

The Quadro da Portego in Sixteenth-Century Venetian Art^{*}

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During the sixteenth century a symbiotic relationship developed between the form, use, and symbolic associations of the Venetian portego, the central reception and entertainment hall of Venetian palaces, and the paintings that were increasingly commissioned to ornament these spaces. The intended placement of the paintings affected their size, format, composition, subject matter, and contemporary interpretation. At the same time, the works of art themselves reflected upon and helped to define the social meanings of the space and the activities taking place there. Analyzing documentary sources and surviving paintings reveals the degree to which we can speak of the quadro da portego as a distinctive type of Venetian painting.

1. INTRODUCTION

A great deal of attention is now paid to the material culture of early modern interiors, though less thought has been given to the interplay between objects on display and the social functions and symbolic associations of the spaces in which they were seen or for which they were made. By examining paintings made for a public room peculiar to Venetian palaces — the *portego* — this study demonstrates how the destination of works of art within the household powerfully influenced artistic choices about size, format, and composition, as well as subject matter and thematic content. These choices were made by artists and patrons, sometimes consciously, sometimes under the influence of unspoken social conventions and habits, to the degree that the *quadro da portego* emerges as a type of Venetian painting with a distinctive set of compositional, thematic, and social concerns. Pictures

^{*}Please see the online version of this article for color illustrations.

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displayed in the *portego* both reflected on and helped create the complex, even conflicted, expectations and social significance of the central space in the Venetian house.

2. THE *QUADRO DA PORTEGO*

The *portego* in Venetian dialect (sometimes spelled *portico*), also called the *sala* in Italian, is located on the *piano nobile* of a Venetian palace and typically extends the entire length of the house from front to back, letting in light and air from windows at both ends. The Ca' da Mosto provides an example of the type (fig. 1).¹ The other main living spaces of the house, the *camere*, or bed-sitting rooms, open off the *portego*, as can be seen in an idealized floor plan for a Venetian palace by Sebastiano Serlio (fig. 2). This distinctive ground plan is both unique to Venetian domestic architecture and characteristic of it.²

The *portego* is the grandest room in a Venetian house or palace in that it is large and central, and its presence is marked on the façade with the most condensed and ornamented windows. As Francesco Sansovino noted in 1581, “the windows of the *sala* are placed in the middle of the facade so that onlookers can easily recognize where [it is] located” (fig. 3).³ The space is therefore the focal point of both the interior and the exterior architectural design.⁴ Scholars of Venetian art and architecture have characterized the *portego* as the main display space in which Venetians exhibited their social status and represented family identity.⁵ As the most public part of the

¹The wall decorations date from the eighteenth century.

²A more modest home might only have *camere* on one side of the *portego*, but in general, the presence of the *portego* is a sign of the class level of the house. If the palace has two main living floors, a *piano nobile* and a floor above, both typically have a *portego*, often referred to as the “portego da sopra” and the “portego da basso.” Schulz, 2004, 5–28, 39, demonstrates how this distinctive ground plan and the *portego* began to develop in the pre-Gothic period, were fully formulated by the fifteenth century, and remained normative through the seventeenth century; *ibid.* also discusses the origins of the words *porticus* and *portego* to describe the room. For the possible Eastern origins of the plan, see Howard, 134–40. On the *camera* and *sala* in the larger Italian context, see Thornton, 285–91; *At Home in Renaissance Italy*; Currie.

³Sansovino, 142^r. Translated in Brown, 2004, 74.

⁴It has been characterized as the “heart” or the “spine” of the home: Tafuri, 1994, 368; Brown, 2004, 71. For Tafuri, the *portego*’s centrality in the house — what he referred to as “il trionfo del salone” — metaphorically represents the predominance of family over individual in early modern Venetian society.

⁵On the room and its interior decoration, see Schulz, 1982, especially 89nn51–52; Palumbo-Fossati, 1984, especially 138–40, 144–47; Crouzet-Pavan, 1:402–06; Aikema, 1996, 70–71, 153; Aikema, 1999, 90–91; Brown, 2000, 306–11; Brown, 2004, 19, 63–67, 71–75; Schulz, 2004, 25; Palumbo-Fossati, 2004, 448, 450, 460–61, 473–77; Brown, 2006, 51, 54–57; Morse, 105; Penny, 2008, 227–29.



FIGURE 1. *Portego* of the Ca' da Mosto in Venice. Photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY.

residence, this grand reception hall was often used for large dining banquets, dances, musical and theatrical performances, and other forms of entertainment.⁶ Hence, as we shall see, pictorial themes congruent with these functions, like dining scenes and family portraits, were usually noted in this room by commentaries and inventories.

⁶Scamozzi, 243 (bk. 3, ch. 6, ll. 10–11), writes, “The large *portici* are used for receiving relations at the time of marriage, and for banquets and parties.” Sanudo describes a number of dinner parties, dances, and performances, often associated with wedding festivities, that took place in the *portego* (and often the *camere* as well): examples include 16:206–07 (2 May 1513); 29:537 (9 January 1521); 29:546–67 (16 January 1521); 37:474–75 (25 January 1525); 40:789–90 (7 February 1526). For sumptuary laws that curtailed festivities in the *portego* and other rooms, see Brown, 2000, 323. The degree to which the room was used as a daily dining room is uncertain: for the suggestion that it was, see Schulz, 1982, 89; Schulz, 2004, 24–25. Brown, 2004, 71–75, however, has noted that, unlike *sale* in other parts of Italy, Venetian *porteghi* typically did not have fireplaces, suggesting they were used more for display and special occasions than for day-to-day living.

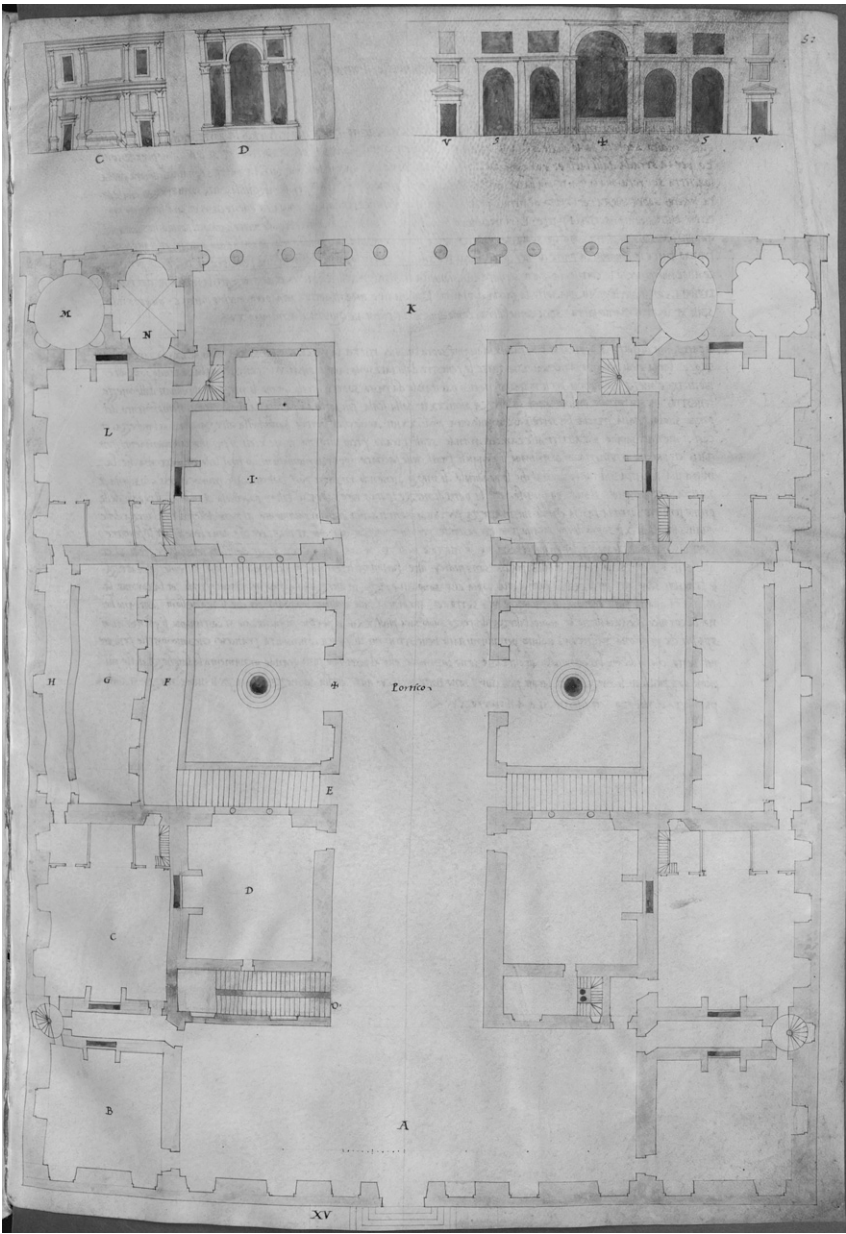


FIGURE 2. Sebastiano Serlio, floor plan for an imaginary Venetian palace, 1547–50. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Codex Icon. 189, fol. 52.



FIGURE 3. Ca' Foscari, Venice, begun 1450. Photo: Adoc-photos / Art Resource, NY.

Together with fixed architectural features, the contents of the *portego*, its furniture and decoration, played a crucial role in creating the social significance of the space. This included pictures specifically made for, or at the very least displayed in the *portego*. Although not commonplace, the term *quadro da portego* was employed in the sixteenth century, most revealingly in the posthumous inventory taken in 1528 of the studio of the painter Palma il Vecchio. Among the paintings inventoried is “one *portego* picture on wood, about 10 *quarta* [about 170 cm] wide, with Christ and the twelve apostles and two women, half

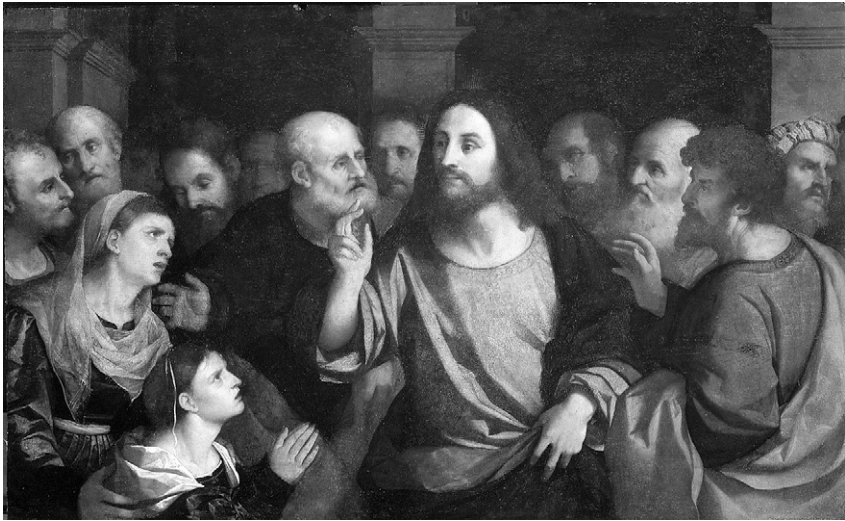


FIGURE 4. Palma Vecchio and workshop, *Christ and the Woman of Canaan*, 1527–30. Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia. Photo: Cameraphoto Arte, Venice / Art Resource, NY.

finished.”⁷ The description of this painting, the only one in the studio said to be destined for a particular type of room, suggests that by 1528 certain characteristics of a picture could distinguish it as especially appropriate for display in that space. Philip Rylands, following Gustav Ludwig (1903), has suggested that a painting of *Christ and the Woman of Canaan* in the Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice (fig. 4) is the work in question, as it appears to have been begun by Palma and finished by another artist.⁸ The

⁷Archivio di Stato, Venice (hereafter ASV), Cancelleria Inferiore, Miscellanea di notai diversi, b. 34, n. 59 bis (published in Rylands, 350): “1 quadro da portego de cerca q[uarta] 10 in tola [tavola] con uno Christo, et dodesse appostoli, et doi done mezo facto.” Other objects in inventories are sometimes identified as “da portego.” For example: ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Miscellanea di notai diversi, b. 34, c. 5, 1^v (1521): “*portego* benches” (“banche da portego”); ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Miscellanea di notai diversi, b. 39, c. 25, 3^r (1554): “large *portego* clock” (“relogio grande da portego”); Appendix, inv. 46, 15^v: “green *portego* cloths” (“panni verdi da portegho”); Appendix, inv. 37, 11^r: “a walnut *portego* table” (“una t[av]ola de nogera da portego”). For the Appendix, see pp. 744–46 below.

⁸Rylands, 27, 301 (cat. no. A63); Ludwig, 77n1. It is painted on wood and measures 95 x 155 cm. Although this is narrower than the dimensions given in the inventory, the painting has been cut down on the righthand side. See Moschini Marconi, 164–65 (cat. no. 274). I found the same subject listed in an inventory of a *portego* later in the century: Appendix, inv. 74, 8^r.

term was also used in an inventory dated 1557: “a large *portego* painting with the Samaritan woman.”⁹

The concept of the *quadro da portego* is frequently mentioned in recent scholarship on Venetian art, usually in reference to particular paintings identified as such due to their unusually large size and horizontal format, as befits the proportions and status of the room. Early examples include two paintings from the palazzo of Andrea Loredano (now Palazzo Vendramin-Calergi): Titian's *Flight into Egypt* (Leningrad, ca. 1512, 206 x 336 cm), which Vasari saw “in the *sala* of Messer Andrea Loredano's palace at San Marcuola,” and its possible pendant, Sebastiano del Piombo's *Judgment of Solomon* (Kingston-Lacy, ca. 1508, 208.3 x 315 cm).¹⁰ Another example, as Philip Rylands has suggested, is Palma Vecchio's *Meeting of Jacob and Rachel*, which measures 146.5 x 250.5 cm (fig. 5).¹¹ In these and other cases,¹² the paintings' dimensions, horizontal orientation, and narrative

⁹Appendix, inv. 37, 11^r: “Un quadro grando d[a] portego con la samaritana.” On the other hand, the term *quadro da camera* was sometimes used to indicate a painting made for a bed chamber instead: for example, ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Miscellanea di notai diversi, b. 40, c. 17, 8^v (1563): “four *camera* pictures of Our Lady” (“quatro quadri d[i] n[ost]ra donna da camera”). The painter Lorenzo Lotto also used it in his *Libro delle spese* (214, 194): “a decent size *camera* picture with the Madonna and Christ and Joseph and St. John the Baptist as a child” (“un quadro da camera de honesta grandezza con la Madonna e Christo et Josef et san Joan Baptista in forma puerile”) and “a decent size *camera* picture showing Suzanna bathing” (“un quadro de honesta grandezza da camera, de una Susanna nel bagno”). For Florentine images of the Madonna “da chamera,” see Musacchio, 218.

¹⁰Vasari, 1906, 7:429. Both Hirst, 17–20; and Lucco, 2006, 106, suggest the paintings were made for display in the *portego*. Although Joannides, 43–49, has questioned the close connection between the two paintings, in her online review of Joannides's book, Wilson argues that the political significance of Joseph's contemporary cult in Venice makes the Flight a particularly appropriate subject for the house of a patrician like Loredano (and I would add especially for his *portego*).

¹¹Rylands, 83, 218, dates the work to ca. 1524–26; Lucco, 2006, 142, suggests it was painted as early as ca. 1515.

¹²Another example is Vincenzo Catena's *A Warrior Adoring the Infant Christ and the Virgin* (National Gallery, London, after 1520, 156.3 x 267.3 cm): Dunkerton, Foister, and Penny, 109; dal Pozzolo, 76–83. Dunkerton, Foister, and Penny also suggest that Titian's *Vendramin Family* “belongs to this class of picture”; however, Lauber, 2002, 35, proposes that it was in Gabriel Vendramin's *camerino* instead. In fact, an inventory taken in 1569 lists the painting, but does not give its exact location: Venice, Biblioteca del Museo di Casa Goldoni, Archivio Vendramin, 42 F 16/5, 40^v. While some paintings in the inventory are explicitly listed as being in the *camerin*, the Titian portrait is not among them, suggesting it was somewhere else. Perhaps it was in a limbo state, moved from some other location (perhaps the *portego*) in order to be inventoried apart. In other words, it is possible that it was in the *portego*, unlikely that it was in the *camerin*, but its exact location is not given. Other identifications of *portego* pictures are discussed below.



FIGURE 5. Palma Vecchio, *The Meeting of Jacob and Rachel*, ca. 1515. Dresden, Staatliche Gemäldegalerie. Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

subjects with multiple figures make them good candidates for display in a large room with ample wall space.¹³

The cultural significance of the *quadro da portego* has less often been addressed. Mauro Lucco, one of the few scholars who has discussed the issue, suggests in the catalogue of the recent exhibition Bellini, Giorgione, Titian and the Renaissance of Venetian Painting¹⁴ that the overall increase in the size of Venetian canvases over the course of the sixteenth century may in part be due to the growing interest in *portego* paintings used as “a method for semipublic self-aggrandizement.”¹⁵ Since then, Nicholas Penny has drawn attention to the prominence of portraits within narrative paintings commissioned for the *portego*.¹⁶ My study will, for the first time, offer an

¹³According to Dunkerton, Foister, and Penny, 109, Venetians used large canvases to decorate the *portego* because the damp climate prohibited the use of fresco to cover large areas. Lucco, 2006, 142, writes that the subjects of *portego* canvases “were always narrative” due to their large size.

¹⁴Held from 18 June to 17 September 2006, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, and from 17 October 2006 to 7 January 2007, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

¹⁵Lucco, 2006, 106. Some years earlier Lucco, 1994, 32, in a review of Rylands’s book on Palma Vecchio, had already noted the difficulty of forcing *quadri da portego* into the more commonly acknowledged categories of altarpiece or *sacra conversazione*. It was Lucco’s brief comment in his review that initially inspired my thinking on the topic.

¹⁶Penny, 2008, xiv, 227–29, 379. Morse, 105–06, discusses the predominance of “moralistic paintings” in the *portego* compared to the *camere*.

in-depth examination of the social function of Venetian *portego* paintings, in particular the interplay between subjects and their representational strategies, as well as the cultural practices and symbolic associations of the rooms for which they were made. How were artistic decisions between painter and patron shaped by unspoken cultural conventions and habits? What, in other words, was the dynamic relationship between paintings and social space in the Venetian house? After considering the *portego* as a symbolically resonant space, I examine archival inventories that document the contents of *porteghi*, and especially the subjects of pictures located there. After attending to broad patterns, I then turn to three case studies of documented *porteghi* from the middle of the century to demonstrate how general practices were adapted to specific circumstances. Finally, the investigation of these documentary sources helps to inform a cultural understanding of three surviving paintings believed to be *quadri da portego*.

3. SYMBOLIC SPACE

Let me begin by examining a historical event that illuminates the use and decoration of the *portego* in the early part of the sixteenth century. The episode was reported by at least two contemporary chroniclers, Marin Sanudo and Marcantonio Michiel. Sanudo's report is better known, but to this I add Michiel's unpublished account that more evocatively articulates what was at stake.

In 1513, Venice found itself in the midst of the War of the League of Cambrai, in which all the main powers of Europe were allied against the republic in an attempt to curtail its territorial expansion onto the mainland. Venice lost all its mainland possessions in 1509, then gained them back, only to lose them again in 1513. Many Venetians interpreted this dire turn of events as a clear indication of God's wrath against their decadence and moral corruption.¹⁷ As the enemy lay outside the gates of Padua and Treviso, Doge Leonardo Loredano admonished all the Venetian noblemen in the Great Council to take up arms themselves and lead infantrymen in defense of the *patria*. According to the nobleman Michiel, "the Doge exhorted us to imitate our ancestors, who courageously [*virilmente*] went themselves to do their duty on the mainland and did not attend as much as we do now to pleasurable pastimes [*le delizie*], and that we all used to have a rack of arms and armor in the halls [*sale*] where we now have tables for company, and other . . . [amusements?], as the doge himself confesses to have done in

¹⁷The classic discussion of this is by F. Gilbert.

imitation of others.”¹⁸ (In the earlier crisis of 1509, the Senate had decreed that dinners for wedding celebrations were to be served only in the *camere* and not the *portego*, in part as a way to limit the number of participants, and thus the expense, but also suggesting an underlying concern about the increasingly display-oriented nature of this space.)¹⁹ In his 1513 account, Michiel specifically mentions the substitution of arms with tables in the *portego*, which he metaphorically construed as the replacement of virility with delights (which would have been clearly coded as feminine in Renaissance discourse).²⁰ Clearly, in the minds of the governing patriciate, the furnishings and objects in the *portego* symbolically represented the health of the republic, and in particular its virility.

The idea that great powers become weak because they favor *delitie* over arms was an oft-repeated trope. In his account of the 1537 war against the Turks, the Venetian patrician Nicolò Zeno claimed that after several generations of military success a culture becomes decadent and its members “think only of idleness and pleasure, and then they come to value architects, songs, sounds, players, palaces, clothes, and having put arms aside, they scorn furthermore those who enjoy them, and certain other follies are valued, that

¹⁸Venice, Biblioteca Museo Correr, Codice Cicogna, 2848, 95^v: “essortando se devesse imitar li maggiori n[ost]ri, li quali virilme[n]te andavano in p[er]sona a le loro occorre[n]tie à s[er]vir la Terra, ne attendevano tanto à le delicie, come se fa hora, et che tutti solevano haver le lanzete ne le sale dove tutti han[n]o adesso le tavole de le compagnie, et altri . . . lazzi [sollazzi?], come et[iam] lui instesso confessava haver fatto, p[er] far quanto faceano li altri.” The manuscript has deteriorated, making one word partly illegible. While the reading “sollazzi” (amusements) does not fit the remnants of the word in the manuscript well, it makes sense in the context, and Michiel, 317^v, uses the word in a similar context elsewhere in his chronicle: “À Roma non era altra novità se no[n] ch[e] tutti attendevano alli soliti sollazzi d[i] mascararsi.” Perhaps there was a copy error: the manuscript is not in Michiel’s own hand and was probably produced by a professional scribe.

¹⁹The restrictions are discussed in Brown, 2000, 323. The expression “le tavole de la compagnie” used by Michiel in the quotation above (n18) might also refer to trestle stages used by the Compagnie della Calze, theatrical associations that sometimes performed in private homes in Venice: Chriscinda Henry, personal communication, 3 August 2010.

²⁰Sanudo presents the speech slightly differently, increasing the doge’s culpability. According to Sanudo, 17:246 (25 October 1513), as an example of the moral corruption of Venetians that had incited God’s will against them, Loredano noted “in the past, every house had its rack of arms, but these have been dismantled and replaced with tables for company, and the doge himself confessed that he was among the first to take down the display of arms in his house at San Cassian, in order to make room for tables for feasts.” Sanudo does not actually mention the *sala*, as Michiel does, nor does he set up the dichotomy between virility and delights. This may account for some confusion in F. Gilbert, 277, which states that Sanudo is referring to the “large hall on the ground floor [*sic*] of their palaces.”

are commonly called courtiers' arts."²¹ Michiel (or rather, Doge Loredano) focused these concerns on the *portego* in particular, portraying it as a charged, at this point even a contested, room, a spatialization of anxiety over social change. And for good reason: as Patricia Brown has recently demonstrated, in sixteenth-century Venice the expression of nobility was in fact shifting from an emphasis on military masculinity, family heritage, and civic duty to the display of wealth and taste in sumptuous living and entertainment.²²

The presence of arms in the *portego* was in part a practical matter: the doge implies that such arms were used in actual combat. In earlier centuries, Venetian nobles were trained to use the crossbow and were required to own arms, although already in the fifteenth century some of these practices were waning.²³ But the arms were also symbols of nobility of a traditional, chivalric kind. By the later sixteenth century, their continued presence in *porteghi* was probably vestigial and purely symbolic. Francesco Sansovino reported in 1581 that "in the reception rooms [*sale*] of great families there are racks of arms with the shields and standards of their ancestors who fought for Venice on land or at sea," suggesting that the arms were a type of "antiquity" and symbol of family akin to portraits, rather than weapons one might actually employ.²⁴ As Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan has evocatively noted, the *portego* was a "space of genealogical memory," in which "temporal discontinuity was surmounted through the coexistence of the present and the absent."²⁵

In sixteenth-century inventories, weapons and armor might or might not be listed in *porteghi*.²⁶ They were more common in noble households, but they were also sometimes found in the houses of elite non-noble citizens (*cittadini*), suggesting that any strict correlation between arms and nobility had broken down as the objects became increasing representational rather than utilitarian.²⁷ They were displayed as emblems of family identity,

²¹"Storia della Guerra Veneto-Turca del 1537," Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, mss. Ital., cl. VII, cod. 2053 (=7920), 73^r–74^r. Translation from Tafuri, 1995, 2. See also the discussion in Concina, 280.

²²Brown, 2004, especially vii, 1–21.

²³Schulz, 1982, 89n52; Schulz, 2004, 25. For Venetian noblemen's involvement in military affairs, see Mallett and Hale, especially 202–10, 330–36.

²⁴Sansovino, 142^v. Translation from Brown, 2000, 296.

²⁵Crouzet-Pavan, 1:406.

²⁶The display of weapons is often referred to as a *lanziera di arme*, or a *restelleria* (specifically, spears arranged in the form of a rake) in the inventories. On arms in the *portego*, see Schulz, 1982, 89n51–52; Palumbo-Fossati, 1984, 150; Crouzet-Pavan, 1:405–06; Brown, 2000, 317; Brown, 2004, 19–20, 73, 224.

²⁷For examples of *cittadini* households with arms in the *portego*, see Schmitter, 1997, 187; de Maria, 2010, 131; and Appendix, inv. 45, 60, 72, and 73.

symbols of nobility, and items of luxury and meticulous craft.²⁸ Together with other objects in the room, such as large paintings, they expressed the symbolic significance of the space.

4. PICTURES IN THE *PORTEGO*: EVIDENCE FROM INVENTORIES

To understand specifically how paintings commissioned for the *portego* might have addressed or responded to the symbolic associations and conflicting expectation of the room, I have analyzed sixteenth-century household inventories to determine what kinds of paintings and other objects were displayed in the *portego* and how they may have changed over time. By far the most useful inventories for this purpose are those preserved in the collection of the Cancelleria Inferiore, Miscellanea di notai diversi (hereafter MND) in the Archivio di Stato in Venice (hereafter ASV). The twelve *buste* (numbers 34–45) together contain about 700 inventories covering a good range of the sixteenth century (the documents date from 1497 to 1630, but are most concentrated between 1526 and 1590). Although it is not clear exactly why these inventories were taken or collected together, their primary purpose apparently was to preserve rather than to appraise household possessions, since monetary values are only very rarely assigned and attributions for works of art are almost never given.²⁹ For whatever reasons (perhaps in part because they were used primarily to identify objects rather than to value them), the inventories in this source tend to be longer, better organized, more descriptive, and (importantly) more legible than those in the series of the Giudici del Proprio, Mobili, also in the ASV. For this reason they have been and will continue to be a particularly important source for cultural historians.³⁰

²⁸Weapons, shields, and banners often displayed the family coat-of-arms; for an example, see Brown, 2004, 20. For the decorative nature of many of these objects, see Contadini, 319–21, who notes that the shields she illustrates “were objects of display rather than tools of warfare, paraded on special occasions and exhibited in the home as symbols of power.” For Fra Sabba da Castiglione, arms were one of the most prized forms of “ornament” in a house: see Thornton, 269.

²⁹See Henry, 264, who notes that the inventories “were drawn up at the request of the relatives, friends, or business partners of a deceased person.”

³⁰Another major source of inventories, the Giudici di Petizion, ASV, contains few examples from before 1580. Inventories of households can also be found within the archives of particular notaries, as is the case with the Contarini inventory discussed in detail below: however, these are relatively rare and difficult to find within the plethora of paperwork any given notary left behind. Family archives, both those in public institutions and still in private hands, also often contain household inventories. A good example are the inventories of the

While the MND inventories are the best available documentary source for analyzing the contents of sixteenth-century *porteghi*, they are nevertheless unsystematic and idiosyncratic documents. Drawn up by different notaries, at different times, and for different purposes, neither their organization nor their terminology is standardized.³¹ Furthermore, because they cover households from a range of backgrounds and degrees of wealth, only a relatively small number include art objects of interest for this study. Many list only a few paintings (or none at all) of very conventional subjects, such as the Madonna and Child or the Dead Christ, and a significant number are not organized by room (this is especially true of earlier examples), making it very difficult, if not impossible, to determine which pictures were in the *portego*. Even if they are organized by room, the works often are simply counted — for example, “nine large pictures with their covers of various sorts” — or described in vague terms like “a picture with two figures.”³² A good example of the limitations of inventories is provided by Paolo Veronese’s paintings made for the *portego* of the Cuccina family palace. The surviving canvases (now in the Gemäldegalerie, Dresden) represent *The Cuccina Family Presented to the Madonna and Child*, *The Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 6), *The Wedding Feast at Cana* (fig. 7), and *The Road to Calvary*. In an inventory of the Cuccina palace, however, they are listed simply as “4 paintings on canvas with portraits.”³³ While the pictures do include portraits, the notary does not bother to record their primary subjects.

For all these reasons, the MND inventories do not lend themselves to a systematic, quantitative analysis of the paintings found in the *porteghi*; however, they can still provide some important insights into the kinds of works of art on display. In the Appendix, I identify seventy-four inventories that list pictures — including prints and maps as well as paintings, since it

Michiel family in the Biblioteca Museo Correr in Venice discussed in Fletcher, 462–67. For an overview of Venetian inventories as sources and a sampling of scholarship dependent on the MND inventories in particular, including her own, see Henry, Appendix I, 262–70. For more on the reasons why inventories were drawn up, as well as their usefulness and drawbacks as sources, see Palumbo-Fossati, 1984, 112–17; Brown, 2000, 308–09; Palumbo-Fossati, 2004, 458–60.

³¹The notaries do not always use consistent or clear subheadings and names for different rooms, so it can be difficult to identify exactly where pictures were located. Two notaries looking at the same object might describe it in different ways, or not describe it at all. It can even be difficult to identify what is a painting. Although the standard term is *quadro* (literally, “square”), the word can be used for a variety of rectangular objects, such as relief sculptures, prints, drawings, maps, and cloth wall-hangings: see Henry, 269.

³²Appendix, inv. 70 and 40.

³³ASV, Giudici di Petizion, b. 350, c. 49, 4^r (1626): “Quadri n.º 4 in tela con ritratti”; de Maria, 2003, 261–63.



FIGURE 6. Paolo Veronese, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1570s. Dresden, Staatliche Gemäldegalerie. Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.



FIGURE 7. Paolo Veronese, *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, 1570s. Dresden, Staatliche Gemäldegalerie. Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

can be difficult to distinguish between them — in the *portego*.³⁴ It is important to note that this represents only about ten percent of the total MND archive, sometimes amounting to no more than a handful of inventories per decade. Given the very small size of this sample set, and the limitations inherent in the documents themselves, the following analysis does not aim at providing a quantitative representation of what was most popular and common, but rather presents a series of emerging trends in the quantity of paintings displayed and the subjects they represented.

Several scholars have suggested that the number of pictures displayed in the *portego* increased in the sixteenth century, and the inventories in the Appendix

³⁴See n31 above on *quadri*.

support this impression to the degree that they can.³⁵ While there is no data from before the 1520s, it is striking that none of the *porteghi* from the 1520s contained more than three pictures. By the 1530s, however, some *porteghi* were reported to have six, eight, nine, and even nineteen images — in this last case, ten paintings, one map, and eight works on paper — on display, and this trend continues in later decades.³⁶ Apparently, the arms and armor (traditional attributes of nobility) were not only being replaced by tables, they were also being substituted, or at least complemented, by paintings.³⁷ This suggests that the *portego* was becoming a different kind of display space, one in which valor, status, and heritage were increasingly conveyed through pictorial means.

As the number of pictures in the *portego* increased, so too did the diversity of subjects. At all times, the most commonly depicted subjects were the Madonna (presumably with Child, although this is not usually stated), sometimes together with other saints, and Christ, often “Christo passo” (Dead Christ) and “Christo in croce” (Christ on the Cross).³⁸ These were the most frequently mentioned types of picture in all parts of the house.³⁹ Other saints were sometimes also represented individually: in the inventories

³⁵On the increase in the number of paintings in the *portego*, see Brown, 2000, 310; Lucco, 2006, 106. Lydecker, 27, notes in passing a similar increase in the decoration of the *sale* of Florentine houses, but to my knowledge the subject has not been investigated in detail.

³⁶Appendix, inv. 10, 12, 17, and 23.

³⁷It is important to remember, however, that an inventory taken at the time of death may actually reflect a decorating project undertaken some twenty years earlier when the household was established. Lydecker, 145–47, 160–65; and Goldthwaite, 228, have demonstrated how Florentines typically decorated their *camere* all at once when they were relatively young. In two examples of *porteghi* discussed below, the comparison of Marcantonio Michiel’s notes on the artworks in the houses of Taddeo Contarini (1525) and Andrea Odoni (1532) to inventories of the households in the 1550s reveals that little changed over the intervening years. Taking into account a lag time between when paintings were purchased and when they began to appear in inventories, it may be that the increase in the number of paintings in the *portego* in the inventories from the 1520s to the ’30s reflects an increased interest in the *quadro da portego* in the 1510s and the ’20s. Such a presumption accords well with the date of some of the paintings discussed above and is the period in which a notary recorded a *quadro da portego* in Palma Vecchio’s studio (1528). It is worth pointing out that in the first decades of the sixteenth century, artists were beginning to paint more on canvas, which made it easier to produce larger paintings.

³⁸Many images are simply said to depict “Christo” or “nostro Signor.” These may have been iconic images, or maybe the notary simply did not note a more specific subject.

³⁹As noted by Penny, 2006, 7; Morse, 103–05. Images of “nostra donna” are particularly ubiquitous, sometimes present in every room in the house, and sometimes several images of the Madonna within one room. For example, Stefano Ferro owned “nine images or paintings of our Lady, some small, small large, some new, some old,” the only paintings listed in the inventory. ASV, Cancellaria Inferiore, Miscellanea di notai diversi, b. 34, c. 15, 1^r (1525): “Inmagine over quadri de nostra dona tra grandi et piccoli nuovi et vecchi n[umer]o 9.”

in the Appendix, St. Jerome, the Magdalene, and St. Christopher were listed most often. In general, the number of portraits, both of family members and of famous people, tends to increase over time, as does the incidence of maps, city views, and landscapes.⁴⁰ Finally, in the later half of the century, notaries record cycles of paintings, such as “four paintings of the seasons,” “four Flemish landscapes,” or “six paintings with the story of Tobias.”⁴¹ Veronese’s four canvases for the Cuccina family palace from the 1570s are well-known surviving examples of this trend.⁴² Also symptomatic of this tendency toward “sets” is a reference in a 1573 inventory to an unspecified number of “pictures all of the same size of different sorts” in the *portego*.⁴³

Of greatest interest for the purposes of this study, however, are subjects that recur but are not part of programmatic decorative campaigns like “the four seasons.” I will not address here the many images of the Madonna, Christ, and individual saints, nor will I focus on the many portraits, maps, and landscapes, although this is not to imply that such images could not also be ideological.⁴⁴ Rather, I propose that in the selection of more particularized narrative subjects we might most readily see how the paintings responded to, or gave expression to, the symbolic associations of the space and the social practices conducted there. Within the context of our limited set of inventories, it is possible to identify several subjects that recur often enough to suggest a certain pattern of choices.

What emerges most clearly is the emphasis on dining scenes, especially those involving Christ, often referred to simply as “una cena di christo” (a supper

⁴⁰Palumbo-Fossati, 1984, 144–45, 147–49; Ambrosini; Brown, 2000, 310. On the subjects of *portego* paintings, see Aikema, 1996, 68–71, 153.

⁴¹Appendix, inv. 72, 2^v: “Quadri 4 delle stagion”; Appendix, inv. 49, 16^v: “quattro quadri grandi de fiandra à paezi”; Appendix, inv. 47, 1^v: “Sei quadri sozadi d[e]lla istoria d[i] Tobia.” The paintings in the cycle are not necessarily the only paintings in the room. For paintings of the four seasons in Venice, including further archival citations, see Aikema, 1996, 131–38; de Maria, 2010, 131.

⁴²Feil, especially 84–86; Cocke, 152–54; de Maria, 2003, 251–85; de Maria, 2010, 143–59. The paintings have previously been dated before 1573, but de Maria argues they may be somewhat later.

⁴³Appendix, inv. 63, 6^r: “In Portego / Quadri tutti de una misura de piu sorte.” Cocke, 137, notes that “by 1570 large paintings were ordered in sets of four — often of the seasons — to be hung in the *camere grandi* [*sic*], the large communal space on the first floor of Venetian palaces,” and discusses several examples (152–59). It is difficult to know how many, and which of the paintings listed in inventories might have been part of such cycles, since, as the Cuccina example demonstrates, the subjects were not always part of an obvious set. For an intriguing analysis of how the Cuccina paintings are thematically linked, see de Maria, 2010, 143–59.

⁴⁴For a particularly interesting example of ideological content in portraiture, see Henry, 45–60, 68–73, on the political and civic associations of portraits of the Venetian *buffone* (comic entertainer) Zuan Polo that were exhibited in the *porteghi* of the Masipo and Della Vedova families: Appendix, inv. 26 and 38.

of Christ). A painting explicitly identified as a *cena* is present in sixteen of the seventy-four inventories in the Appendix, representing about twenty-two percent.⁴⁵ Given that many of the inventories in the Appendix identify only a couple of paintings (often the Madonna and/or Christ), or none at all, by subject, this is a remarkably high number. In earlier inventories this theme is sometimes found in the *camere*, but later is almost always in the *portego*.⁴⁶ A painting so listed might represent the Last Supper, especially when specifically identified as “a supper of our lord Jesus Christ with the apostles,” but it could also represent a number of other dining scenes from the New Testament.⁴⁷ For example, the painting of “Christ at the table with four other figures” probably depicted the Supper at Emmaus.⁴⁸ We know from contemporary sources that the patrician Cornaro family had a painting of this subject by Giovanni Bellini in their *portego* (now lost, but the composition is recorded in an eighteenth-century print).⁴⁹ One homeowner felt that his “large painting of the supper” was such an integral part of the room that he stipulated in his will that his heirs were forbidden to move the painting from its location “at the head of the *portego*, opposite the balcony.”⁵⁰ In this last case “the supper” was presumably

⁴⁵Appendix, inv. 2, 12, 19, 25, 26, 28, 32, 38, 49, 52, 53, 61, 62, 66, 68, and 72. Inv. 49 lists two “cene . . . d’apostoli” in a single *portego*. Inv. 31 records “uno quadro de dodexe apostoli,” which was also possibly a Last Supper.

⁴⁶Examples of a supper of Christ in *camere* include Appendix, inv. 8, 3^v; inv. 10, 7^r; inv. 13, 5^r; inv. 15, 2^r.

⁴⁷Appendix, inv. 32, 8^v.

⁴⁸Appendix, inv. 26, 12^v: “Uno quadro fornito de legname indora con una figura de uno xpo a mensa con quarto altre figure.”

⁴⁹In his account of the burning of the Cornaro palace “on the grand canal at San Maurizio” in 1532, Sanudo, 56:753, notes that among the many objects in the house at the time were “the paintings that were in the *portego*, including the beautiful *Supper at Emmaus* that once belonged to Vianello” (“li quadri erano in portego, tra li qual la *Cena di Emaus*, fo dil Vianello, cosa bellissima”). The passage is incorrectly translated in Labalme and White, 476, who assume the painting was by Vianello. In fact, Michele Vianello was an important art patron at the turn of the century, and was presumably the first owner of the painting; for Vianello, see Lauber, 2005, 86–87. The painting seems to have survived the fire since Vasari (1568) and Ridolfi (1648) saw a painting of the Supper of Emmaus by Giovanni Bellini in the Cornaro palace at San Maurizio: Vasari, 1906, 3:164; Ridolfi, 1:72. For Bellini’s painting and the print after it, see Goffen, 277–80.

⁵⁰Appendix, inv. 61, 13^r: “Un quadro grande della Cena nella testa del portego allincontro del pergolo, qual’ha da restar nel detto luogo.” A large painting of the *Adulteress* was to stay in one of the *camere* (1^v). The stipulation was made by the nobleman Vincenzo Querini, son of Zorzi, who wrote in his will that his *casa di statio* was to rotate in ownership between his three sons for three years each, while the two paintings stayed in place (he does not actually specify in the will that they have to stay in the same room, as the inventory states): ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 1200, c. 165 (6 July 1572).



FIGURE 8. Paolo Veronese, *Supper at Emmaus*, 1550s. Paris, Musée du Louvre. Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

the Last Supper.⁵¹ In several other instances when paintings were referred to even more cursorily as “una cena,” it is possible that they represented another sort of dining scene, not necessarily involving Christ.⁵²

That a “supper with Christ” was such a popular narrative subject for a *portego* is hardly surprising.⁵³ Since the *portego* was often used for banquets, one could see it as the domestic counterpart to the long tradition of depicting the Last Supper in refectories.⁵⁴ As Erasmus noted in his colloquy “The Godly Feast,” for Christians any meal “represents in a way that hallowed Last Supper which the Lord Jesus took with his disciples.”⁵⁵ With knowledge of this predisposition towards dining scenes involving Christ, we can with great confidence assume that Paolo Veronese’s large, festive painting of *The Supper at Emmaus* (fig. 8), measuring 241 x 415 cm, was

⁵¹Although described simply as “un quadro grande della cena” in the inventory, it most likely was a Last Supper since Querini refers to it as “il quadro gra[n]do d[el]l[is] 12 apostol[is]” in his will: ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, b. 1200, c. 165 (6 July 1572).

⁵²Appendix, inv. 28, 38, 68, and 72.

⁵³Aikema, 1996, 70, who studied the same series of inventories that I did, notes that the Last Suppers were “not uncommon in sixteenth-century Venetian interiors” and that they were usually found in the *portego*. Henry, 47n81, found the Last Supper to be the “most common subject for a ‘quadro da portego’” in her survey of Venetian inventories. Their popularity in Venice is also mentioned by Morse, 106.

⁵⁴Also noted by Morse, 107; Penny, 2008, 229.

⁵⁵Erasmus, 182 (ll. 29–31).

commissioned for a *portego*. Within one painting it combines the requisite pious dining scene with portraits of family members (on the right side of the canvas), who might otherwise (or also) have been represented in individual portraits around the room.⁵⁶ The setting of the scene also reflects the space for which the painting was made: behind the family portrait is an elaborate credenza with luxury tableware — just the sort of item one would find in a *portego* — and the pedimented door frame behind Christ reads as though it might be a doorway from the *portego* into an adjacent *camera*. Two other large horizontal paintings of the same subject, also including portraits, by Vincenzo Catena were most likely also intended for a *portego*.⁵⁷ One of the four panels from the Cuccina *portego* cycle is a “cena di christo” as well, in this instance *The Wedding Feast at Cana* (fig. 7); Veronese renders it as a veritable “party scene,” not just a dinner but a wedding banquet, a type of event that often took place in the *portego*.⁵⁸ The popularity of *cene di Christo*, and Veronese’s prominent role in depicting them, helps contextualize the artist’s somewhat cavalier attitude when brought before the Inquisition to defend the perceived profanations in his Last Supper for the monastery of Santi Giovanni e Paolo, as well as the later ease with which he simply renamed it “Feast in the House of Levi.”⁵⁹ There was a long tradition in Venice of painting various suppers of Christ somewhat interchangeably and in secularized terms.

Another related subject that recurs is the Prodigal Son, who could be represented at the table eating and drinking with his companions, as in

⁵⁶Penny, 2008, 229, also came to the conclusion independently that this must be a *portego* picture, noting the emphasis on portraiture in *portego* paintings in general. Brown, 2004, 96, writes that “despite the sacred theme of the scene, it is difficult not to see it as a celebration of the family’s prosperity and fecundity as well” and suggests, quite plausibly, that it might have been commissioned by a *cittadino* family. Cocke, 144, dates the painting to shortly after Veronese’s arrival in Venice in 1553. Penny suggests that earlier renditions of this subject were probably also made for the *portego*.

⁵⁷Contini Bonacossi Collection, Uffizi, Florence, 130 x 241 cm; Accademia Carrara, Bergamo, 114 x 240 cm: see dal Pozzolo, 76.

⁵⁸For the Cuccina panels, see n42. As de Maria, 2010, 145–47, has pointed out, the Cuccina paintings represent different moments in the life cycle: birth, marriage, family, and death. For weddings in the *portego*, see n6.

⁵⁹For discussion of this famous controversy, see Grasman and citations therein. Even within the report of Veronese’s interrogation, the artist (or perhaps the scribe) appears to confuse the Last Supper (“Cena ultima”) with the Feast at the House of Simon (“in ca de Simeon”). Interestingly, the inquisitor made a distinction between the Wedding Feast at Cana, which he did not consider a “Supper of Our Lord,” and the Feast at the House of the Pharisee and the Feast in the House of Simon, which he did. See Grasman, 125–27. The original document is published as a facsimile insert in Delogu.



FIGURE 9. Jacopo Palma Giovane, *The Revels of the Prodigal Son*, ca. 1600. Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia. Photo: Cameraphoto Arte, Venice / Art Resource, NY.

Palma il Giovane's rendition of the scene from ca. 1600 (fig. 9).⁶⁰ More than Christ's various suppers, this subject allows for a festive, potentially even decadent, dining and entertainment scene, while at the same time putting forth a moral message. This combination of the depiction of dining delights (Michiel's *delicie*) with moral messages once again recalls Erasmus's "Godly Feast." In the colloquy, learned visitors to a house admire paintings in a room used for dining; they include the *Last Supper*, *Feast of Herod*, *Dives Dining and Lazarus Driven from the Gates*, as well as *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Battle of Lapiths and Centaurs*, and *Alexander Piercing Clitus with a Spear*. In Erasmus's example, sacred and secular subjects are combined to elucidate a Christian moral, as the host explains, "these examples warn us to be temperate at feasts, and deter us from drunkenness and extravagance."⁶¹ Paintings in Venetian *porteghi* seem, at least nominally, to have been commissioned with similar intent. The display of religious or moralizing dining scenes in the room lent a sacred air to the lavish feasts and entertainment taking place there and added a note of piety to the family's display and consumption of worldly goods. In this sense, these subjects countered the more "decadent" associations of the space, while also, to one degree or another, celebrating them. It is easy to

⁶⁰Appendix, inv. 12, 12^r; inv. 48; inv. 49, 16^v. On the subject, see Aikema, 1996, 153. The painting by Palma il Giovane was paired with an image of the return of the Prodigal Son, both of which came to the Accademia as part of the "Dono Contarini" in 1838. See Moschini Marconi, 154–55 (cat. nos. 257–58).

⁶¹Erasmus, 205 (ll. 15–23). The colloquy was written in 1522.

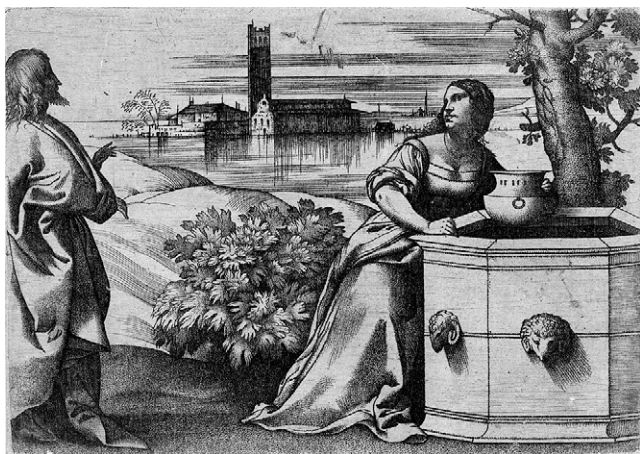


FIGURE 10. Giulio Campagnola after Sebastiano del Piombo, *Christ and the Samaritan Woman*, ca. 1510. London, British Museum.

understand the appeal of the subject of the Supper at Emmaus in particular. Not only is it a dining scene, but it also depicts an incident of hospitality while literally figuring the presence of the sacred within the profane.⁶²

Several non-dining subjects found repeatedly in the *portego* also connect with the theme of hospitality, relating to the room's receiving and entertaining functions. One depicted Christ asking the Samaritan woman at the well for water, listed in the inventories simply as "the Samaritan woman" or "the Samaritan woman at the well."⁶³ While the subject is a religious and moral tale about faith and redemption, at a basic level it is also an image of a stranger requesting sustenance, in this case drink rather than food.⁶⁴ A print by Giulio Campagnola, which may record the composition for a painting of the story by Sebastiano del Piombo (fig. 10), illustrates the prominent role the well and water vessel play in depictions of the scene.⁶⁵ The relative popularity of this

⁶²Dal Pozzolo, 76, 82; Gallo.

⁶³Appendix, inv. 20, 12^f; inv. 35, 3^f; inv. 40, 10^f; inv. 37, 11^f; inv. 65, 14^v.

⁶⁴On the theme, see Sale, 383–87; *Botticelli and Filippino*, 284. I would like to thank Jonathan Katz Nelson for these references.

⁶⁵There are a number of large surviving canvases depicting the subject by later Venetian painters, including Paolo Veronese, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 143 x 289 cm (Cocke, 159 [fig. 4.15]); Palma Vecchio?, formerly London, collections of William Graham and Charles Butler, ca. 1514–15, 96.5 x 132 cm (Rylands, 285 [cat. no. A41]); circle of Bonifacio Veronese, formerly London, collection of Max Rothschild, ca. 1535, 140 x 275 (Rylands, 286 [cat. no. A42]); Bonifacio Veronese and workshop, London, Kensington Palace, 1535–40, 167 x 251 cm (Cottrell, 2000, 441 [cat. no. 73]). For the print, see Joannides, 131.

somewhat obscure subject (there are five examples in the inventories in the Appendix) suggests it was considered particularly suitable for a *quadro da portego*.⁶⁶

Somewhat less surprising, given the subject's prevalence in Italian painting in general, is the number of pictures of the Adoration of the Magi. This too is one of the subjects included in the Cuccina "set" (fig. 6), and I found six examples in the inventories. It also represents the reception of visitors and figures the exchange of gifts, spiritual or material, while at the same time allowing for the depiction of lavish clothing, fancy objects, and exotic figures (as in the Cuccina canvas).⁶⁷

Values of hospitality and charity also lie behind the images of St. Christopher that were exhibited in the *portego*. St. Christopher was one of the saints most frequently represented in the space.⁶⁸ A giant who carried Christ across a river, he was the patron saint of travelers, a particularly apposite one in Venice where all journeys involve crossing water. It was (and still is) believed that gazing upon an image of the saint would protect viewers from harm on journeys. They functioned as talismans, welcoming and bidding farewell to visitors and family members coming and going from the house.⁶⁹

The recurrence of this subject is unexpected, given that not many Venetian paintings of St. Christopher seem to survive. Most likely, these images of the giant St. Christopher were vertical in format, more iconic than narrative, similar to Titian's fresco of the saint with a distant view of the city of Venice, located above a doorway at the base of a stairway in the Doge's Palace (fig. 11).⁷⁰

⁶⁶Interestingly, the one instance I found where the term *quadro da portego* was employed in the inventories, aside from the reference in Palma Vecchio's studio, was "un quadro grando d[a] portego con la samaritana": Appendix, inv. 37, 11^r.

⁶⁷Penny, 2008, xiv, suggests that the Adoration of the Shepherds was a popular subject for the *portego*, illustrating an example by Bonifacio de' Pitati, now on loan to the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum. I found only one inventory specifically mentioning "pastori" (Appendix, inv. 12, 12^r), but notaries may simply have recorded such a scene as an image of the Madonna.

⁶⁸Appendix, inv. 16, 3^v; inv. 18, 3^r; inv. 19, 2^r. In one case St. Christopher was represented in three dimensions rather than two: "uno san christophero dj legno d'intaglio" (Appendix, inv. 38, 11^v). Morse, 106, notes that St. Christopher is one of the "subjects that were . . . closely associated with the space of the *portego*."

⁶⁹Morse, 106–07. Such images may have been common outside Venice as well. For example, an over-lifesize fresco of St. Christopher was painted in the entrance hall of the Palazzo Datini in Prato, at the bottom of the staircase to the right of the front door: Cole, 72.

⁷⁰For the association of the image of St. Christopher with doorways and entries, see Morse, 106–07. The fresco (which measures 310 x 186 cm) was painted ca. 1523 for the private apartments of Doge Andrea Gritti: Humfrey, 80; Wethey, 1:131 (no. 98). Possibly some of the images in the *porteghi* were directly inspired by Titian's image; the examples in the inventories are all from the latter half of the 1530s, a little over a decade after the fresco in the Doge's Palace.



FIGURE 11. Titian, *St. Christopher*, ca. 1523. Venice, Doge's Palace. Photo: Cameraphoto Arte, Venice / Art Resource, NY.

Thus the images of St. Christopher probably did not fit the typology of the *quadro da portego* outlined here, but they do relate in theme, establishing the room as a space of reception and *accueil*.

While some of the recurrent subjects in the *portego* relate to themes of hospitality and feasting, others respond to the more militaristic and civic-minded associations of the space. This includes a number of representations of military forces and battles, such as "a sea armada," a "Turkish battle," and

“the story of Troy.”⁷¹ The subject of the Conversion of St. Paul also falls into this category.⁷² In part, the scene may have been popular because the patrician Zuanantonio Venier owned Raphael’s famous Sistine Chapel tapestry of the subject, which was probably on display in his *portego* alongside a “canvas of the supper of our Lord” by a Netherlandish artist.⁷³ But in many Venetian renditions of the subject, as in Jacopo Tintoretto’s early canvas in the National Gallery, Washington (fig. 12), the composition is focused less on the figure of Paul and more on the *mise-en-scène* with its trappings of war such as arms, armor, and horses — note especially how pieces of armor and Paul’s shield are conspicuously placed in the foreground.⁷⁴ Tintoretto’s composition is obviously based on Titian’s painting of the *Battle of Spoleto* in the Doge’s Palace, which would have enhanced the civic connotations of the subject by alluding to a specific battle in Venetian history and by recalling the Great Council Hall.⁷⁵ A finished drawing by Pordenone (ca. 1532–33, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York) may also record a composition for a *portego* painting of St. Paul’s conversion.⁷⁶

⁷¹Appendix, inv. 60, 10^v: “[U]n’altro quadro grande d’armada de mar fornido con fornimenti negri doradi”; Appendix, inv. 42, 17^r: “un altro quadro grandio con una bataglia turchescha fornido d[e] noghera”; Appendix, inv. 44, 8^v: “quarto pezi de spaliere a figure cu[n] l’historia Troiana nove.”

⁷²For examples, see Appendix, inv. 30, 5^r; inv. 38, 11^v. Michiel also lists a painting by Bonifacio de’ Pitati of “la trasfiguratione de S. Paulo,” by which he surely meant the Conversion of St. Paul, among the paintings in Andrea Odoni’s *portego*. Cassegrain, 56, notes that one of the attractions of the subject was the occasion it offered for depicting a large battle scene. Interestingly, all the paintings of St. Paul were owned by prominent *cittadini* (non-nobles): Angelo Savina, Francesco della Vedova, and Andrea Odoni.

⁷³In his notes on the collection in Venier’s house, taken in 1528, Michiel, 98, lists this tapestry, as well as another from the series, immediately after the “Supper of our Lord.” In Michiel’s manuscript (Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, MS Ital. XI 67 [7351]), these works are listed on a separate page from others in the collection, a composing strategy that Michiel sometimes employed so that the layout of the notes reflects the physical disposition of the works in the collection. For how the tapestry came to Venice, see Shearman, 140–41. The original cartoon was also in Venice from at least 1521: *ibid.*, 139, 144–45.

⁷⁴On the painting, see Cassegrain; Falomir, 192–95.

⁷⁵The canvas also alludes to depictions of the Crossing of the Red Sea, a subject that had civic associations in Venice: Cassegrain, 66n42; Schmitter, 2004, 928–31 (and citations therein). In his iconographic reading of the work, Cassegrain, 55, makes a convincing argument that it was commissioned for “une sphère de réception privée,” and notes that it is four times smaller than Tintoretto’s first public commissions. It is, however, a fairly standard size for a *portego* painting (152.4 x 236.2 cm), and I think it originally served this purpose.

⁷⁶Cohen, 1:342–45, which also mentions a number of other Venetian renditions of the subject.



FIGURE 12. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Conversion of St. Paul*, ca. 1544. Samuel H. Kress Collection. Image courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington.

In an ekphrasis in praise of a print depicting the subject by Francesco Salviati, Pietro Aretino, a famous resident of Venice, enumerates all the martial accessories to be admired in this theme: “I will not speak of the noble shape of the helmets, for I do not know how to express the excellence of your invention, which decorates them with so light an array of plumes and so rich an intaglio of ornaments. Moreover the praise which is due them is due also to the whole shields and the half swords which the co-militants of Saul hold on their arms or wear at their sides . . . I am pleased also by the agile skill and the grace of warlike valor with which they hold in their unconquered hands both the spear handles which are separated from the spear heads by a fringe, and the gonfalons which are stirred by the blowing of the winds.”⁷⁷ Like the Supper at Emmaus, the Conversion of Paul was an ideal subject for the *portego* because the bellicose context also had a Christian spiritual theme.⁷⁸ Pictures of this sort did not just ornament the space, they dramatized its significance.

Rather than sacralizing the *delicie* of the *portego*, martial subjects instead reasserted its virile traditions. In some cases these militaristic paintings

⁷⁷Aretino, 2:85–86 (August 1545); translation in Chubb, 211. See Landau and Parshall, 293–94.

⁷⁸For the idea that the subject metaphorically represented the triumph of the Church over its enemies, infidels, and heretics, see Arasse, 57–58.

substituted altogether for actual spears and helmets; in other cases they were exhibited alongside them. In either instance they underlined the civic and martial heritage of the room, counteracting its association with feminized pleasures and emasculating pastimes.

5. PERSONALIZING THE *PORTEGO*: THREE CASE STUDIES

In addition to examining overarching patterns within numerous inventories, one can also learn much from the analysis of individual *porteghi*. As the following three examples reveal — all from midcentury but belonging to people from different social groups — when a household had a number of paintings in the room, a distinctive set of concerns and values often emerged from the subjects chosen. While some of the works might fit the general types I have just outlined, the aim was clearly also to emphasize the inhabitants' particular background, profession, class, and interests through the objects on display. In other words, the works chosen for display might articulate particular family identities, as well as address the symbolic meanings of the space in Venetian society as a whole.

The first example is Andrea Odoni (1488–1545), whose portrait by Lorenzo Lotto, painted in 1527, is well known (fig. 13).⁷⁹ Odoni was a wealthy citizen (*cittadino*) whose family had recently immigrated to the city, but he was not a member of the governing nobility. A merchant, he also held a bureaucratic state office, like many *cittadini*, and was responsible for collecting taxes on wine. He was a significant art patron, famous for his small but sumptuous house filled with works of art. It is this aspect of his persona that Lotto highlights in his innovative portrait.

The contents of the Odoni *portego* are recorded in an inventory taken in 1555 and in notes compiled by the Venetian nobleman and art expert Marcantonio Michiel — the same Michiel who recorded Doge Loredano's speech twenty years earlier — when he visited Odoni's house in 1532.⁸⁰ The inventory reveals that Odoni displayed a considerable amount of sculpture in his *portego*, which was relatively uncommon in Venice.⁸¹ His particular proclivity for the medium is also evident in Lotto's portrait, which foregrounds a collection of ancient marble statues. Among the objects inventoried in the

⁷⁹On Odoni, his art collection, and his portrait see Cicogna, 3:434–38; Battilotti and Franco, 79–82; Coli; Schmitter, 1997, 135–293; Martin; Schmitter, 2004, 939–63; Schmitter, 2007.

⁸⁰Appendix, inv. 45 (the inventory was taken after the death of Andrea's brother Alvise); published in part in Gronau, 53–84. Michiel, 82–86.

⁸¹For Odoni's unusual interest in sculpture, see Luchs, 9–10, 25, 27–29; Schmitter, 2004, 947–54.



FIGURE 13. Lorenzo Lotto, *Portrait of Andrea Odoni*, 1527. The Royal Collection © 2011 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

portego are portrait busts and various figures, some of which were fragments, and thus perhaps antique. The works on display included a two-foot-tall marble statue of Mars, the god of war, by the sculptor Simone Bianco, and several statuettes of men on horseback, one of which is specifically identified as the famous Venetian general “Gattamelata” (probably a copy after Donatello’s statue in Padua). These last works resonate with the military associations of the *portego*, although Michiel notably describes the Mars figure as nude, “with his helmet over his shoulder,” as though to represent the idea of strength at peace.⁸²

The inventory is much less forthcoming about the paintings in the *portego*. The notary simply listed one large painting of “purgatory” and a further “11 paintings, 7 small and 4 large.”⁸³ Luckily, Michiel names the subjects of six of these. None were dining scenes or depictions of hospitality,⁸⁴

⁸²Gronau, 63–64. Michiel, 82–86.

⁸³Gronau, 64.

⁸⁴It is possible that among the unidentified paintings listed in the inventory was a work Michiel saw in the house of Andrea’s uncle Francesco Zio some years earlier, representing “Christ washing the feet of the disciples” by Jan Scorel: Michiel, 94. Andrea clearly inherited a number of works from his uncle — for example, see *ibid.*, 82, 84 — and perhaps this one as well. The subject of the painting by Scorel might, broadly speaking, be considered a “cena di Christo” from a notary’s point of view.



FIGURE 14. After Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo, *The Clemency of Scipio*. Formerly in a private collection, Florence. Photo: Fototeca Berenson, Villa I Tatti, Florence.

but several had martial themes or allusions, and Odoni did display some arms and armor alongside the works of art even though he was not a nobleman.⁸⁵

One painting by Bonifacio de' Pitati depicted the Conversion of Paul, a subject whose martial potential has already been noted.⁸⁶ Alongside this were two subjects not explicitly identified in any of the other inventories consulted, the Clemency of Scipio and the Justice of Trajan. Giovanni Bellini's earlier rendition (1506) of the first subject highlights the triumphal military potential of the scene. Bellini's painting was made for the house of Francesco Cornaro, although probably not for the *portego*.⁸⁷ Odoni's version of the theme, which Michiel attributed to Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo, may be preserved in a copy (fig. 14).⁸⁸ In any case, the painting would surely have depicted the military general refusing to accept a young woman as a war prize and instead restoring her to her fiancé, her rightful possessor.⁸⁹ Scipio was to be admired, according to the Roman historian Livy, not only for his chastity, but also for "conquering everything by arms and especially by generosity and favors."⁹⁰

⁸⁵Gronau, 63.

⁸⁶See n72.

⁸⁷For discussion of a possible arrangement in the house, see Knox.

⁸⁸C. Gilbert, 449–53, 516; Martin, 165–66; for reservations about this identification, see Schmitter, 1997, 192–93.

⁸⁹Michiel, 84, describes it as depicting "the young woman presented to Scipio."

⁹⁰*Livy*, 195 (bk. 26, ll. 3–5). For a recent discussion of the subject in Italian art with reference to other textual sources, see Baskins. A drawing by Pordenone of the subject could conceivably be a design for a *portego* painting. See Humfrey et al., 220–21 (cat. no. 87).

The painting Michiel described as “the story of Trajan, with many figures and antique buildings, was by . . . Zuanne del Comandador [Giovanni Cariani], but the buildings were designed by Sebastiano Bolognese [Sebastiano Serlio],” may have been a pendant to the Scipio scene.⁹¹ The story of Trajan and the widow who beseeched him to avenge her murdered son had many textual variants and was depicted in several narrative moments, as it often was on *cassoni*.⁹² Most commonly it showed the Roman emperor on horseback, “hurrying off to war with all possible speed,” but stopping to listen to the pleas of the widow kneeling before him.⁹³ That Odoni’s canvas depicted many figures and ancient buildings further supports the idea that this was the narrative moment selected in this case. Although not an overt battle scene, like the Scipio painting, it was a subject with a military setting and martial *raison d’être*.⁹⁴ As Jean Seznec intuitively noted about Dante’s famous recounting of the story, “although Dante is supposed to be describing a marble bas-relief, his description conjures up to mind a Venetian canvas, full of rearing horses, golden lights and fluttering standards” — in other words, a scene not unlike the Conversion of Paul.⁹⁵

The two episodes, the Clemency of Scipio and the Justice of Trajan, were depicted side by side in fresco on the façade of a house in Verona along with a large lion of St. Mark and a smaller representation of Doge Loredano and four Venetian senators (ca. 1518). Painted just after the return of the city to Venetian rule, the scenes are explicitly civic and political, figuring the justice and clemency of Venetian rule.⁹⁶ The iconography derives from Venice, where the two subjects are also depicted on the same historiated capital devoted to the theme of justice on the Doge’s Palace.⁹⁷ Both subjects concern forceful military rulers who listen to the needs and concerns of their subjects. In any case, they were certainly appropriate moral exemplars of clemency and justice, respectively, for a man who collected taxes for his

⁹¹As suggested by Martin, 166–67. Michiel, 84.

⁹²For an exhaustive and fascinating study of the legend and its visual representation, mostly on *cassone*, see Settis, 1995. Also see Cetto; Klapisch-Zuber.

⁹³As described in the life of St. Gregory in the *Golden Legend*: Jacobus de Voragine, 1:178.

⁹⁴Klapisch-Zuber, 17, notes how *cassone* paintings exploited the “context militaire” of the story as related in the *Golden Legend*.

⁹⁵Seznec, 111.

⁹⁶Schweikhart, 27, 219–20, cat. no. 69, figs. 128–36; Romano, 92–98, with color reproduction, figs. 77–79. The frescoes, attributed to Girolamo Mocetto, have been detached and are now in the Museo Civico in Verona. They include the coat of arms of Giampaolo Gradenigo, Provveditore del Campo Veneto and Governatore della Città.

⁹⁷Martin, 167; Manno, 69–77, who notes the imperialistic theme of the capital as a whole. For works of art in Florentine homes that refer to civic commissions and iconography, see Musacchio, 230–43.

livelihood.⁹⁸ As a non-noble from an immigrant family, Odoni, through his display of arms, sculpture, and paintings, associated himself with the venerable traditions and values of the Venetian Republic.

Alongside Odoni's paintings of St. Paul, Scipio, and Trajan, Michiel noted three other canvases. One, based on a composition by Giorgione, depicted a nude St. Jerome in the desert by moonlight; the other two were probably fiery landscapes in the tradition of Hieronymus Bosch — one described as a scene of "purgatory" in the inventory, the other, attributed by Michiel to the Venetian painter Giovanni Cariani, showed Cupid with his arrows amid flames. All three paintings touch on themes of penance or punishment, the last two perhaps warning of the consequences if one does not follow the other exemplary figures on display.⁹⁹

It is worth noting that all the protagonists of Odoni's *portego* paintings are male, which is in clear contrast to one of his two *camere*, where the emphasis was on images of women, including a reclining female nude.¹⁰⁰ While female characters appear in at least two of Odoni's paintings in the *portego*, they are shown in subservient and supplicant positions: the bride offered to Scipio and the mother who beseeches Trajan. Compositionally the paintings would have resembled subjects like Christ and the Woman from Canaan and Christ and the Samaritan Woman. The representation of male dominance and mercy, particularly directed toward women, may be another identifiable theme in *portego* pictures. Such images figured and reinforced the subservient position of women in the household, but they also justified authority in a larger social and political sense. By showing men in magnanimous acts of kindness towards women, the paintings figure the proper use of authority in relationship to those who are represented as weak and dependent. The women in the paintings can function as stand-ins for the less-powerful party in any patron-client, ruler-subject, or judge-suppliant relationship. Such images addressed viewers in the *portego* by underscoring relations of power that were deeply inscribed in Renaissance culture and that would have been enacted in the reception space of the *sala*.

The next example of a particular *portego*, that of the house of the Venetian nobleman Taddeo Contarini (1466–1540), was probably a larger

⁹⁸In the fifteenth century, Angelo Decembrio discussed the story of the widow and Emperor Trajan as "a reference to the admirable mean maintained by the Emperor between Justice and Mercy": as quoted and translated in Baxandall, 316. In the next century, Sebastiano Serlio described the Porta Decumana, with its mixture of Corinthian style and rustication, as an expression of the "gentleness and mildness of the Emperor Trajan's mind in giving pardon": Onians, 277.

⁹⁹Michiel, 86, 84, 94; Gronau, 63. On these works, see Schmitter, 1997, 86–91, 189–92, 199–202. On the Cariani in particular, see also Henry, 138–39.

¹⁰⁰Michiel, 84; Gronau, 66–67; Schmitter, 1997, 214–23.

space and less densely packed with works of art. Although Michiel visited Contarini's house as well as Odoni's, the two hosts were quite different types of men. Unlike Odoni, Contarini belonged to the wealthiest, most elite segment of Venetian society. A ruthless businessman who garnered his fortune in maritime trade, he was reported to be among the eighty most affluent men in the city. Although he seems to have had an interest in Roman history and philosophy, he was apparently not a collector of antiquities.¹⁰¹ While not as avid and diversified a collector as Odoni, he owned a number of important paintings by Giovanni Bellini and Giorgione.

If the recently discovered inventory of Contarini's house is any indication, he was just the kind of patrician Doge Loredano criticized. No arms and armor are to be found, but the *portego* did contain three tables (two of which are described as "large"), no fewer than twenty-two chairs and seven benches, as well as a very fine credenza and many chests full of household goods.¹⁰² Although the room must have been large to contain all this furniture — it is referred to in the inventory as the "large *portego* upstairs" — only four paintings and no other works of art were on display, which is quite sparse compared to Odoni's twelve paintings and many sculptures.¹⁰³

Three of the four paintings fit comfortably into the patterns discussed above. We know the least about the work the notary described as "a largish picture with the figure of our Lord and other figures," a painting that Michiel attributed to Palma Vecchio without giving any further indication of its subject.¹⁰⁴ Based

¹⁰¹ On Contarini and his collection, see Settis, 1990, 153–57; Battilotti and Franco; 58–61; Anderson, 1997, 148–60; Vescovo; Lauber, 2002, 105–07. Contarini did borrow texts by Appian, Galen, and Philo Judaeus from the Libreria di San Marco in 1524, but Vescovo, 115, argues that earlier scholars have over-idealized Contarini as a "humanist merchant, true to grand traditions and high values."

¹⁰² ASV, Notarile, Atti (Pietro Contarini), b. 2567, part 1, c. 76^v–78^r; 84^v–99^r; 100^{r-v} (17 October–16 November 1556). For the *portego*, c. 97^v–98^v. The inventory was first discussed and partially published by Anderson, 1997, 148–50, 365, who thanks Charles Hope for the citation; it is published in greater detail in Vescovo. The full inventory with all household objects remains unpublished.

¹⁰³ By contrast, listed in Odoni's *portego* are two credenzas, only six benches, and no table: Gronau, 64.

¹⁰⁴ ASV, Notarile, Atti (Pietro Contarini), b. 2567, part 1, c. 97^v: "Un quadroto grandeto con la figura del nostro Signor et altre figure con sue soaze dorade intorno"; Vescovo, 118; Michiel, 88. Although Michiel did not explicitly organize his notes on Contarini's collection by room as he did for Odoni's house, he used short horizontal lines across the page to break works of art into groups, which coordinate with the rooms listed in the inventory, including the *portego*. The four paintings Michiel lists in his first grouping correspond well with those listed in the *portego* in the inventory. For the reasoned and convincing argument that Michiel's notes on the Contarini collection are organized according to the location of the works of art in various rooms, see Lauber, 2002, 105, especially n103.

on the types of subjects most frequently listed in the inventories in the Appendix, Palma's painting most likely showed a scene from the Passion of Christ, or one of Christ's suppers, or a depiction of Christ with a woman. It was perhaps something like the painting in Glasgow usually attributed to Titian and believed to represent Christ and the Adulteress.¹⁰⁵

Two other paintings in Contarini's *portego* had martial overtones. A large painting of a cavalry regiment, by the Brescian painter Romanino, finds a number of counterparts in other households.¹⁰⁶ Another large painting depicting "the inferno with Aeneas and Anchises" by Giorgione most likely represented Aeneas carrying his father out of the burning city of Troy.¹⁰⁷ Michiel notes that both these paintings were large. The latter combined a martial subject, a scene from the Trojan War, with a fiery landscape reminiscent of the painting of "purgatory" in Odoni's *portego*. Although the subject was unusual in Venetian painting at the time, it would have had civic and patriotic connotations since the Venetians claimed to be descendents of the Trojans: such associations would have been magnified by its placement in the more public space of the *portego*. It was also very conspicuously a story about filial piety and duty (not to mention war), and therefore a highly appropriate theme for a room that traditionally represented the nobility and family heritage of the owner. Nova has suggested that the choice of subject might be tied to the travails of the League of Cambrai, but rather than a particular historical event, I propose more generally that the destination of the painting, i.e., the space of the *portego*, played a role in the choice of subject.¹⁰⁸

The last of the four paintings is the most intriguing. Not only is it one of the most discussed and controversial works of Venetian art, but it also fits less clearly into the patterns outlined above. It turns out that Giorgione's

¹⁰⁵Lucco, 2006, 102, suggests the painting (102, fig. 2), which has been cut down by about fifty cm, was particularly suited for "a secular setting in a private house rather than a church and opening the way for the *quadri da portego*." Two inventories in the Appendix (inv. 12, 12', and inv. 72, 2") list a picture of the "adultera" in the *portego*. Another example can be found in an inventory in ASV, Giudici del Proprio, Mobili, b. 22, c. 204^r (1561).

¹⁰⁶ASV, Notarile, Atti (Pietro Contarini), b. 2567, part 1, c. 97^v: "[U]n quadro vecchio strazado soazado con certe figure a cavallo"; Vescovo, 118. Michiel, 88: "La tela grande a colla delordinanza de cavalli fo de mano de Hieronimo Romanin Bressano."

¹⁰⁷As argued convincingly by Nova, 48–54. ASV, Notarile, Atti (Pietro Contarini), b. 2567, part 1, c. 97^v, identifies it simply as depicting "l'inferno": "[U]n quadro grande di tela soazado sopra il qual e depento l'inferno"; Vescovo, 118. Michiel, 88: "La tela grande a oglio de linferno cun Enea et Anchise fo de mano de Zorzo da Castelfranco."

¹⁰⁸Nova, especially 52–53. For the Trojan legend, see Brown, 1996, 13, 25, 31, 41–42, 70–74, 268.



FIGURE 15. Giorgione, *The Three Philosophers*, ca. 1505–10. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

famous canvas called *The Three Philosophers* (fig. 15) by Michiel may be an early example of a *quadro da portego*.¹⁰⁹ Even if the painting was not originally commissioned for this location (something we do not know), it was adapted to it and presumably remained in place from at least 1525, when Michiel saw it, to 1556, when the inventory was taken. While it may not be a huge painting, neither is it small; the inventory qualifies it as “grandeto,” or largish. Now slightly under five feet wide, we know it was cut down on the left by as much as seven inches.¹¹⁰ This would mean that originally it was almost exactly the same width as the *quadro da portego* in Palma’s studio.

In light of what has been said above about the decoration of the *portego*, the painting was probably not intended as an image for private philosophical

¹⁰⁹Michiel, 86–88: “La tela a oglio delli 3 phylosophi nel paese, dui ritti et uno sentado che contempla gli raggi solari cun quel saxo finto cusi mirabilmente, fu cominciata da Zorzo da Castelfranco, et finita da Sebastiano Venitiano.” ASV, Notarile, Atti (Pietro Contarini), b. 2567, part 1, c. 97^v: “[U]n altro quadro grandeto di tella soazado di nogara con tre figure sopra”; Vescovo, 118; Anderson, 1997, 149.

¹¹⁰Recent examination of the painting suggests it might also have been cut down on the right: see Oberthaler, 268.

or religious contemplation, as has often been argued.¹¹¹ Rather, especially hanging next to depictions of a cavalry regiment and a Trojan scene of filial piety, we might consider it as a semi-public pronouncement on nobility and family identity. A number of recent studies have argued convincingly that the image is at heart what Michiel described, a painting of three philosophers, by which he meant three natural philosophers — probably geographers, cosmographers, or astrologists, as their instruments and activities suggest. Michiel in fact describes the youngest man as “contemplating the solar rays.” Probably they are meant to be particular ancient or Eastern “philosophers,” although we do not know for certain which ones.¹¹²

The cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove has illuminated the Venetian patriciate’s investment in geography and cartography at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries. Practical applications of geometry, geography, and astronomy in map-making had long been important for maritime commerce, but with the Venetian expansion into the mainland, geographical knowledge and skills became even more crucial. Cosgrove ties the patricians’ particular “cartographic literacy” to their practical and ideological concerns for the destiny of the republic: “geography and cartography [were] at the heart of learned discourse among the political elite of Venice.”¹¹³ As an educated man and an owner of merchant sea vessels, Contarini would have had both a scientific and a practical interest in such subjects. In his last testament, Contarini’s brother-in-law and fellow art collector, Gabriel Vendramin, advised his nephews (among them Contarini’s sons) to devote themselves above all else to the following three enterprises in order to exalt both family and *patria*: first, navigation and maritime warfare; secondly, humanistic study; and lastly, good business practices.¹¹⁴ Giorgione’s

¹¹¹For example, Cocke, 137, who describes it as an example of a “cabinet picture” intended “for a relatively restricted studio.” This widespread idea derives largely from the arguments of Settis, 1990, especially 138. Vescovo, 119, however, points out that the location in the *portego* makes it unlikely that the painting has an arcane subject oriented towards personal piety, further noting that based on his biography, it is unlikely that Contarini was interested in hermetic or contemplative works (116).

¹¹²The literature on the painting is vast. Perhaps the most enduring interpretations are those of Settis, 1990, 15–47, which sees the painting as a complex meditation on the theme of the three Magi; and Meller, which associates it with Plato’s allegory of the cave. For further bibliography, see Anderson, 1997, 86–90, 152–60, 298–99; *Giorgione: Myth and Enigma*, 179–82 (cat. no. 5).

¹¹³Cosgrove, 69, 81; *ibid.*, 77, also discusses the *Three Philosophers*.

¹¹⁴ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, Antonio Marsilio, b. 1208, c. 403 (3 January 1547); translation in Settis, 1990, 144–45: “In the course of your lives you should follow those three things through which you can glorify your family and your country. The first is that you master navigation and that you put all your mind to the study and mastery of naval warfare;

Three Philosophers calls attention to the kinds of learning necessary for a robust, wealthy family, patriciate, and state. From this point of view, it appears less incongruous next to a cavalry regiment and a scene from the Trojan War. Contarini was apparently not the only patrician to find this an appropriate subject for the *portego*. In the seventeenth century Carlo Ridolfi reported that he saw “two large pictures of cosmography with figures of Ptolemy, Strabo, Pliny, and Pomponius Mela” that Giovanni Bellini “had painted in the *sala* of the Grimani palace at Sant’Ermagora.”¹¹⁵ One might also see Contarini’s painting by Giorgione as a more exemplary and figural forerunner of the maps and city views on display in *porteghi* later in the century. Crouzet-Pavan notes the number of objects in *porteghi* associated with travel connected to military and mercantile activities.¹¹⁶

Tying the work to family identity and civic concerns does not necessarily rule out Settis’s compelling argument that it refers to the Three Kings, that these philosophers are seeking Christian truth only makes them all the more exemplary.¹¹⁷ As we have seen, the Magi were a popular subject for paintings in the *portego*, perhaps because of their association with travel, as well as their evocation of themes of hospitality and gift-giving. *Portego* paintings could often ingeniously combine sacred and secular themes without any sense of contradiction. For example, a painting’s identity as a dining scene might be more important to a patron than whether it depicted a biblical or mythological subject. For Erasmus as well, secular and sacred subjects interchangeably evoked moral themes appropriate for a dining room.

Learning that the *Three Philosophers* was at least in some sense a *quadro da portego* does not provide us with the much-sought-after, ever elusive, definitive interpretation of this painting, but it does force us to consider the work in a different light: in the context of the symbolic valence of the room itself, in relation to other types of subjects that were common there, and with regard to the format and size requirements for display in such a space. It is possible that the painting’s unusual asymmetrical composition, in which

the second is that you do not abandon the study of letters; the third is that you take up the trading of merchandise and never leave debts unpaid.” For discussion and partial publication of the will, in addition to Settis, see Gronau, 72–73; Battilotti and Franco, 66–68; Anderson, 1979, 640; Penny, 2008, 224–25.

¹¹⁵According to Ridolfi, 1:72, the work was signed by the artist: “in casa Grimana à Santa Ermacora dipinse nella Sala due gran quadri di Cosmografia con le figure di Tolomeo, Strabone, Plinio e Pomponio Mella, e v’iscrisse il nome suo.” An inventory of another house taken in 1552 (Appendix, inv. 34, 9^a) lists “uno quadro de Tholomeo” in the *portego*, which might be either a Ptolemaic map or an imaginary portrait of the geographer.

¹¹⁶Crouzet-Pavan, 1:406.

¹¹⁷A point made to me during a conversation with Salvatore Settis at the Washington exhibition of 2006.

much of the original canvas was given over to the depiction of a rock formation, is at least in part due to the need for a relatively large and horizontal painting that leads the viewer's eye across space. The cave may have helped the painting fill a less-visible part of its designated space, while viewers approaching from the stairs or from another room first saw the human figures framed by the palace's architectural elements.

The Three Philosophers, Romanino's cavalry scene, and Giorgione's *Aeneas and Anchises* all, to one degree or another, engaged civic and dynastic themes appropriate to the *portego* space, but it may be significant that the Contarini did not display arms and armor alongside them. Such real military accoutrements would perhaps have detracted from the more festive uses and appeal of the space. The paintings conveyed ideas about Contarini and his family that another, perhaps less refined and sophisticated, patrician might have sought to project by more conventional means. At the same time, the Contarini's display of art in the *portego* was fairly restrained. The inventory of the Odoni reception hall gives the impression of a space packed with things to look at, the space of a collector (once again this accords well with Lotto's portrayal of the *cittadino*). By contrast, in the Contarini household, it seems as if the space of the room, with tables and chairs for company, itself mattered more than showing off a collection. Contarini was less anxious to portray himself specifically as a collector, which is not to say that he did not have a few, select fine paintings on display.¹¹⁸

However different Contarini's *portego* may have been from that of his *cittadino* counterpart Odoni, the third and last *portego* to be examined belonged to someone in an altogether different social group, a woman named Elisabetta Condulmer (d. 1538), who seems to have been a courtesan. In any case, as her will makes clear, Condulmer was married to one man but had a total of seven children by three different men, none of them her husband, and all of them still living. At the time of her death, her principal protector — she refers to him in her will as “mio signor” — was the printer Zuan Francesco Torresani, known as Francesco d'Asola. As the daughter of an impoverished nobleman and of a non-noble woman of possible disrepute, Condulmer apparently turned to the occupation of the courtesan. By all indications she was successful: the house she herself owned was well-appointed with numerous works of art and other luxury items. Of particular concern to us here, however, is the *portego*, the contents of which are known from an inventory made shortly after her death in 1538.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸For the ways that *cittadini* in particular used collecting as a means to enhance social distinction, see Schmitter, 2004.

¹¹⁹Appendix, inv. 23. For an extensive analysis of Condulmer and her possessions, see Brown, 2004, 173–81.

Broadly speaking, the inventory demonstrates the degree to which the patterns of decoration in a courtesan's house could resemble those of well-to-do male patricians and *cittadini*. Most of the paintings Condulmer owned were in the *portego* rather than the *camere*, suggesting the *portego*'s importance as a display and entertainment space. Ten paintings, a map, as well as eight works on paper decorated the walls. As in other *porteghi* at midcentury, the subjects of the paintings were more unusual and were more often narrative, as compared to the images of the Madonna, saints, and half-length figures often found in the *camere*.¹²⁰ The furniture and other items around the space also conform to standard practice, including a credenza, a set of chests and other boxes, twenty-four chairs of various sorts, a dining table, and three painted "*portego* benches."¹²¹ Although she was the daughter of a nobleman, as a woman (never mind a courtesan) she would not have been obliged to display weapons or armor.

The subjects of the paintings do, however, suggest different priorities. There are neither battle scenes nor a "*cena di Christo*," and, unusually, most (although not all) of the images are secular. One can imagine that the room was used for entertaining clients and other visitors, presumably with the possibility of retiring to Condulmer's adjacent *camera*, where there was a bed described as "*alla cortesana*."¹²² The first painting listed in the *portego* is a portrait of Elisabetta herself, and it must have been the centerpiece of the whole ensemble.¹²³ The notary describes it as large and equipped with a "*timpano*," a canvas cover used to protect the painting, often itself ornamented.¹²⁴ Notably,

¹²⁰The main bedroom had a large image of the Madonna with Sts. John and Jerome and a half-length image of a woman that the notary thought depicted Judith: Appendix, inv. 23, 1^{r-v}: "*par sia Judit*." Another bedroom had a Madonna "*alla greca*" with a votive light and an image of the *sudario* (8^v); in the third were displayed a small devotional image (*anchoneta*) of the Madonna described as "*vechia antiga*" and an image of St. Dominic (12^r).

¹²¹Appendix, inv. 23, 13^{r-v}.

¹²²See Brown, 2004, 176. "*Alla cortesana*" appears to be a type of bed and can be found in other inventories: for example "*una letiera de nogera alla cortesana con colone et cielo*" in Appendix, inv. 10, 3^v. See also Appendix, inv. 25, 8^r, and inv. 29, 1^v.

¹²³Appendix, inv. 23, 12^v: "*Uno retratto grandio d[e] madona Hisabeta Condulmera co[n] suo timpano*." It is common in inventories of the time to list an image of the Madonna before all other paintings, as is the case in the other rooms of Condulmer's house. While there was an image of the Madonna and the Three Magi in Condulmer's *portego*, it is in fact the last image listed.

¹²⁴According to Aikema, 2004, 89, a *timpano* could be painted with "images such as coats of arms, allegorical figures or landscapes." Two good descriptions are given in an inventory of 1551 (ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Miscellanea di notai diversi, b. 38, c. 60): "*a canvas timpano with four figures, which is the cover for the Madonna*" and "*a timpano with Our Lady on it, that is the cover for the S. Vincenzo*"; paintings of the Madonna and of S. Vincenzo are listed earlier in the inventory. There is, however, no indication that the *timpano* for Elisabetta's portrait had such ornament. On *timpani*, see also Penny, 2004, 99–101.

the room contained no other identified family likenesses, so this portrait suggests the centrality of Condulmer's identity in the room — the space literally revolved around her, whether in person or in painting — the painting's cover serving to highlight the special act of viewing her.¹²⁵ It is intriguing to imagine what kind of portrait this might have been, and the possibilities are wide-ranging, from the more decorous, standard portrait-type, perhaps something like Titian's *La Bella* (Florence, Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti) to a more explicitly erotic depiction like Titian's partially nude version of the same woman in a fur coat (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum).¹²⁶

The only other painting noted to be large, and one of only two religious subjects, was an image of Mary Magdalene, described as "in the Flemish style."¹²⁷ This painting of a reformed prostitute and the patron saint of the profession also clearly had personal, one might even say professional, associations. Like the portrait of Condulmer, it was potentially sensuously appealing, here mixed with a note of piety. If the portrait of the Magdalene was somewhat titillating, it would have resonated with three other paintings in the *portego* depicting erotic and romantic subjects, scenes that might have derived from classical mythology or pastoral poetry. The first is described simply as "a painting of a woman and a nude man."¹²⁸ If the notary was being careful in his notations, in this picture the man, and not the woman, was depicted nude, perhaps something along the lines of Titian's painting, often titled the *Three Ages of Man* (Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland) or Palma Vecchio's *Venus, Mars and Cupid* (Cardiff, National Museum of Wales).¹²⁹ A female nude was, however, surely present in a second painting, said to portray a "nude woman being tied to a tree."¹³⁰ Brown has suggested this might have been an image of Andromeda, but if this is true, the notary was not very exact, since Andromeda was tied to rocks,

¹²⁵It is worth noting that although portraits, especially family portraits, were common in *porteghi*, there were none in Contarini's *sala*, and that Odoni kept his likeness by Lotto in one of the bedrooms. On the importance of courtesan's portraits in their homes, see Santore, 54–55.

¹²⁶Indeed, the former painting was commissioned by Francesco Maria della Rovere with a *timpano* in 1536: Penny, 2004, 100.

¹²⁷Appendix, inv. 23, 13^r: "Uno quadro grande de la madalena alla fiandrese." This was probably a Flemish painting rather than an Italian picture in the Flemish style: see Henry, 269.

¹²⁸Appendix, inv. 23, 13^r: "Uno quadro de una dona et uno homo nudo."

¹²⁹For the former, usually dated ca. 1512–14, see Humfrey, 83–85. For the latter, dated 1518–20, see Rylands, 40.

¹³⁰Appendix, inv. 23, 13^r: "Uno quadro de una dona nuda vien ligada ad uno albero."

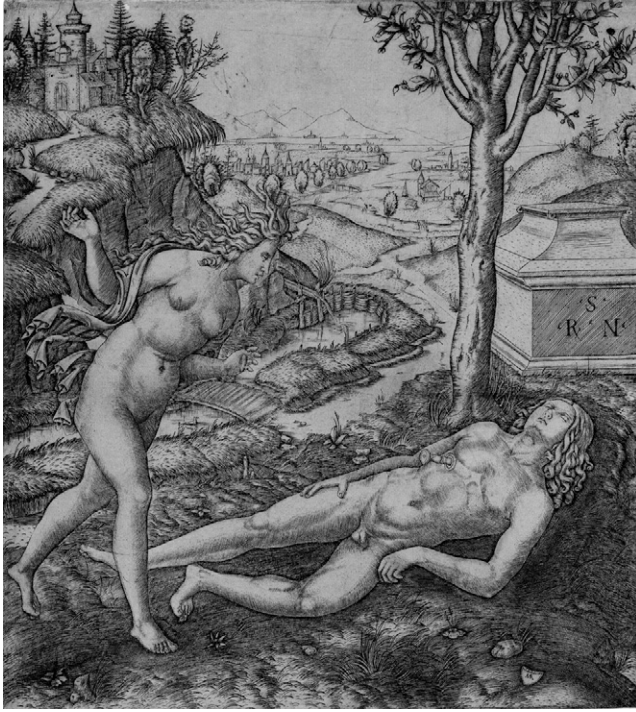


FIGURE 16. Marcantonio Raimondi, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, 1505. London, British Museum.

not a tree.¹³¹ These images of nudes were appropriately accompanied by a representation of the star-crossed lovers Pyramus and Thisbe, which probably depicted Thisbe encountering the dead body of Pyramus.¹³² Surviving depictions of this subject in Venetian art are rare, but an early print by Marcantonio Raimondi (fig. 16) suggests that the Condulmer picture might also have featured a male and a female nude.¹³³

Some of the paintings in Condulmer's *portego* were clearly more focused on nudity and eroticism than in either Odoni's or Contarini's *portego* — which is not to say they did not have these types of paintings, just that they

¹³¹Brown, 2004, 175.

¹³²Appendix, inv. 23, 13^r: "Uno quadro de piramo et tisbe." Most images of the story depict this scene, including sixteenth-century illustrations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

¹³³For textual sources, which include Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Dante's *Purgatory*, Petrarch's *Triumph of Love*, and Boccaccio's *Concerning Famous Women*, see Reid, 2:962.

kept them in the *camere* instead of the *portego*.¹³⁴ In addition to eroticism, other pictures suggested worldliness and humorous entertainment. On display was a framed world map (*mapamondo*) recalling the interest in geography that emerged in Contarini's *portego* and gained currency over the course of the century. The map might also be a result of her tie to the printer Torresano, who published maps.¹³⁵ Also present was "a likeness of a man in foreign style."¹³⁶ Since the portrait is not identified as a family member or the father of any of her children, it may simply refer to a wider, more exotic world, whether it depicted a known person or not.

Another group of works was intended to be comic: a man pulling teeth and a man in a barrel (both Flemish), and finally an old man with a birdcage.¹³⁷ They may have been based on prints such as Lucas van Leyden's *Dentist*, dated 1523 (fig. 17). Such images may have had proverbial meanings, very likely of a salacious nature. Given the ubiquitous association of birds of various sorts with male genitalia, an old man with a bird in a cage lends itself easily to such an interpretation. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch art, scenes with birdcages and bird sellers typically had erotic content. A birdcage could connote a man or woman ensnared by love and was depicted as a sign outside a brothel in paintings by Jan Sanders van Hemessen

¹³⁴At the time of Michiel's visit to the Casa Contarini there were three images of women in one of the *camere*: a portrait of the daughter of the Duke of Milan, a bust-length image of a woman by Bellini, and a painting of three women by Palma Vecchio, probably to be identified with the voluptuous threesome now in the Gemäldegalerie, Dresden: Michiel, 88; Rylands, 185. (For the way Michiel's notes record the placement of works of art within the Contarini household, see n104.) A number of years later, at the time of the inventory, paintings in the *camere* had been distributed somewhat differently, but in the room of Taddeo's son, Dario, were a painting of a female figure by Giovanni Bellini (probably the same described by Michiel), a largish painting of a woman looking at herself in a mirror (perhaps Bellini's painting of a nude woman with a mirror now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), and another largish painting of three nude women (perhaps a fantasized description of the Palma's Dresden picture): ASV, Notarile, Atti (Pietro Contarini), b. 2567, part 1, cc. 86^{r-v}; Vescovo, 118. One of the *camere* in Odoni's house contained a painting of a young woman with an old woman behind her by Palma (probably one of the artist's sensuous half-length images of women), a reclining female nude by Savoldo, and a painted frieze of Venuses and *amorini*: see Schmitter, 1997, 214–23. It should be noted, however, that Condulmer was not the only Venetian to exhibit nude figures in the *portego*. At least two other inventories in the Appendix also list images of female nudes in the *portego*: Appendix, inv. 38, 11^v, and inv. 59, 1^r.

¹³⁵Brown, 2004, 175.

¹³⁶Appendix, inv. 23, 12^v: "uno retratto d[e] uno alla forestiera." The phrase *alla forestiera* could mean either "in foreign style" or "in foreign dress."

¹³⁷Appendix, inv. 23, 12^v–13^r: "uno retrato de uno che cavadenti alla fiandrese, uno quadro de uno homo in una bote alla fiandrese . . . uno quadro de uno vechio con una cheba."



FIGURE 17. Lucas van Leyden, *The Dentist*, 1523. London, British Museum.

and Hieronymus Bosch (an artist much appreciated in Venice).¹³⁸ While genre scenes like these are relatively rare in Venice in 1538, they are not unique.

On a decidedly more conventional note, a final painting depicted the Adoration of the Magi.¹³⁹ As we have seen, this was a recurring subject in the

¹³⁸De Jongh, 22–46, especially 25, 43. For Italian paintings employing similar thematics, although at a later date, see Porzio, 125–26.

¹³⁹Appendix, inv. 23, 13^r: “Uno quadro co[n] la madona e li tre maggi.”

portego in the Appendix inventories. The episode lends itself well to the long horizontal format that was suited for paintings made specifically for the *portego*. It is worth noting here that, although the Magi's gifts are intended for Christ, visually the image represents men kneeling before a beautiful woman. It therefore provides an interesting reversal of the images of female supplicants to Christ and other male figures that have emerged in this study. Perhaps ironically, it mirrored (or set an example for) the clients' act of giving gifts to Condulmer herself. As might a *cena di Christo*, this subject not only reflected, but metaphorically elevated, the social activities taking place in the room.

Superficially, Condulmer's *portego* resembled those of other wealthy Venetian households, like Odoni's or Contarini's, so that a visitor of a certain class might feel more or less at home. But the works of art on display helped redefine the space. Rather than images of exemplary masculinity — Trajan and Scipio, for example — or military battles, there were representations of women, pictures of nudes, and humorous genre scenes. The pictures set the stage for sensuality and entertainment. Like Odoni, Condulmer had a lot of images on display, considerably more than Contarini: although she did not, like Odoni, have sculpture. While perhaps the nobleman Contarini was still using the space of the *portego* primarily as a room for receiving and entertaining on a grand scale, Odoni and Condulmer seem to have used it for artistic representation in a more concerted manner, perhaps because they had more to demonstrate. In all three cases, the decoration of the *portego*, and particularly the pictures on display, addressed broader social practices, while at the same time tailoring choices to the specific interests and ambitions of the inhabitants.

6. VIEWING *PORTEGO* PAINTINGS

To this point, the discussion has been chiefly concerned with archival sources and unidentified works of art. But this documentary evidence can contribute to our understanding of actual Venetian paintings now hanging in numerous museums and galleries. An examination of three canvases in light of the archival evidence presented here not only confirms the plausibility of suggestions that they were painted for a *portego*, but also gives us further insight into why certain artistic choices were made and how contemporaries viewed these works within the context of given conventions and practices. In short, it helps us understand both the inception and the reception of works such as the *Three Philosophers*.

The first example is Bonifacio de' Pitati's unprecedented depiction of the parable of *Dives and Lazarus*, now in the Accademia Gallery in Venice



FIGURE 18. Bonifacio de' Pitati, *Dives and Lazarus*, 1535–40. Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia. Photo: Cameraphoto Arte, Venice / Art Resource, NY.

(fig. 18). Painted ca. 1535–40, it shows the beggar Lazarus seeking alms from the wealthy, but indifferent, Dives, who is seated at a table surrounded by a coterie of women and musicians. In the left frame we see Dives on his deathbed, and in the rear corner of the right frame, the burning fires of hell, where he will ultimately reside. Earlier scholars had associated the subject with the Venetian government's concern for poor relief and assumed that, given the large size of the work (205 x 437 cm) and Bonifacio's known association with government projects, it must have been made for a public setting. More recently, however, on the basis of the painting's provenance, Philip Cottrell has proposed that it was not only made for a private setting, but in fact for a *portego*.¹⁴⁰ My research outlining the prevalence of scenes involving dining and hospitality strongly supports Cottrell's theory: indeed, Cottrell noticed that "references to thirst and drinking are everywhere in Bonifacio's painting."¹⁴¹ Although I have not found examples of the subject listed in other inventories (which does not mean it was not among the many

¹⁴⁰Cottrell, 2005, 131–33. Cottrell traces the provenance to the Giustinian family palace at S. Stae, proposing that it is identical with the painting described as "un quadro co[n] la historia d[e] Lazaro mendico" in a 1573 inventory. The situation is somewhat complicated by Cottrell's discovery of the coat of arms of the Bragadin family within the painting, which he hypothesizes is due to an intermarriage of the two families. While the inventory of the house is not clearly laid out by room, the painting is listed near objects typically found in the *portego*, such as a table, a *restaleria*, and "*portego* benches": ASV, Cancelleria Inferiore, Miscellanea di notai diversi, b. 42, c. 42, 6^r. For the painting, see also Moschini Marconi, 35–36 (cat. no. 60).

¹⁴¹Cottrell, 2005, 135.

unidentified paintings), it is a brilliant solution to the problem of the *portego* painting in that it allows for the depiction of dining and entertaining while framing a moral exemplar precisely on the theme of hospitality and charity. In this case, music-making is more foregrounded than feasting, but the central panel represents what might be a typical gathering in a *portego*. As Cottrell notes, “the very presence of the painting in an environment similar to that which it apparently censures actually fulfils a legitimizing role. As long as one were, in the metaphorical sense, aware of Lazarus at the gate and able to occasionally relieve his plight, then the trappings of a luxurious lifestyle might be excused.”¹⁴² The theme is almost unknown in earlier Italian art, leading Cottrell to relate its sudden appearance to “prevalent trends in charitable reform.”¹⁴³ While I do not necessarily dispute this, I would argue that the choice of theme was also dictated by the symbolic associations of the space for which it was made. The turn to this subject may be less directly related to the external circumstances of changing notions of charitable reform than to the particular thematic exigencies of the *portego*. It may even be that the choice of subject was influenced by Erasmus’s description of paintings in a dining room in the “Godly Feast”; among the subjects intended to “warn us to be temperate at feasts, and deter us from drunkenness and sensuality” is in fact “Dives Dining and Lazarus Driven from the Gates.”¹⁴⁴

That the interest in *portego* paintings led to iconographic experimentation and invention is further demonstrated by a little-known painting by Paris Bordone representing *Christ and the Centurion*, ca. 1555 (fig. 19). Like Dives and Lazarus, this is a highly unusual subject: I know of no earlier rendition in Venetian painting. Comparing the canvas to a later version of the subject by Paolo Veronese known to have been made for a private context, Peter Humfrey has proposed that Bordone’s painting was originally intended for display in “the grand, first-floor reception room of a Venetian palace” (i.e., in a *portego*).¹⁴⁵ Certainly, the large size of the canvas, 194.5 x 305 cm, supports this thesis. But even more striking is the way in which the novel selection of the subject allows the artist and patron to simultaneously engage several themes and visual tropes that recur in *portego* paintings discussed earlier in this article. As Victoria Newhouse has recently observed

¹⁴²Ibid., 136.

¹⁴³Ibid., 138.

¹⁴⁴For the passage in the “Godly Feast,” see discussion above. Cottrell (ibid., 135) also connects the painting to the reforming influence of Erasmus in a larger sense.

¹⁴⁵Humfrey et al., 2004, 152. I am grateful to Peter Humfrey for alerting me to this previously unknown work.



FIGURE 19. Paris Bordone, *Christ and the Centurion*, ca. 1555. Private collection at Mount Stuart, Isle of Bute.

about other material, the “power of placement” is potent indeed, and is very much evident in this work.¹⁴⁶

According to the narrative, a Roman centurion humbly beseeched Christ to heal his sick servant, but when Christ offered to come to his house, the officer responded, “Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.”¹⁴⁷ The architecture in the right background presumably refers to the centurion’s house, the grandness of the buildings contrasting with the humility of their owner’s pose.¹⁴⁸ The subject thus alludes to the theme of hospitality, promoting the idea not only of supplication for those in need, but also of modesty towards one’s guests. Like a number of other *portego* paintings, it is a “submission scene,” only this time, unusually, with a male figure entreating Christ.¹⁴⁹ The substitution of a male figure, who just happens to be a centurion, allows for the introduction of military paraphernalia. Bordone has taken considerable pains to depict armor, weapons (the centurion’s sword is

¹⁴⁶Newhouse uses the phrase in the title of her book on the placement of art, particularly in museums.

¹⁴⁷Matthew 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10.

¹⁴⁸Humfrey et al., 152.

¹⁴⁹I have adapted the concept of a “submission scene” from Settis, 1995, 41, who discusses the subject of the Justice of Trajan in relation to the classical “scena di *submitio*.”

particularly foregrounded), shields, helmets, banners, and lances: the very components Aretino admired in Salviati's rendition of the Conversion of St. Paul. In addition, the anatomical articulation of the Romans' cuirasses and the musculature of nude male body parts, particularly of the seemingly gratuitously lightly-clad man with his back to us in the foreground, stresses the masculinity of these figures, especially in contrast to the somewhat bodiless, heavily-clad apostles opposite them.¹⁵⁰ The painting represents manly submission to a higher, spiritual authority.

By choosing this obscure subject, Bordone combines a number of characteristics of *portego* paintings we have seen: first, the theme of hospitality, secondly, an emphasis on arms and armor, and finally, a submission scene. This last may be compositionally as well as thematically driven. Given the task of making lively a large expanse of horizontal space, the artist makes use of the lower form and diagonal emphasis of the supplicant figure. As in the Adoration scene for the Cuccina *portego* (fig. 6), this produces a relief-like composition that reads from one side to the other, moving the viewer along in space and emphasizing the narrow, longitudinal flow of the *portego* itself.

Bonifacio's *Dives and Lazarus* and Bordone's *Christ and the Centurion* are excellent examples, thematically and compositionally, of the *portego* painting type. These Venetian artists found innovative ways to respond to the demand for a local type. It may be that some artists developed something of a specialization in *portego* paintings.¹⁵¹ Even Titian at the height of his international career did not shirk such a commission. In 1543, he painted a huge canvas, 242 x 361 cm, depicting *Ecce Homo* for the *portego* of the *cittadino* d'Anna family palace in Venice (fig. 20).¹⁵² A number of scholars have noted that this version of the *Ecce Homo* theme is highly unusual in Italian Renaissance art: Italian depictions of *Ecce Homo* are typically devotional rather than narrative, usually presenting only half-length figures and often only Christ himself. The more scenographic, narrative rendition of Christ presented to the people (which Panofsky preferred to call *Ostentatio Christi*) derives from Northern art, and was probably known to

¹⁵⁰The connection between these two groups of male figures is further highlighted by the similar facial features and pose of the soldier on the far right and of the dark-haired, bearded apostle, perhaps a portrait of the patron.

¹⁵¹There seem to be a number of possible examples by Palma Vecchio and Veronese in particular.

¹⁵²Vasari, 1906, 7:429, saw the canvas in the d'Anna family palace, but he does not specify the room. Several scholars have suggested that the painting must have been made for the *portego*: Dunkerton, Foister, and Penny, 109; Alison Luchs, personal communication, 20 January 2008; Penny, 2008, 228; de Maria, 2010, 133n36. Given its size and its very public, civic concerns, it only makes sense that it was displayed in this space.



FIGURE 20. Titian, *Ecce Homo*, 1543. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

Titian through prints by Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden, among others. Following a comment by Panofsky, scholars have attributed Titian's unusual iconographic choice to the Northern origins of the patron, Zuanne d'Anna, whose family had immigrated to Venice from Brussels and still maintained strong economic and other ties to Northern Europe, and in particular to the Holy Roman Emperor, as evidenced also through the portraits and insignia included in the painting.¹⁵³

While certainly the patron's heritage may have played a role, that the painting was intended for display in the *portego* also had a significant impact on its subject and composition. The choice of a Passion scene is not unusual; inventories reveal that such subjects were common in the *portego*, as in other parts of the house.¹⁵⁴ This particular Passion scene, however, required the artist to depict a large crowd of people and allowed him to lay out that scene asymmetrically across a broad horizontal plane. Notably, Titian fills that

¹⁵³Panofsky, 102–10; Wethey, 1:79–80 (cat. no. 21); Hood, 123–27; Fehl, 173–76; Freedman, 48–62; de Maria, 2003, 89–134. De Maria, 2010, 133–34, also suggests a connection with paintings by Hieronymus Bosch, one of which might have been known to the patron Zuanne d'Anna.

¹⁵⁴Many images are described as depicting the “Dead Christ” or “Christ on the Cross.” One of the paintings in the Cuccina cycle depicts *The Road to Calvary*.

space with a sense of energy and commotion not unlike a battle scene, including a remarkable amount of armor, as well as lances, swords, banners, shields, and horses.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, three of the most visually prominent figures are shown in military garb: Pilate (famously, a portrait of Aretino) in his blue and gold *all'antica* Roman armor; the figure on horseback at the right edge of the painting in gleaming contemporary armor (probably a portrait of Alfonso d'Avalos, Commander of the Imperial troops); and the large, hunched male figure with his back turned to the viewer in the foreground, who sports a greenish cuirass and rests on a large Hapsburg shield. The presence of the Turkish Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (1494–1566), whose attention d'Avalos directs to Christ, ties biblical conflicts to contemporary battles.¹⁵⁶ In the midst of all this commotion, at the intersection of two diagonals and highlighted in white, are the seemingly incongruous figures of a woman restraining a young girl. Thought to be portraits, perhaps of Zuanne's wife Maria and daughter Silvia, these female figures create a deliberate contrast with the active, civic, almost warlike attitudes of the male figures in the rest of the picture.¹⁵⁷

This is a complicated image, and not just compositionally. The painting's engagement with contemporary Venetian and international politics is so involved that it is something of a puzzle to art historians.¹⁵⁸ My aim here is not to find the solution, but rather to point out the ways in which it is a remarkable manifesto as a *portego* painting. The imagery not only resonates with the martial associations of the *portego* space in general, but also directly connects this civic spirit to the immigrant d'Anna family. William Hood has argued that in addition to being a religious subject, Titian's *Ecce Homo* is also a political allegory of the contemporary conflicts between the Turks and the Hapsburgs, highlighting the d'Anna family's (and Venice's) support of the latter.¹⁵⁹ In the *portego*, the painting thus literally becomes a representational equivalent to the "racks of arms with the shields and standards of . . . ancestors who fought for Venice on land or at

¹⁵⁵Hood, 147–48, notes the many similarities between this work and Titian's *Battle of Cadore*.

¹⁵⁶De Maria, 2010, 135.

¹⁵⁷On the identity of the women, see *ibid.*, 135n52.

¹⁵⁸That Waddington has recently interpreted the painting as an expression of Titian's, d'Anna's, and Aretino's Protestant sympathies, or "Nicodemite beliefs," while de Maria, 2010, 141, claims it provides "visual evidence of the d'Anna family's orthodoxy and support of the Catholic faith," is just one example of how hard it is for modern viewers to decode the contemporary references in the image. For more on the painting's historical and religious context, see Hood; Gentili.

¹⁵⁹Hood, 135–38.

sea” described by Sansovino, underlining — perhaps exaggerating — the family’s role in contemporary political and military affairs.

In order to connect this biblical event to contemporary circumstances, Titian inserted a number of portraits of famous contemporaries, and possibly also of d’Anna family members.¹⁶⁰ More portraits, in this case primarily if not exclusively of family members, were included in another painting by Titian that may well have been a pendant to the *Ecce Homo*: “a picture of Our Lady with other figures the size of life, of men and children, all portrayed from life and from the persons of that house.”¹⁶¹ The artist thus conflated a dramatic narrative scene with likenesses of famous men and of family members, likeness that might otherwise have been present in the *portego* as independent pictures. Indeed, were one to commission one or more such large paintings, there might be little space left over to hang other works of art alongside. Thus the tendency that Penny has noted to incorporate portraits into narrative scenes in *portego* pictures may partly have been a practical solution.

Titian’s *Ecce Homo*, a brilliant new composition and iconographic scheme, responds to and derives from a number of conventions, social practices, and expectations set in place for the decoration of this central, symbolic space. Through his use of varying heights and the strong, centralized diagonal paralleling the picture plane, as well as the yelling figure who then directs the viewer’s attention out to the left, Titian has risen to the challenge of the *quadro da portego* problem — how to compose a long, large scene that maintains interest and draws the viewer’s eye across space. As de Maria has astutely noted, by placing the Roman *praetorium* at an oblique angle to the picture plane, Titian creates an unprecedented dynamic interchange between picture space and the actual space of the room in which the viewer stands. This is particularly striking when compared to the much more staid representation of a similar architectonic setting in Titian’s somewhat earlier *Presentation of the Virgin* (1534–38).¹⁶² The scene of the *Ostenatio Christi* literally tumbles into the *portego*, dramatically engaging the viewer as part of the crowd looking up at a tableau vivant.

¹⁶⁰On the identification of various portraits, see Wethey, 1:79; Hood, 132–34; Fehl, 173–74; Polignano; Freedman, 53–54; de Maria, 2003, 103–19; de Maria, 2010, 135–39.

¹⁶¹Vasari, 1906, 7:430; translation in Vasari, 1996, 2:782–83. Vasari says both paintings are in the d’Anna family palace; Penny, 2008, 228, has plausibly suggested that both were in the *portego*.

¹⁶²De Maria, 2010, 137, 142. For Titian’s particular attention to “structural decorum, that is, the proper adaptation of a picture to its architectural setting,” see Rosand, 53, 67–70, 75.

An artist like Palma Vecchio, not known as a great innovator, was not always so successful. His *portego* paintings, including *The Meeting of Jacob and Rachel* (fig. 5) and *Christ and the Woman of Canaan* (fig. 4), discussed above, can be compositionally awkward, as though he had difficulty figuring out how to fill so much horizontal space. He might place the main narrative in the center with filler to either side (as in *Jacob and Rachael*) or he might emphasize one side of the composition, leaving the other side rather repetitive and monotonous (*Christ and the Woman of Canaan*).¹⁶³ Like the altarpiece or the portrait, faced with the task of painting a *quadro da portego*, artists had to be creative within certain bounds: this was part of the challenge and sometimes also a limitation. It may be that Titian's *Ecce Homo* played a fundamental role in the development of the *quadro da portego* type, laying down a challenge to future painters, like Veronese, who would be employed to ornament the walls of this particular domestic space. Titian's *Ecce Homo*, with its militaristic paraphernalia, its civic historical themes, its glorification of family interests, and its dynamic engagement of space, is the *quadro da portego* par excellence. It is worth considering what Doge Loredano, who lamented the replacement of arms and armor with tables for parties, would have thought of such painting. While he might have appreciated its allusions to military and civic matters, its clear signaling of Habsburg predominance would have revealed that after the League of Cambrai the power of the Venetian Empire was never the same. The arms and armor had become mere representations of themselves.

The lack of early inventory sources makes it difficult to know precisely how Venetian *porteghi* were used in the fifteenth century, or what exactly was displayed in them, but contemporary testimonials suggest that during the sixteenth century the room was increasingly, and somewhat discomfotingly, associated with aristocratic leisure and displays of refinement. The increase in the number and variety of paintings on display in this space makes sense in this context. When paintings were specifically commissioned for the *portego*, to the degree that in the latter half of the sixteenth century they were sometimes ordered as sets, there was an implicit, perhaps sometimes explicit, understanding between artists and patrons about what was appropriate. This

¹⁶³This also indicates the importance of choosing a subject that would make for a good horizontal composition. The first solution was also used by Palma in his *Visitation* (Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum) of about 1520–22, which measures 168 x 354 cm. Rylands, 191 (cat. no. 48), cites a provenance from the Church of San Cassiano in Venice, but admits that it is “unproven”: this might be a *portego* painting. Rylands notes that the composition is open on the right, but closed on the left. One could easily see how this would fit placement in the *portego* with the closed end at the back or front end of the *portego*.

encompassed not just issues of size and composition so that the painting would impressively occupy the space, but also concerns about thematic content. As we have seen, many works made for the space reflect on the social activities taking place there (such as entertainment, reception, dining) and address the familial and civic associations historically and symbolically tied to the *portego*. Individuals and families worked within these broader patterns to articulate their own identities — whether they were patricians, *cittadini*, or courtesans — in what Stuart Hall terms (in a very different, but related context) “the play of difference and commonality.”¹⁶⁴ When we see *quadri da portego* today outside their original contexts — in the Accademia Gallery, the Kunsthistorisches Museum, or a private collection on the Isle of Bute — in order to more fully comprehend the many artistic choices involved in their conception, as well as the ways they would have been understood by contemporaries, we need to consider the particularities, physical and anthropological, of the space for which they were originally made.

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¹⁶⁴Hall, 20, who writes about how modern “West Indian” front rooms both conform to social patterns and strive to portray individual family identities.

*Appendix: Inventories from the Cancelleria Inferiore,
Miscellanea di notai diversi that list pictures in the portego*¹

DS — dining scene; **PS** — Prodigal Son; **SC** — St. Christopher; **AM** — Adoration of the Magi; **SW** — Samaritan Woman; **CP** — Conversion of Paul; **BS** — battle scene

1. b. 34, c. 9, inv. of Piero Luna (1523)²
2. b. 34, c. 30, inv. of Elisabetta, widow of Marco called "A Syrena" (1526 m.v. [1527]) **DS**
3. b. 34, c. 34, inv. of Ettore Brunelli (1527)*
4. b. 34, c. 35, inv. of Francesco Livello, son of Lorenzo (1527)**
5. b. 34, c. 37, inv. of Pietro di Domenico (1527)
6. b. 34, c. 51, inv. of Cornelia Bellon, widow of Giovanni Alvise (1528)
7. b. 34, c. 56, inv. of Domenico Gallimberti (1528)
8. b. 34, c. 60, inv. of Giovanni Floreti, son of Alvise (1528)*
9. b. 34, c. 61, inv. of Giacomo and Michele, brothers "a sirico," sons of Antonio (1528)
10. b. 35, c. 4, inv. of Nicolò Duodo, son of Marco (1530)**
11. b. 35, c. 20, inv. of Francesco de Leuprinis (1531)
12. b. 35, c. 27, inv. of Domenico Capello, son of Nicolò (1532) **DS, PS**
13. b. 35, c. 42, inv. of Tommaso Michiel, son of Francesco (1532)
14. b. 35, c. 48, inv. of Nicolò Zorzi, son of Bernardo (1534)³
15. b. 36, c. 27, inv. of Alvise Bon (1535)
16. b. 36, c. 29, inv. of Carlo da Fano (1535) **SC**
17. b. 36, c. 45, inv. of Bartolomeo Donà, son of Bernardino (1536)**
18. b. 36, c. 49, inv. of Domenico Formento, son of Giovanni (1535)* **SC**
19. b. 36, c. 59, inv. of Benedetto Franceschi, son of Alvise (1538) **SC, DS**
20. b. 36, c. 63, inv. of Antonio Gradenigo, son of Paolo (1538) **SW**
21. b. 37, c. 4, inv. of Eufrosina, widow of Simone de Alberici (1543)
22. b. 37, c. 10, inv. of Zuan Marco Trevisan, son of Vito Antonio (1537 m.v. [1538])
23. b. 37, c. 28, inv. of Elisabetta Condulmer, son of Gerolamo (1538) **AM**
24. b. 37, c. 32, inv. of Marco Aurelio Sereni (1540)
25. b. 37, c. 49, inv. of Gerolamo Zono, son of Pietro (1545) **DS**

¹In the Appendix, inventories marked with a single asterisk (*) are not organized by room, but either specific pictures are identified as coming from the *portego*, or they were clearly in the *portego* because of the other kinds of objects surrounding them, such as credenzas, many chairs and benches, and arms and armor. For inventories marked with a double asterisk (**), no subjects of paintings are identified or they are only very vaguely identified.

²This inventory lists three paintings in the ninth of nine *casse* in the *portego*: it is unclear if the paintings were originally displayed on the walls in the room.

³There are two *porteghi* with paintings, the "*portego* below" and "*portego* above."

26. b. 37, c. 61, inv. of Alvise Masipo, son of Giovanni (1546) **DS, AM**
27. b. 38, c. 3, inv. of Bortolo da Lesina, son of Davide (1549)
28. b. 38, c. 12, inv. of Gerolamo Rimondo, son of Fantin (1548) **DS**
29. b. 38, c. 24, inv. of Paolo di Giacomo (1548)**
30. b. 38, c. 40, inv. of Angelo Savina, son of Leonardo (1550) **CP**
31. b. 38, c. 41, inv. of Tommaso Mamoli, son of Giovanni (1550)⁴ **DS (?)**⁵
32. b. 38, c. 56, inv. of Giovanni Griffalconi, son of Francesco (1551) **DS**
33. b. 38, c. 59, inv. of Gerolamo Tinto, son of Stefano (1541)
34. b. 38, c. 66, inv. of Serafino Vecchia, son of Valerio (1552)
35. b. 38, c. 69, inv. of Gasparo Negro (1552) **SW, BS**
36. b. 38, c. 74, inv. of Vincenzo Pasqualigo, son of Francesco (1553)
37. b. 39, c. 1, inv. of Domenico de Gritti (1557)* **SW**
38. b. 39, c. 6, inv. of Francesco della Vedova, son of Gaspare (1557) **DS, CP**
39. b. 39, c. 18, inv. of Francesco Bernardo (1556)**
40. b. 39, c. 19, inv. of Giacomo Balbi, son of Nicolò (1555–56) **SW**
41. b. 39, c. 31, inv. of Giovanni Maria Albano, son of Vincenzo (1557)
42. b. 39, c. 41, inv. of Fermo di Giovanni “dalla seda” (1558) **BS**
43. b. 39, c. 49, inv. of Giovanni Battista Campanato, son of Pietro (1555)**
44. b. 39, c. 55, inv. of Marino di Giovanni, “a cannabi” (1553) **BS**⁶
45. b. 39, c. 58, inv. of Alvise Odoni (1555) **CP**⁷
46. b. 39, c. 59, inv. of Pietro Gritti, son of Marco (1557)
47. b. 40, c. 16, inv. of Bernardo da Crema, son of Bernardino (1563)
48. b. 40, c. 36, inv. of Francesco dall’Oca, son of Marc’Antonio (1566) **PS**
49. b. 40, c. 45, inv. of Alvise Bragadin, son of Gerolamo (1566) **PS**, two **DS**
50. b. 40, c. 67, inv. of Ambrogio Vitellini (1560)
51. b. 41, c. 46, inv. of Andrea Maioli, son of Antonio (1571)
52. b. 41, c. 56, inv. of Paolo Saroldo, son of Alessandro (1572) **DS**
53. b. 41, c. 59, inv. of Angelo Contarini (1573) **DS**
54. b. 41, c. 60, inv. of Gerolamo dall’Angelo, son of Bernardino (1573) **AM**
55. b. 42, c. 4, inv. of Michele Melchiorre, son of Andrea (1577) **AM**
56. b. 42, c. 15, inv. of Andrea Pasqualigo, son of Pietro (1579)
57. b. 42, c. 16, inv. of Bartolomeo Fontana (1571)**
58. b. 42, c. 31, inv. of Giovanni Antonio Barazzi (1576)
59. b. 42, c. 32, inv. of Gasparo Segezi, son of Cristoforo (1576)
60. b. 42, c. 35, inv. of Nicolò Franceschi, son of Zuan Leonardo (1577) **BS**

⁴There are two *porteghi* with paintings, one described as “below.”

⁵The painting listed as “a painting of the twelve apostles” perhaps depicted the Last Supper.

⁶In addition to paintings on the walls, the inventory lists “four new *spalliere* pieces with figures depicting the story of Troy” in a large chest. These may have been displayed on the walls of the room.

⁷Although not specifically identified in the inventory, Michiel notes that one of the paintings in the *portego* depicted the Conversion of Paul. See discussion above.

61. b. 42, c. 40, inv. of Vincenzo Querini, son of Giorgio (1574) **DS, BS**⁸
62. b. 42, c. 43, inv. of Gaspare Calvi, son of Pietro (1574) **DS**
63. b. 42, c. 48, inv. of Gerolamo Croce, son of Gasparo (1573)**
64. b. 42, c. 66, inv. of Donato Da Lezze, son of Michele (1582)
65. b. 43, c. 40, inv. of Domenico Condulmer, son of Nicolò (1589)* **SW, AM**
66. b. 43, c. 49, inv. of Giovanni Ambrogio Perlasca (1587) **DS**
67. b. 43, c. 52, inv. of Daniele Furno, son of Augustino (1585)
68. b. 43, c. 58, inv. of Ortensio Amulio, son of Lombardo (1590)⁹ **AM, DS**
69. b. 43, c. 60, inv. of Giov'Antonio Balbiani (1585)
70. b. 44, c. 2, inv. of Nicolò Rimondo (1599)**
71. b. 44, c. 5, inv. of Lucio Martinello, son of Alessandro (1593)
72. b. 44, c. 8, inv. of Nicolò Padavino (1594)¹⁰ **DS**
73. b. 44, c. 9, inv. of Alessandro Ram (1592)¹¹
74. b. 44, c. 15, inv. of Franceco Rubeis or Rossi, son of Antonio, called "Meloncin" (1591)

⁸The "Flemish picture of the *Impresa* of St. Quentin of France" may have depicted the Battle of Saint-Quentin (1557).

⁹There are paintings in two different *porteghi*.

¹⁰There are paintings in two different *porteghi*, listed as the *portego* and the *sottoportego*.

¹¹This inventory is not very clearly organized, so it is sometimes difficult to determine if a particular painting was or was not in the *portego*.

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