of rock crystal being formed from snow persisted into the sixteenth century, even in scientific thought. Vannoccio Biringuccio, for example, gave the lucent stone significant attention in his book, *Pirotechnica*, first published in Venice in 1540. In the chapter

¹⁷⁷ Mentions of crystal can be found in Ecclesiasticus, 43, 22, Psalms, 147, 17, and Revelations. See Marco Collareta, "Il cristallo nella liturgia religiosa e civile con qualche osservazione sulle croci veneziane in cristallo di rocca," in Zanettin, 495 and 500. Beliefs in the properties of crystal can also be found in Pliny, who similarly described the translucent rock as the artifact of pure snow hardened through intense freezing.

¹⁷⁸ Kornbluth, 17.

¹⁷⁹ From, Gregory, *Homiliarum in Ezechielem*, book 1, homily 7, *PL* 76: 849-50, as quoted in Kornbluth, 18.

titled, “Concerning Rock Crystal and All Important Gems in General,” he reiterated the traditional ideas about this crystal and its origins as ice.¹⁸⁰

Venice was a major center for working in rock crystal, a result of the city’s nearness to the mountains where the material was readily found and its long vocation to the sumptuary arts.¹⁸¹ Crystal was often incorporated into reliquaries and Eucharistic monstrances as the transparent material through which one sees the holy contents. The medium, therefore, was integrally tied to the object it displayed. The purity of the crystal was equated with that of the martyr whose remains were embedded within the rock, while the host—the body of Christ in the Catholic faith—was suspended in a material that stood for Jesus himself.¹⁸² The properties of crystal were also exploited in Renaissance processional crosses, which were produced largely in Venice. The use of the medium eliminated the need for a *recto* and *verso* since both are in view when the cross is in use. At times, the body of Christ was etched into the hard material, like the example of the exquisite altar cross made by the Venetian sculptor and goldsmith Valerio Belli around 1516-1517, and now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (fig. 167). The medium and the image become one with each aspect sustaining the essence of the other.¹⁸³ Like processional crosses, a number of the crucifixes listed in Venetian inventories were either made from rock crystal or incorporated the substance into their design (168). The priest Domenico de Tauris, chaplain of the monastery of Saints Cosimo and Damian, owned “una croseta d[i] cristal,” while the ducal secretary Daniele Bonrizzo possessed “una

¹⁸⁰ McCrory, 176, note 32.

¹⁸¹ Collareta, 501-502.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 501.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 510-511.

crosetina de putti de cretallo de montagne con una perletta tachuda,” a tiny cross of crystal “from the mountains,” with a small pearl attached, that was likely intended to be worn by children (*de putti*).¹⁸⁴ Early modern beliefs regarding the nature of this material made it an apt medium for a sacred object that was synonymous with Christ.

Other religious items found in domestic spaces utilized the medium, as well. As mentioned above, Bernardino di Redaldi kept in a bag “un christo dentro un cristalo,” or a “Christ” embedded in a piece of crystal. There are also records of crystal paternosters, like those logged in the inventories of the German Pietro Talcher from 1532, and the nobleman Michele Memo from 1572.¹⁸⁵ The crystal devotional goods owned by many Venetians, therefore, were visual and physical reminders of the principals of the Christian faith: the purity attained through the sacrament of Baptism, and the salvation of man achieved through the death and renewal of Christ. Beyond serving as a memory aid, however, was the influential authority of the medium; as with gemstones, it was believed that wearing the crystal or using it in one’s devotions would impart onto the owner the innocence of Christ – represented in the clarity, translucence, and beauty of the substance itself.¹⁸⁶

The Agnus Dei

Although it normally did not utilize any precious materials in its fabrication, the Agnus Dei deserves special consideration in the context of jewelry and other household items that were intended to ward off evil and danger. As discussed in Chapter One, the Agnus Dei is a medallion of wax derived from the Paschal candle

¹⁸⁴ ASV, Canc., Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 40, n. 29 (de Tauris, 1566) and n. 20 (Bonrizzo, 1561).

¹⁸⁵ ASV, Canc., Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 35, n. 45 (Talcher), and b. 41, n. 48 (Memo).

¹⁸⁶ Evans, 146-147.

and blessed by the pope during Holy Week. It took on a variety of forms—circle, square, oval, and sometimes even the shape of a lamb—and bore the impression of the Lamb of God with the cross and flag, into which one could often find the words: *Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi*, or “Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world”; sometimes the papal coat of arms or images of saints appear on the reverse side. Chrism was often combined with the wax as part of the act of benediction, a substance with connotations of the fullness of grace and the sweetness of virtue, and compared to the “good odor of Christ.”¹⁸⁷ As a sacramental, the act of possessing and wearing the Agnus Dei was considered a ritual in and of itself. The name “Agnus Dei” means “Lamb of God,” a reference to the Paschal lamb slain and eaten on the Jewish Passover that became a title for Christ. The words themselves are sung during the moment in the Eucharistic liturgy when the priest combines the bread and wine in preparation for communion. The object was intended to serve as a material reminder of Christ’s sacrifice in the Eucharist through the symbolism of the Paschal lamb, and to commemorate one’s initiation into the faith, expressed in the medium of the wax from the candle that was illuminated during the baptism of catechumens on Holy Saturday.¹⁸⁸ The origins of the sacramental are uncertain, although the first reference of a pope granting to parishes the concession to use the Paschal wax date back to 417.¹⁸⁹ By the eleventh and twelfth centuries they were referred to with frequency.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ “For we are the good odor of Christ unto God” (II Cor., ii, 15). Gaetano Moroni Romano, “Agnus Dei di cera benedetti,” in *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica da S. Pietro fino ai nostri giorni* 1 (Venice: Tipografia Emiliana, 1840), 127.

¹⁸⁸ Jones and Olson, 256-257, and 279.

¹⁸⁹ Romano, “Agnus Dei,” 127.

¹⁹⁰ Cherry, 171-72.

Dozens upon dozens of Agnus Deis are recorded in Venetian inventories, owned by a good number of households in the lagoon in the sixteenth century. There are even records of the ritual object in inventories as far back as the fourteenth century, such as the Agnus Dei of silver with chalcedony from the 1368 inventory of Pietro Soranzo, and the one owned by Marco Nani from the parish of Santa Fosca, whose inventory was drawn up in 1393.¹⁹¹ The popularity of this item during the Renaissance has understandably been overlooked because so few from the period survive, their ephemeral materials likely having been recycled for other purposes. Like many of the goods recorded in inventories, notaries were generally vague in their descriptions of the Agnus Dei, often referring to the items simply as “uno agnus dei.” As mentioned in Chapter One, the Agnus Deis owned by Venetians were most likely portable in nature—probably about an inch or two in diameter like those that can be acquired for personal use today—although some household may have possessed ones of more a more sizable scale that would have been kept on display, similar to the Agnus Deis that were acquired by churches and confraternities, exemplified by that owned by the Scuola di San Rocco, measuring several inches in height (fig. 169). At times, though, they are described as being made of silver or gold—“d’argento” or “d’oro”—and the diction probably refers to the containers that protected the object given the more delicate nature of the wax medium.¹⁹² The Agnus Dei owned by the nobleman Alvise Barozzo, whose inventory dates to June 1529, was placed in a cover of silver worked in *niello* with a “mezza croseta,” or a small

¹⁹¹ ASV, PSM, Misti, b. 73, Soranzo; and PSM, Misti, b. 2 (Nani).

¹⁹² Cherry, 171-183. The frequent references to Agnus Deis “d’argento” or “d’oro,” like that of Pietro Soranzo mentioned above, may also indicate that they were replicas of the authentic versions made from wax.

cross in relief that was attached to one side.¹⁹³ Sometimes they are described as being stored in tiny cases and fabric pouches, as well. For example, in the 1554 inventory of Lucrezia Soresini there are listed two agnus deis of white wax and six agnus deis “de seda,” or “of silk,” described as “divisadi et schieti,” or “uniform and pure,” perhaps a way to indicate that each was stored in its own silk pocket.¹⁹⁴

The majority of these pious articles were stored in small chests and boxes with jewelry, which attests to their esteemed value, but also their probable use as an item to be worn. A handful of Agnus Dei containers survive, probably dating to the second half of the fifteenth century or the early sixteenth century. An example of a silver container from the British Museum with nielloed plaques (fig. 70) shows the kneeling lamb on one side and the letters IHS—the name of Jesus—on the reverse, with the crucifix incorporated into the H. The silver loop at the top—also present on other surviving Italian examples—clearly indicates that this was an object that was worn.¹⁹⁵ The 1575 inventory of Giovanni Battista Cariolo describes his like a pendant—“una mando[r]lla, over agnus dei d’oro da portar al colo co[n] filli no quatro d’oro.”¹⁹⁶ The object’s prophylactic qualities took effect when they came into contact with the body.

The repeated appearance in the households of Venice from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is testament to their highly effective role in securing both physical and spiritual safety. While borrowing from the liturgical context, as a charm that could be worn on the body or kept in the house this wax medallion was assigned

¹⁹³ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 34, n. 89.

¹⁹⁴ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 40, n. 18.

¹⁹⁵ Cherry, 172-74.

¹⁹⁶ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 51.

several protective benefits over the years.¹⁹⁷ Its earliest and most notable attribute was the power to protect buildings from thunder and lightning.¹⁹⁸ The prayers said by the pope in the ceremony for the consecration of the Agnus Dei referred to a number of other dangers that could be avoided through the inherent virtue of the object, which included: the tricks of the Devil; storms; misfortunes; pestilence and other corruptions of the air; sickness, especially epilepsy; the effects of poison; shipwreck; fire; and the injustice of man.¹⁹⁹ In addition to its association with the Eucharist, the power of the object derived from the important place the “agnus dei” held in the litany of saints. The litanies opened with the “kyrie eleison” and closed with the “agnus dei”; between these two chants fell petitions for relief from a number of named evils, which were thus incorporated into the pope’s benediction that sanctified these wax mementos.²⁰⁰

The Agnus Dei also figured into theories of reproduction. In 1366 Pope Urban V (1362-70) sent three as a gift to the Byzantine Emperor John Paleologus and included with them a poem listing their virtues. In addition to the aforementioned talismanic properties, he declared the Agnus Dei could also aid women in conception and pregnancy, and bring about the safe delivery of a child.²⁰¹ Death in childbirth was an unfortunate yet common occurrence in the early modern era, and often meant dying without having received the last sacrament, a fate to be avoided given the shared view of purgatory.²⁰² A wide variety of objects appeared during the

¹⁹⁷ Jones and Olsan, 260 and 279.

¹⁹⁸ Cherry, 171

¹⁹⁹ Jones and Olsan, 279. The benedictions varied over the years, with new properties added, and old ones removed. Romano, 130.

²⁰⁰ Jones and Olsan, 257-258.

²⁰¹ “Praegnans servatur, simue et partus liberatur” (It at once preserves the woman, and delivers her of her pregnant child). Cherry, 171-72.

²⁰² John Cherry, “Healing through Faith: The Continuation of Medieval Attitudes to Jewellery into the Renaissance,” *Renaissance Studies* 15 (June 2001), 157.

Renaissance, including special furniture, linens, and amuletic objects, to assist and commemorate pregnancy. For example, threads said to have touched the relic of the Virgin's girdle in Prato were believed to relieve labor, while the wearing of a special parchment or fabric girdle inscribed with prayers was supposed to restore fertility to barren women.²⁰³ The Agnus Dei added to this visual culture of childbirth. The accounts of the Frenchman Hémon Raguier in 1393 record the purchase of five little tablets of silver called Agnus Dei that "women wear when they are large with child,"²⁰⁴ and the trousseaus of Anna Sforza and Angela Sforza Visconti, whose contents were recorded in 1491 and 1493, contained gold and silver versions of the item, presumably to ensure fertility in their future marriages.²⁰⁵ The multi-layered function of the sacred object—from preserving buildings to a safe pregnancy and childbirth—accounts for the high rate of references to the Agnus Dei in Venetian inventories.

The validity of those Agnus Deis in the dwellings of the Republic, however, is questionable. Popes traditionally consecrated Agnus Deis during the first year of their pontificate, and every seven years thereafter.²⁰⁶ Given this limited time table, authentic medallions were rare, thus adding to their esteem. Perhaps this is why it was important for the notary of the inventory of Nicolò Franceschi to refer to the

²⁰³ Weasels, too, were associated with conception and childbirth. This animal was thought to conceive and give birth through divine intervention, and thus their pelts became talismans for pregnant women. For more on art associated with childbirth in the Renaissance, see Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth*, and "Weasels and Pregnancy in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Studies* 15 (June 2001), 172-187.

²⁰⁴ Cherry, "Healing through Faith," 157.

²⁰⁵ Luke Syson and Dora Thornton, *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy* (London: The British Museum, 2001), 61-62.

²⁰⁶ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Catholic Church*, 26. They were often also distributed to pilgrims during Jubilee years. Romano, 129.

nobleman's Agnus Dei as "del Papa."²⁰⁷ The Agnus Dei owned by Andrea Musatti, whose inventory was recorded in 1582, was similarly described: "un agnus dei *da Roma* fornido d'oro..."²⁰⁸ The repeated papal bulls issued during the Renaissance with regards to strict penalties—including excommunication—for the false production and unauthorized sale of these holy objects indicates that forgeries were common.²⁰⁹ Most likely, the majority of Agnus Deis owned by Venetians were not consecrated. A lack of authenticity, however, did not necessarily lessen the belief in their purported powers, nor can we assume that Venetians would have always been aware of the sanctified status of these objects; acquiring them at markets, on pilgrimages, and through family members, they may have trusted their alleged condition. Given their frequency in Venetian households, with many homes owning two or three or more, the conviction in the influence and efficacy of the Agnus Dei in combating a number of significant dangers—regardless of its origin—was very real.

A small item with a low survival rate, seemingly insignificant today, the Agnus Dei played a vital role in the sacred visual culture of the domestic setting in Renaissance Venice. It was a pious object that served as a daily reminder of the principals of the Catholic faith, as well as a valued talisman that protected the wearer and the home from an enormity of harm. The Agnus Dei, like the pendants,

²⁰⁷ De Francesco's Agnus Dei was also described as a pendent, further reinforcing the assumption that a majority of these objects were worn on the body. ASV, Canc. Inf, Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 35.

²⁰⁸ ASV, Canc. Inf, Misc. Not. Div., b. 42, n. 62.

²⁰⁹ Pope Nicholas V, issued a Bull in 1452 that imposed severe punishments on Giovanni Urioch and Dionico de Molinis, for counterfeit indulgence notes and images of the Agnus Dei. In 1470, Paul II reiterated that penalties would result for those who made and sold Agnus Deis of consecrated wax without authorization. Gregory XIII went so far as to threaten excommunication for such acts. Romano, 131.

crucifixes, and paternoster beads made from precious materials with potent prophylactic qualities, was just as powerful in protecting the devout and contributing to the devotional atmosphere of the household as were the paintings and sculptures of plague saints that populated the city's residential spaces. Whether it was wearing an amulet or saying prayers said before the appropriate spiritual intercessor, both acts were hoped to alter the personal and social circumstances of that person.²¹⁰ Each of these items were part of the rich visual culture that developed around the related concerns of physical health, security and spiritual well-being that were experienced by all individuals in a time of frequent disease, death, and overall uncertainty, a visual culture that made itself felt most strongly in their everyday, domestic environments.

²¹⁰ Jones and Olsan, 268.

Chapter 5. Family Values: Creating a Christian Household

In the Veneto region, during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, a number of images were produced for private patrons that took liberties with the time-honored theme of the Madonna and Child. A recently restored painting by Vittore Carpaccio titled, *Madonna Adoring the Christ Child with Saint John the Baptist* (fig. 170), along with Giorgione's *Madonna Reading with Christ Child* today in Oxford (fig. 171), are two paintings that demonstrate these variations. In the former example, the figures appear arranged as if in the midst of a lesson. The Christ child, shown at around age five, is seated on a ledge reading a small book, perhaps a psalter or other prayer book, while a youthful John the Baptist, located behind the ledge, points at his cousin. The Madonna stands with her young nephew with her hands clasped in prayer and directs her devotions toward her young son. At the same time, her position above the two boys indicates that she oversees their actions.¹ The latter painting shows the reverse scenario; instead of the Christ child with the book, it is the Madonna. Her introspective manner suggests that she is reading to herself rather than the infant Jesus, but nonetheless she teaches her son through her devout actions.

In the realm of the household, pictures like these took on particular meanings for the familial audience. By representing the most holy mother and her divine son in the act of prayer and devotion, they were inevitably models of ideal pious behavior. The paintings were not only exemplary, however; they were also the product of a time and

¹ The Correr painting is said to be the same painting recorded in an inventory of the monastery of San Giacomo on Giudecca. Despite the possibility that its original location was a monastery, it could have first been a household devotional picture as domestic objects were frequently bequeathed to these institutions. A similar version exists in Frankfurt.

place that set heavy demands on families—and mothers in particular—in raising moral and devout children. The settings in Carpaccio and Giorgione’s painting appear to be contemporary interiors, similar to the spaces that the pictures would have originally adorned.² Both paintings move beyond the traditional devotional picture by showing the Virgin Mary and her son engaged in their own prayers and spiritual learning, taking on the activities that seem rooted more in the domain of the viewer than divinity.

This chapter explores how Renaissance Venetians used the sacred images and objects of their domestic surroundings to create and maintain a proper Christian home, which included, amongst other things, an emphasis on the religious formation of the children. The concentration will be on how women and children, often the primary users of these objects, learned their faith and expressed their beliefs. They were also the members of society with the most limited access to other, more public, devotional outlets. Therefore, they more readily employed what was in their everyday environment as vehicles for religious expression. To provide a contextual framework in which to situate this discussion, I first look at contemporary perceptions of marriage and the family during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, and how these society and the Church judged these institutions in relation to other vocations. I then move on to female piety and how the home and its visual and material culture offered women a recourse to a spirituality largely denied to them in the institutional church, and defined their roles in the family as moral educators and the overseers of household religion. The Church maintained a rigid patriarchal structure with regards to the dissemination of the faith, but in the context of

² Norbert Huse and Wolfgang Wolters, *The Art of Renaissance Venice: Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting, 1460-1590*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), 236.

the Renaissance household the strongest formative influence on the spiritual development of the family was the mother.

Next I examine how children learned within the domestic environment; in Renaissance Venice, where only a small percentage of the youth attended formal schooling, children were taught by means of the pious images and objects that filled their everyday spaces. I close the chapter with a discussion on the efforts of Venetian families to maintain the bonds of family and preserve a Christian household in times of death. Domestic goods played a significant part in fulfilling this function. Devotional items most dear to an individual were often left to kin in signs of love and remembrance, and to ensure the salvation of both living and the departed. Portraiture, too, played an influential role in this arena by offering a constant visual presence of the deceased, and operating in conjunction with the household's sacred visual culture to secure prayers for the sitter's soul. The prime medium for cultural transmission, including access to religion, was unavoidably the family, making the household the most basic context for upholding the faith.³ A devout and moral family not only sustained and nourished itself, but contributed to the success and virtue of society as a whole.

Marriage and Family in the Renaissance: Contemporary Perspectives

There is little consensus amongst scholars on the nature of the early modern family. In his seminal study on the history of childhood, Philippe Ariès characterized the Medieval and Renaissance family as cold and impersonal. He argued that until as late as the seventeenth century parents considered their children as diminutive adults and thus

³ Swanson, 71, and 121.

were not sensitive to the distinctive qualities of youth.⁴ The commonness of arranged marriages and unions of older men to women as young as twelve and thirteen have also supported conceptions of weak emotional ties in domestic groups. A number of historians have defended Ariès' claim, thus maintaining the assumption that as households became more like the modern, "nuclear" family—that is to say, consisting of only parents and their children—they became more loving and affective.⁵ Some scholars have attempted to trace the origins of this development as early as the fifteenth century in Italy, coinciding with the circulation of humanistic values throughout the peninsula, while others have demonstrated that households and families of the Renaissance tended to be more complex than normally assessed, making the typical domestic unit difficult to characterize.⁶ In Venice, for example, while marriage normally guaranteed independence and physical autonomy for husband and wife, it was not uncommon for households

⁴ Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962).

⁵ See in particular Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Hareper & Row, 1977); and Andreas Fletcher and Walter Hornstein, "Kindheit und Jugendalter in geschichtlicher Betrachtung," *Zeitschrift für Pädagogie* 10 (1964): 311-39.

⁶ Richard Goldthwaite and F. W. Kent have presented two different portrayals of the family in Renaissance Florence. Goldthwaite's argument is based on an examination of Renaissance construction and spending patterns of personal wealth. He maintains that the beginning of the Quattrocento marked the rise of the modern nuclear family, and that the newly fabricated palace walls functioned as the demarcation between the public and private realms. This point of view has been challenged, however, by F. W. Kent who stresses the continuation of the model of the extended family and its dependence on group camaraderie with the Florentine patriciate well into the sixteenth century. For Goldthwaite's work, in particular, see *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence: A Study of Four Families* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968); Kent's seminal study on the Florentine family is *Household and Lineage in Renaissance Florence: The Family Life of the Capponi, Ginori, and Rucellai* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). His later studies continue and expand upon this notion of extended kin in the Renaissance. See also Kent, "Individuals and Families as Patrons of Culture in Quattrocento Florence," in *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. A. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 171-192; and "Palaces, Politics, and Society in Fifteenth-Century Florence," *I Tatti Studies* II (1987): 41-70. For a critical comparison of the methodologies of Goldthwaite and Kent, see Anthony Molho, "Visions of the Florentine Family in the Renaissance," *Journal of Modern History* 50 (1978): 304-311. Giovanni Ciapelli also places their studies within the broader context of Florentine studies on the family, "Introduction," *Art, Memory and Family in Renaissance Florence*, eds. Giovanni Ciapelli and Patricia Lee Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-2. The analytic study of the Florentine *catasto* records of 1427, completed by David Herlihy and Christiane Klapish-Zuber, op. cit., has demonstrated all of the many scenarios of domestic life in the Tuscan city and its surrounding region.

headed by married couples to include unmarried siblings, widowed parents, adult children and grandchildren, servants and borders.⁷

Evidence from the Middle Ages and Renaissance of sincere sentimental ties between family members abounds and challenges generalizations about the emotional—or non-emotional—character of families throughout history. The lives of medieval and early modern saints that became enormously popular with the laity are full of familial images that would have been entirely unsuccessful had they not replicated in some way authentic domestic acts and emotions.⁸ The authors of personal diaries and family memoirs from the Renaissance express clear sentiments of love and affection among close kin. One of the most famous examples is the diary of the fourteenth-century Florentine Giovanni Morelli, who wrote vividly about the pain and anguish he experienced upon the death of his 9-year old son, Alberto.⁹ Similar emotive ties are also articulated in testaments from the period, along with the desire to maintain close-knit kin relations for generations to come. Testators often describe their spouses and children as “mio carissimo marito” or “mia dolcissima figlia,” and bequests were usually bestowed to heirs “in segno d’amore,” or “in a sign of love.” Arguably these were formulaic

⁷ Households headed by married couples were the most numerous in Venice, followed by couples who lived in a parents’ home, followed by couples who boarded in a landlord’s home, then by couples in a sibling’s home, and a small number of twosomes who lived in an employer’s home. Evidence also indicates that unmarried siblings often dwelled together, and boarding houses consisting of unmarried and widowed individuals—sometimes with children—from different households were also not uncommon. Half of all Venetian couples in charge of their own homes lived only with their children; about 14 percent of couples lived alone. Chojnakca, 4 and 6.

⁸ David Herlihy, *Women, Family, and Society in Medieval Europe: History Essays, 1978-1991*, ed. and intro. Anthony Molho (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995), 171. In their study of the life course of over 864 medieval and early modern saints, Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell cite numerous examples from hagiographic literature that highlights the distinctiveness of childhood, and vigorously contradicts the conception of the medieval family as distant and unemotional. They state “The widely held modern view that a concept of childhood did not emerge until the early modern period is emphatically contradicted by our reading of the evidence on saints, where we find a clear sense of what it was to be a child.” *Saints & Society*, 19.

⁹ Evelyn Welch, *Art and Society in Renaissance Italy, 1350-1500*, new ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 309-11.

expressions, but in some wills, the testators went to great lengths to articulate their feelings towards family members, leaving little to question about the sincerity of their words. For example, in the will he drafted before departing for Corfu in 1569, Paris Malipiero promised his wife a return of her entire dowry not merely “in segno d’amore” but “in segno che io l’amata più nel cuore che in apparantia,” in other words, to show that he loved her more in his heart than in appearances. He also implored her not to remarry and always to hold his memory with her.¹⁰ This is not to say all households of the Renaissance were happy ones.¹¹ In addition to arranged marriages and great disparities of age between husband and wife, families and societies also routinely faced problems such as infanticide and infant exposure, sibling rivalry, and domestic violence.

The family existed as a paramount social organization in the Renaissance, one built on ties of blood and/or loyalty, as well as love. The rituals of marriage and birth were essential in the establishment of this unit, and they sustained the household for generations to come. Both were occasions sanctioned by God, prompting the creation of a visual culture within the home to ensure divine control over such events and to shape the family life that ensued from such ceremonial occasions.¹² In a twelfth-century decree, the Roman Catholic Church pronounced that marriage was both a natural contract and a sacrament, and its sanctity was reinforced throughout the medieval period by the *topoi* of Biblical story of the marriage at Cana, an event that Christ honored with his presence and the site of his first miracle.¹³ Regardless of the Church’s official stance on

¹⁰ ASV, Testamenti, b. 210 (Atti Canal), n. 463.

¹¹ On the dissolution of marriages, see Ferraro, *Marriage Wars*.

¹² For more on the relationship between the rituals of birth and marriage and the domestic visual culture, see the aforementioned publications of Jacqueline Musacchio.

¹³ Klapisch-Zuber, “Introduction,” in *Storia del matrimonio*, vii-xx: vii. Also Agostino Valier, *La istituzione d’ogni stato lodevole delle donne cristiane; del Cardinale Agostino Valier, vescovo di Verona*.

marriage, the realities of increasing wealth in a mercantile culture and the need of the aristocracy to preserve the purity of their ranks meant that marriage in the early modern period was rarely consensual, and families overwhelmingly prioritized the notarized contract itself over the inviolability of the union.¹⁴ This was especially true in Venice, where since the end of the thirteenth century, laws were firmly in place to ensure that one did not marry outside his or her social class; all births and marriages of the patrician and *cittadini* classes, had to be registered with the government agency of the *Avogaria di Comun*.¹⁵

Despite the Church's efforts to promote the sanctity of marriage and the prominence it was given in Venetian social life, it was still considered to be inferior to the vocation of celibacy. The discussion of studios and domestic devotions in Chapter Three remarked on how despite the awakening of a lay religious movement in the early modern period, monastic institutions and religious orders continued to set the framework for pious activity at all levels.¹⁶ From the early days of the Church there was an inherent tension in Catholicism between the celibate ideal and the need for and realities of

Novella impressione, corretta, accresciuta, e in varie guise illustrata da D. Gaetano Volpi, a da esso dedicata alla santiss. Vergine Maria Madre Dio (Padua, Appresso Giuseppe Comino, 1744), 17.

¹⁴ Ferraro, 3. This point is also emphasized in, Diane Owen Hughes, "Representing the Family: Portraits and Purposes in Early Modern Italy," in *Art and History: Images and Their Meaning*, eds. Theodore K. Rabb and Robert I Rothberg Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

¹⁵ Given the marital customs entrenched in Venetian society, when the Catholic Church, following the Council of Trent, reiterated the sacred nature of marriage by making the contract binding and gave precedence to the free will of the partners over parental wishes, most residents of the Republic were hesitant to abide by the new rules. Lorenzo Priuli, who served as Venetian Patriarch from 1590-1600—the office that assumed responsibility for communicating the decisions of the Council of Trent to the parishioners of the Republic and seeing that they were enforced—had to reiterate throughout his term that legitimate marriages now required the presence of a parish priest who knew the couple; medieval canon law only required mutual consent of the partners to make a valid union. Eventually, knowledge of the Tridentine decree did spread, but for most of the Renaissance, marriage strategies in Venice were largely based on family honor, class, and wealth. Ferraro, 3-4.

¹⁶ Zarri, 220-221.

marriage and procreation in furthering its mission.¹⁷ Nonetheless, monasticism continued to be exalted above all other ways of life. The conjugal union and family life in particular were considered to be too enmeshed in the material world for true spiritual fulfillment to be attained. Saint Paul, for example, wrote that while marriage was not a sin, it did produce “worldly troubles.”¹⁸ Similarly, Saint Jerome cautioned that family burdens interfered with the ascetic vocation.¹⁹ Later, with the Gregorian reforms of the late eleventh century, priest and layperson became more distinctly separated in status and lifestyle, through the conferral of increasing clerical powers and dignity.²⁰ Such differences were reinforced in the sixteenth century when the Council of Trent overwhelmingly denounced the Protestant repudiation of the pre-eminence of celibacy over married life. In fact, the Tridentine emphasis on the sacramental nature of marriage continued to sustain the hierarchy of celibate clergy over the laity, for a valid nuptial now depended entirely on the blessing of a priest.²¹

This conflict between marriage and celibacy—just one aspect of the spiritual debate over the active versus the contemplative life—seems to have been felt more profoundly by women, who were largely denied a voice in the public institutional church, as well as access to the confraternal life of men.²² Popular hagiography sent conflicting

¹⁷ Daniel Bornstein, “Spiritual Kinship and Domestic Devotions,” in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, eds. Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis (London and New York: Longman, 1998), 173.

Detrimental losses in population due to the frequent bouts of plague further necessitated marriage and procreation.

¹⁸ Atkinson, 16.

¹⁹ Atkinson, 67-68.

²⁰ Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books; Cambridge, MA: Distributed by the MIT Press, 1991), 195.

²¹ Redford Ruether, *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 58 and 81.

²² With the exception of the rosary confraternity, which appeared in Venice in around 1480. After its inception membership numbers in this confraternity quickly soared. See Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose*.

messages to ordinary women with regards to feminine sanctity.²³ For the most part, the hagiographic model of God's chosen female was the virgin saint, a woman who renounced the domestic life and the trappings of family for complete dedication to God. For much of Christian history, therefore, the Church typically presented holiness and physical motherhood as alternatives rather than compatible states of being. Even the Madonna, whose physical motherhood fulfilled the Incarnation, for centuries was revered for her virginity rather than her maternal status.²⁴ Throughout the better part of the Middle Ages the married women who did figure into the hagiographical record were typically those of extraordinary status—like queens whose role as mother perpetuated royal lineage—or those who assumed the cloistered life once widowed and freed from the bonds of their conjugal union, exemplified in the story of Blessed Angela of Foligno (d. 1309).²⁵

During the late Middle Ages, a new model of feminine sanctity emerged: the lay female mystic. She was a woman who exhibited what might be considered “extreme” behaviors, but what has perhaps been more fittingly described by Daniel Bornstein as “sacred charisma”; she was subject to visions and received mystic insights, practiced spiritual fasting, spoke as prophets and seers, interceded for communities, and counseled

²³ Atkinson, 6.

²⁴ Antonella Degl'Innocenti, “Spouse e madri nell'agiografia medievale,” in *Religione domestica*, 11; and Atkinson, 110-111.

²⁵ Angela married young and had several children. After the death of her mother, husband, and children, she turned to God and penance and became a Franciscan tertiary; she was subject to visions and composed mystical writings. According to Angela's confessor, Father Arnold of Foligno, Angela had asked for the death of her family, and viewed their passing as a great blessing. Atkinson, 170. For more on wives and mothers in the history of medieval hagiography, see Degl'Innocenti, 9-53. The few exceptions of women who were venerated for their position as mothers were Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine, Nonna, mother of Saint Gregory of Nazianzo, Helen, mother of Constantine the Great, and of course, the Virgin Mary, mother of the Jesus Christ and wife of Joseph—all the mothers of exceptional figures. Degl'Innocenti, 11-12.

princes and popes.²⁶ One of the most popular of these female mystics was Saint Catherine of Siena (d. 1380), a Dominican tertiary, who, while commanded by God to remain at home with her family and perform acts of charity, strove to live an ascetic life within this context. Her synthesis of manual labor as an exercise in humility with the Dominican belief in the apostolic involvement with humanity—spiritually charged by the practice of contemplation—provided a quasi-paradigmatic solution for lay women torn between the demands of domestic life and the desire for true spiritual fulfillment. Her unusual acts of devotion, however, were largely a rejection of the family; she fasted until the point where she was unable to eat, cut her hair, scalded herself, practiced sleep deprivation, carried out frenetic housework, and refused marriage.²⁷

The mystic remained bound to ideals of virginity and asceticism, but their influence and popularity amongst locals did result in a growing recognition of the distinctiveness of female devotion by both the lay and clerical community, in addition to a willingness to confer a certain amount of spiritual authority to women, despite their limitations with regards to institutional power within the church.²⁸ Regardless of vows of chastity, the markedly lay character of the religious orientation of female mystics eventually allowed even wives and mothers to be put forward as archetypes of sanctity.²⁹

²⁶ Bornstein, “Women and Religion in Late Medieval Italy: History and Historiography,” in Bornstein and Rusconi, 5. For more on fasting as a spiritual exercise, see Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); and Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, epilogue by William N. Davis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

²⁷ Her rejection of food is perhaps the most unusual of the acts. For a discussion of Catherine’s holy fasting, see Walker Bynum, 163-175. Other authors interpret Catherine’s story differently than Bynum, overlooking her fasting and other eccentric behaviors and focus on her dedication to household tasks as a model for early modern lay women. Zarri, 235; and Diana M. Webb, “Women and Home: The Domestic Setting of Late Medieval Spirituality,” in *Women in the Church, Papers read at the 1989 Summer Meeting and the 1990 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, eds. W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Published for the Ecclesiastical History Society by B. Blackwell, 1990), 171.

²⁸ Bornstein, “Spiritual Kinship,” 176.

²⁹ Zarri, 236 and 251; and Atkinson, 145.

Amplified numbers of female saints emerged, testifying to the spiritual weight now invested in women. Between 1000 and 1150 only eight percent of all canonized persons were women, but by the sixteenth century this number increased to thirty-eight percent. Growing numbers of married women were welcomed into this company of saints. Saint Birgitta of Sweden, for example—enormously popular throughout Europe for her visions of the Madonna and Christ Child recorded in her *Revelations*—was wife, mother, and manager of a large estate. Widowhood enabled her to carry out her vocation as commanded by God, after which point she began to experience her visions, as well as a mystical pregnancy. In addition to her motherly encounters with the Christ Child, the *Lives* of Birgitta frequently refer to the saint's concern for the souls of her own children and care for their religious training; her former role as humble wife and dedicated mother thus remained essential to her later sanctity.³⁰

Birgitta's lingering maternal virtues, and those of other women like her, became the essence of a new type of holy woman that emerged in the sixteenth century. The stress once placed on a woman's powers of prophecy and mysticism shifted onto her morals and merits, especially those of humility and charity. More and more, the devoutness of wives and mothers was judged by their dedication to home and family. The holy female now gave aid to the poor and needy, taught the less fortunate of her community, obeyed her husband, and raised pious children.³¹ Despite Trent's reaffirmation of the pre-eminence of virginity over matrimony, in reality these decrees ran counter to contemporary developments, and a Catholic ideology of marriage and

³⁰ Atkinson, 171-183.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 190 and 192.

domesticity soon took shape.³² Beyond clerical and religious vocations, Roman Catholic Church now expected its members to marry and to bring up holy and pious children who served God, the Church, and the state.³³

These shifting ideologies of motherhood even affected the cult of the Virgin, whose image infiltrated churches, households, and civic spaces, and in turn, she participated in Christian faith and experience in new ways.³⁴ No longer the remote and regal queen as she was presented in early medieval art and literature, Mary became more immediate, emotional and intimately involved with both her divine son—as the Carpaccio and Giorgione paintings aptly demonstrate—and her larger brood of children, her devout followers. From the Duecento on, artists depicted the Madonna as a real mother who nursed and embraced her child, mourned his death as an adult, and interceded on behalf of human kind as they faced the perils and uncertainties of this world and the next. More and more, the maternal experiences of the Virgin came to be set in an increasingly domestic environment (fig. 172), not so distant from the everyday realities of the majority of women in Venice and elsewhere in Europe. As a result, the familial roles of the Madonna as envisioned in art and literature offered ideal yet concrete models that could now easily be emulated by women.³⁵

³² Ibid., 199, 221-222. According to John Bossy, this shift in perceptions of the family on the part of the Church was related to increasing reorganization of religion primarily around parishes based on conjugal institutions, *Christianity in the West*, 64-72.

³³ Similar opinions were held by the “secular” point of view; fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian humanists also considered the conjugal household to be the fundamental institution of society, the principal site of education, and the foundation upon which societal virtue and patriotism rested Atkinson, 191 and 229.

³⁴ Atkinson, 102.

³⁵ Ibid., 161.

Christian teachers, artists, and religious leaders also gave renewed attention to both the kin of Jesus and human families in general.³⁶ In Christian art and literature, the image of the infant Christ child become more “child-like,” with greater emphasis on his human attributes rather than divine. There also developed an emergent iconography of the Holy Family, a subject quite common in Renaissance Venetian homes as elsewhere on the peninsula, resulting in sympathetic treatments of divine domestic relationships. Over time, devotion to Saint Joseph flourished, and the stepfather of Christ was subsequently transformed from the obscure, elderly cuckold to a faithful servant of God, protector of Mary, and nurturer of his son, Jesus.³⁷ Titian’s *Holy Family in a Landscape* from around 1512 (fig. 173), is one example of the renewed attention given to Christ’s terrestrial family. Joseph is presented as a somewhat younger man thoroughly engaged with his infant son. Father, Mother, and Child sit casually in a landscape with affective gestures and glances that visually and emotionally tie one to another. The emphasis is less on their divine status than their human nature, and the loving bonds of family.

The shifting attitudes with regards to marriage and family life that emerged in the Renaissance were reflected in a new genre of literature that made these issues their very subject. Treatises on household management and domestic economy touched upon a wide array of subjects, from the relationship between husbands and wives to the proper education of children and the qualities of good and bad mothers.³⁸ Penned by both lay

³⁶ Ibid., 144.

³⁷ On the iconography of the Christ child see Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, 2d ed., rev. and expanded (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). On the cult of St Joseph, see Carolyn C. Wilson, *St. Joseph in Italian Renaissance Society and Art: New Directions and Interpretations* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph’s University Press, 2001); idem, “The Cult of St. Joseph in Early Cinquecento Venice and the Testimony of Marino Sanudo’s *Diaries*” *Studi Veneziani* XLVII (2004): 287-312; and Owen Hughes, 8.

³⁸ Atkinson, 196. Even literature that dealt with broader themes, such as nobility and manners, often considered, as a subgenre, the topic of governing the household. One example is Fra Sabba Castiglione’s

and religious scholars, these texts assumed and made a case for the centrality of the conjugal family in human experience.³⁹ One of the most consistent themes broached in domestic treatises from the period is the importance of raising and preserving a Christian family. An early surviving economy from the Renaissance is *De regimine rectoris*, composed by Venice's Fra Paolino the Minorite in the beginning of the fourteenth century. The Venetian friar counseled fathers to instruct their children first in faith, then in good manners, and finally in knowledge. Giovanni Dominici's *Regola del governo di cura familiare* written around 1400, gave specific details and advice to women about how they should teach their children to be moral and devout Christians; he declared that no matter what a woman's position in life was, her primary responsibility was to instruct her child in faith.⁴⁰ The *Regola della vita matrimoniale* by Cherubino da Spoleto, printed at least fourteen times between 1477 and 1495 aimed to advise the reader on how to live in a "Christian and well-bred manner" within the state of matrimony.⁴¹ A rare domestic treatise in that its intended audience was the married couple rather than males or females separately, the author addressed issues ranging from the duties of husband and wife to

Ricordi over ammastramenti di Monsignor saba da Castiglione cavalier Gierosolimitano, ne quali con prudenti, e christiani discorsi si ragiona di tutte le materie honorate, che si ricercano a un vero gentil'huomo (Venice per Paulo Gherargo, 1554), which addresses subjects from warfare to ornamenting one's house.

³⁹ Atkinson, 196.

⁴⁰ A. B. Coté, 'Blessed Giovanni Dominici. Regola del governo di cura familiare, parte Quarta. On the Education of Children' (Ph.D. diss, The Catholic University of America, 1927), 34. Giovanni Dominici's work was copied until at least 1518. Bornstein, "Le donne di Giovanni Domenici: un caso nella recezione e trasmissione dei messaggi religiosi," *Studi Medievali* 36 (1995): 356-361.

⁴¹ Interestingly, Cherubino's *Regola della vita matrimoniale* was usually issued together with his very popular, *Regola della vita spirituale*. Although Cherubino addressed the latter book to an unnamed nun and the text covers seven aspects of convent life (thoughts, affections, speaking, work, relationships with other nuns, prayer, and cleansing of conscience), the publication of the two books together suggests that by the fifteenth century married and cloistered persons were not considered so entirely different. Anne Jacobson Shutte, "Printing, Piety, and the People in Italy: The First Thirty Years," *Archive for Renaissance History* 71 (1981): 13-14.

how to carry out sexual intercourse in accordance with the tenets of Christian morality.⁴²

In his *Reggimento del padre di famiglia* (*Rules for the Father of the Family*), published in 1580, the theorist Francesco Tommasi declared every father to be God's minister on earth and should be honorably praised by his family as such; he also proclaimed that the principal care of parents toward their children must be that of faith, and encouraged religious education to be carried out as soon as possible after birth.⁴³

Authors of domestic treatises gave particular attention to the circumstances of women. Some recognized the hardships that married women faced, but they overwhelmingly praised the position of wives and mothers; through their care of the own families and children, mothers were the custodians of the state, and the "people of God."⁴⁴ Although Fra Paolino accentuated the father's role as the head of the household, he noted the special role women played in ruling the home, particularly when it came to the care of the children and servants.⁴⁵ Giovanni Maria Memmo, in his 1563 treatise on the perfect prince and perfect Republic, laid great emphasis on choosing the right woman as a wife, because of the serious duty she would serve as mother. In addition to a good appearance, she must above all be honest, prudent, pleasant, and compassionate, for these

⁴² The work was republished in 1553. Gabriella Zarri, "Christian Good Manners: Spiritual and Monastic Rules in the Quattro- and Cinquecento," in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: Legenda, European Humanities Council), 76-91: 79-80.

⁴³ Francesco Tommasi, *Reggimento del padre di famiglia* (Florence: Giorgio Mariscotti, 1580), 138.

⁴⁴ Valier, 17. The concept of a mother's role in preserving the state is a reiteration of Saint Augustine. Similarly, Giovanni Maria Memmo calls women the mothers "dei nostri figliouli" or of *our* children, suggesting, too, that they laid the foundations of the state through their care of children. Some authors, like Francesco Barbaro, elevated the role of wives and mothers because their ultimate agenda was the praise of nobility, for which women played an essential role in securing lineage. For more on Barbaro, see Margaret Leah King, "Caldiera and the Barbaros on Marriage and the Family: Humanist Reflections of Venetian Realities," *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 6 (1976): 19-50; and Frigo, op. cit. In considering the four "states" of women—as cloistered nuns, as celibate women who remained within their homes, as wives, and as widows—the Veronese bishop Agostino Valier believed the married state to be the hardest condition for females, since they often had to deal with the bad practices of their husbands. Valier, Book II: 11.

⁴⁵ Fra Paolino's text was dedicated to the Venetian nobleman Marino Badoer, duke of Crete. Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, 5-7.

would be the virtues that she would pass down to future generations.⁴⁶ Fra Sabba Castiglione expressed similar sentiments. He advised men that the true beauty of a woman is modesty, honesty, temperance, solemnity, and above all, religion; such a beauty will never die, no matter how old she becomes.⁴⁷ Cardinal Agostino Valier (1531-1606), in his *Della istruzione delle donne maritate (On the Instruction of Married Women)* first published in Venice in 1575, stressed the importance of wives in maintaining moral households in order to make the home “truly houses of God, lodges of peace and concord.”⁴⁸ Often considered the first educators of children, the spiritual and moral nature of women was therefore of the utmost importance.

Female Piety in the Household

While many early modern women felt that the home and family life were obstacles to true union with the divine, evidence suggests that the majority who chose or were obliged to reside within this world led a holy and devout life simultaneous with the responsibilities, burdens, and joys of the domestic experience.⁴⁹ In Venice, some girls did find shelter in convents, but such a vocation was not always by choice; dowry inflation forced many fathers to commit daughters to monastic institutions because they

⁴⁶ Giovanni Maria Memmo, *Dialogo del Magn. Cavaliere M. Gio. Maria Memmo, nel quale dopo alcune filosofiche dispute, si forma un perfetto Principe, & una perfetta Republica, e parimente un Senatore, un Cittadino, Un Soldato, & un Mercante, diviso in tre libri* (Venice: appresso Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1563), 21.

⁴⁷ “...la vera & real bellezza delle donne essere la pudicitia, l’honestà, la continentia, la gravità & sopra tutto la religione...” Castiglione, 48r-48v.

⁴⁸ This quote comes from the epilogue of Valier’s treatise in which he calls on the Holy Spirit to assist married women in their domestic and familial obligations. The entire passage reads: “Questa benedizione dello Spirito Santo la quale ho con alcune parole dichiarata, desidero che caschi sopra tutte le Madri di famiglia di Verona, e sopra quelle della nostra patria, e finalmente sopra tutte le Donne Maritate del mondo: acciocchè colla buona lor disciplina si tengano lontani gli odi, e tutte le sorte di peccati: siano tutte le case veramente di Dio, alberghi di pace, e di concordia.” Quote and translation from Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*, 22 and 255, note 78.

⁴⁹ Borntstein, “Women and Religion,” 4.

could not afford to provide for the futures of these young women. A good number of Venetian females, however, lived the mixed life, which many considered to be spiritually superior to the cloistered existence, for it allowed them the opportunity to practice acts of charity and fulfill a social mission while still engaged in a rich spiritual life of prayer and devotion that a sacred visual culture helped to foster.⁵⁰

A woman's responsibilities and autonomy as wife and mother were largely dependent on her affluence and social class. Wealth provided Venetian females with power, which while restricted, was unlike the experience of women in many other Italian cities. Venetian law allowed women to maintain possession of their dowries, a privilege that entitled them to bequeath money, property, and goods as they saw fit. Prosperity and social standing also provided many women with at least a vernacular education, if not some basic Latin skills. At the same time that women of the upper classes experienced certain advantages, social expectations severely restricted their mobility and kept them largely enclosed in the palace. Women of the *popolani* class, on the other hand, while lacking the financial control of their patrician counterparts, maintained jobs, traveled freely throughout the city, and often lived independently of men, sometimes by choice and sometimes the result of forces beyond their control, such as the death of a spouse. But for these women, too, occupations largely tied them to the domestic sphere—as servants, seamstresses and the like—and they faced similar social pressures to get married and care for a family. Consequently, for nearly all classes of women, the household remained the physical setting for the greater part of their lives.

Given the relative confinement of women to the domestic world, as well as their exclusion from basic institutional rituals and structures of the Church, women exploited

⁵⁰ Zarri, "Living Saints," 235.

the home as an arena for spiritual expression and fulfillment in the face of these challenges.⁵¹ Their exclusion from any kind of clerical office seems to have encouraged them to cultivate their interior powers.⁵² Recognized as conduits of the divine, women were believed to be more impressionable, more inclined to have visions and other bodily manifestations of the sacred, all of which gave their sex a certain spiritual authority, as evidenced in the rising number of female saints and mystics.⁵³ As a result, women assumed the leading roles in household religion, including domestic devotions, charitable activities, the rearing of their children in the principles of the faith, and the constant consumption of a sacred visual culture, which encompassed images, altars, religious figurines, pious books written in the vernacular, and other portable holy objects. Renaissance females articulated their deeply felt piety in a number of modes and in doing so, helped shape the spiritual and moral character of their families and households.⁵⁴

Many scholars argue that the more physical and emotional aspects of devotion in vogue during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were partially the result of the “feminization” of devotion. As described meticulously in several publications by Carolyn Walker Bynum, women were more apt to somatize religious experience than men; in other words, the female body often became a site for devotional expression and reception through vision, touch, and action, in great contrast to the bookish learning of

⁵¹ Jeffrey Hamburger has observed a similar relationship between female spirituality and exclusion/enclosure in relation to the cloistered life of nuns. Women rarely resisted or challenged ecclesiastically authority or established doctrine; instead they developed distinctive forms of worship and devotion working within their literal and figurative boundaries. See Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), esp. 30.

⁵² Herlihy, “Did Women have a Renaissance? A Reconsideration,” in *Women, Family, and Society*.

⁵³ David Herlihy alludes to the connections between the amplified numbers of female saints during the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance and domestic religion. The feminine responsibility and leadership in household religion paved the way for greater acceptance of the women saints and mystics that soon dominated medieval cults and hagiography, and vice versa. Herlihy, “Women and the Sources of Medieval History,” in *Women, Family, and Society*, 17.

⁵⁴ Bornstein, “Women and Religion,” 4.

male clergy.⁵⁵ Fasting, for example, a subject on which Bynum has concentrated a good deal of attention, was one such spiritual activity.⁵⁶ The renunciation of food in medieval and early modern culture was believed by many to be a fitting means by which to prepare the body for consuming Christ in the Eucharist.⁵⁷ Given the tendency towards a corporeal spirituality, the daily devotions of females went beyond mere prayer and contemplation, and women were more likely to utilize a variety of articles to engage with the divine on a physical level.

Pious images placed around the domestic interior—hung on walls, stored in chests and illustrated in books—served to bring the sacred nearer to the realities of women through the sense of sight, and sometimes, touch. The relationship between the naturalism of religious art in the Renaissance and devotion—in large part the result of the shifting emphasis in texts, images, and devotional practices onto the human nature of Christ and the Madonna—has been discussed in Chapter Two. In her work on Tuscan sculpture, Geraldine Johnson has expanded this reasoning to include the specific demands of female piety. Johnson focuses in particular on the carved and molded reliefs of the Madonna and Christ child that became so popular in Florentine homes during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the creations of artists like Donatello and Desiderio da Settignano (fig. 174). The three-dimensional nature of these panels and the frequent use of pigment to enhance their naturalism placed the represented figures of the Virgin and her son more firmly in the actual realm of the beholder. According to Johnson, the

⁵⁵ Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 190 and 194.

⁵⁶ Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). See also Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). One of the main ways in which Bell's book differs from Bynum's is that he only treats the subject of abstinence, and thus Bell does not consider the positive significance of food in Christian practice.

⁵⁷ Walker Bynum, *Holy Feasts*, 2-3.

believable physicality of these images corresponds to the first of the three levels of spiritual contemplation as explicated by a number of late medieval scholars and discussed in the second chapter.⁵⁸ Such theories suggest that more tangible works of art, like relief, assisted the lower, more physical level of devotion; by implication, argues Johnson, they were intended for relatively “unsophisticated” beholders, like women and children, the primary consumers of such images that adorned the household environment.⁵⁹

Since women played a central role in shaping spirituality in the home, they undoubtedly created demand for sacred images that responded to the means by which they experienced religion. I take issue, however, with Johnson’s assessment of the corporeality of the Marian relief as a response to viewers considered less advanced in spiritual matters. The increasing presence of the female in hagiographic literature and as the focus of local cults points to the acceptance, and even praise of, holy women and their ability to experience the divine. The believability—even concreteness—of images were certainly central to the way women encountered them, because their experience with the divine tended to be corporeal, involving the body and the senses; while these were behaviors perhaps less rational and intellectual, they were certainly not less sophisticated.

Although art historians have typically designated the Marian relief as a fifteenth-century Tuscan phenomenon, as explained in Chapter One, Venetian inventories indicate that the collecting practice was not confined to central Italy. As the most popular image in the Venetian home, the image of the Madonna appeared in both painted and sculpted form (fig. 175). One could even argue that the increasing naturalism in painted pictures of the Madonna by artists like Giovanni Bellini, Palma Vecchio, and Titian, may have

⁵⁸ Johnson, “Beautiful Brides,” 143.

⁵⁹ According to Johnson, the use of marble in some of these reliefs may have been intended for more sophisticated viewers trying to achieve a higher level of contemplation, *Ibid.*, 144.

served similar objectives as the three-dimensional works of art, but in very different manners. Titian's so-called "Gypsy Madonna" (fig. 32), for example, with its rich, saturated colors and soft contours, is the complete opposite of the hard stoniness of the reliefs of Desiderio. Titian's Mary looks like a real woman he may have encountered on the street; her olive complexion, dark hair, and humble nature contradict the fair, blond and aristocratic Madonnas of Florentine painters like Fra Filippo Lippi and Botticelli (fig. 176) that pervaded Quattrocento Florentine visual culture, while the Christ Child bears the proportions and tender manners of a real baby. All of these formal strategies make the sacred figures just as palpable as the more three-dimensional art forms of central Italian artists, if not more so. Both painters and sculptors employed innovations in style and medium to enhance the believability of the feigned image of the divine. The painted and sculpted pictures of the Madonna would have facilitated the methods by which women constructed their spiritual encounters, which were sincere, complex, and highly developed.

The Madonna provided the ultimate model of virtuous femininity. A humble, devout and untarnished woman who was the chosen one of God, she was both model wife and mother for married women, and an exemplary symbol of chastity for those who chose the celibate life. As we have seen in Chapter Two, artists of the Renaissance presented her role as Mother of God in a variety of ways, and these visual interpretations became increasingly tied to real experiences. The greater intimacy between the Virgin and her infant son—shown in images of the nursing Madonna and tender embraces—reinforce the ideals of love between mother and child and the duty of women to be compassionate nurturers of their offspring. Such images may have had greater meaning

in the homes where children were sent out to wet nurses for the initial months and years of their lives, usually as a means to protect the infant and to increase the chances of fertility for the mother.⁶⁰ Even the many Greek icons that continued to appear in Venetian homes throughout the Quattro- and Cinquecento portrayed details of a closer relationship between the Madonna and Jesus, like the cheek-to-cheek embrace of the Virgin Glykophilousa, and an increasing naturalism, exhibited in the fifteenth-century Virgin and Child panel by the Cretan painter Nikolaus Tzafouris (fig. 177); such changes were partly in response to a Western market that demanded both the sacral status of pictures from the East and images that related to their own realities.

At the same time, the somberness and remoteness generated by the abstraction of Byzantine works—qualities that were replicated by Giovanni Bellini in many of his early Madonna and Child panels—could have also resonated with the maternal beholder.⁶¹ Routine separation combined with high infant mortality rates meant that women repeatedly had to deal with the chilling effect of loss, much like the Madonna, who was aware from the start of her Son's impending death.⁶² Images of the *Pietà*, *Lamentation*, and *Man of Sorrows* made these harsh realities even more palpable because death is no longer implied but becomes the subject of the image. In the Brera *Pietà* by Giovanni Bellini (fig. 96), emotion is subtle but by no means hidden. The Madonna embraces her dead son and her expression is one of utter grief. In a period when death was ever present, the inclusion of Mary in pictures like these drew on the empathetic reaction of

⁶⁰ Many wet nurses lived out in the countryside, and it was believed that this setting was healthier for children than the congested cities, especially during times of plague. Some women sent their children to wet nurses as a symbol of status, for it had traditionally been a custom of the noble classes. Palmer, "The Maternal Madonna," 11.

⁶¹ Goffen, "Icon and Vision," *Art Bulletin*,

⁶² Goffen, *Giovanni Bellini*, 93-94.

the (female) beholder to recast pain and sorrow into love and devotion for God, and trust in his master plan.

The positive realities of motherhood—such as a woman’s role as primary educator and spiritual leader of her family—were also reinforced by the figure of the Madonna in both image and text. The popularity of apocryphal texts that focused on Christ’s youth, what Egle Becchi has called the “gospels of childhood,” magnified the role of Mary as Mother, and directed attention on the details of the experiences of domestic life; the transferal of these stories into images made the sacred events all the more real and imitable for the ordinary lay viewer.⁶³ The paintings by Carpaccio and Giorgione that opened this chapter present Mary as teacher of her young son. In both images the divine figures are presented carrying out a normal household activity: the domestic lessons of youth. A similar scene is presented in *The Virgin with the Reading Child*, painted by Andrea Previtali in 1514 (fig.178). In this painting, the infant Jesus is engrossed in his small book while the Madonna places a thin veil over her son, most likely an allusion to his future death shroud, but an act that also emphasizes her role as overseer and protector.

The Madonna was one of many holy figures in the Venetian domestic sphere who served as a visual exemplar for women. Scholars of the Florentine domestic situation have commented at length on the moralizing narratives of virtuous women that permeated the residential spaces of the Tuscan city. Adorning domestic objects such as *cassoni*, birth trays, and wall hangings, these stories, like the tales of Lucretia and Griselda (fig. 179), derived primarily from ancient and medieval literature. They articulated feminine

⁶³ The childhood of Mary also became popular in apocryphal texts and images, and in these instances, Saint Anne was depicted as the ideal maternal figure. Egle Becchi, “Medioevo,” in *Storia dell’infanzia I: dall’antichità al Seicento*, ed. Egle Becchi and Dominique Julia (Rome: Edizioni Laterza, 1996), 71-72.

ideals of chastity and fidelity, as well as the proper place of women within a marriage.⁶⁴ There is little to no evidence to suggest that these themes were popular in Renaissance Venice; the subjects do not appear in household inventories from the period, nor are there many surviving works of art from this area bearing these narratives that suggest a domestic origin. Perhaps the great exception is Lorenzo Lotto's famous portrait of a woman in the guise of Lucretia (fig. 180), from around 1530. The households of the Republic, however, did not lack in imagery that communicated the principles of acceptable—and sometimes, unacceptable—female behavior. Instead, the stories of exemplary women that Venetians craved derived more commonly from the Bible and hagiographic texts.

Two of the most popular narrative themes found in the households of the Republic were *Christ and the Adulteress* and *Christ and the Samaritan Woman*, gospel stories that deal with Jesus' encounters with female outcasts. Many works of art from Cinquecento Venice survive bearing these subjects, such as Titian's *Christ and the Adulteress* (fig. 181) from around 1508-1510, and *Christ and the Woman of Samaria* (fig. 182) by an artist in the school of Tintoretto during the second half of the sixteenth century. Naturally, the story of the adulteress would have served as a visual discouragement against the sin and crime of adultery, which in Venice carried a penalty for women of imprisonment, fines, and the forfeit of the dowry.⁶⁵ Corresponding to the biblical account, the images underscore even more, however, Christ's compassion for the women, as well as his warning not to cast judgment on others. In Titian's version, Christ grasps the arm of the woman's accuser in a gesture that tells him to cease with his

⁶⁴ See the works cited in the introduction by Baskins, Klapisch-Zuber, Musacchio, and Withoff.

⁶⁵ On adultery in Renaissance Venice, see Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 45-69.

indictments. Although quite different in terms of style and composition, Lorenzo Lotto's version of the Biblical tale, executed around 1530 (fig. 183) imparts an analogous mood. In the midst of the gruff and sneering men who charge the woman with the crime, Christ raises his hand to halt their tirade of hate and blame.

The ancient Samaritans lived nearby Jerusalem but were despised by the Jews. But in both the written and visual account of Christ's encounter with the woman from this neighboring land, the focus shifts from hate to acceptance. An unlikely model of Christian charity, the Samaritan woman offers Christ water from the well, while he singles her out to carry his message to her people. In the aforementioned version of this subject (fig. 182), this welcoming exchange is shown through the bucket of water and the gestures of giving and receiving that occupy the center of the canvas. In the works of art that adorned Florentine interiors in the Renaissance, the female protagonists face humiliation, displacement, and even death in order to preserve their chastity. Venetians, on the other hand, seemed to favor narratives more sympathetic than these harsh stories of feminine virtue. The gospels the Adulteress and the Samaritan woman emphasized the themes of tolerance and forgiveness, and serve to remind the beholder that Christ came to save all of humanity, regardless of gender, class, or origin.

Female saints offered similar visual paradigms. Saints Catherine and Mary Magdalene rank as the two most popular holy women in Renaissance Venetian homes, second only to the Madonna. A composite saint whose persona incorporated three different women from the Gospels, Mary Magdalene was best known in the Renaissance from her story in the *Golden Legend*.⁶⁶ She was a repentant prostitute who gained God's absolution for her sins and thereafter lived her life as a hermit, a conflation of the

⁶⁶ De Voragine, I: 374-383.

forgiven woman from the Evangelical narratives and another female penitent, Mary of Egypt.⁶⁷ Throughout the Quattrocento, Mary Magdalene was commonly depicted as a hermit, with long hair covering her gaunt figure; Donatello's bronze statue created around 1457 (fig. 184) is perhaps the most famous version of the ascetic saint.

In the sixteenth century, Northern Italian painters deserted this image and instead used the Magdalene's captivating beauty to underscore the intensity of her extreme repentance.⁶⁸ Titian's paintings of the ecstatic Magdalene are examples of this new vision of the popular Renaissance saint (fig. 39), and they were indeed intended for private devotion. When looking at one of Titian's Magdalene's it is hard not to be struck by the overt sensuality of the repentant saint that borders on eroticism, particularly in his first version (now in the Pitti) from around 1530 to 1535, in which she is nude. He depicts the saint with long golden hair that flows over her shoulders and across her breasts. Her face carries an expression of near ecstasy emphasized by her upward glance and eyes that have been reddened by the tears she has shed, and slightly parted mouth. Although the interpretations of these paintings remain varied, most scholars by now reject the notion that they functioned as high-class pornography.⁶⁹ While the erotic

⁶⁷ Three different Mariés—other than the mother of Christ—believed to be Mary Magdalene are cited in the New testament: Mary of Magdala, whom Christ freed from the demons (Luke 8:2), present at the foot of the cross and the one who met Christ after his Resurrection (John 20:1, 11-18); the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 11:2); and an unnamed woman who anointed Christ's feet and had her sins forgiven (Luke 7:36 ff). Paola Tingali, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation and Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 174. James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 202-203. Katherine Ludwig Jansen, "Mary Magdalen and the Contemplative Life," in *Medieval Religion: New Approaches*, ed. Constance Hoffman Berman (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 249-271.

⁶⁸ Tingali, 174-175.

⁶⁹ See Bernard Aikema, "Titian's Mary Magdalen in the Palazzo Pitti: An Ambiguous Painting and its Critics," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 57 (1994), 48-59; Rona Goffen, *Titian's Women* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997); Patricia Meilman, "A Lifelong Passion: Titian's Religious Art," in *The Cambridge Companion to Titian*, ed. Patricia Meilman (Cambridge and New York: University of Cambridge Press, 2003); and Una Roman D'Elia, *The Poetics of Titian's Religious Paintings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

nature of these images seems tailor made for a male audience, the pictures would have resonated with lay women, as well, many of whom were in constant turmoil over their state in life, situated between worldly temptations and union with God. Like the aforementioned narrative themes of *Christ and the Adulteress* and the *Woman from Samaria*, the sensuous pictures of Mary Magdalene communicated the theme of penance and redemption; even sinners like prostitutes and adulteresses were given a second chance and could achieve Christ's forgiveness and companionship if truly sorrowful and willing to repent.⁷⁰ Displayed in the household context, such images presented women not only with a continual reminder to atone for their sins, but a constant vision of hope.

Despite the frequent references to Saint Catherine in Venetian inventories, notaries are unspecific about which female saint was kept in each home: Catherine of Alexandria or Catherine of Siena. Both holy personages were immensely popular in the sixteenth century, and their stories would have held particular meaning for lay married and single women. The *Vita* of Saint Catherine of Siena has been discussed. While her unusual forms of devotion were largely a rejection of domestic norms, she nonetheless served as an example of a woman who fulfilled her spiritual obligations not in an isolated and cloistered convent, but within the household context. Saint Catherine of Alexandria, an early Christian martyr, appears with greater frequency in surviving works of art from the Veneto region than her namesake, which suggests that she is the saint who more often graced the walls of Venetian homes. According to her legend, Catherine was a virgin of royal status who was baptized by a desert hermit after she became queen. She publicly admonished Emperor Maxentius for coercing his subjects to make sacrifices to the gods.

⁷⁰ According to Patricia Meilman, Titian's versions after 1550, which depict Mary Magdalene in a landscape, partially clothed, and with more attributes of penance, like the skull and open book, may also be a repudiation of the Protestant belief that salvation was achieved through faith alone. Meilman, 70.

In retaliation, the emperor enlisted fifty of the best rhetoricians of his kingdom to challenge the young woman, but none were a match for her eloquence; in fact, her speech was so persuasive that they all converted to Christianity, only to be executed as a result. Catherine's victorious disputation led to her own martyrdom, as well. After a failed first attempt to bind her to a wheel studded with iron spikes—which became the saint's best known attribute—she was subsequently beheaded.⁷¹ In the Renaissance, artists commonly presented the royal saint as a woman of ideal beauty, dressed in fine clothes, as seen in Lorenzo Lotto's *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* from 1522 (fig. 185). The halo, palm of martyrdom and hint of a wheel all identify the holy personage, but equal emphasis is given to her jeweled headpiece, the sumptuous fabrics of her clothing and the backdrop of the painting, and her unparalleled beauty. The painting's dimensions (57.2 x 50.2 cm) and half-length format give it the quality of portraiture and blur the lines between sacred and profane.⁷²

Saint Catherine is best known in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century art for her mystic marriage with the Christ Child. Titian's *Madonna and Child with Saint Catherine and the Infant Baptist in a Landscape*, or the *Aldobrandini Madonna* (fig. 43) is a slight variation on the theme. Rather than presenting the infant Jesus placing a ring on the saint's finger, Titian transforms the marriage into a Venetian pastoral. The Holy Family is seated in a lush landscape with shepherds in the right background, and Saint Catherine

⁷¹ Because of this famous story of Catherine's knowledge and rhetorical skills, artists of the Cinquecento depicted the martyr as an exemplar of sacred learning and virginity. Marta Ajmar, "Exemplary Women in Renaissance Italy: Ambivalent Models of Behavior?" in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, University of Oxford, 2000), 244-264.

⁷² It is believed that this painting was once a private devotional image that was then donated to the parish church of Celana in the province of Bergamo, where there is a nineteenth-century copy of a Saint Catherine ascribed to Lotto (Milan, Museo Poldi Pezzoli). Before the painting was donated, the patron had Lotto change the background, eliminating elements of a landscape background. *Lorenzo Lotto: Rediscovered Master of the Renaissance*, 128-130, cat. 19.

actively embraces the Christ child on the Virgin's lap. Through a naturalness of poses and gestures, Titian created an intimate and affectionate scene between women and children in this devotional painting that was likely intended for a domestic environment.

Diane Owen Hughes argues that the popularity of this narrative subject may have been the result of the forced containment of patrician daughters in convents during the sixteenth century, a consequence of skyrocketing dowry inflation that an increasingly impoverished noble class could no longer meet; in their new role as nuns, these women assumed the position of this aristocratic virgin martyr united with Christ.⁷³ The popularity of these images in the residential setting, however, suggests they could have also served a role for wives of the household, in particular, as well as daughters and other female household members. Wives would have associated themselves with Catherine as the bride of Christ, lending their terrestrial, conjugal union a sacred aspect. At the same time, the saint's marriage to the Christ child could have easily been conflated with their new role as mother, striving to replicate the intimate bond between Catherine and the infant Christ within their own families. Catherine's encounters with the divine also happened as a result of her contemplation of an image. The saint's mentor, the hermit, gave her a picture of the Virgin and Child to guide her devotions (fig. 80). Catherine's prayers had first caused the Infant in the image to turn his face to her, and when her faith had grown, he placed a ring on her finger. Images of the mystic marriage of Catherine not only visualized this spiritual betrothal, but they thematized one's devotional experiences with likenesses of the divine.

⁷³ As fathers were being criticized in the later seventeenth century for surrendering their daughters to convents, the popularity of the mystic marriage began to fade. Owen Hughes, 28.

Scholars of early modern Florence and Germany have examined the use of holy dolls in devotion and domestic life.⁷⁴ Employed primarily by women who received them on the occasion of marriage—either a young bride’s earthly nuptials or a nun’s spiritual union with Christ—these *bambini* merged reality with the divine through the use of figuration.⁷⁵ The presence of wooden holy figures adorned with clothing and jewelry as noted in Chapter One suggests that women in the Republic may have practiced similar traditions. The use of these holy dolls is entirely in keeping with the corporeal nature of female devotion as explicated above. The three-dimensionality of the figures, and more importantly the fact that they were often fully clad, demanded some type of physical interaction on the part of the devout with the mannequins. This activity could range from something quite dynamic and intimate, like dressing and ornamenting the doll to match its sacred status, to simply touching the holy personage, verifying its presence and making contact with the divine. Such activity is outlined in the widely-popular *Meditations of the Life of Christ*, when the Franciscan author directs the devotions of a Poor Clare with the Christ Child: “You also, kneel and adore your lord God, then his mother, and salute the holy and venerable Joseph respectfully. Then kiss the feet of the infant Jesus who is laid in his bed, and ask Our Lady to give him to you and allow you to pick him up. Receive him and hold him in your arms. Look at his face with attention and kiss it with respect, take joy in this with confidence... Then give him back to his mother and look well how she suckles him, cares for him, and serves him in all things with solicitude and wisdom. Thus, you also, keep yourself ready to help her if you can... serve

⁷⁴ Klapisch-Zuber, “Holy Dolls”; and Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*.

⁷⁵ Klapisch-Zuber, “Holy Dolls,” 311.

Our Lady and the child Jesus as much as you can.”⁷⁶ Sacred figurines demanded physical contact, appealed to the beholder’s sensitivities, and promoted identification and participation with the object of one’s devotions.⁷⁷

Wives were the owners of a substantial portion of the movable goods in the household, including those items of a sacred nature. While studies have shown that in Florence it was the groom who was principally responsible for the decoration of the couple’s dwelling, the evidence relating to the Venetian domestic situation seems to suggest that both husband and wife brought with them items to furnish their the new home. Since Venetian women maintained possession of their dowries once widowed and could bequeath their goods as they saw fit, it is likely that within the conjugal household they considered themselves to be the principal owners of certain goods. Dowries from the Republic generally reveal very little about specific items that women brought into marriage. Postmortem inventories, on the other hand, which itemized the possessions of women, as well as testaments that record the dispersal of a woman’s property at her command, are proof of female ownership and autonomous wealth. Custody and control over at least a portion of the household’s sacred material culture may have been another circumstance that contributed to the relative freedom women had in exercising their piety within the domestic sphere, and may have also been a reason why images of female exemplars in the Venetian household were more sympathetic than those in Florence.

In addition to ownership, women were also considered to be the guardians of the goods of the household. Siena’s San Bernardino, whose sermons from the early fifteenth century gained a reputation across Italy, named wives as the caretakers of the household

⁷⁶ Klapisch-Zuber, “Holy Dolls,” 323.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 321.

possessions that the husband had earned for the home. Leon Battista Alberti reiterated such sentiments in his treatise on the family when he wrote: “It is as though nature thus provided for our well-being, arranging for men to bring things home and for women to guard them. The woman, as she remains locked up at home, should watch over things by staying at her post, by diligent care and watchfulness.”⁷⁸ Watching over and maintaining the religious items and spaces of the house was considered to be a devotional act in and of itself; such deeds were offered up in service to God, allowed regular contact with the sacred, and prevented idleness, considered at this time to be one of the most contemptible of all feminine vices. A fifteenth-century text for young girls preparing for marriage, the *Decor puellarum* written in 1471 by Giovanni di Dio, detailed the practical and spiritual obligations that females should carry out each day. A Carthusian prior who wrote treatises for single, married, and widowed women, Giovanni modeled his counsel largely after monastic rule. Written in the Venetian dialect, the *Decor puellarum* was unmistakably generated for a local audience and published in anticipation of popularity and financial yield.⁷⁹ At one point, the treatise directs young females on how to make and adorn a domestic altar. Giovanni wrote:

“Make an altar that you will take delight in decorating with beautiful and devout images: with beautiful ornaments and embroidery made by your own hand. You will do it in this way: First, briefly say some prayers for this altar. Then read a little if you are able; if you cannot read, then learn some stories of saints. Then return to prayer at your altar. If you truly have extra time, in order to escape the danger of idleness, you may honor our Lord by pursuing the decoration of the altar; that is, make a garment for some Virgin: embroidery, lace for the front of the altar, or a garment or some other decoration for a Virgin to which you are devoted, always alternating this task with prayers until supper time.”

⁷⁸ Alberti, 207-208.

⁷⁹ Kasl, 71-72.

Physical engagement in work was another channel for religious experience. A woman's household duties provided the ideal opportunity for devotions and many writers from the period counseled women to pray while working, considering it a spiritual exercise, often making reference to the Biblical story of the sisters Mary and Martha, who represented the feminine epitome of the active and contemplative lives. In her spiritual counsel to women of different ranks, the French poet and author Christine de Pisan (1363-1430) emphasized that God looked with great favor upon those who fulfilled her mundane duties.⁸⁰ The *Decor puellarum* also commented on day-to-day work and chores. In addition to the adornments and maintenance of domestic altars, the book promoted a daily regimen of meditations to pursue while engaged in domestic tasks.⁸¹ If a woman could not carry out the two tasks simultaneously, she was advised to divide her time between chores and devotions: "...after you have dined and dispatched with the needs of the household," Giovanni di Dio wrote, "direct yourself to your room, and if you know how, read the Matins of our Lady."⁸² Frances of Rome (1384-1440), a saint beloved in Italy for her unwavering commitment to God's will while remaining dedicated to her husband and children—despite her original desire for the cloistered life—is credited with expressing similar sentiments: "It is most laudable in a married woman to be devoted but she must never forget that she is a housewife. And sometimes she must leave God at the altar and find him in her housekeeping."⁸³ As the sixteenth century progressed, the moral component of manual activity continued to be stressed. According to Agostino Valier, the ideal wife and mother attended not only to the spiritual

⁸⁰ Webb, "Women and Home," 161.

⁸¹ Swanson, 124.

⁸² Kasl, 72.

⁸³ Quote from Atkinson, 190.

obligations of herself and her family, but to those household exercises which are the responsibility of women, like cooking and spinning, for the same reasons advocated by theorists over a hundred years earlier: in order to escape idleness.⁸⁴

Books were another means by which women accessed the sacred in their daily environments. Women and devotional literature were so intertwined during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance that the image of the reader was increasingly seen as a woman rather than a man.⁸⁵ Women were two times more likely than men to possess books of prayer, specifically Psalters and Books of Hours.⁸⁶ In female portraits painted throughout Europe during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, the sitter is often shown with her book, by this time the standard attribute of feminine piety. In Lorenzo Lotto's portrait of Laura da Pola, one half of a double portrait of husband and wife painted in 1543-44 (fig. 186), the richly dressed upper-class woman is shown behind what appears to be a *prie-dieu* with a small tome in her hand, most likely some kind of prayer book. In Leandro Bassano *Portrait of a Widow*, discussed in Chapter Three (fig. 105), the book's connection to devotion is made explicit through its placement on her kneeling bench, and her prayers before the holy image.

The most popular image of the female reader was that of the Virgin (fig. 187) and some scholars have even interpreted the frequency of images of the Madonna with a book as legitimization of women's access to literature.⁸⁷ Addressing a crowd of young girls in the church of Santa Croce in 1425, San Bernardino made the relation between the activities of the Virgin and what was expected of women unequivocally clear: "Ma

⁸⁴ Valier, Book IV: 29.

⁸⁵ Swanson, 305.

⁸⁶ Rigaux, "Les couleurs," 254.

⁸⁷ Luisa Miglio, " 'Un mondo a parte': libri da donne, libri di donne," in *Religione domestica*, 243

diciamo dove la trovò l'Angiolo. Dove credi ch'ella fusse? A le finestre e a fare qualche essercizio di vanità? Eh no! Ella stava isserrata in camara e leggeva per dare esempio a te fanciulla (...). che tu stia dentro in casa, dicendo delle avemarie e de' Patarnostri; e se tu sai leggere, legge de le cose sante e buone. Impara l'Uffizio de la Donna, e con esso ti diletta.”⁸⁸ Saint Bernardino's vision of the Madonna surprised by the angel closely matches standard Renaissance iconography of the Annunciation (fig. 188), where the Madonna is depicted in her chamber kneeling at her bench and reading her prayer book, immersed in her devotions when she receives the announcement that she is to bear the son of God.⁸⁹ These images transform the moment of divine conception into a familiar portrayal of the female domestic experience.⁹⁰

Access to the messages of sacred texts was, of course, at least partially dependent on one's ability to read. Female literacy increased nearly everywhere in Europe throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. More and more women attended school and printing quickly became widespread and less inexpensive, making books increasingly available for larger segments of society. These factors were compounded by the fact that after around 1525, the written vernacular had developed into a language of high status, seen as worthy of expressing elevated thoughts and thus eliminating Latin as the barrier

⁸⁸ From Miglio, 219.

⁸⁹ Rigaux, “Les couleurs,” 252.

⁹⁰ One should be cautious, however, in making the assumption that the representation of Mary reading derives directly from contemporary life; it has been said that the iconographic source for the representations of the Virgin with her book is a passage in the enormously popular *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, universally attributed to Bonaventure at the time, but actually written by another late 13th century Franciscan, Giovanni da San Gimignano. According to this author, Mary was reading Isaiah's prophecy of the Virgin Birth at the moment of the angel's arrival. Nevertheless, the popularity of such images likely endured and even strengthened because of the relationship between the divine event and daily experience, expressed in concrete forms. The *Meditations* were quite influential in both devotions and art, which helps to account for the image of Mary as housewife. Originally written for a Franciscan nun, the author encouraged the concentrated visualization of gospel stories and its outgrowths in apocryphal literature. Mary made a living as a seamstress and Joseph a carpenter, while the Christ child stayed at home to help to set table and make beds. Webb, “Women and Home,” 162-165.

to edification.⁹¹ The primary motivation for the advocacy of female literacy, however, was not for intellectual enrichment but for prayer: for women, to read was to pray. Therefore, while learning was made easier for girls, they were constrained in terms of what they could read and study. The designations for certain books reflect contemporary attitudes towards the education of women. Early modern theorists on female learning and spirituality—as well as inventories—often described such texts as “piccoli” and with diminutive suffixes, such as “libretti santi,” underscoring the lesser status this reading material had in the larger intellectual environment available to men.⁹²

How much a woman should learn was also dependent on her social status. In *Dell'educazione cristiana e politica de' figliuoli*, first published in 1584, author Silvio Antoniano (1540-1603) stated that girls of noble status destined to become mothers of distinguished families should know how to read and write *well*, in addition to understanding elementary arithmetic, so as not to be considered “rustic.” Antoniano expected less and less of women as he moved down the social ladder. Girls of middling status should learn to read and write a little, while the poorest of women only needed to be able to read books of prayer.⁹³ Basic vernacular reading and writing skills were thus seen as essential for a woman's expected role as virtuous and industrious wife and mother, regardless of social class. Women only needed to know enough Latin to be able to read the “Little Office of the Virgin,” and recite standard prayers, like the “Our Father,” “Hail Mary,” and the Creed; a more extensive humanistic course of study was

⁹¹ In fact, the early sixteenth century witnessed a European-wide acquaintance with many of the major doctrinal and devotional works of earlier centuries, which printing helped to perpetuate, Swanson, 82.

⁹² Several authors advocated some secular works in the vernacular, as well, for women, such as Boccaccio, Dante, and Petrarch. Castiglione, 94r.

⁹³ Paul Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 1989), 89.

linked to public, male roles and was considered both unsuitable and unnecessary for females.⁹⁴

The education “specialists” of the Renaissance all advocated roughly the same curriculum for women. The “Office of the Virgin”—also commonly referred to by names such as the “Little Office of Our Lady” and the “Hours of the Virgin”—was the text most strongly promoted by the authors of the domestic economy, as well as church officials. It lay at the heart of the Book of Hours, the most commonly read and owned prayer book of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Dating as far back as the eighth century, the “Little Office” was a compilation of certain prayers in honor of the Madonna to be recited at eight fixed hours of the day. Originally part of the Breviary, the Little Office of Our Lady was a standard component of both clerical and lay private devotion.⁹⁵ As the cult of the Virgin gained momentum beginning in the thirteenth century, the Office of the Virgin grew in importance, being embellished with other prayers and texts to form the Book of Hours.⁹⁶ The opening prayer of the tract invites intimacy with God and coalesces with the corporeal nature of the spirituality so commonly associated with female devotion: “Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise. God, come to my assistance”;⁹⁷ with this entreaty, the body becomes the vehicle for honoring God and conveying his divine message. As early as the fifteenth century both Saint Bernardino and the Venetian notary, Francesco da Barberino, were counseling women and those responsible for them to read and know well the Office of the Virgin. Barberino

⁹⁴ Lodovico Dolce, *Dialogo della institutione delle donne di Messer Lodovico Dolce. Da lui medesimo nuovamente ricorretto et ampliato* (Venice: Appresso Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari, 1547), 10v and 19v. Grendler, *Schooling*, 87.

⁹⁵ See “Little Hours,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 8: 610-611.

⁹⁶ Roger S. Weick, *Time Sanctified: The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (New York: George Braziller, Inc. in Association with the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore), 60.

⁹⁷ Weick, 63.

saw the collection of prayers as the foundation for a woman's spiritual knowledge, saying "s'ella sa leger si usi l'ufficio della donna primieramente e, s'ella puote, l'ufficio ancor tutto; poi a diletto tanti libri usi di legere e imprendere sempre."⁹⁸ Sixteenth-century theorists repeated the opinions of their predecessors. In addition to the lives of the saints and other spiritual books, Silvio Antoniano specifically named the "Little Office of Our Lady" as a book a good father should be pleased that his daughter can recite.⁹⁹

The inventories of many Venetian families mirror the spiritual prospectus outlined in domestic economies and contemporary treatises on women. The "Office of the Virgin" is the most frequently found book in sixteenth-century households from the Republic. In recording its presence in Venetian homes, notaries employed the terms "ufficio," "offitio," and "officieto;" they referred to them as both "a stampa" and "a pena," indicating that Venetians owned printed and manuscripts versions of this much admired text. In some cases, the descriptions of the books and their coverings call to mind costly and sumptuous objects, suggestive of their high value as both a material and a spiritual object. Angela Saro, the daughter of Lorenzo from the parish of Santa Marina, owned a printed version of the Divine Office that was bound in a cover of white leather; when not in use, she kept the book protected in a bag, also made of white leather, that could be tied closed by cords.¹⁰⁰ The noblewoman Adriana Michiel, daughter of Nicolò Michiel and the widow of Antonio Gradenigo, possessed several copies and versions of the Divine Office, in various states of condition; in the inventory of her goods recorded in 1546 there are listed: an Office of the Madonna on good paper, "istoriado," or illustrated, and covered in black leather with two bejeweled silver ornaments; a little Office of the

⁹⁸ Miglio, 219.

⁹⁹ Grendler, *Schooling*, 89.

¹⁰⁰ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 3, (1534).

Madonna on good paper, but old and “rotto,” or somehow damaged, with a silver angel as an embellishment; and four used “officeti” of the Virgin.¹⁰¹

The Divine Office was not a prayer book reserved for women, however. The goldsmith Bartolomeo Baccacci owned three forms of this text: a manuscript version on bergamine paper decorated with miniatures of various figures and covered in yellow velvet with a silver ornament, and two “officeti” that were kept in his studio, along with a Bible and a legend of the saints, both in the vernacular.¹⁰² While these texts could have been enjoyed by Baccacci’s wife, Elisabetta, or the other women in his household, the fact that two copies of the Office of the Virgin were kept in his study suggests that they were carefully guarded under his possession.

Other choices of spiritual works available to women included the Bible; the psalter or “psalterino,” a collection of 150 psalms divided in a particular manner so as to be recited at certain times of the day; saints’ legends; the life of Christ and the lives of the Holy Fathers; the works of the Evangelists; and “altri libri Catolici, divoti, spirituali, & religiosi convenienti à donne.”¹⁰³ All of these books appear in Venetian inventories, and as mentioned in the first chapter, they were often listed separately from larger book collections, which were cursorily noted as a chest or shelf “pien di libri,” thereby

¹⁰¹ She also owned a small copy of Petrarch’s work “in ottavo,” with a black leather cover; noble women were encouraged to read the vernacular work of this popular fourteenth-century author. ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 37, n. 55.

¹⁰² ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 41, no. 51, 1572.

¹⁰³ Castiglione, 95v. Also Miglio, 221. A similar reading list was advocated for women elsewhere in Europe. The *Ménagier de Paris* told his young wife that when she had fulfilled her other religious duties, including hearing sermons, she could conclude her spiritual formation by making use of “la Bible, la Legende Dorée, l’Apocalice, la Vie des Pères et autres pluseurs bons livres en françois que j’ay, dont vous estes maistress pour en prendre a votre plaisir.” Webb, “Women and Home,” 161. Access to the Bible may have been more limited for women during the Counter-Reformation, after the Index banned the vernacular Bible. Women were still likely familiar with certain Biblical accounts, however, through images, oral tradition, and the variations of these stories in apocryphal literature.

implying that these popular holy texts were not stored away but utilized in the household with great frequency.¹⁰⁴

The clerics and humanists who wrote conduct manuals and domestic treatises during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries encouraged women to seek literacy and religion in order to control passions and restrain immoderations of behavior, like laziness and vanity.¹⁰⁵ All of the authors, however, were more or less in agreement about the primary reason why women should be able to read and know well the foundations of their Christian faith: to teach their children. Women were principally responsible for the care of children, and one's introduction to religion was through the maternal figure.¹⁰⁶ As mentioned above, Giovanni Maria Memmo stressed the imperative of choosing a wife who was educated, virtuous, and eloquent, for as mother she would be the one from whom the children would receive their first morals, words, and lessons—in other words, the one who they would first imitate.¹⁰⁷ Women, therefore, played an essential role in the promotion and preservation of the Catholic religion. They taught the faith in the ways that they experienced it, not only through texts and more academic routes, but also in

¹⁰⁴ Valier recommended a slightly different curriculum for the *dimessa*, or a woman who chose to carry out a chaste life within her own home rather than marriage. According to Valier, devotion and meditation were more important for the *dimessa* than the married woman for without these activities she would be a creature “inutile,” i.e. “useless.” Mothers, on the other hand, had to attend first to serving their husbands, taking care of their children, and governing their homes. In the time she had left over, she should say her prayers and educate herself in the lessons from the holy books in order to teach her children and avoid laziness. Thus, in addition to the standard prayers and readings like the *Divine Office* and *Lives of the Saints*, Valier encouraged for the *dimessa* intense contemplation on the mysteries of Christ's passion, and suggested works such as the *Specchio di Cristo* to assist in these spiritual undertakings. Valier, 19-22, and 29.

¹⁰⁵ Euan Cameron, “‘Civilized Religion’: From Renaissance to Reformation and Counter-Reformation,” in *The Renaissance: Italy and Abroad*, ed. John Jeffries Martin (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 297-316: 299.

¹⁰⁶ Becchi, 71.

¹⁰⁷ “Queste madri essendo dotte & costumate, daranno i primi costumi, & insegneranno le prime letter, & parlare ornatamente a figliuoli, di modo che a suoi tempi saranno atti a maggior studij. Ei in vero è di non poca importanza, che le madri siano eloquenti & usino vocaboli puri & scelti. Il che vedeno i fanciulli, cercano d'imitare, & seguitando la madre fanno un'habito...” Memmo, 125.

manners that used the body to access the divine. The rich visual and material culture of the household thus played a critical role in the transmission of this didactic piety.

The Spiritual Education of Children

Interest in the rearing of children began even before the birth of the child. As explicated in Chapter Three in the discussion of the Agnus Dei, the recurring outbreaks of plague and high mortality rates for newborns and young children spurred a demographic predicament that made reproduction all the more imperative and directed attention on childbirth.¹⁰⁸ Pregnancy and the birthing process were always uncertain moments for both mother and child and a variety of talismanic objects associated with the ritual developed to protect and aid the parties involved. Objects and images played an operational role in determining the character of the child, as well, even before the moment of conception. The theory of sympathetic magic deemed there to be a causal connection between viewing pictures and the formation of children. The roots of this relationship can be traced back to antiquity, in theories of embryology upheld by philosophers such as Aristotle, Hippocrates, Avicenna, Galen and Soranus.¹⁰⁹ Images looked at by women during pregnancy—or by either parent during conception, for that matter—were understood to increase fertility and assure divine protection of the infant at the earliest possible stages; pictures could also directly affect the child’s sex, character, and physical features.¹¹⁰ Religious images, therefore, became all the more imperative in

¹⁰⁸ Musacchio, “Weasels and Pregnancy,” 180.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, “Beautiful Brides,” 151; and Musaccio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth*, 128.

¹¹⁰ Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth*, 129-131

this exchange, for the divine was not only overseeing the creation and safety of the infant but was also influencing future behaviors and personalities.

Images of the Madonna and Child were frequently employed for these purposes because they combined the epitome of motherhood with the ideal offspring: pious, obedient, and male.¹¹¹ The conviction that there was a contributory relationship between viewing images and the formation of children may account partially for the inclusion of images of the Madonna and Child in a dowry, and for their subsequent display in bedrooms.¹¹² As mentioned in Chapter One, in the Venetian home the image of the Madonna and Child was not confined to bedchambers, as scholars have concluded was usually the case in Florence, but appeared all throughout the house—in the *portego*, the *studio*, and sometimes, in kitchens and workshops—thereby creating multiple opportunities for prayer and reflection to occur. Venetian inventories suggest, however, that when such images were in the *camera*, they were hung in close proximity to the bed. This practice would have endowed these ostensibly devotional objects with a talismanic function that went beyond mere devotion.

Notaries frequently recorded pictures of the Madonna—in addition to other sacred works—directly before or after the *letto*, suggesting the physical juxtaposition of image and bed. For example, the 1531 inventory of Vincenzo Zorzi, the son of Girolamo, records a small *ancona* of “nostra donna” and an oil lamp, just before two *letti* in the gentleman’s *camera*.¹¹³ The description of Vincenzo’s chamber bears resemblance to the

¹¹¹ Palmer, “Maternal Madonna,” 11. The Christ child was not the only image of a male child that would have been seen in an Italian Renaissance home. Young boys were often featured on birth trays, and in busts and reliefs. See Musacchio, “The Medici-Tornabuoni Desco da Parto,” 137-51; and *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth*, 126-134.

¹¹² Johnson, “Art or Artifact?,” 1-17.

¹¹³ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 35, n. 16.

bedroom depicted in Vittore Carpaccio's *Dream of Saint Ursula* (fig. 18), where an elaborately framed image of the Madonna, illuminated by a candle, is displayed directly next to the saint's canopied bed.¹¹⁴ The notary's use of the word "ancona" in Vincenzo's inventory implies an image modeled after altarpieces, perhaps ornamented with a tabernacle frame, like that in Carpaccio's painting, to enhance its holy status; the oil lamp further adds to the reverence and sacred authority that this image commanded.

Some religious leaders of the period disapproved of the placement of sacred images in bedchambers because these commonly used spaces were also sites of vanities and carnal acts.¹¹⁵ Inventories show that these warnings went largely unheeded, and some thinkers of the period encouraged just the opposite. The fifteenth-century Lombard humanist Maffeo Vegio, for example, suggested that parents keep an appropriate religious picture in view during conception to assure the protection of the child and the desired outcome of the couple.¹¹⁶ In fact, a genre of domestic object developed specifically for such a purpose: the *image de chevet*. Thought to have been modeled on the pax used in the liturgy, these small plaquettes bearing sacred images were sewn into the insides of bed curtains by means of small holes around the edges; a plaquette of the Madonna and Child in a niche, from the circle of Donatello (mid-1400s), today preserved in the Walters Art Museum (fig. 189), is conjectured to be an *image de chevet*.¹¹⁷ A

¹¹⁴ Although Ursula's legend was largely admired for the saint's preservation of her virginity, in nearly all aspects of Carpaccio's representations of interior rooms in the Saint Ursula cycle, he created believable setting – based on contemporary life – in which the extraordinary story of the martyr unfolds. The detail of the sacred picture hung next to the bed may have contributed to the realness of his painted narrative.

¹¹⁵ San Bernardino of Siena, for example, disapproved of the shameless behavior of women in front of holy images placed in the bedroom, such as dressing immodestly and leaving their cosmetics and perfumes around them. Kasl, 70.

¹¹⁶ Grubb, *Provincial Families*, 191-192.

¹¹⁷ Walters Acc. No. 54.22, 3 ¾ x 2 15/16 inches. The Walters Madonna and Child plaquette was probably cast in Padua. Sixteen copies of the work exist today, as well as countless slight variations on the composition. Palmer, "The Walters' Madonna," and Randall, Jr., "An Image de Chevet."

number of surviving bronze medals and plaques from the Veneto region also bear holes at the top and sometimes on the sides (fig. 190), and thus may have been displayed in similar ways. The placement of paintings of the Madonna by the beds was probably not conceived of as a disrespectful act by those who used them, but an efficacious one that superseded any notions of irreverence. The care that Vincenzo took in displaying his “ancona” to underscore its sacral authority also suggests this. In Vincenzo’s case, and many others like his, the image of the Madonna likely served to create an environment where conception could occur under the approval and protection of the divine.

During the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, as childhood came to be seen as a stage in life distinct from adulthood, an interest in the proper development and education of one’s offspring advanced simultaneously, beginning with the first moments of life. Evidence of the concern over the interests of children can be seen in the contemporary literature on breast feeding. Theorists with an interest in family and society went to great lengths expounding upon the pros and cons of the use of a wet nurse. Advocates of the practice argued that nursing weakened the mother and lessened a woman’s fertility, a risk that few families—particularly those of the noble class—could afford. On the other hand, moralists and preachers insisted that it was a woman’s obligation to nurse her own child, for the qualities of the mother were transmitted through milk, just as they were passed to the fetus through the mother’s blood. Bernardino of Siena warned: “The child acquires certain of the customs of the one who suckles him...”¹¹⁸ Children were thus highly impressionable beings – affected not only by the food they consumed, but the words they heard and the images they saw. Nearly all theorists of the Renaissance agreed, therefore, that parents should begin to instruct their offspring almost immediately

¹¹⁸ Atkinson, 60.

following birth, when children, as expressed by Fra Sabba Castiglione, are still like “wax,” easily molded and administered; otherwise, the youth will become like a hard metal, set in their habits and difficult—if not impossible—to persuade.¹¹⁹

Just as images were vital in assuring fertility and a successful birth, they continued to play an influential role in shaping the spiritual and moral development of the child. Through pictures, one became acquainted with the faith. It was believed that before a child even knew how to read letters on a page, he or she should learn good behavior and how to pray, all through the visual examples set around the household. The use of images as a pedagogical tool was established on the simple but efficacious principle of the gradual assimilation of the beholder to the depicted subject.¹²⁰ As Paolo Cortesi wrote: “...pictures should be symbols of virtue so that... the soul will be excited to similar virtuous acts [throughout the day]...”¹²¹ Domestic religious images undoubtedly fulfilled such a task. The tenets of visual exemplarity in the rearing of youth are perhaps most clearly laid out by Giovanni Dominici. He wrote:

“The first regulation is to have pictures of saintly children or young virgins in the home, in which your child, still in swaddling clothes, may delight and thereby may be gladdened by acts and signs pleasing to childhood. And what I say of pictures applies also to statues. It is well to have the Virgin Mary with the Child in arms, with a little bird or apple in His hand. There should be a good representation of Jesus nursing, sleeping in His Mother’s lap or standing courteously before Her while they look at each other. So let the child see himself mirrored in the Holy Baptist clothed in camel’s skin, a little child who enters the desert, plays with little birds, sucks the honeyed flowers and sleeps on the ground... Thus it is desirable to bring up little girls in the contemplation of the eleven thousand Virgins as they discourse, pray and suffer. I should like them to see Agnes with her little fat lamb, Cecilia crowned with her roses, Elizabeth with roses in her cloak, Catherine and her wheel with other such representations as

¹¹⁹ Castiglione, 65r.

¹²⁰ The same held true for adults, as implied in the above discussion on women’s spiritual education. Images of saints, like Francis and Catherine of Siena, kneeling before images became models for men and women. Rigaux, “Les couleurs,” 257.

¹²¹ Syson and Thornton, 21.

may give them with their milk love of virginity, a longing for Christ, a hatred of sin... Creatures are books of revelation, the understanding and contemplation of which lead to a knowledge of the Supreme God. But the revealed Scriptures are principally for the more advanced, in which is found all truth, uncreated and created, of which the mind is capable, wholly relishing food for the present.”¹²²

In addition to serving as talismanic devices and models of motherhood for new brides, images of the Madonna and Child placed around the house offered the divine offspring as an example for young children. In a similar vein, depictions of saints not only protected the household and acted as intercessors to the divine, but they also provided young family members with a visual paradigm of Christian virtue to which they should aspire. And a child could become acquainted with images like these at the earliest moments in life, when he or she was “still in swaddling clothes.”

Wills from the period are additional testimony to the anxiety felt over the proper upbringing of children. Several Venetian testators from the sixteenth century, facing an imminent death and about to leave behind young offspring, made attempts not only to guarantee financial and material assistance for their children, but that their souls receive support, as well. Male testators frequently reminded their children that they must obey the commands of their mother and remain attentive to their studies, and above all, as expressed by Marc’Antonio Priuli in his will from 1543, of the imperative to live under the fear of the Lord, and with God’s love: “...a essi mie fiolli li coma[n]do e priogo che sopra ogni altra cossa i deba viver soto el timor e con lamor d mx yhu xpo...”¹²³ Paris Malipiero, whose will was discussed above, asked his beloved wife, Soretta, to look after their children with love and attentiveness, and to raise them to be servants to God even

¹²² Translated by Coté, 34.

¹²³ ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 1221 (Atti Marsilio).

more so than Malpiero children: “...non tanto per essere loro carna nostra, quanto per educargli al servizio veramente al Dio.”¹²⁴

Images remained a critical aspect of religious education in the household as children advanced in age. As soon as a child learned to talk, however, prayer and other religious lessons began in earnest, beginning with oral instruction and corporeal imitation, and eventually leading to lessons utilizing written and illustrated texts. An exchange of letters between two Venetians during the years 1509 to 1511 reveals the emphasis placed on the religious formation of children in the home, and the kinds of prayers and actions youngster were expected to know. Written by the sea-faring father of a young boy named Zuan Francesco and the child’s uncle, the two men express their delight in the youngster’s knowledge of “the ‘Our Father’ and the ‘Hail Mary,’ the Creed, the *Salve Regina*, the *Qui abitat*, and many other prayers which his mother has already taught him.” In addition, the boy’s uncle tells the father that “Zuan Francesco has chosen for himself a poor fellow to whom he gives alms every Friday for your sake, and every day he says a lovely prayer to Our Lady for you, and the prayer to St. Sebastian to protect you from plague.”¹²⁵ The account of young Zuan Francesco is consistent with the religious instruction that Francesco Tommasi advocated for children, a curriculum consisting of the “Our Father,” the twelve articles of faith, and the divine precepts ordered by the Holy Roman Church.¹²⁶

While large numbers of the Venetian population may not have been able to read religious texts in Latin or Italian, the majority would have acquired what R. N. Swanson has called “passive literacy,” an awareness of the value of the written word and the

¹²⁴ ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 210 (Atti Canal), n. 463.

¹²⁵ Chambers and Pullan, 266-267.

¹²⁶ Tomassi, 138.

reception of certain texts even if direct access was limited or impossible. In other words, one did not have to be able to read the “Our Father” or the life of a saint to know, and often times to know by rote, the words or the message of the text. Prayers, biblical accounts, and other popular spiritual narratives were said aloud and repeated constantly in the home, in church, and at public sermons that took place throughout the city; these aural modes of communication encouraged one to take in knowledge and retain it through memory.¹²⁷

This kind of oral pedagogy was accepted as a standard mode of teaching. The ability to know something by heart and easily recollect it was a highly desired skill. Memory texts were plentiful in the Renaissance with a variety of exercises designed to increase this faculty.¹²⁸ For mothers, this skill was especially valuable. Authors of both devotional texts and domestic treatises encouraged mothers to commit to memory the fundamentals of the faith in order to teach their children. Agostino Valier urged women, in addition to reading spiritual books in their free time, to know by heart the one that contains the “Christian Institution”—probably a kind of catechism—in order that they may teach the lessons to their children and maidservants: “...principalmente quel picciolo libro che contiene l’Instituzion Cristiana; e lo devono imparar a mente per insegnarlo a’ loro figliuoli, e anche alle loro fantesche.”¹²⁹ In the introduction to his much-reprinted rosary book, Alberto di Castello presented similar reasoning for why women should read and commit to memory the prayers of his manual; he advised women to carry the holy mysteries always in their heart (“habiti questi misterii sempre nelli vostri cuori”) in

¹²⁷ Swanson, 79.

¹²⁸ The classic study on the exercise of memory from the Greeks through the seventeenth century is Yates, *The Art of Memory*.

¹²⁹ Valier, 29.

order to recite them continually, and instruct their children also to say the sacred rosary (“per continua recordatione de quelli e narrereti quelli a gli vostri figlioli insegnardoli a dire questo sancto rosario.”)¹³⁰

The use of the body was one means by which the fundamentals of the faith were remembered. Children, as well as adults, learned through physical action and bodily gestures. This was all the more true in the domestic setting where women were the primary educators of a household’s youth. Since women were more apt to experience and express the sacred through their bodies, they imparted similar devotional behaviors to their children. Limited literacy skills contributed to the physical character of religious education in the home. The formalization of bodily comportment became increasingly important during the sixteenth century, with vast numbers of treatises written on the subject, providing guidance for every social state and age group—from knights and princes to small children. Corporeal demeanor was a reflection of one’s inward character, and thus in the area of prayer and devotion, the actions of the body were even more central.¹³¹ Erasmus, whose writings on education were translated into the Italian by Stefano Penelli and published in Venice in 1547, recommended to parents that a child as early as three years old should “learn to kneel, fold his hands, remove his hat, and finally, form all of the habits of the body to religion.” By adjusting physical posture and the movements of the body, as Erasmus advocated, a child learned to exercise the discipline of the soul.¹³² Erasmus also advised that children make the sign of the cross with a brief

¹³⁰ Alberto di Castello, *Rosario della Gloriosa Vergine Maria* (Venice: impresso per Marchio Sessa & Piero di Rauani compagni, 1522).

¹³¹ Niccoli, “Bambini in preghiera,” 290.

¹³² “...impara ingenocchiarsi, giungere le mani, cavarsi la berretta, e finalmente formare tutto l’habito del corpo alla religione...” Stefano Penelli, *Della institutione de’ fanciulli come di buona hora si debbono ammaestrare alle virtù e alle lettere* (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de’ Ferrari, 1547), 20v; also quoted in Niccoli, 276. Folding hands and kneeling during orations became stereotypical during the Counter

prayer to Christ when passing by a church, before going to bed, and when waking up in the morning, counsel that was reiterated by Cardinal Silvio Antoniano in his treatise on the Christian education of children published in 1584.¹³³ The attitude of the body was not only reflective of prayer, but was prayer itself; more than words that are either proclaimed aloud or silently recited, prayer was one's entire demeanor, involving vision, touch, movement, and posture.

Giovanni Dominici encouraged exercises similar to the guidance of Erasmus, in teaching children to pray and behave with respect and courtesy:

“Let your children respect you in *corporeal* acts in addition to the common reverences that are honest and good; not to sit in the presence of their parents without being told to; to stand erect and courteously, to humbly incline the head at each command and to make the proper reverence with the cap... let them kneel down with all reverence at the feet of yourself or their father or of both and ask a blessing... Let them say, on their knees, ‘Bless me’... And having received such benediction let them bow the head, and rising kiss the hand of the one blessing, and let them go secure in the belief that nothing will harm them so far as the salvation of their souls is concerned. And as I say children should act toward you, so I say you should act toward the Supreme Father, God, in all things, and especially in kneeling down before Him and asking His blessing, not only three times a day, but always when you must begin something new, kissing a cross made with the finger on the ground, a chest, the wall, or any place nearest the hand when you ask this blessing...”¹³⁴

For Dominici, the value of physical gesture and bodily comportment was not restricted to children, but applied to adults, as well. Prayer and devotion toward God should be marked by maximum control over the body, which both shaped the soul and became a visible sign of one's pious inner character.

Reformation, but it had been practiced previously, and played an important role in the education of children. Niccoli, 285-90.

¹³³ Niccoli, 290; and Antoniano, *Dell'educazione cristiana*, 151-152.

¹³⁴ Italics are mine. Coté, 53-54.

Because the body was another medium through which one learned and expressed the Christian faith, touch—combined with vision—became all the more central in teaching prayer and devotion. One major means for the reinforcement of religion for all members of the household was the rosary. As mentioned in previous chapters, almost all households in the Republic owned at least one set of paternosters or rosary beads, and many possessed multiple versions in both precious and inexpensive materials. As a portable item, either worn on the body or held in the hand, rosaries could be with the devout at all times and offered a continual physical reminder of the duty of all Christians to pray. The beads marked off each of the many prayers said and also complemented the rhythm of the devotion, for a larger bead or one rendered in a different medium often punctuated a rather uniform set of beads in order to signal these special moments of contemplation.

Just as women manipulated holy dolls in their domestic devotions, it is likely that children, too, followed their example. Theorists promoted devotional activity for children that often blurred the boundary between piety and play, while teaching them aspects of the Christian religion in the spirit of imitation. Such principles of learning are once again spelled out by Giovanni Dominici. The Dominican friar not only recommended religious images throughout the household to assist in the spiritual formation of children, he also detailed ritualized behavior for them to carry out, modeled after ecclesiastical practices:

“But make a little altar or two in the house, dedicated to the Savior whose feast is every Sunday. You may have three or four different colored little vestments and he and the other children may be sacristans, showing them how on all feasts they should variously adorn this chapel. Sometimes they may be occupied in making garlands of flowers and greens with which to crown Jesus or to decorate the picture of the Blessed Virgin. They may light and extinguish candles, incense,

keep clean, sweep, prepare the altars, clean pieces of wax and dust off the candlesticks, have in place the little bell and run to ring it at all hours as is done in church. They may be dressed in surplices as acolytes, sing as well as they know how, play at saying Mass, and be brought to the church sometimes and shown how real priests do it, that they may imitate them.”¹³⁵

In his life of Savonarola, Pico della Mirandola records that the Florentine friar engaged in similar kinds of role playing when he was a child. He amused himself and kept busy by setting up small altars and engaging in “other devotions of the same sort.”¹³⁶

A child’s intellectual development was intimately tied to his or her religious growth, even within more official educational settings. Formal training for children in Venice—in school and at home with tutors—was an option for some families in the Republic. In the sixteenth century, Venice had a typical combination of independent, communal, and church schools for a city of its size, with independent establishments assuming most of the control over the formal education of the Republic’s youth. The Church sustained a limited role in institutionalized matters of education. In fact, in 1587-88, in the height of a period of renewed interest in lay education on the part of the Catholic Church, the majority of Venetian students who attended school—89 percent (c. 4115 pupils)—continued to be trained in independent institutions, while only 7 percent (c. 322 students) attended church schools.¹³⁷ Although technically secular, independent

¹³⁵ Coté, 42-43.

¹³⁶ Klapisch-Zuber, “Holy Dolls,” 322.

¹³⁷ 4 percent (c. 188 students) frequented communal schools. Parish schools were extremely rare, and evidence confirms that parents and civil governments rather than the Church took action in creating the Latin and vernacular schools of Renaissance Italy where the majority of pupils studied. Grendler, *Schooling*, 3-4, and 43. Grendler derives his statistics from the 1587-1588 Profession of Faith made by the city’s educators, a document that demonstrates that while the Church did not form many of their own schools, they still exercised a certain amount of control over education. Beginning in 1564, all teachers in Italy were required to profess their Catholic faith before the local bishop or his representative, as commanded by the bull of Pius V, *In sacrosancta beati Petri*. Venice charged its teachers to obey the bull in 1567-68 and perhaps at other times over the next 20 years, but no records of these professions of faith are known to exist. The Republic ordered new professions from its teachers in the spring of 1587. 237 Venetian teachers professed between 30 April and 30 June, followed by 21 others who had arrived in the

and communal schools still taught the fundamentals of the faith, since the primary purpose for literacy was devotion and worship. Over half of the teachers (62 percent) that taught in these schools were members of the clergy, as well.¹³⁸

Metaphorically speaking, religion was thus one of the three “R’s” of Renaissance schooling; Italian primers and hornbooks customarily began with an image of the cross and the alphabet, linking the fundamentals of faith and language. One example is the Latin grammar of Aldo Manuzio, the leading Venetian publisher of Greek and Latin language texts, which began with an invocation of Christ crucified (fig. 191); first printed in 1493, followed by two revisions in 1501 and 1508, the book underwent at least 29 printings through 1586.¹³⁹ After the introduction came prayers, always led by the obligatory “Our Father,” which sometimes were printed in divided syllables to facilitate reading. These were followed by canticles, psalms, and responses at mass, in both Latin and Italian. Once one had mastered these basics, he—and on occasion, she—advanced on to religious vernacular books. Students began with the enormously popular *Fior di virtù*, a medieval text on virtues and vices, and moved on to scriptural tomes, like the *Epistole e Evangelii che si leggono tutto l’anno alla messa* (Epistles and Gospels that are read yearlong at mass), and hagiographical literature. Sometimes schools or tutors incorporated meditational works into the curriculum, such as the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas of Kempis, to inculcate good devotional habits. These books frequently drifted from home to school; the texts that were favored in the classroom were the same as those

city hoping to start schools. The teachers answered questions about themselves: name, age, town of origin, and civil or ecclesiastical status. All declared that they taught Christian doctrine, placed images of Christ, Mary, and the saints on the walls, and neither held nor read prohibited books. Grendler, *Schooling*, 42 and 55.

¹³⁸ The schools clergymen taught in, however, tended to be Latin schools; 80 percent of the Latin schools masters were clerics, and 75 percent of the teachers of vernacular schools were laymen. Clergymen also constituted the majority of household tutors – 80-90 percent. Grendler, *Schooling*, 55.

¹³⁹ Grendler, *Schooling*, 153-154.

that appear in household inventories from the period, and it is reasonable to assume that it was the popularity of certain books outside of the scholastic context that brought them into the schoolhouse.¹⁴⁰

Estimates taken from a Venetian census in 1586 indicate that only approximately 14 percent of boys and girls between the ages of six and fifteen attended formal schools.¹⁴¹ Students could acquire religious instruction through other outlets, however. Religious education became part of the mission of many confraternities beginning in the fifteenth century, but there is no evidence of the establishment of formal schools of learning by these groups in Venice.¹⁴² An indeterminate number of lay girls from the lagoon lived and studied as long-term boarders in female monasteries. Another popular and notable locale in which children learned were the Schools of Christian Doctrine, also known as catechism schools, which first appeared in Venice in 1540. They met on Sundays and regular holidays and taught children religion, reading, and writing, as religious instruction and literacy were regarded as synonymous concepts. The main text utilized by these schools of Christian Doctrine was the *Summario* (Summary), a small booklet of about sixteen pages that presented, without explanation, the essentials of the Catholic faith; it was composed of prayers, precepts, and lists to be memorized by the pupil. More advanced religious instruction was supplied by the *Interrogatorio*, a larger

¹⁴⁰ In the 1587 Profession of Faith, ten Venetian teachers state that children brought books from home to read in school. Grendler, *Schooling*, 277. This, of course, would have been an issue of great concern for the Church during a period in which they were cracking down on heretical texts.

¹⁴¹ Only .2 percent of school age girls attended formal schools, however. Girls were rarely allowed to venture outside the home. Grendler, *Schooling*, 44.

¹⁴² Florence had a much stronger public mission toward the moral development of its youth, commonly expressed in the didactic campaigns of the city's confraternities. Pullan, "The Scuole Grandi," 286; Donatella Frioli, "Tra oralità e scrittura. Appunti da libri e biblioteche dei laici devoti," in *Religione domestica*, 188; and Grendler, *Schooling*, 339.

question-and-answer catechism of 120 to 220 pages (fig. 192).¹⁴³ Perhaps more than 6000 boys and girls patronized these schools in Venice by the 1580s, but whether or not these children attended regularly is uncertain; the level and quality of education received, therefore, ranged depending on the particular circumstances of each student.¹⁴⁴

The home served as the most stable and primary channel for the training of the city's children, in particular in the areas of religion, morality, and virtuous conduct. The variety of modes by which religion was passed on to youth in the domestic context has been discussed, but one cannot discount the role of texts in the educational process. Because the principal educator in the household was the mother, her knowledge often determined the pace and character of the instruction. As stated earlier, noble and upper-class women were expected to have reading and writing proficiencies in the vernacular—if not in some Latin, as well—and therefore would have been able to impart similar skills of literacy to their families. Parental tutoring may have occurred in artisan household and poor families, as well.¹⁴⁵ Two sixteenth-century Venetian teachers—Giovanni Antonio Tagliente and Domenico Manzoni—published home teaching manuals (fig. 193) designed to assist parents in schooling their children in math and language, and as stated by both authors, these books were aimed specifically at the poor.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ The contents and the methods of the *Summario* came from the Middle Ages, but the sixteenth-century text expanded on earlier works by including things like the alphabet, the sign of the cross, prayers, hymns, and occasional advice on behavior. Neither the *Summario* nor the *Interrogatorio* attempted to deepen theological knowledge or encourage the student to speculate on the faith. Grendler, *Schooling*, 344-45 and 350-353.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 44-45, and 337-9.

¹⁴⁵ According to Grendler domestic education was dependent partly on wealth—for in poorer families both parents had to work, leaving little extra time for their children's instruction—but even more so on literacy. He obviously sees learning as tied to texts and the capacity to read them, rather than other forms with which one could—and did—gain knowledge.

¹⁴⁶ Giovanni Antonio Tagliente, *Libro maistrevole* (Venice, 1524), and Domenico Manzoni, *La vera et principal ricchezza de' giovani, che disiderano imparar ben legere, scrivere, et abaco* (Venice, 1550). Grendler, *Schooling*, 100-101. For more on the *Libro maistrevole* of Tagliente, see Anne Jacobsen Shutte,

The presence of instructional books in the inventories of several of the city's residents confirms the existence of home-schooling in Venice. As mentioned in Chapter One, Antonio da Pesaro, who had a large collection of books, owned "uno libro de amastrar li puti & uno alfabeto, hystorie," in other words a book to teach children and an illustrated "alphabet," one of the standard instructional texts of the Renaissance. The 1560 inventory of Giovanni Mariani records a number of books that may have been used to educate his son, Angelo. These included two Greek "alphabets"; two "abacheti," or abacus books, designed to teach basic accounting principles; several grammar books, including one by Aldo Manuzio; and a "specchio della lingua latina." In addition to these more formal instructional manuals, other texts in Mariani's inventory constituted the standard reading list for the religious education of young boys and girls, such as a vernacular Bible, a *confessionari* (probably a confessional manual), the *Fior di virtù*, a rosary book, five "Little Offices" of the Virgin, and the lives of the Madonna, Saint Roch, the virgin martyrs, and the holy fathers.¹⁴⁷

Even as children progressed on to reading texts, images remained a vital element of their religious instruction. Most of the books that children read, listened to, and studied were illustrated, like the Bible, hagiographical texts, and even the formal instructional tomes that children used both in school and at home. The so-called Malermi Bible (Venice, 1490), for example, was not only the first Bible translated into Italian, it was also the first to be fully illustrated.¹⁴⁸ On the opening page to the Book of Genesis (fig. 65), for example, word and image are equally employed to convey God's act of

"Teaching Adults to Read in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Giovanni Antonio Tagliente's *Libro Maistrevole*," *Sixteenth Century Journal* XVII (1986): 3-16.

¹⁴⁷ ASV, Canc. Inf., Mics. Not. Div., b. 40, n. 73 or 74, 1560, 14 April – 7 May.

¹⁴⁸ The Bible was translated into the vernacular by Niccolò Malermi, which is why this particular version has acquired the name it has.

creation. In the opening to the 1522 edition of the much reprinted and richly illustrated rosary book of Alberto di Castello, it is specifically stated that through the incorporation of pictures, the book was intended for literate and non-literate readers alike. The sacred events and mysteries upon which the reader was to contemplate during prayer were expressed through both figure and text (fig. 194): "...the figure which will be made on one part and on the other the declaration of such act in writing in order to satisfy those who know how to read."¹⁴⁹

The *Portrait of Contessa Chiara Albini Petrozzani with her children*, painted by Tiberio Titi around 1600 and conserved in the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua, aptly summarizes the ways in which religious education was carried out in the household setting (fig. 195). Although dated slightly later than the period on which this discussion is focused, and created for an aristocratic patron living elsewhere on the Italian peninsula, the painting encapsulates how a multi-faceted visual and material culture was utilized in the home to teach children good devotional habits and the fundamentals of the Catholic faith, and how women assumed a leading role in this pursuit. Five children kneel rigidly with their hands folded before what may be a domestic altar ornamented with a crucifix and furnished with candlesticks, an altar cloth, and a small altarpiece. They are situated between this sacred table and their mother, the countess, the large figure cloaked in black. She kneels with them, but at a prayer bench, like those frequently found in Venetian inventories and pictured in contemporary Annunciation scenes. The countess not only

¹⁴⁹ Alberto di Castello, 6r. The argument for the didactic use of images was epitomized by the statements of Gregory the Great, who said: "One thing is the adoration of an image, another thing is to learn what to adore from the story rendered by the image. For what Scripture teaches those who read, this same the image shows to those who cannot read but see; because in it even the ignorant see whom they ought to follow, in the image those who do not know letters are able to read." The opinions of Saint Gregory were widely accepted throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance in Catholic Europe, and were reinforced by the Council of Trent's decree on images. Quote from Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative*, 11

prays with her children but directs their devotions, as expressed by the hand that rests on her youngest daughter's head, gently guiding the girl's attention to the altar, in addition to her position at the rear of the group, bracketing the children between herself and the sacred table, and overseeing their actions. In the countess's hand, resting on the prayer bench, is a small prayer book, a standard devotional item for a woman of her status. Another rests at the feet of her eldest daughter, suggesting the girl's future role as mother and spiritual teacher, and visually tying these holy texts to women.

The children learn their prayers through images, as well. Statues of what are likely saints surround their space, and the boys and girls focus their attention on a painting of the crucifixion on the altar, except for the two little ones who glance out of the painting, inviting the viewer to participate in the family's devotion. Even the youngest members of the household are part of the spiritual lesson, just as Renaissance authorities on education and the care of the *casa* recommended. The environment of the Petrozzani kin is a spiritual one, filled with objects and images that sanctify the home and are an integral part of the devotions and religious development of the mother and her children. And as the family utilizes this visual culture, they themselves become a part of this visible expression of the household's sanctity.

Death, Salvation, and the Family Future

The belief in an ongoing relationship between the living and the dead was firmly rooted in religious thought, supported by both doctrine and common practice; each side worked for the other in what Natalie Zemon Davis has called a "Catholic mutual

economy of salvation.”¹⁵⁰ It was within this system of exchange that Venetians employed their domestic visual and material culture to maintain the bonds of lineage that persisted between this world and the next. Individuals went to great measures to guarantee a favorable future for their families after their departure, not only in monetary ways but spiritual ones, as well. Conversely, those family members who remained in the world of the living were essential participants in the rituals of death and commemoration for they were the ones principally responsible for preserving the memory of the deceased kin and assuring the deliverance of his or her soul.

The greatest threat to the attainment of eternal paradise was purgatory, a dreadful place where souls were forced to remain until cleansed of the tarnish of sin. Activities here on earth, however, could minimize the time suffered in this intermediary place. Para-liturgical devotions, the possession of certain objects, acts of charity, and pilgrimages made to holy sites to view relics were all means by which one could obtain Church-sanctioned indulgences that normally carried a defined period of remittance in purgatory. In addition to acts like these to prepare for one’s own destiny in the hereafter, the living could work for the benefit of the already departed. Masses and prayers for the dead were the primary means by which the deceased depended on others to help them break the bonds of purgatory.¹⁵¹ The partnership was mutually beneficial, for it was

¹⁵⁰ Natalie Zemon Davis, “Ghosts, Kin, and Progeny: Some Features of Family Life in Early Modern France,” *Daedalus* 106 (1977): 87-114, 93.

¹⁵¹ Laura D. Gelfand and Walter S. Gibson, “Surrogate Selves: The *Rolin Madonna* and the Late-Medieval Devotional Portrait,” in *Simiolus* 29 (2002): 119-138, esp. 125. While the practice of assisting souls through purgatory was popular throughout Europe during the Middle Ages, it was made official doctrine by the Church Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438. The Council declared that the pains endured by friends and relatives in purgatory could be eased by prayers and masses said on their behalf, and by alms and other works of charity carried out in their name. Welsh, 147.

believed that those who had reached heaven would in turn intercede on behalf of the living who had helped expedite their journey to salvation.¹⁵²

One way to assure prayer and masses for one's soul was through membership in a confraternity, for constituents of the brotherhood aided and looked after each other through their combined entreaties.¹⁵³ Testamentary strategies were also deemed effective, and were perhaps the most common channel for securing relationships. Testaments from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Venice abound with requests for masses of the Madonna and Saint Gregory to be said on the deceased's behalf.¹⁵⁴ Such concerns were almost always the first order of business in a will, coming before any distribution of the patrimony to living heirs. Funds were left to churches, monasteries, confraternities, friends, and family members to guarantee continual supplication for the deceased's soul. On occasion, testators bequeathed to institutions and individuals material gifts, like devotional pictures, that would stimulate prayer in memory of the departed.¹⁵⁵ Deceased family members were also considered when drafting a testament. Testators frequently asked for masses to be said not only their own behalf, but also for those loved ones who

¹⁵² Welsh, 139.

¹⁵³ Winston-Allen, 120.

¹⁵⁴ Masses of St. Gregory were considered to be particularly effective in liberating the soul from purgatory, Gelfand and Gibson, 134.

¹⁵⁵ As early as 1475, a Venetian notarial charter included a condition that obliged all notaries to ask testators if they wished to add contributions to pious institutions in their final bequests. Since wills were logged in front of witnesses, the customary bequeathal of charitable funds may have been the consequence of significant peer pressure. De Maria, 179, n. 9. I would caution against doubting the sincerity of such altruistic actions, however; Venice, with its substantial numbers of *scuole* and a prevailing republican ideology, was a city in which the Christian virtue of charity permeated nearly all aspects of life. Additionally, as a legally binding document that had considerable repercussions for the future—both for the living and the dead—testaments served for the testator as a means by which to affirm his or her own personal religious orientation and to see that his or her wishes be carried out after passing; thus, wills were documents in which genuine intention on the part of the testator would have been paramount. For an interesting discussion on the relationship between wills and religious belief, see Federica Ambrosini, "Ortodossia cattolica e tracce di eterodossia nei testamenti veneziani del cinquecento," *Archivio Veneto* 5th ser, 136 (1991): 5-64.

had previously passed. Requests for interment with already-departed family members, including parents, spouses, and sometimes, children, were common, as well.

Domestic objects also served to sustain the bonds between the living and the dead. The sacred articles described in household inventories as *vecchio*, or old, may have been items handed down from past generations, perhaps as an effort to pass on and secure traditions of faith. Wills confirm such practices in Venice during the Renaissance. Because individual goods were not commonly singled out from one's larger pool of possessions in Venetian testaments, when this did happen the act likely signaled a high economic or symbolic value associated with the object. While the bequeathal of these items to certain individuals—usually members of the family or household—was driven partially in an effort to retain wealth and status within one's network of kin, these items worked to solidify certain relationships and to assure the future of the testator's soul.¹⁵⁶ In securing one's legacy, there were few distinctions between religious and social thought; through the repartitioning of the family patrimony, the testator could extend the most essential Christian virtue of charity for both the salvation of the soul, and the spiritual development of those who survived him or her.¹⁵⁷

The fact that testators associated an object or a series of physical objects with particular individuals suggests the extent to which relationships were experienced relative to the routines and the material culture of the domestic environment.¹⁵⁸ By remaining a part of the daily surroundings of a household member, whether within the original

¹⁵⁶ For similar testamentary practices elsewhere in Europe during the Renaissance, see Catherine Richardson, "Household Objects and Domestic Ties," in *The Medieval Household in Christian Europe, c. 850-c.1550: Managing Power, Wealth, and the Body*, eds. Cordelia Beattie, Anna Mastakovic, and Sarah Rees Jones (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 433-447, esp. 435, and 447.

¹⁵⁷ Ambrosini, "Ortodossia cattolica," esp. 12.

¹⁵⁸ Richardson, 434.

dwelling or in a new residence, domestic objects provided tangible reassurance that heirs would honor the soul of the departed, and the virtue and bonds of the family and its individual members would continue intact.¹⁵⁹ An example of such testamentary strategies is provided by the will of Giovanni Battista Valier, compiled on 17 February, 1520. To his brother, Valier deeded houses and other forms of property, but for the dowry of his adopted daughter, he provided an array of material objects. In addition to the money Valier bequeathed to Catterina, he gave her a number of household and devotional items, including: a drawing or print of the Resurrection (“la carta dela resurrection”) that may have been displayed in or on a *restello*; an oil lamp, which presumably would have hung with the sacred image; a silver crucifix; and another in gold, this one specifically to wear around the neck (“la qual porto al collo”) and which also displayed an additional pendant bearing the image of the Madonna with the Christ child in her arms on one side and Saint Sebastian on the other.¹⁶⁰ While the personal objects Valier left to Catterina had the practical function of securing her future, they would have also operated as a means by which to strengthen bond between the testator and his daughter who was not his own flesh and blood. Material goods had the power to convey family lineage just as much as property did.

Another member of the Valier family, Pavola, the wife of Bertuzio, who recorded her will on 2 July 1528, left to her nephew Bertuzio Domenego her house in the parish of San Barnaba, but under the explicit condition that her niece, Zizilia, would have a room

¹⁵⁹ Servants were also the recipients of gifts left by testators. They were considered the ideal individuals to pray on one’s behalf. Theologians of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance stressed that the poor and humble were in closer communication with God and the saints than the rich. For more on the bequeathal of personal items in testaments, what Dennis Romano has called “secondary patronage systems,” see Romano, “Aspects of Patronage in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Venice,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 46 (Winter 1993): 712-733.

¹⁶⁰ ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 51, n. 93.

in the said house for as long as she desired. To this same niece, Pavola left “la mia anchona d’oro grando,” or her large, gold *ancona*. Both actions on behalf of the testator indicate the love and care Pavola felt for her niece. While she left household goods, like linens and clothing to other family members, it was only with Zizilia that she gave specific orders for a room to be secured in her home, and to whom she gave one of her devotional items.¹⁶¹ In this instance, the religious image remained in its original environment, and preserved the relationship between the departed aunt and her living niece.

The power of bequests to build familial relationships is brought into startling focus by its opposite: the denial of objects as a means to sever family ties. In her testament dated 30 October 1540, Lucrezia Camus, daughter of the noble cavalier from Cyprus, left her niece Apollonia a figure of the Madonna ornamented with silver, along with a pair of gilded silver salt-cellars and a small ivory chest with a silver lock. But in a later codicil to the will, Lucrezia redistributed these goods, and instead gave a woman also named Lucrezia the figure of the Madonna, and left the salt-cellars and ivory box to her maid Antonia. Apollonia, the will clearly states, would not have anything (“non habbia alcuna cosa”).¹⁶² The testator’s reasons for this change are not explained, but one can only assume that Apollonia in some way gravely offended her aunt, causing Lucrezia to sever ties by denying her niece much treasured goods.

Portraiture was another tactic by which individuals ensured their salvation and preserved the bonds of family, and the domestic context may have been one of the most effective settings for such a function to be achieved. During the sixteenth century,

¹⁶¹ ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 874 (Spitti), n. 439.

¹⁶² ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 1209 (Marsilio), n. 565.

portraits were almost as popular as religious works of art in Renaissance Venetian *case*.¹⁶³ While the likenesses of past and present emperors, famous philosophers, and feminine “beauties” appeared from time to time, a majority of residences in the Republic displayed portraits of their own family members, both living and dead, and sometimes going back several generations. The wealthy nobleman Giovanni Simone Donà, for instance, possessed several portraits of his relatives, including Francesco Donà, who served as doge from 1545-1553, his father Gerolamo, his wife Luchesa Trevisan, and a “Zuan Donà,” in addition to a image of himself.¹⁶⁴ The artist and biographer Giorgio Vasari made note of the Venetian tradition of portrait collections of one’s kin. Praising Giovanni Bellini’s initiation of the custom, Vasari wrote that, “there are many portraits in all the houses of Venice, and in many gentlemen’s homes one may see their fathers and grandfathers back to the fourth generation, and in some of the more noble houses back further still.”¹⁶⁵

Scholars have traditionally interpreted the function of independent portraiture as primarily secular.¹⁶⁶ First and foremost, they argue, portraits were commemorative, whether it was to honor an important event in the life of an individual, like the elevation to a government office or the occasion of marriage, or to preserve the memory of the

¹⁶³ Portraits do not seem to be as common in fifteenth-century Venetian households; I have found no reference to a portrait in any of the Quattrocento inventories I have surveyed. This omission corresponds to the fewer surviving Venetian portraits from the period, particularly of individuals who did not hold high government offices in the Republic. As an artistic genre, portraiture did not flourish in Venice until the sixteenth century, around the same time when paintings appeared in greater quantities and varieties in the city’s domestic spaces.

¹⁶⁴ Donà also displayed the likeness of Doge Andrea Gritti (1521-1523) in his home. ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 43, n. 57, 3 February 1587, m.c.

¹⁶⁵ Translated quote from Brown, *Private Lives*, 16. See also Vasari, vol. 3: 168.

¹⁶⁶ For example, in an essay on early Renaissance Flemish portraits in the Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, Guy Bauman states: “Generalizations are dangerous, but perhaps it can be said that donor portraits fulfilled a public function in a religious context and that independent portraits were of a personal, often secular nature.” Bauman, “Early Flemish Portraits, 1425-1525,” *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 43 (Spring 1986): 1-64, 16.

sitter for future generations. In fact, Patricia Fortini Brown has suggested that the customary exhibition of portraits in the *portego* was a means of asserting familial lineage in this most public space of the home.¹⁶⁷ The likenesses of family members, however, hung throughout the household, and while tribute was certainly a motivation for their acquisition, alternative incentives may have equally stimulated the practice, if not more so. Venetian household inventories most often list portraits in the midst of other images, the majority of which depicted religious subject matter. Assuming that the notary recorded the paintings on the wall of a room in the manner in which they were displayed, portraits were likely exhibited in relation to devotional works of art, either directly adjacent or in close proximity. For instance, in the home of Antonio Roda from the parish of Sant’Aponal several pictures hung on the wall in a child’s room, and the notary listed them in the inventory in the following order: an old, gilded painting of the Madonna “alla grecha”; a gilded painting of Christ; a gilded copper mirror; a damascened *cesendelo*, or oil lamp; six pieces of copper upon which were engraved scenes from the Passion of Christ; an old portrait of the head of the household, Antonio; a wooden crucifix; and five silk wall-hangings.¹⁶⁸ Given the way the notary recorded the items, the portrait of Antonio likely hung in the midst of these religious paintings and sculptural pieces.

The presentation of these portraits amidst holy images imbued the painted likenesses with spiritual overtones. Portraits may have been displayed nearby sacred

¹⁶⁷ Fortini Brown, *Private Lives*, 71 and 75. Wolfgang Wolters suggests that the popularity of portraits in Venetian homes during the sixteenth century was linked to the absence of the likenesses of *uomini illustri*, or illustrious men, from recent history in the city’s public edifices – with the exception of the Palazzo Ducale – largely due to the republican mentality that disallowed the glorification of particular individuals. *Storia e politica nei dipinti di Palazzo Ducale: aspetti dell’autocelebrazione della Repubblica di Venezia nel Cinquecento* (Venice: Arsenale, 1987), 70.

¹⁶⁸ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 36, n. 52, 8-18 April 1537.

pictures so that when a member of the household looked upon an image of a holy personage or event while engaging in his or her devotions, the likeness of the loved one would have also been in view and thus considered in relation to the divine. The relationship between portraits and holy images is not unusual for this period. Throughout Europe, including Venice, during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance donor portraits commonly appeared in altarpieces and even some domestic devotional works during the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. The cavalier Andrea Maioli, from the parish of San Zulian in Venice, displayed in his *camera* a painting of “nostra donna” that included a portrait of himself and his wife, who were most likely shown in the act of prayer or as witnesses to a miraculous vision.¹⁶⁹ While Maioli’s painting cannot be identified today, a number of surviving domestic images from the Veneto region exist that may be akin to the Venetian gentleman’s Madonna, such as Lorenzo Lotto’s *Madonna and Child with Two Donors* (fig. 196), painted around 1525-1530 and today housed at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, a work executed for Bergamese patrons. In Lotto’s painting the wealthy couple kneels before the divine mother and her offspring, and look up at the Christ child, who rewards their faithfulness with a blessing. Despite sharing the same space with the holy figures, the man and woman are tied to the earthly realm by their location in the bottom realm of the composition and the somber colors of their dress, in great contrast to the brilliant red and blue of the Madonna’s garb and elevated position. Whether or not they were similar in appearance, the painting commissioned by Maioli, as well as that of the Bergamese couple now at the Getty, functioned equally as commemorative portraits and as declarations of the religious devotions of the donors.

¹⁶⁹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 41, n. 46, 9 April 1571.

In addition to sacred imagery that presented the likenesses of donors, there was a strong tradition of votive portraiture in the lagoon, most discernible in the large scale paintings of this type representing the doge (fig. 197). Commissioned shortly after the doge took office to be displayed in the ducal palace, these portraits represent the head of state kneeling in a sign of devotion before a sacred image or an allegorical personification, and often accompanied by intermediary saints.¹⁷⁰ This genre soon became popular with private individuals for their own homes. A famous example is the *Coccina Family Presented to the Madonna and Child* (fig. 198), commissioned by the head of the household, the merchant Alvise, and painted by Paolo Veronese in 1571.¹⁷¹ Featuring all of the members of the Coccina household, including a posthumous portrait of the deceased Antonio, it was part of a monumental pictorial cycle for the family palace that featured *The Adoration of the Magi*, *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, and *The Road to Calvary*. Each painting within this larger narrative cycle includes at least one portrait of a key member of the family.¹⁷² Taken as a whole, the cycle visually professes the personal faith and orthodox beliefs of its patron.¹⁷³ These portrait/devotional paintings thematize the subject of personal prayer and piety by making visibly manifest the donor's experience in the presence of the sacred.¹⁷⁴

Donor and votive portraits served both temporal and spiritual purposes. They were the product of the order of worldly and wealthy individuals concerned with social

¹⁷⁰ Scholars do not know exactly when this tradition began; the oldest surviving example is a relief by Pietro Lombardo conserved in the ducal palace that portrays Leonardo Loredan (1501-1521) affixed in the Sala degli Scarlatti above the door leading to the Scala d'Oro. Wolters, 93.

¹⁷¹ For an extensive discussion on the patronage of the Coccina family of Venice, see Blake De Maria's dissertation, op. cit.

¹⁷² De Maria, 253.

¹⁷³ In a period in which one's loyalty to the Catholic faith was constantly in question, orthodoxy may have been of pressing concern for Coccina, a merchant with contacts in the Protestant and Muslim world, and hailing from Bergamo, a heretical hotbed. De Maria, 272.

¹⁷⁴ Kasl, 81.

prestige and lasting fame, but who remained deeply religious and were all the more anxious over the salvation of their souls. A good number of altarpieces that contained donor portraits functioned as gifts to churches and monasteries that bound priests to say Masses (or monks and nuns to pray) for the soul of the donor, whose visible presence served as a constant reminder for holy men and women of their obligation to the departed.¹⁷⁵ In a similar manner, donor portraits served efficacious roles as “surrogate selves” in the perpetual act of prayer, carrying out what the patron could no longer do once he or she had left this world. In their essay on Jan Van Eyck’s *Rolin Madonna* and the functions of devotional portraits, Laura Gelfand and Walter Gibson have demonstrated that in late medieval thought, likenesses and effigies were believed to be the physical embodiments of the persons they depicted; portraits, therefore, both sculpted and painted, could continue to engage in spiritual activity to ensure salvation and communicate with the divine figures who shared the same fictive space.¹⁷⁶ Such convictions are spelled out in the testament of the Veronese Andrea Pellegrini drafted in 1429. The testator meticulously described the commemorative actions to be taken after his death and the funerary monument he desired to be erected in the church of S. Anastasia in his home town, made by Michele dei Firenze around 1335. Pellegrini stated

¹⁷⁵ Gelfand and Gibson, 125-126.

¹⁷⁶ Bauman, 17-18. Numerous examples of the treatment of portraits throughout the centuries—from kissing them to damaging them—demonstrate that people have often treated painted figures as if they were actual persons, possessing souls. Ann Adams calls this kind of psychological response to portraits, the “aesthetic unification of bodily appearance.” Because we live in bodies ourselves, we believe that we bring a great deal of knowledge about the human form to the portrait, and thus are more likely to respond to representations of the body as true, no matter how distorted or schematized. Ann Jensen Adams, “The Three-Quarter Length Life-Sized Portrait in Seventeenth-Century Holland: The Cultural Functions of *Tranquillitas*,” in *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art: Realism Reconsidered*, ed. Wayne Frantis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 158-174, esp. 161. The circulation of portraits between courts, and the collections of exemplary likenesses that were increasingly amassed by intellectuals and rulers during this period indicates that portraits were understood to be direct substitutes for their sitters, and functioned as a way of bestowing immortality to the worthy subject depicted. Joanna Woodall, “Introduction: facing the subject,” in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, ed. Joanna Woodall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 1-3.

in his will, “I order that my body be buried in the church of S. Anastasia... there where my father is buried... I order that after my death... for three years continuously the Mass of St Gregory shall be said for my soul... I want to be sculpture... in this chapel... kneeling [and] praying... I want this to be done and completed within three years of my death.”¹⁷⁷ Given the time frame outlined by Pellegrini—three years—his praying effigy would take over the responsibility of supplication that the Masses served in freeing his soul from Purgatory.¹⁷⁸

The testament and inventory of cavalier and ducal secretary Simone Lando illuminate Venetian attitudes with regards to the sacred role of portraiture, as well as the power of goods to secure the bonds between the living and the dead after death. Not entirely unusual for someone of his noble rank and professional status, Lando had a fairly large art collection that comprised paintings, medals, armor and sculpture; the bulk of the subject matter, however, was religious.¹⁷⁹ It was because of their principally devotional function that Lando saw it entirely appropriate to bequeath a majority of his paintings to the monastery of Santa Maria Maggiore to decorate the main chapel of the church associated with the convent, where he was buried. The paintings included: an *Ecce Homo*; the Madonna with Saint Peter and Lando at around age forty; Saint Thomas and the other apostles “serati,” or “locked,” probably a reference to the story of the Doubting Thomas; the Mother of the Sons of Zebede; the Centurion; Christ and the Adulteress; Noah’s Ark; the Magdalene; the four seasons; Christ in Agony; and a painting that

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in Geraldine Johnson, “Activating the Effigy: Donatello’s Pecci Tomb in Siena Cathedral,” *Art Bulletin* 77 (September 1995): 458-59.

¹⁷⁸ Gelfand and Gibson, 134.

¹⁷⁹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 43, n. 59, January 10, 1585, m.c.

represented an Old Testament story, the subject of which was not identified.¹⁸⁰ The majority of the aforementioned paintings are now lost, with the exception of *Christ in Agony*, painted by Veronese probably shortly before Lando's death and today preserved in Milan (fig. 199).¹⁸¹ With this gift of paintings of primarily sacred subjects, Lando also included the terracotta portrait of himself and two other images with his likeness: one showing him as a young man and the other at a later age.¹⁸² Although none of Lando's portraits survive, a terracotta head of an elderly warrior (fig. 200) attributed to Alessandro Vittoria, who was active in Venice from 1543, may be similar to Lando's sculpted likeness in terms of size, color, and overall style. Lando also left money to the monastery so that masses would be said everyday for his soul at the altar by which he was to be buried. The fact that one or more of his portraits was likely displayed in the monastery church where the nuns gathered daily to pray meant that Lando himself was a constant presence in this dedicated sacred space. The bequeathal of his likeness to S. Maria Maggiore was perhaps a means by which this gentleman sought to secure the perpetual future of his soul.

Portraiture had long had a religious component, and was intimately tied to the issue of salvation. Artists, patrons, and beholders were all acutely aware of the spiritual functions this genre of art served. Given contemporary theories with regards to images

¹⁸⁰ Most of these paintings are named in the inventory of Lando's goods, which was compiled about a year after he composed his testament. There are also some general references to paintings in his inventory, like "quadretti numero tre," that may correspond to those specifically named pictures in his will but that cannot be found in the record of his household possessions.

¹⁸¹ According to Boschini, the *Ark of Noah* and *Four Seasons* were painted by Jacopo Bassano, while the *Agony* and *Centurion*, companion pieces, were done by Veronese. Boschini also attributes the *Ecce Homo* to Paris Bordone and the *Mother of the Sons of Zebedee* to Carletto Carliari. For more on the Lando bequest to the church and monastery of Santa Maria Maggiore, see Deborah Helen Walberg, "'Una compiuta galleria di pitture veneziane': the church of S. Maria Maggiore in Venice," *Studi Veneziani* XLVII (2004): 259-304, esp. 283-287.

¹⁸² ASV, Atti Notarile, Testamenti, b. 1192 (Secco), n. 572.

as substitutes for the person they represent, individual portraits of the type normally classified as “secular” could have thus easily operated in manners similar to donor portraits and those that occupied ecclesiastical spaces. In the domestic context, they provided the household with a constant visible presence of the relative depicted, continuing to witness family events, and perhaps even offering comfort to those grieving over his or her physical absence due to reasons such as travel, war, death, marriage, or religious vows. In this manner, portraits functioned to strengthen past, present and future family ties.¹⁸³ When hung in close proximity to holy personages and sacred narratives they would have served to prompt the viewer to pray for the soul of the relative represented in the image. The depicted individual also existed as devout surrogate and perpetual witnesses to the sacred person or event in an adjacent or nearby work of art, perhaps continuing to pursue his or her salvation long after death. Collecting family portraits may have operated as a means by which Venetians pronounced their lineage to this world, but the act assured divine favor for the family in the next life, as well.

Domestic piety in Renaissance Venice honored not only God, but the family itself. In the *casa*, access to faith had to be cultivated and nurtured for all household members, and familial ties upheld in perpetuity. Following social and religious prescriptions, women assumed the responsibility for these most serious and sacred of household duties. As a result, religion in the domestic sphere extended beyond the

¹⁸³ The bonds of lineage reinforced by portraiture were not always positive, as explicated by Diane Owen Hughes. She argues that in an age when young men and especially women were sent off to monasteries due to escalating dowries, portraiture in some instances may have only merely masked the weakening of their right to an equal share in the family estate with the disingenuous appearance of familial unity, 25-26.

written text to include visual and concrete forms that engaged the body in devotion and remembrance. Holy domestic goods thus functioned to construct and preserve a Christian household. They mediated the transitional moments of life, while offering outlets for devotional activity, exemplary models of sanctity and virtue, and lessons in the fundamentals of the Catholic faith. Working in tandem with seemingly more secular items, the religious visual culture of the Venetian household maintained the bonds of family, and brought salvation within reach.

Chapter 6. The Intersection of Personal and Communal Devotion

The religious visual culture of the *casa* cultivated a complex personal and familial piety in Renaissance Venice, one that touched upon not only spiritual concerns, but also those seemingly more “terrestrial”: bodily protection and good health; the assurance of fertility and a safe birth; literacy, education and moral development; and the securing of family bonds and honor both in the present and for generations to come. These functions were achieved through visual and material forms that were, for the most part, tailored for individual rather than communal use, such as the half-length figural format adopted for domestic devotional images to facilitate more intimate viewing experiences, or rosary beads and religious jewelry, which although often openly displayed were designed specifically for the service of a single person. Contact with sacred household goods was direct, immediate, and often devoid of the constraints of decorum dictated by ecclesiastical space. Although informed by the *casa* and utilized within this context in often personal ways, domestic devotions and the arts associated with them were not confined to this environment. The amassing of pious objects in domestic spaces situated the individual dwelling within a larger community of believers, reinforcing collective piety. In the Venetian Republic, the ties between the so-called “public” and “private” spheres, particularly in the realm of religion, were so entrenched that our current nomenclature seems inept at characterizing the situation. While this dissertation has argued for a reconsideration of the Renaissance home as sacred space, it was but one framework

of many that cultivated faith and piety, each of which built on and influenced the other.

As alluded to in previous chapters, private devotion and its visual culture often drew upon public cultic forms. Hans Belting has explicated that this was because, "...it ultimately needed objective contents that were beyond the whims of the individual."¹ In Venice, the "public" influence over the "private" manifested itself in a number of ways. The myth of *la Serenissima* that so strongly pervaded public life in the city also had a profound impact on the daily, personal lives of its residents; in addition to the churches and squares across the city, the protection of Christ, the Virgin, and saints extended over each household, made effective and reinforced by the images of these holy personages displayed there. As we have seen in Chapter Three in the discussion on the spaces of household religion, the potency of ecclesiastical space inevitably had an effect on the tailoring of areas in the *casa* for sacred purposes.² Many families in Venice sought to obtain the rights for an altar in their own homes, or simply fashioned altar-like environments through the use of normal household items. Images, too, were framed and adorned in ways that reflected altarpieces and marked their holy status.

At the same time, the personal colored the public. Visible marks of individuals and families permeated churches and confraternities in the form of coats of arms, family chapels, floor and wall tombs, and the paintings, sculptures, and liturgical objects that were continually bequeathed to sacred institutions. Personal ownership of stock religious subjects and devotional items also played a role in

¹ Belting, 59.

² Webb, "Domestic Space," 32.

disseminating the faith, standardizing prayer and devotion, and uniting the households of the Republic under a shared Christian piety. In addition, the possession of sacred goods functioned as outward markers of a family's spiritual, social, and sometimes, financial status, and were thus acquired with an eye toward a broader audience. As this chapter will demonstrate, the religious visual and material culture of a family's home generated a continual and reciprocal exchange between the personal and the communal.

Personal Piety and Public Prestige: The Marketplace and Patronage Practices

While the visual culture of domestic religion in Venice was vast and varied, it also exhibited a degree of uniformity that connected households throughout the Republic under an umbrella of collective spiritual values and practices. For example, the predominance of particular holy figures within the domestic sphere, most notably the Madonna and Christ, but also saints like Jerome, Christopher, Roch, Sebastian, and Catherine, offers clear evidence of the infiltration of shared public cults into personal environments. Similarly, the popularity of particular prayer books, like the Book of Hours and its derivative, the Office of the Virgin, meant not only that numerous households throughout the Republic possessed the same spiritual texts, but that the act and content of private prayer was likely standardized as well, even down to the timing.³

The marketplace sustained this regularity with regards to devotion. Both large and small artistic workshops readily replicated—sometimes with little to no variations

³ Webb, "Domestic Space," 31.

in form—those sacred images and objects deemed effective in fulfilling spiritual needs, offering protection for the owner, or educating the family in the faith. The use of molds, along with materials like terracotta, gesso, and papier mâché, for instance, allowed successful sculptural compositions—such as the Madonna and Child reliefs produced by the workshop of Jacopo Sansovino (figs. 53 & 54)—to be reproduced in a relatively quick and inexpensive manner. Various methods of tracing and the use of model books in painting ateliers offered means by which two-dimensional images could be duplicated—either whole or piecemeal—with comparative precision. Already discussed in Chapter One, this was certainly the case in the *studio* of Giovanni Bellini, of which numerous works survive bearing almost identical compositions and/or formal details (figs. 27 & 28).

Prints, of course, were another important medium by which holy pictures permeated multiple households. Through the printed medium, families and individuals in Venice could possess well-known sacred images in far-off places, like the Sistine Ceiling in Rome, as well as nearby locales. The painting of *Christ Bearing the Cross* in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco of Venice (fig. 201), ascribed to both Giorgione and the youthful Titian quickly acquired a reputation as a miracle-working image after it was installed in the church sometime around 1508 or 1509. Marin Sanudo commented on its sacred status, and the alms generated as a result, in an entry in his diary dated 20 December 1520:

Non voglio restar di scriver il gran concorso a la chiese di S. Rocho al presente, per una imagine di Cristo vien tirato da zudei, è a uno altar, qual à

fato et fa molti miracoli, adeo ogni zorno vi va asaissima zente, si trova assa elemosine con le qual si farà la scuola bellissima.⁴

Vasari later told a similar account, and claimed that the vast amounts of alms that were collected when it was displayed far exceeded the combined earnings of the two painters.⁵ The calligrapher and engraver Eustacio Celebrino composed a pamphlet of verse, titled, *Li Stupendi et maravigliosi miracoli del Glorioso Christo de Sancto Roccho Movamente Impressa*, in which he described no less than six miracles brought about by the picture which he claimed to have witnessed.⁶ The image was reproduced in a variety of media, including several popular woodcuts (fig. 202), which allowed the laity to bring this influential image into their daily lives. The subject was also a popular one for paintings in the households of the Republic, as discussed in Chapter Two, and this may have been the direct result of the power and status that the cult image belonging to the Scuola di San Rocco had gained.

Even pictorial inventions designed specifically for the personal devotions of an individual patron were often copied and circulated through prints. Titian's famous paintings of the Magdalene, already discussed in Chapter Four, gained a successful reputation not only in the elite circles of Italy and Europe, but also amongst a broader population, made possible through the printed medium; the Flemish artist Cornelius Cort, for example, reproduced a number of the Venetian artist's inventions in engravings executed between 1565 and 1566, including Titian's famous Mary

⁴ For more on this image, its commission, and the subsequent confusion surrounding it, see Jaynie Anderson, "'Christ Carrying the Cross' in San Rocco: Its Commission and Miraculous History," *Arte Veneta* 31 (1977): 186-188. The Sanudo quote can be found on 186.

⁵ Anderson, 187.

⁶ Anderson, 188.

Magdalene (fig. 203).⁷ As a more affordable art form that enabled access to particular holy forms by a larger audience, the print transformed the relationship between personal devotion and the broader context of religion through the medium of vision. What once was public could now be possessed by each individual, while the personal was more readily disseminated across the community of the faithful.

Like the repetition of ritual to assure the effectiveness and truth of the activity and its messages to participants,⁸ the replication of the form, subject, and/or style also secured the legitimacy of an image or object. The fact that multiple households could possess the same or similar types of holy goods joined their more personal devotions into a larger network of Christian spirituality, and validated individual beliefs and actions. The arts of domestic devotion also linked families across social and economic classes, even in a city where rank and hierarchy were of the utmost importance. It is true that wealthier households acquired a greater number and variety of religious goods for their personal spaces. Nevertheless, the concern and desire for redemption cut across social boundaries, and the overwhelming majority of households in the Republic, despite their economic position, visually transformed their daily surroundings—even if in modest ways—as a means by which to negotiate the divide between human and divine.

Most pious objects and pictures were sold on speculation out of artists' shops, at markets on the Rialto and along the *Merceria*—the shopping district that stretched

⁷ Humfrey, Clifford, Weston-Lewis, and Bury, eds., 303, cat. 145.

⁸ Ossie Onuora Enekwe, *Igbo Masks: The Oneness of Ritual and Theatre* (Lagos: Dept. of Culture, Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, 1987), 32.

from the Rialto to San Marco⁹—and during Venice’s annual festival of the Ascension, known as the *Sensa* in local dialect, when Venice celebrated its symbolic marriage to the sea.¹⁰ The workshop of a paternoster maker seen in a fifteenth-century German illustration (fig. 204), and the vendors of paintings and crucifixes portrayed in a seventeenth-century Flemish print representing the art market in Rome (fig. 205), are sights probably quite similar to what Venetians would have encountered in their local markets, or during their frequent travels throughout the world. As stated above, household inventories reflect the livelihood of merchants and traders, and abound with references to items—both sacred and secular—that came from foreign lands, including England, Germany, France, Flanders and the Near East. Holy goods for personal use may have also been acquired by individuals during pilgrimages. For example, the hat maker Agostino Cigrini, son of Francesco, owned “do madonine d’ariento indorado da Loretto piccole,” or two very small gilded silver Madonnas from Loreto, perhaps a memento Agostino acquired from this much revered city, not far from Venice, where the house of the Virgin Mary is purported to be located.¹¹ In addition to small medals like those owned by Agostino, items such as prayer beads, alleged relics, and the Agnus Dei are some of the smaller, more portable goods that could have been acquired on such journeys, making an aspect of the distant, hallowed site both visible and physically present within the everyday space of the *casa*.

⁹ The central market was at the Rialto, where merchandise was sold wholesale and then transferred to retail outlets through the city. Brown, *Private Lives*, 86.

¹⁰ The art market in the lagoon city, while closely regulated by the Venetian government, was much more extensive than previously assumed. See Louisa C. Matthew, "Were There Open Markets for Pictures in Renaissance Venice?," in Matthews-Grieco and Fantoni, 253-261.

¹¹ ASV, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 40, n. 27 (1562).

The religious visual and material culture of domestic spaces cannot be divorced from consumption as a whole in Renaissance Venice. As explicated in Chapter One, the *casa* embodied the family that dwelled there; thus the practice of commissioning and collecting works of art for this sphere provided a channel for the formation of familial honor and identity in a particular place and time.¹² In Venice during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, where the sacred infiltrated all aspects of life, to be seen by one's peers as devout, moral, and favored in the eyes of God was of considerable importance for nearly all individuals and families, and the acquisition of pious works of art were thus a means by which to enhance one's public standing. This is not to say that the motivations that drove domestic devotion were spiritually insincere. The previous four chapters have discussed some of the functions successfully fulfilled by the images and objects associated with household religion, a testament to their critical role in shaping the home and the family that dwelled there. It was because of their potential to define and articulate these particular circumstances that sacred articles became an authoritative vehicle for forming both the personal and social identity of the individuals who experienced their power intimately on a daily basis.¹³

While new technologies of mass-production contributed significantly to the ability of households from lower social classes to acquire religious goods, many objects were equally valued for their originality and artistic sophistication. Pious articles were a component of Venetians' amassing of mythological paintings, portraits, antiquities, and curiosities from around the world, and in many cases, they

¹² The role of the visual arts in defining identity is discussed by a number of scholars, including Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici*, esp.6; Syson and Thornton; and Brown, "Behind the Walls" and *Private Lives*.

¹³ Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici*, 6-7.

were acquired not only for intimate viewing and enjoyment, but with a somewhat public audience in mind, as well.¹⁴ Some forms of personal piety were intended to be displayed in very conspicuous ways, like the sacred emblems that adorned the facades of many of the city's residences (figs. 3 & 4), or the crucifixes and rosary beads worn and carried openly in the city's civic spaces (fig. 206). Other goods remained firmly in the domestic sphere. Documentary evidence relating to the commissioning of household images in Venice is rare, and artists' names are almost universally omitted in the inventories drawn up by the city's representatives. Nevertheless, general descriptions of paintings as *all'antica*, or from the Greek, Flemish, or German schools, demonstrate not only the range of painting styles that could be obtained in Venice during this period, but also patrons' desire for images of a certain appearance, whether motivated by devotional concerns, or issues of aesthetics.¹⁵

The series of notebooks compiled by the Venetian connoisseur and collector Marcantonio Michiel in the 1520s and 1530s constitute a key record in the history of collecting. Michiel chronicled works of art—including religious images—in the collections of patricians and wealthy citizens in Venice and the cities of the Venetian mainland.¹⁶ His invitation into the homes of collectors as well as his attention to identifying artists, when possible, attest to the status these images held as objects of artistic esteem, in addition to their devotional function. Wealth expended on the procurement of piety, made manifest in the abundance of devotional goods in the

¹⁴ Aikema, "The Lure of the North: Netherlandish Art in Venetian Collections," in *Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the Time of Bellini, Dürer and Titian*, eds. Bernard Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown (New York: Rizzoli, 2000), 83.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁶ Peter Humfrey outlines primary sources available for the study of Venetian works of art—including the notebooks of Michiel—in *Painting in Renaissance Venice*, 32-35, esp. 32.

home, was an honorable enterprise that reflected both personal virtue and public prestige.

Lorenzo Lotto's famous portrait of the Milanese-born merchant and *cittadino* Andrea Odoni (fig. 44) epitomizes the approach to collecting amongst a certain class of patrons in Renaissance Venice. Odoni had a very extensive collection of art, detailed in both his household inventory and the chronicles of Michiel; it included paintings, sculpture, manuscripts, antiquities, and *naturalia*.¹⁷ In the portrait the patron is surrounded by objects that include fragments of marble statues, bronze statuettes, coins, a book, pearls, and a small blue dish. These treasures do not visually document the actual works of art and antiquities in Odoni's home, but instead function more symbolically to publicize his passion for collecting.

When the painting was cleaned in 1996, a small detail was revealed that transformed its interpretations. With the hand that rests on his chest, Odoni holds between two fingers a previously unseen gold crucifix that hangs from a chain around his neck. Peter Humfrey reads the inclusion of the cross as a contrast between Christianity and the idolatry of antiquity, while Monika Schmitter conversely interprets the presence of the crucifix as an expression of continuity and reconciliation of the two cultures.¹⁸ I tend to agree more with Schmitter's analysis of the painting; it seems odd that a man who took such care to acquire and preserve his complex and valuable collection of both sacred and secular objects would have desired to represent himself renouncing the activities and ambitions that occupied his

¹⁷ Much of Odoni's collection was inherited from his uncle, Francesco Zio. Zio's inventory is also preserved in the archive of the Cancelleria Inferiore. On Odoni as a collector, see Humfrey, Andrew John Martin, "'Amica e un albergo di virtuosi': La casa e la collezione di Andrea Odoni," *Venezia Cinquecento* 19 (2000): 153-170; and Monika Schmitter "Virtuous Riches," 942-963.

¹⁸ Humfrey, *Lorenzo Lotto*, 164; Schmitter, "Virtuous Riches," 955-956.

adult life. Nonetheless, the crucifix is critical in forming the identity that Odoni wished to project in this portrait. Although it is a small detail in the painting, the object is carefully displayed by the sitter, and held close to his heart, assuming visual and emblematic centrality. Odoni appears less engaged, however, with the other objects depicted, excluding the statue of Diana of Ephesus (a symbol of nature) he holds in his other hand. The message here is that religion was as fundamental to Odoni's personal and social identity as his antiquarian and cultured tastes; he could be both distinguished collector and devout Christian. The numerous sacred works of art within his home are further testament to his religious persona. These included: the "Justice of Trajan," a story taken from the life of Saint Gregory; Saint Jerome in the desert, painted in the style of Giorgione; a canvas depicting the inferno in a Northern style, probably something similar to the manner of Bosch given Michiel's description of the painting as "filled with monsters"; a *sacra conversazione* in a landscape; a small ebony box with a painted image of Saint Joseph inside; a tiny ivory panel featuring Saint George, which he kept in a small chest; two Offices of the Virgin, one of which was an illuminated manuscript; a painting of Christ preaching; a stucco relief of Saint Jerome; silver and jeweled crucifixes; a wooden statue of Christ; and two more paintings: one of Christ and the other of the Madonna.¹⁹

Nowhere is the intersection between private ownership and public piety/reputation more evident than in the series of events surrounding the Madonna of the Amadi family, recorded in the personal account of Francesco Amadi, from 1481. Members of the *cittadini* class, the Amadi of Venice commissioned in 1408 a painting

¹⁹ Odoni's collection is recorded in both his household inventory, compiled on 23 June 1555, Canc. Inf., Misc. Not. Div., b. 39, n. 58, and by Marcantonio Michiel. For a discussion of Michiel's description of Odoni's collection, see Schmitter.

of the Madonna, which they affixed to an outside wall that was part of the palace of the Barozzi clan. Decades later, in August 1480, the painting had gained a reputation for performing miracles, and thus became the object of intense public devotion. In order to provide for the protection and safety of the Madonna, the Amadi relocated the image to their own courtyard (fig. 207), where they constructed an altar adorned with linens and various greenery. They opened a portion of their private household to the public, and masses continued to be held, but the family now attempted to control collective fervor by reasserting their ownership over the miraculous painting and placing it in their personal space. The Barozzi family, however, protested the removal of the image from their palace, also claiming rights and threatening to transfer the image to their parish church of Santa Maria Formosa. The issue eventually went to the Signoria, who sided with the Amadi with regards to ownership. Meanwhile, devotion to the Madonna had grown to such an extent that it could no longer be contained within the domestic environment that the Amadi family had created for it. Therefore, they commissioned the church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli (fig. 208) to provide a more suitable setting for the image. While the Amadi family still considered itself the rightful owners, they also recognized the collective ownership the image had acquired through its exterior placement and its miraculous workings for the people of the city. The commissioning of the church of the Miracoli, therefore, served as a means of maintaining the public's relationship with the painted Madonna while affirming Amadi authority over such devotion, and their status as one of the Republic's most distinguished and virtuous households.²⁰

²⁰ The chronicle of the Amadi Madonna and the founding of the Church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli have been discussed by James Grubb in "House and Household," 130-131. Grubb continues to

Corporate Devotion in Renaissance Venice

Although the laity did not actively participate in the Mass, nor regularly receive Communion, the church still assumed central importance in the religious life of most Europeans. As explicated by Diana Webb, the church possessed for many a particular quality of sacredness unique to its structure, appearance, and the actions that took place there; all aspects of its architectural design and decoration contributed to this holy atmosphere, further augmented by its consecrated status, the presence of relics and the reserved sacrament, and the “accumulated spiritual potency of the past prayers of a multitude of worshippers lingering in the air.”²¹ This was especially true in Venice, where many of the churches held important relics and miracle-working images, making Venice a popular destination for pilgrims en route to the Holy Land. Venetians themselves did not have to travel far to worship and pray in ecclesiastical spaces. On the small cluster of islands that comprise the city, churches were everywhere. According to the diarist Marin Sanudo, writing in 1493, there were 137 churches throughout the city of Venice and the lagoon, including 70 parish churches, 33 connected to monasteries and 31 linked to convents. These numbers may have been larger than any other Christian city at that time, excluding Rome.²² Given the enormous funds needed to build and sustain a church—not to mention the limited availability of land in Venice—the construction boom in ecclesiastical architecture would not have been possible without the financial and psychological support of the

investigate this family and their patronage practices for future publication on Venice’s *cittadini* households. The story of the Amadi Madonna can be found in the *Memoirs of Francesco Amadi*, Venice, Civico Museo Correr, ms Gradenigo 56.

²¹ Webb, “Domestic Space,” 31-32.

²² Peter Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 21.

community. Visitors to Venice, like the German pilgrim Felix Farber and the statesman and chronicler Philippe de Commines, both traveling to lagoon city in the late fifteenth century, commented on the crowded nature of the city's many churches, as well as the devotional fervor of those who attended.²³

Ecclesiastical spaces, therefore, provided sites for shared devotional experiences. Church authorities—as well as the Venetian government—encouraged the faithful to regularly attend the mass. The state believed that social unity and patriotic solidarity could be achieved through communal worship.²⁴ Because their participation in the liturgy was limited, the laity often performed more individual prayers and devotions during the mass, like the silent recitation of the rosary. The commonplace nature of such acts, however—being performed by multiple people simultaneously in a shared place—lent them a collective character. Sermons also drew the devout into the city's ecclesiastical spaces. Pronounced in the vernacular and often addressing very contemporary concerns and events, they were aimed squarely at the laity, providing them with both spiritual and practical direction that could be readily applied to their personal situations.

Civic rituals also occupied a prominent position in the devotional life of Renaissance Venetians. Every year, public festivals in Venice honored 65 saints' days and ten movable feasts, in addition to entries of foreign dignitaries and ambassadors, the coronations and funerals of doges, and the commemorations of victories and public treaties. Deborah Howard has postulated that at least every five days, every year, Venice was engaged in some kind of elaborate public ritual, an

²³ Humfrey, *Painting in Renaissance Venice*, 24.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

equally spiritual and political affair that involved all segments of the population.²⁵ The form of communal devotion in which Venetians were most actively engaged, however, was the city's confraternal life. From rich *cittadini* to impoverished artisans, the vast majority of Venetian laymen below the level of nobility belonged to one or more confraternities, known in the Republic as *scuole*.²⁶ These *scuole* were groups of individuals, often of the same profession, who placed themselves under the protection of a particular holy figure or were united by a common devotion.²⁷ The members performed charitable acts on behalf of their own poor, sick, and deceased; maintained altars in local churches; and participated in the city's religious and civic festivals.²⁸

By 1550, Venice had five *Scuole Grandi*, dedicated to Santa Maria della Carità, San Giovanni Evangelista, Santa Maria Valverde della Misericordia, San Marco, and San Rocco.²⁹ The *Scuole Grandi*, whose members numbered between 500 and 600, were also known as *Scuole dei Battuti*, or “of the beaten,” because their members practiced public acts of flagellation—at least in their initial years—in an effort to atone for both personal and worldly sins by imitating the sufferings of Christ.³⁰ Over the course of the Cinquecento, this penitential focus weakened and was replaced by an emphasis on altruistic acts, as well as interior contemplation.³¹ Well over a hundred lesser societies, called *Scuole Piccole*, were also present in

²⁵ Deborah Howard, “Ritual Space in Renaissance Venice” *Scroope: Cambridge Architectural Journal* 5 (1993/4): 4-11, 4.

²⁶ Humfrey, *Painting in Renaissance Venice*, 58-59.

²⁷ *Scuole* dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament or the rosary are examples of this latter type.

²⁸ Weissman, 204.

²⁹ The number of *Scuole Grandi* in Venice rose to six in 1552, when the Council of Ten advanced the Scuola di San Teodoro, which claimed to have been founded in 1258, to this rank.

³⁰ Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 33-34; and Weissman, 204.

³¹ Weissman, 214.

Venice during the sixteenth century and they only gained in popularity over the duration of the Republic; 120 of these smaller *scuole* are recorded at the Doge's funeral in June 1521, and an official statistic compiled in 1732 referred to 357 of these religious associations.³² The *Scuole Piccole* were comprised of three main types: those purely devotional in nature; those representing the many foreign communities in Venice, like the Germans, Florentine, or Dalmations (*Schiavoni*); and those connected to guilds, trades, and crafts.³³

The *scuole* of Venice were not concentrated in one particular church, parish, or *sestiere*, but spread their influence over the entire city.³⁴ Confraternal life thus offered a broader segment of society a powerful means by which to gain authority in the city. They were administered wholly by the laity of non-noble status who were normally excluded from roles in government.³⁵ The statutes of Venetian *scuole* were not dissimilar to fraternities elsewhere in Italy, but they held no commitment to any archconfraternity in Rome, nor to a local administration of clergy. Instead, a legitimate *scuola* had to receive authorization from the Council of Ten, placing them under state supervision. Their allegiance thus rested first and foremost with Venice—the city and its people—rather than with the papacy, a diocese, or even a religious order. The move toward autonomous meeting houses for both *Scuole Grandi* and *Scuole Piccole* in the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, rather than chapels in churches or sites within convents for congregation, reflects the independence of the

³² Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 33-34.

³³ Humfrey, *Painting in Renaissance Venice*, 29-31.

³⁴ Pullan, "The Scuole Grandi," 275.

³⁵ Zorzi, 88.

groups from the institutional church.³⁶ Even in the decades following the Council of Trent, when the Church decreed that bishops would have ultimate authority over the accounts and administration of lay fraternities, the *scuole* of Venice maintained complete autonomy from ecclesiastical control.³⁷

As described by Ronald Weissman, the fundamental trait of Renaissance confraternities was their “synthesis of interior spirituality and collection action.”³⁸ A strong preoccupation with interior religious experience and prayer typified the devotional practices of confraternities throughout Europe, while at the same time they were called upon to execute quasi-municipal undertakings.³⁹ Members formed spiritual bonds with the intention of pooling merit gained through good works like masses, prayers, fasts, vigils, flagellations, and the distribution of alms. Metaphorically speaking, each member became a “partner” in this spiritual contract and benefited from the merits accumulated by the others.⁴⁰ The charitable acts carried out by confraternities not only served to resolve an individual’s concern for his salvation; they also worked for the spiritual, social, and financial prosperity of the Republic. Redemption was viewed as a collective process, for social ills—like the plague, famine, and war—were caused and in turn felt by large numbers of individuals; personal remorse, therefore, had to be expiated through public

³⁶ Pullan, “The Scuole Grandi,” 276 and 291.

³⁷ This was not necessarily true for the territories of the mainland that were part of the Venetian dominion where Tridentine decrees regarding clerical control over confraternities was widely enforced. In Venice proper, priests could be members of *scuole* and they were often employed by the organizations to say masses, but the administration was entirely under the control of the laity. Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 45-46, and 61.

³⁸ Weissman, 206.

³⁹ Weissman, 204, 210.

⁴⁰ Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 48-49.

reconciliation.⁴¹ This perspective was perhaps rooted in Christianity itself. As a religion based on *caritas*, to be validated it had to be shared, binding together in often indistinguishable ways the personal with the communal.⁴²

The rosary confraternity was a rarity amongst the *scuole* of Venice and elsewhere in Europe for its inclusion of women and its lack of public forms of ritual—including mass, processions, and banquets—but it also epitomized the link between individual devotion and communal benefit, as well as the pursuit of spiritual merit that characterized the other religious associations of the Republic.⁴³ A universal fellowship that began in Germany in the mid-fifteenth century, the rosary confraternity was founded in Venice shortly after 1480 by the Dominican John of Erfurt, chaplain to the community of German merchants and artisans residing in the lagoon city. In principle, the confraternity did not even meet. All that was required for membership was a willingness to have one's name entered into a register and to recite the Marian Psalter once every week, at any place and at any time.⁴⁴ Although an essentially private devotion, the prayers were not performed solely for the profit of a single individual. The actions of the confraternity aided and protected each member through collective supplications, while all who participated would be entitled to the benefits offered by the entire stock of merit accumulated by the larger praying community.⁴⁵

The rosary beads embodied these ties between the individual and the communal. Composed of a variety of mediums, from simple bone or wood (fig. 66)

⁴¹ Weissman, 208, 210.

⁴² Swanson, 134.

⁴³ Anne Winston-Allen, 117.

⁴⁴ Pullan, "The Scuole Grandi," 275.

⁴⁵ Winston-Allen, 119-120, and Pullan, "The Scuole Grandi."

to more elaborate and expensive versions that incorporated precious materials such as amber or jasper (fig. 160 & 166), the form the rosary chain could take was fairly standardized in order to conform to the conventions of the devotion. Some sets of rosaries contained enough beads to stand for each of the 150 “Hail Marys” to be said, punctuated by an “Our Father” at each decade, while others consisted of only enough beads to form a single decade, to be repeated over and over until the entire devotion was fulfilled. The basic unit of the decade, however, dictated the essential form of the rosary. Rosary beads were objects utilized by a single person at a given moment in time, but the predominance of these objects in the household of Venetians throughout the sixteenth century indicates the popularity that the prayer had achieved across the Republic, and how individual households were tied together under a common devotion.

As major patrons of art, the Venetian *scuole* made considerable use of images in their devotional pursuits. Many *scuole* maintained chapels in the city’s parochial and monastic churches, which involved not only the charge of masses to be said in these spaces, but their adornment and the commissioning of altarpieces. One example is the Polyptych of Saint Barbara, painted around 1524-1525 by Jacopo Palma il Vecchio (fig. 209), commissioned by the confraternity of the Bombardieri, or artillerymen. A grouping of individual saints combined with an image of the *Pietà* and set within a classically-inspired marble architectonic frame, the polyptych bears two clear signs of patronage: the canons, rifles, and other weapons carved in relief at the top of the frame, and the dominant figure of Saint Barbara, the confraternity’s patron saint. Outside of the ecclesiastical context, however, confraternity members

drew on more familiar and everyday forms in practices of visual piety. Large and small *scuole* alike filled their meeting halls with devotional images not dissimilar to what individual members would have displayed in their own personal environments (figs. 201 & 202). They also commissioned large pictorial cycles that narrated events of a particular holy figure, or the sacred history of the city. As demonstrated in the aforementioned canvases by Carpaccio executed for the Scuola di Sant'Orsola and the Scuola di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, the settings represented in these pictures often recalled the civic and domestic spaces of *la Serenissima*. Thus, while congregating in their meeting halls to discuss administrative matters or engage in spiritual activities, members of *scuole* had constant examples of the sacred unfolding within the physical realm of the mundane.

Evidence of one's membership in a *scuola* also infiltrated the home. The presence of certain saints in the household, like Roch and Christopher, may have been motivated by a family's tie to a particular confraternity. Seals bearing the emblems of the city's *scuole* are listed in household inventories from time to time, along with confraternal robes. In the testament of a man named Alvisè Baroccio, dated 20 May 1522, the father leaves to his son, Zuan Francesco, the vestment of his confraternity, the Scuola di S. Marco.⁴⁶ Since many sons joined the same confraternities as the father, the handing down of the physical accoutrements of membership was probably not an unusual scenario. In the case of the Baroccio family, the vestment that once associated Alvisè with a corporate fellowship was also used to maintain personal bonds between father and son, and in turn sustain the ties between the family and their commitment to a larger religious community.

⁴⁶ ASV, Atti Notarile, b. 1183 (Grasolario), n. 40.

Domestic Goods in Ecclesiastical Spaces

Families and individuals appropriated the rituals and objects that they had seen and experienced in churches and confraternal meeting houses into their homes and personal environments; at the same time they also left their own mark upon these more communal venues for worship. As mentioned above, churches throughout Italy abound with visible signs of the ownership of private families, from coats of arms and altarpieces to large scale expressions such as tombs and entire chapels expressly commissioned for these ecclesiastical spaces. The Pesaro Altarpiece executed by Titian between 1519 and 1526 is perhaps one of the most famous examples of this phenomenon in Venice (fig. 210). Commissioned by Bishop Jacopo Pesaro for the altar of the Conception in the Church of Santa Maria dei Gloriosa dei Frari, it clearly announces Pesaro patronage with male family members and their patron saints represented in the lower right hand corner, and the family's coat-of-arms emblazoned on the laurel-adorned red flag on the left.

Venetian testaments show that the residents of the city habitually requested burial in churches and monasteries, an act that quite literally placed the private individual into public sacred space for posterity. Venetians also gave to the parishes and monasteries of their city the very goods that formed the visual culture of their everyday domestic settings. The painting of the Madonna and Child by Giovanni Bellini, mentioned in Chapter One, which once belonged to the merchant Luca Navagero and was bequeathed to the Church of the Madonna dell'Orto in 1485 (fig. 211), is one example of the infiltration of items of personal devotion in ecclesiastical settings. Numerous other examples can be cited from testaments of the period. The

practice dates back to at least the twelfth century, as Fernanda Sorelli has described in her essay on the transferal of sacred goods between personal and communal contexts in late medieval Venice.⁴⁷ For example, in a testament dating back to August 1197, the testator, Matteo Calbani from the district of San Silvestro, left a silver cup “scultam cum apostolis” as well as a gold reliquary cross—“cruce[m] unam de auro habentem intus lignum Domini et bullam de auro in modum ycone cum ipsa cruce”—to the monastery of San Nicolò on the Lido, where he was buried.⁴⁸

Such gifts not only increased the patrimony of churches and monasteries, but were also believed to benefit the salvation of the individual who made the bequest, indicated in the phrase frequently given in wills for the motivations of such bequests: “per l’anima mia.” Like the portraits hung in the domestic sphere discussed in the previous chapter, in some cases personal objects were intended to provide reminders to the religious men and women attached to ecclesiastical and monastic spaces to pray for the soul of the departed who made such a gift. The donation of candles and money in combination with the domestic items indicate such objectives on behalf of the testator. The 1564 will of Francesco Zorzi offers one such example. Zorzi, a bachelor who resided on the island of Murano, bequeathed a number of his religious paintings and sculptures to his niece and nephew, Elena and Leonardo Bon, as well as his servant Pollonia.⁴⁹ Although he was buried in the cemetery of S. Stefano in Venice and lived in the parish of S. Maria e S. Dona, Zorzi also left a painting of a

⁴⁷ Sorelli, “Oggetti, libri, momenti domestici,” 55-77.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁹ To his niece, Elena Bon, he bequeathed a small painting of the Madonna “fata alla Crecha,” and to his nephew, Leonardo Bon, a small gilded painting with the figure of the Madonna, again made “alla Crecha,” and another painting, framed, with the figure of Saint Catherine of Siena; he left even more goods to his servant Pollonia, including a large elaborately-framed painting that featured Saint Jerome and an image, probably sculpted, of Christ on the cross, kept in a little armoire. ASV, Atti Notarile, Testamenti, b. 125 (Bianco), n. 344

Byzantine Madonna—described as large, gilded, and “antigo”—to the Dominican church and monastery of Saint Peter the Martyr in Murano. The painting bore two coats of arms in relief—presumably on the frame—and an iron candleholder. Along with the image, Zorzi left ten ducats for the purchase of wax candles which were to be burned before the painting every Saturday and every vigil and feast of the Madonna, and for prayers and lauds to be said to the Virgin in honor of his soul.⁵⁰

Objects were also left to ecclesiastical institutions to be kept under the holy care and protection of priests, monks and nuns. The will of Francesco Zorzi provides a convenient and typical example. While the nobleman requested that his painting be hung in the church, he left to the monastery of Saint Peter the Martyr a chest, full of all his books and writings, and kept secure “sotto tre chiave,” or “under three keys.” While the monks may have enjoyed the texts that Zorzi provided them, he left these items to them to be placed under their good care (“bon governo”). Similar objectives were articulated in the will of Benedetto Arborsani who left to the nuns of Santa Maria dei Miracoli a gold cross that he kept in a small coffer with the most holy wood of the cross inside (“co[n] el santissimo legno de la + dentro”); he intended the nuns to keep the crucifix with honor and devotion (“con onor e devotion”).⁵¹

In addition to paintings and sculpture, altar cloths were common items left by individuals to churches. In her testament compiled on 10 November 1549, a woman named Anna, originally from Bergamo and the wife of Leonardo di Barillo, bequeathed a leather altar cloth (“uno pano d’altar d[i] cuoro”) to the church of Saint Sebastian in her native city. As stated in will, she made the gift to benefit her own

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ ASV, Atti Notarile, Testamenti, b. 1209 (Marsilio), n. 546.

soul, as well the souls of her son and husband. The gesture may have also been intended as an effort to maintain the bond between her family now in Venice, and their hometown of Bergamo.⁵²

Anna's testament leaves unclear whether or not the altar cloth she bequeathed was something she commissioned specifically for the church, or was an item she had already owned. There are examples, however, in which the items donated to ecclesiastical altars clearly came from the domestic spaces of the testator. Andriana Giustiniani, the daughter of the nobleman Francesco, in her will composed on 22 June 1535, left to the altar of the sacrament in San Pantalon an altar cloth of white silk that she had in her house ("che ho in casa") and two iron candlesticks, so that 200 masses would be said before the altar on behalf of her soul.⁵³ Maria, the daughter of Ser Nicolò di Mendi, from the parish of Santa Margherita, left one of her own scarlet vestments to the Scuola di San Giorgio, which she wanted to have made into a cloth for the altar of the chapel of the *scuola* in the adjoining church, Sant'Angelo.⁵⁴ Although not exclusively, women made the majority of the bequests of altar cloths to the churches, *scuole*, and monasteries of Venice, and these linens were perhaps handmade by them, as implied in the testament of Maria di Mendi. Sewing, embroidery, needlework, and lacemaking constituted a large percentage of women's work in Venice, and as was explicated in Chapter Five, these activities also formed an important component of their daily devotional exercises.

Bequests of sacred household goods to the city's ecclesiastical spaces tied a family's personal devotions to the wider Christian community in concrete ways.

⁵² ASV, Atti Notarile, Testamenti, b. 209 (Canal), n. 21.

⁵³ ASV, Atti Notarile, Testamenti, b. 201 (Chiodi), n. 40.

⁵⁴ ASV, Atti, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 874 (Spitti), n. 386.

These acts also attest to the value of the religious visual culture of the domestic sphere; it was composed not of objects of lesser status than what could be found in churches, but of items that were considered to be efficacious and spiritually charged. Domestic goods were of a quality—spiritually and artistically—on par with that which could be found in sites clearly defined as sacred.

Public/Private, Individual/State: The Curious Absence of Saint Mark

The cult of saints is another phenomenon that transcended any boundaries between public and private. Chapter Four demonstrated how particular saints, like Christopher, Sebastian, and Roch, responded to daily issues of safety as well as catastrophic crises, such as the plague, that affected both individuals and the community at large. These sacred guardians were honored not only in domestic spaces, but also in church altarpieces throughout the lagoon, and as the patrons of confraternities. Images of the Virgin could be found all throughout the civic and religious spaces of Venice, as well as nearly every one of the city's households. A reciprocal religiosity was in force; public worship of particular holy figures esteemed for their efficacy influenced the focus and energies of private devotion while communal efforts were continually supported and enhanced by the dedication of the city's residents at the individual level. In general, the cult of saints that flourished throughout Venice thrived in the domestic context, and vice versa, but with one notable exception—Saint Mark, the Republic's patron saint.

Beyond a few sigils bearing his image, the patron saint of Venice is curiously missing from the city's household inventories. His absence is particularly

idiosyncratic given the popularity of civic patron saints in the domestic spaces of other Italian cities. Saint John the Baptist was a common figure in Florentine homes, and it would have been quite unusual to enter a household in Naples and not find the image of San Gennaro.⁵⁵ Saint Mark was a critical figure in the myth of Venice as a predestined and divinely sanctioned city. According to legend (which may date as late as the fourteenth century, long after the Evangelist's relics had arrived in Venice), Mark was sent by Saint Peter to Northern Italy to spread the word of God. He went to the lagoon seeking shelter from a storm. During the night, an angel appeared to the frightened Evangelist in a dream and reassured him that a magnificent city would be erected on the spot where he lay and its residents would honor his relics there.

The transfer of Mark's body from Alexandria, where he had died, to Venice in 827 or 828, secured his patronage for the city. Myth claimed that the Evangelist's body was "rescued" from the Arab-controlled port in Egypt by two Venetians whose ships had landed there after being blown off course on a voyage east. Religious and secular authorities of the Republic received the saint's relics with great pomp and splendor, and the basilica was constructed to shelter his remains in perpetual magnificence. The holiness of Mark's relics was affirmed by several miracles performed in the Ducal palace shortly thereafter, and he quickly supplanted all other saints revered in the city. The patronage of Mark bestowed upon this emerging maritime state a legitimate and independent status. It marked the conclusion of the Venetian struggle for independence from Byzantium, as the Evangelist became a symbolic alternative to Byzantine protector saints. The Republic quickly asserted

⁵⁵ Musacchio, "The Madonna and Child," 152; and Palumbo Fossati, "L'interno della casa," 151.

their relationship with Saint Mark as at least equal to Rome's connection to the apostle Peter, who validated of papal authority in the Church.⁵⁶

Considering the pride that Venetians held for their patron saint and the great efforts the city expended to acquire his relics, why would they in turn neglect this important holy figure in their everyday environments? Isabella Palumbo Fossati's assertion on the connection between Mark and the domestic context appears wholly accurate. She argues that Saint Mark was so closely associated with the state that the city's residents considered it improper and unnecessary to possess his image in their personal spaces.⁵⁷ He was a figure and an entity that could not be possessed, for as stated by David Rosand, "In every sense, Saint Mark came to represent Venice; Saint Mark was Venice."⁵⁸ During the ducal coronation ceremony, each newly elected head of state swore "To conserve the patrimony and ecclesiastical honor of Saint Mark in good faith and without fraud."⁵⁹ While the boundaries between public and private were not always distinct in Renaissance Venice, the Republic itself remained an exclusive domain, independent from external regimes as well as internal personal ambitions.

The hypothesis of Palumbo Fossati is further supported by visual evidence. The iconography of ducal votive paintings from the period helps to clarify the association between the figure of Saint Mark and the state, in this instance, as it was embodied in the figure of the doge. Upon election, the doge was required to commission with his own money a number of images to adorn the ducal palace and

⁵⁶ Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 79-84; and Rosand, 54-55.

⁵⁷ Palumbo Fossati, "L'interno della casa," 151.

⁵⁸ Rosand, 66.

⁵⁹ Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 285.

the adjoining basilica: a *paliotto* for the high altar of San Marco; a shield with his family coat-of-arms to be displayed in the palazzo's *Sala del Scudo*; and picture for the *sala consigliari*. It became customary for this latter image to take the form of a votive painting. The surviving pictures more or less all share a set of common features; the doge kneels in a sign of devotion in front of a sacred personality—most often the Madonna—or an allegorical personification, and is accompanied by figures of saints or other allegories. In the majority of these pictures, however, it is Saint Mark who takes on the role as intercessor on behalf of the doge (fig. 197). It is not certain when the tradition started, but the oldest votive portrait still conserved in the Palazzo is that of Leonardo Loredan (1501-1521), a sculpted relief by Pietro Lombardo affixed in the *Sala degli Scarlatti* above the door that led to the *Scala d'Oro* (fig. 212).

The portrait of Doge Alvise Mocenigo (1570-77) and his family in the company of the Virgin and Child (fig. 213), today preserved at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, presents a different kind of ducal votive painting, however, and its variation is key to understanding the place of Saint Mark in the public and private life of Venice. Painted by Tintoretto around 1573, several years after Mocenigo had been elected doge, it is one of the few images of this type to show the entire ducal family rather than just the solitary figurehead. Visually, it is more closely tied to Quattrocento painting traditions, with its symmetrical grouping of figures around the Madonna and Child, unlike the bold diagonals that came to be characteristic of ducal votive portraits in the second half of the sixteenth century. Wolfgang Wolters believes that these visual and iconographic distinctions suggest

that its original location was not the ducal palace, but the Palazzo Mocenigo.⁶⁰ The image is more personal than the typical votive portrait of the doge, not only with the presence of family members, but through the simultaneous absence of Saint Mark, his lion, and any allegorical figures.⁶¹ A more conventional votive portrait of Doge Mocenigo—*Doge Alvise Mocenigo Presented to the Redeemer*—also painted by Tintoretto, around 1577 (fig. 214)—hung in the *Sala del Collegio* in the Palazzo Ducale. In this official and public statement of Mocenigo’s rank and piety, the winged lion of Saint Mark appears in the center foreground in addition to the saint, both acting as clear markers of princely power. Thus, in the more personal context of the home, Doge Mocenigo appears as the head of a family rather than head of state.⁶²

Even though Mark was the patron of all Venetians, after the fourteenth century his image and persona became so enmeshed with that of the Republic that “he was limited to silent service at the placid center of the state cult.”⁶³ As symbol of the Republic, Saint Mark often did not even appear in human form; instead his lion stood for his presence (fig. 215). This visual substitution removed the patron from the level of humanity and closer toward purely symbolic form. In an era when the laity sought out holy figures to whom they could connect directly, Saint Mark did not fulfill their daily spiritual needs. The Madonna instead served as the highly personalized intercessor who acted not only on behalf of the state but on behalf of each individual.

⁶⁰ Wolters, 123. Carlo Ridolfi also records the painting in the possession of Tommaso Mocenigo in 1648. Ridolfi, *Le meraviglie dell’Arte: ovvero Le vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato*, 2 vols. (Berlin: G. Grote, 1914-24), II: 44.

⁶¹ Wolters, 123.

⁶² In the preparatory drawing for this large-scale painting, Saint Mark himself and another saint appear hovering above the figure of Mocenigo. Wolters, 120. Modeled after ducal votive portraits, many Venetian magistrates had themselves represented in acts of devotion before holy figures or allegories. In these images, as well, Saint Mark is never present. While magistrates worked for the government, they did not embody the state in the same way that the doge did. *Ibid.*, 138-150.

⁶³ Muir, “Virgin,” 31.

Through the possession of images of the Madonna and other personal saints, the city's residents were able to express their loyalty to the state and remain connected to important public cults, while at the same time they nourished more individual desires. Such relationships were mutually beneficial to both citizen and state. So that the hegemony of Saint Mark was never threatened, the government encouraged local and individual devotion to the Virgin and even helped to fund the erection and maintenance of her image on the streets and *campi* in neighborhoods through the city.⁶⁴ In Venice, the Evangelist lay outside of the personal realm; devotion to Saint Mark was equivalent to devotion to the state.

The holy objects that filled the households of Venice served as the vehicle for interactions between the individual and the divine, freed from any constraints imposed on more formal modes of worship in church and more public contexts. At the same time, these pious goods linked households across the city through a shared visual language, and reinforced civic cults and other communal forms of devotion. While the spaces and objects of domestic religion were modeled after ecclesiastical forms, the "private" also influenced "public" environments of worship through the testamentary strategies of particular individuals. The ties between personal and collective forms of religion were fluid and sometimes imperceptible, except when the autonomy of the state was threatened. The Republic's very existence was dependent on its independence from individual power or possession. Nonetheless, Venice was a sacred city under the protection of a host of saints and supported by the profound

⁶⁴ Muir, "Virgin of the Street Corner," 33.

piety of its lay population, which exploited all devotional outlets—including their most personal spaces—to experience and express their faith.

Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the sacred visual culture of the home during a period when the Catholic Church experienced perhaps its greatest challenges and most momentous changes. The reforms that began in the early sixteenth century resulted in new sects of Christianity as well as responses on the part of Rome to the confrontations and disputes over some of the most fundamental principles and doctrines of faith. The impact of these events was felt well beyond the upper echelons of the religious hierarchy. Through the decrees of the Councils of Trent, Rome undertook measures to maintain its members, extend tighter ecclesiastical control over all aspects of the Catholic religion, and promote a uniformity of lay devotion centered on the parish—a site supervised by a priest who was responsible to his bishop—rather than individualistic approaches to the spiritual. Such campaigns ostensibly would have had overwhelming, and perhaps devastating, effects on domestic religion in the latter sixteenth century. Many of the issues that generated the reforms of the sixteenth century, such as the growing disillusionment amongst the laity with their ordained leaders and a desire for more direct relationships with the divine, were also the impulses that revitalized and sustained household devotion in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance.

Late Cinquecento Venetian inventories, however, reveal no waning of sacred goods in the home. In fact, the number and variety of holy objects increased across social classes as the century progressed. It thus appears that the efforts of Catholic reformers to increase control over lay religion did not notably alter existing domestic

traditions in Venice. The explanations for this are twofold, at minimum. First, as already alluded to in Chapter Three in the discussion of domestic altars, the Venetian Republic had always retained its independence from Rome, even while it worked with religious leaders to combat heresy.¹ Venetians had long tried to prevent the encroachment of the clergy on the affairs of the laity and the state, including areas that fell under the realm of devotion. For example, the government of Venice continued to ban clergy from positions of leadership in the *scuole*, while elsewhere in Italy confraternities increasingly fell under Church control.² As a Republic operating under the myth of its miraculous origins and divine favor, the city was fiercely resistant to outside influences and pressure to change its political, social—and most especially—its religious systems, from its public rituals to devotion carried out in domestic spaces, all of which for centuries had brought *la Serenissima* continued spiritual prosperity and protection.

Another reason why household religion was not weakened—and instead flourished—in the second half of the sixteenth century is because the tenets of the reforms were not wholly at odds with domestic devotion and the visual culture that developed around it. At the same time that the priests and bishops advanced regularity in worship and a strong parish life, they also placed great emphasis on the

¹ Grendler, 138-40. In fact, Paolo Sarpi, who wrote a history of Venice, had insisted that the state, not the papacy or local church, had founded the Venetian Inquisition and that it was a lay body, Grendler, 35. The Venetian government insisted that lay advisors from the Republic serve on the Holy Office. These were elected representatives of the Venetian government, commonly known as the *Tre Savii*. This political feature of the Venetian Inquisition served as a means by which to check the power of Rome, and ensure that Venetian interests—particularly economic ones, such as the book industry—were protected. For example, not all of the Indices of Prohibited Books issued from Rome were accepted outright in Venice. Grendler, 85-126.

² Brian Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 45 and 61.

interior spiritual life and the frequent examination of conscience by the individual.³ In considering the reforms of the sixteenth century as a split from the “unreformed” Christianity of earlier times, historians have tended to emphasize the differences between post-Reformation religion and the practices of late medieval and early Renaissance Christians.⁴ Instead, the interior religiosity of the late medieval period persisted well into the Cinquecento and beyond. In his study on prayer and devotion in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Giorgio Caravale has recently argued that local resistance to a rigid religious control—particularly strong in an ardently independent city like Venice—and the efforts of the reformers did ultimately influence Catholic thought and forced ecclesiastical leaders to accept and promote the spiritual interiority of the individual, while maintaining overarching guidelines.⁵

The efforts of the reforms of the sixteenth century to advance personal devotion expressed itself in a number of outlets that both drew on existing traditions and moved beyond them to make the family and home central in Catholic thought and life. Revised versions of standard devotional texts, such as the breviary, missal, and Little Office of the Virgin, were printed in increased quantities in the latter sixteenth century and the decades following, along with newly conceived spiritual tracts and didactic religious works written in the vernacular.⁶ Religious leaders fervently endorsed rosary devotion, a product of late medieval piety, and encouraged the mental prayers associated with the devotion to be recited internally at nearly all points and places—in church during the mass, while traveling, and at home—to which the

³ Luria, “Popular Spirituality,” 93, and Caravale, esp. viii-ix.

⁴ Peter Wallace, *The Long European Reformation*, 2.

⁵ Caravale, esp. 52, 153, 162-165.

⁶ Grendler.

numerous sets of rosary beads recorded in Venetian inventories attest. Some of the most characteristic aspects of domestic religion, such as Marian devotion and the cult of saints, continued to prosper in post-Tridentine Italy and Europe at the command of religious officials who sought to reinforce the Catholic belief in sainthood and divine mediation called into question by some Protestant reformers.

In addition, clerical leaders supported a strong family life rooted in religion and reinforced by visual and material means. Some scholars have seen the reform of marriage and family as the most significant conciliar agenda after the reform of the clergy.⁷ In an endeavor to eradicate clandestine and forced marriages, under Tridentine legislation nuptials had to be canonically authenticated through the witness of a priest and two other individuals. Marriage gradually became a religious rather than strictly legal affair. The sacramental bond of matrimony was underscored and consequently could not be dissolved.⁸ Clerical leaders identified the family as an essential instrument in disseminating the fundamentals of the Catholic religion; a pious household, therefore, figured critically into this most primary of exchanges of faith. As explicated in Chapter Five, a number of Catholic reformers, such as Cardinals Agostino Valier and Silvio Antoniano wrote extensively on the subject of the pious household. Another of the chief religious leaders of the latter sixteenth century, Saint Charles Borromeo, stated in a 1584 homily that Christian marriage was the source for the moral rearing of children, and thus a stable society.⁹ Many religious leaders thus elevated the position of family life in the Christian experience,

⁷ Christopher Black, *Church, Religion and Society in Early Modern Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 99; and Ludwig von Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. 15: 355-6, 376.

⁸ Black, 99.

⁹ Black, 103.

and renewed efforts to use images as a means to teach the faith and stir the soul to devotion aligned wholly with domestic religious activities in Venice and elsewhere that had been carried out for decades.

Of course, the effects of the reforms of the Cinquecento were felt well into the following century, beyond the scope of this dissertation. Venetians, like their counterparts elsewhere on the peninsula, continued to exploit their most basic, everyday environment as a principal site where sacred relationships were created, fostered, and affirmed, all the while responding to the changing circumstances of life in the lagoon. And they continued to fashion a rich and varied visual culture in the household setting to support this spiritual activity.¹⁰ The consequences of the reformations during this later epoch on household religion, however, are the subject of a longer, and perhaps altogether separate, investigation. This dissertation has looked at Venice as a case study for a larger phenomenon that extended to other cities and countries, as well as other time periods; it is but one piece in the history of art and family life. But by demonstrating the pervasiveness and persistence of a sacred visual culture in the households of late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Venice, I have located religion in the domestic interior during a period in which the home assumed a critical role in constructing and sustaining family identity. No longer can the Renaissance *casa* be considered secular space; rather, it was a complex environment, situated at the intersection of public and private, individual and communal, spiritual and worldly, as were the sacred objects that both emerged from and informed this sphere.

¹⁰ This is strongly supported by surviving inventories from the seventeenth century, preserved in the *fondo* of the Guidici di Petizion.

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