

A Driving Force. On the Rhetoric of Images and Power

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Reflections of Venetian *Cittadini Originari* The Zamberti Family: A Case Study

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Abstract The category of *cittadini originari* in Venice had rather blurred contours at least until 1569, and this fluidity had an impact on the image they aimed to portray of themselves. As bureaucrats of the Serenissima and prominent members of the Scuole Grandi, they aimed to demonstrate their possession of *mediocritas* and *onorevolezza*, underlining the hereditary nature of such attributes. Through the case study of the Zamberti family, the experiences of three generations of *cittadini* will be followed to reconstruct various aspects of their visual culture, focusing on the role of images in conveying, asserting, and confirming their social status.

Keywords Venice. Cittadini originari. Renaissance. Scuole Grandi. Visual culture

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1 **Being a *Cittadino Originario* between the Quattrocento and Cinquecento**

Defining the characteristics of the class of *cittadini originari* is a complex task. Historiography has highlighted the numerous obstacles encountered in trying to define the boundaries of this social group.¹ Only from 1569 did the *Maggior Consiglio* establish criteria for obtaining recognition of this status: for at least three generations, male members of the family had to have been born and resided in Venice and refrained from engaging in *arti meccaniche*.² This law is functional to the final regulation of access to notarial and chancellery positions within the complex bureaucracy of the Serenissima, following various fifteenth-century attempts to reserve public service posts for *cittadini originari*.³ This fluidity is reflected in the writings of historians attempting to frame the components of Venetian society,⁴ and it is only in the works of Antonio Milledonne that the mention of *cittadinanza originaria* as a defined category appears for the first time.⁵

Similarly, the cultural features of this group are equally debated: the most recent studies take an intermediate position, highlighting the continuous approaching and distancing of citizens from the cultural models of the patriciate.⁶ They are distinguished by certain traits, which will be explored later, primarily related to the concepts of *mediocritas* and *onorevolezza*. It is not coincidental that these elements are common denominators of the core values of the Republic's bureaucratic body: it is here that the majority of *cittadini* are employed, serving as notaries or secretaries in the offices of the Palazzo Ducale. The honour demanded by the status of "elite citizens" (Grubb 2000, 339) did not allow for much deviation from these professions, simultaneously allowing ample space for the formation of a composite middle class. As Zannini (1993, 46) emphasizes, the basic criterion for defining a *cittadino originario* was primarily linked to "the 'social recognizability' of the individual as native, Venetian, and 'ancient' in the acceptance of their social role". This observation is essential to understanding the weight of the cultural expressions,

1 Pullan 1971; Trebbi 1980; Neff 1985; Casini 1992; Zannini 1993; Grubb 2000; Zannini 2013; Setti 2014; Casini 2016.

2 Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASV), *Maggior Consiglio*, reg. 29, c. 45r.

3 ASV, *Inquisitori e revisori sopra le Scuole Grandi*, b. 1, *capitolare* 1, cc. 3r, 5v-6r. ASV, *Consiglio dei Dieci, Misti*, reg. 19, c. 99v. ASV, *Consiglio dei Dieci, Misti*, reg. 21, c. 194r-v. ASV, *Consiglio dei Dieci, Misti*, reg. 23, cc. 108v-109v. ASV, *Avogaria di Comun*, b. 13, c. 5v. ASV, *Consiglio dei Dieci, Misti*, reg. 27, c. 202r.

4 Pullan 1971, 99-100; Grubb 2000, 339-40.

5 Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venezia, MS It. VII, 709 (8403), cc. 3r-4r, 44r-46r, 51r-52v.

6 Humfrey 1993, 108-9; Schmitter 2004; Zannini 2013, 385-6; Casini 2016, 70.

especially artistic ones, that they pursued to convey their image as members of this elite. This aspect suggests that their cultural activities should be viewed as a manifestation not only of personal inclinations but also of proud adherence to the class closest to the patriciate. In fact, as Sanudo notes, the patricians are indistinguishable in outward appearance from the citizens, as *tutti vanno vestiti quasi a un modo* (1980, 22). Nevertheless, as we will see, it is possible to define a more precise image of the aspirations and values of this “imperfect order” (Zannini 2013).

The protagonists of this article are the members of the Zamberti family. Through the analysis of testimonies spanning three generations, some of the cultural themes dear to *cittadini originari* will be brought to light, as manifested in their visual culture.

2 **The *cittadinesca* famiglia Zamberti, soprannominata dall’Avogaria**

One of the tools for reconstructing the history of *cittadini* families is the collection of *Genealogie dei cittadini veneziani* compiled by Tassini.⁷ In the fifth volume (Venice, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, MS P.D. c. 4, 5: 120), we can find an extensive family tree, along with additional information: the family, residing in Venice since 1361, has Florentine origins, and their burials are located at the Frari and Sant’Andrea della Zirada. They are known for having given the name ‘dell’Avogaria’ to the bridge and *calle* near San Barnaba, where they owned some properties. This appellation is linked to the *primarie cariche sostenute in quell’uffizio* by several family members. The Zamberti family became extinct with the death of its last male descendant, Giulio, in 1615, leaving its assets to the Superchi family. Three variations of the family coat of arms are presented in sketches, consisting of three stars in a field delimited by horizontal and parallel lines. In the present article we will focus on Alvise *quondam* Filippo, viewed through the lens of his wife Brigida de’ Franceh schi; Bartolomeo *quondam* Alvise, and Elena *quondam* Alvise [tab. 1].

These individuals are of particular interest because documents concerning their lives, professions, and some traces of their material and visual culture have been preserved.

The four acts of Brigida’s will⁸ shed light on her husband Alvise – of whom no will has been preserved – and their children Filippo, Bartolomeo, Giovanni, Maria, and Cristina. The profession of Alvise, a

⁷ <http://lettere2.unive.it/manoscritti/tassini/>.

⁸ ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, Notaio Trioli, b. 974b, 205; ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, Notaio Rizzo, b. 1227, 60; ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, Notaio Rizzo, b. 1229, 93, 94.

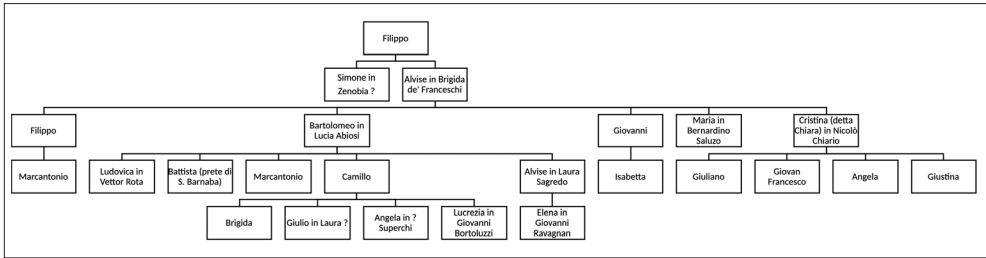


Figure 1 The Zanetti family tree

notary of the *Avogaria di Comun*, is prominently mentioned by Brigida, firmly placing him within the broader framework of the *cittadino originario* outlined earlier. Brigida and Alvise resided together in a “grande casa a stazio” in San Barnaba and owned an adjacent building that was rented out. The nature of the family’s residence war-rants attention: as Matino (2020, 18) emphasizes,

living in a *casa da stazio* was an expression of material wealth and personal standing, particularly when non-noble tenants were concerned. Originally built as seats of patrician families, Venetian *casa da stazio* were often rented to well-off middle-class families seeking an upper-class residence that, among other things, would proclaim their professional achievements and advance their social aspirations.

Owning, and not just living in, a *casa da stazio* is thus a strong indicator of the family’s aspirations, and in terms of projected image, it is one of the most effective signals that the Zamberti family could display in the city, especially in the residential district of Dorsoduro. Brigida specifies that the house was built by Alvise “suis pecuniis”, emphasizing the exclusive nature of this possession and the alignment of the architectural and functional choices with the desires and needs of the *cittadino*.⁹ She orders that, after her and her husband’s deaths, the “cameram in qua nos iugalis habitamus cum suis fulimentis” be inherited by their youngest son, Giovanni, as the other two sons already have their own private rooms.¹⁰ This indicates the family’s affluence, enabling them to provide two of their male heirs - while the parents were alive - with their own personal chambers. Brigida’s will gives further insight into the family’s

⁹ ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, notaio Rizzo, b. 1227, 60, c.1r.

¹⁰ ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, notaio Rizzo, b. 1227, 60, c.1v.

substantial real estate holdings: beneath the family's *casa da stazio* lies a "domuncula",¹¹ rented by Caterina and Giorgio da Scutari. Brigida instructs not to "ampliare, mutare velut alterare de forma et stato" this property, perhaps to preserve the meticulously crafted family image.¹² Brigida bequeaths her garments to her daughters and "certas meas perlas" to Maria, the eldest.¹³ The significance of clothing and jewelry for the family will be explored further, but it is noteworthy that the memory of such objects often resurfaces through writings by women.¹⁴ Brigida's will also indicates a strong connection, which will be encountered in other family documents,¹⁵ with two specific churches: San Barnaba and Sant'Andrea della Zirada. Another relevant detail is worth noting: in Brigida's last will, drawn up for the third time in 1515,¹⁶ following her husband's death a year before, a significant change in the distribution of bequests is evident. As a widow, Brigida possesses the entire family estate and orders that, after her death, the *casa da stazio*, the adjacent *casa da serzenti*, her remaining dowry, and assets pass to her youngest son, Giovanni.¹⁷ This reversal of fortune for the elder sons is easily explained: while Alvise managed to secure "condecetibus officiis" for Filippo and Bartolomeo during his lifetime - posts akin to his prestigious role in the Venetian bureaucracy - his death prevented him from ensuring that the youngest son would similarly obtain such a position.¹⁸ Therefore, Brigida seeks to compensate Giovanni with material assets that allow him to maintain a status befitting the family's respectability, despite lacking a chancellery job. This underscores the key role of a chancellery appointment in the image of a *cittadino originario*.

After examining the extent of the legacy of Alvise and Brigida, let us now see how one of their heirs position themselves in relation to this family tradition. We gain insight into this through the extant wills of Bartolomeo (Venice, *ante* February 19, 1473-1548),¹⁹ the

11 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, notaio Rizzo, b. 1227, 60, c. 3r. Given the complex structure of this residential complex, we could consider the building constructed by the Zamberti family as a "casa doppia" (Gianighian 2008).

12 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, notaio Rizzo, b. 1227, 60, c.1v.

13 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, notaio Rizzo, b. 1227, 60, c.1r.

14 As Palumbo Fossati Casa highlights in her research (2013, 258) and as we will see in Elena Zamberti's inventory (ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, 345/10, 45).

15 For example, in Bartolomeo's and Giovanni's wills. ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 193, 141, c. 1r; ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 197, 85, cc. 111v-112r, 116r; ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Priuli, b. 776, 226, c. 1r.

16 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, notaio Rizzo, b. 1227, 60, cc. 3r-v.

17 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, notaio Rizzo, b. 1227, 60, c. 3r.

18 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, notaio Rizzo, b. 1227, 60, c. 3r.

19 ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, Notaio Branco, b. 221, 43-4; ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 193, 141; ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 197, 85;

second son of Alvise and Brigida. Bartolomeo, a renowned philologist, notary of the *Consoli dei Mercanti*, and later secretary of the Senate, left several lengthy and detailed *in scriptis* wills, which reveal much about his personality. A strong bond with his family members emerges as he names his “charissimo fratello” Giovanni as executor of the will, along with his sons Camillo, Alessandro, Alvise, and his son-in-law Vettore Rota.²⁰ A connection to the church of Sant’Andrea della Zirada is also evident, as Bartolomeo requests to be buried “nella mia archa” there.²¹ Regarding his funeral arrangements, Bartolomeo espouses the citizenly value of *mediocritas*, stating that “pompa funebris nihil aliud est quam fumus”.²² However, he does request, as was customary, that a suitable sum be spent to have masses said for the salvation of his soul over ten years, to be celebrated by his natural son Battista, the parish priest of the church of San Barnaba, complete with candles to illuminate the Blessed Sacrament.²³ Alms are also to be distributed to various charitable institutions in the city.²⁴

Valuable details about the extent of Bartolomeo’s library are provided. He orders that “tute le opere in logica et nele mathematice le quale io ho traduto de greco in latino le quale sono molto utile ali studenti et anchor necessarie le quale sono in una cassa nela camera mia” be printed, mentioning the presence of an inventory of his works.²⁵ Additionally, he mentions that “la mia libreria nela quale sono molti libri latini, greci et hebraici” should be shared among all his sons but primarily administered by Alessandro.²⁶ This suggests a sort of handing over the reins to the heir who perhaps displayed more passion for his father’s interests. It is plausible that Bartolomeo’s residence had a designated *studiolo* where he kept his codices, and the emphasis on the shared usefulness of these texts suggests that it was a semi-public space accessible to scholars and friends. Due to his service in the chancellery, Bartolomeo possessed “repertori [...] de le cosse della cancellaria della illustrissima signoria nostra”,²⁷ which were bequeathed to Alvise, who was employed in the same profession and on the verge of becoming an ordinary chancellery member. This confirms another commonality among *cittadini originari*,

ASV, Notarile, Testamenti, Notaio Ragazzola, b. 88, 81.

20 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 197, 85, c. 112r.

21 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 197, 85, c. 112r.

22 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 197, 85, c. 112r.

23 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 197, 85, cc. 112r-v.

24 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 197, 85, c. 113r.

25 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 197, 85, cc. 113r-v.

26 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 197, 85, c. 113v.

27 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 197, 85, c. 114r.

where specific career paths are often divided among male offspring.

For his silverware, Bartolomeo stipulates that some items can be sold to satisfy bequests and creditors.²⁸ However, he requests that certain pieces, adorned with the family coat of arms, be retained.²⁹ This emblem is likely one of the variations of the sketches by Tassini seen at the beginning and emulates a custom originally associated with the patricians, which over time becomes “no proof of nobility [but] simply the sign of a certain level of *politia* as Sansovino would have understood it” (Fortini Brown 2000, 316). Did this emblem also appear on the façade of the family’s *casa da stazio*? This is not far-fetched. Bartolomeo also provides information about the layout of his house, which he had improved in various areas, including his room, the *portego*, other bedrooms, the cellar, the laundry room, the firewood storage, the attic, the chicken coop, and the garden.³⁰ This suggests a rather complex building, most likely corresponding to the *casa grande* built by his father Alvise. Together with previous clues, this demonstrates a solid economic standing and particular care for the family’s image. Bartolomeo also showed concern for preserving the family’s legacy, specifying that the entirety must pass to legitimate male heirs and under no circumstances to natural children.³¹ This emphasizes his almost compulsive concern for the family’s *virtus*. Only in the absence of such heirs should everything be inherited by his daughter Ludovica, and finally, after her death, by the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista.

3 The Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista: A Father-to-Son Connection

This marks the beginning of another significant chapter for the Zamberti family – the strong generational connection with the Scuola Grande. The presence of prominent families among the ranks of these confraternities and the recurring participation of their members in leadership positions without interruption are well-known facts and a consistent pattern for multiple clans of *cittadini originari*.³² As highlighted by Fortini Brown (1988, 254 fn. 95), between 1498 and 1525, 35% of the *Guardiani Grandi* and 21% of the *Quattro Capi di Banca* are drawn from this group, often challenging the period of *contumacia* and

28 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 197, 85, cc. 113v-114r.

29 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 197, 85, c. 114r.

30 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 197, 85, c. 115r.

31 ASV, Notarile. Testamenti, Notaio Cavanis, b. 197, 85, cc. 115r-v.

32 Pullan 1971, 64-116; Neff 1985, 269-92; Fortini Brown 1988; Bellavitis 2001, 131-7; Marino 2015; 2016.

the prohibition on closely related individuals being elected to key roles in the governance of the Scuola (Bellavitis 2001, 135; Matino 2016, 20).

The family's connection with the Scuola can be traced back to the father, Alvise, who joined the confraternity in 1469³³ and held several prestigious positions. He served as *degano* in 1473, 1478, 1480, and between 1483 and 1484, eventually becoming *Guardian da Matin* in 1494 and *Vicario* in 1498.³⁴ His sons followed the same path, with Bartolomeo being the most successful, achieving the position of *Guardian Grande* in 1540.³⁵ Some authors focusing on the group commissions of the Scuole and emphasizing the significance of the *Quattro Capi di Banca* and their connections with artists have already been cited. In the case of the Zamberti family as well, certain junctures are worth highlighting. The years in which Alvise held prestigious positions were crucial for the commissions of the paintings in the cycle of the Miracles of the Relic of the True Cross, proudly preserved by the Scuola. In 1494, precisely when Zamberti served as *Guardian da Matin*, Carpaccio delivered his painting depicting the *Miracle of the Cross at the Rialto Bridge*; Mansueti portrayed the *Miracle of the Cross at Campo San Lio*; Lazzaro Bastiani depicted the *Presentation of the Relic*, and Perugino contributed with the *Rescue of the Ships of Andrea Vendramin*. Concurrently with other significant commissions for the Scuola, the Zamberti family members assumed leading roles. This is the case with the hiring of Codussi, who in 1498, when Alvise is *Vicario*, creates the Scuola's monumental staircase. Notably, during the *guardianato* of Bartolomeo, in 1540, the renovation of the hall of the *albergo* finally commenced (Schulz 1966, 89; Humfrey 1989, 316). Four years later, Bartolomeo, member of the *Zonta*, still held influential status within the Scuola and it was then that Titian was engaged as an advisor for reconfiguring some canvases in the *Sala della Croce*, making way for two doors leading into the newly completed *albergo*.³⁶

The pivotal role of the *Quattro Capi di Banca* in the commissions of the Scuole, as emphasized by Matino (2015), encompassed fundamental tasks that carried responsibilities and certainly personal inclinations. These ranged from "defining projects in minute detail, estimating expenses and execution times, selecting artists, to drafting contractual terms" (Matino 2015, 89). Holding such positions also meant being entitled to be depicted in the crowd witnessing miraculous events, perpetuating one's image and, above all, one's status, in a prominent position - always with the appropriate deference to the

33 ASV, Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista, hereafter SGSGE, reg. 13, c. 56r.

34 ASV, SGSGE, reg. 73, cc. 9r, 14r, 18r, 19v, 20r, 30r, 34r.

35 ASV, SGSGE, reg. 73, c. 77r.

36 ASV, SGSGE, reg. 141, c. 135v.

relic, the true protagonist – in the construction of the pictorial layout. It is almost certain that Alvise, then *Guardian da Matin* (who held the essential role of supervising the ceremonies and processions of the Scuola), was also immortalized in one of the four paintings delivered in 1494, implying an even more direct relationship with engaged artists and a deep emotional and personal involvement. Considering the constant presence of family members in various roles, it's conceivable that youth and children figures depicted alongside more mature *confratelli* might include Alvise's three sons, who would have formally entered the Scuola only a few years later. Lastly, it's noteworthy that the Scuola Grande of San Giovanni Evangelista boasts the highest number of secretary officers among the *confratelli*. The correlation between *cittadinanza originaria* and service within the Ducal Chancellery, as demonstrated by Neff (1985, 292), suggests that the presence of *cittadini originari*-bureaucrats among the *Quattro Capi di Banca* and the inclination toward enriching the Scuola's artistic heritage is not coincidental.

4 **The Inventory as a Mirror: Reflections of Daily Life, Devotion, Collecting, Portraiture, and Public Commissions**

Finally, we come to the last generation of the Zamberti, which we will examine through the figure of Elena. Daughter of Alvise *quondam* Bartolomeo and Laura Sagredo, and widow of Giovanni Ravagnan, Elena passed away shortly before August 21, 1613. On behalf of her great-grandson Agostino, the inventory of her assets was compiled on request of Marco Antonio Rota, Agostino's guardian.³⁷ The document details the items present room by room in the "già solita habitatione della quondam signora Helena Zamberti posta in contrà de san Bernaba".³⁸ This inventory allows us to roughly reconstruct the structure of the dwelling: it consists of seventeen rooms, including five chambers, a study, a *portego*, and an attic on the first floor, and four chambers, a kitchen, a laundry room, a wood storage, a second *portego*, a passageway, and a "horto" on the ground floor.³⁹ The building overlooks the canal, "il ponte che vada nella calle longa", a courtyard and the *Calle Longa* itself.⁴⁰ Taking into consideration this description along with information provided by Tassini and Bartolomeo's will, discussed earlier, it seems plausible to identify Elena

37 ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45.

38 ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, c. 1r.

39 ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, cc. 1r, 2r-v, 3v, 4v, 5v-7r, 8r-9r.

40 ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, cc. 1r, 2v, 3v, 4v, 5v, 6v-7r.

Zamberti's dwelling with at least a portion of the houses constructed by the family patriarch Alvise near the present-day bridge and *calle dell'Avogaria*. The diversity and quantity of rooms also suggest a considerable level of prosperity, confirmed by the array of movable goods stored within.⁴¹

In addition to a substantial amount of furniture, three categories of objects hold significant positions in the inventory: clothing, jewelry, and paintings. It is primarily due to the wide variety of garments described that Elena's house appears vibrant with colour. Each piece is detailed with its style, material, and colour. The number and types of clothing (including men's, women's, children's, and infants' attire), along with a frequent usage of the attributes *usado* and *vecchio*, portray a wealth accumulated over time and passed down through generations. Also appearing among the various pieces are also the *vesti di color* and the *barette negre de ormesin o de velludo* worn by the *cittadini originari* leading the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista in the paintings of the *Sala della Croce* – a compelling concordance between diverse visual and written sources. The level of economic well-being achieved by the family is confirmed by the number of jewelry items described, followed by an additional section at the end of the document, prepared by two goldsmiths, which provides the specific value of each jewel.⁴² Among these are some noteworthy pieces, such as “un zugiello con un caval alato smaltado con cinque perle et una pietra bianca et una rossa et quattro altre piccole” and “una veretta d'oro rotta con l'ongia della gran bestia dentro”.⁴³ Also, multiple pieces of silverware are engraved with “l'arma zamberp ta a tre stelle”,⁴⁴ providing tangible evidence that matches the heraldic sketches presented by Tassini. Exotic items further enrich the inventory, including *tappeti cagiarini*, *turcheschi* and *siriani*, leather chairs from Bulgaria, two Levantine *tachie* (a type of skullcap), *scatole alla turchesca*, and colorful and figured cloths and *cuoridoro* covering the walls.⁴⁵

Elena's house also boasts a significant collection of paintings. The officials of the *Giudici di Petizion* count a total of forty-five paintings, variously arranged throughout the different rooms, indicating in twenty-nine cases their subjects.⁴⁶ Referring to Hochmann's re-

⁴¹ As highlighted by Palumbo Fossati Casa (2013, 102, 131), only the residences of the wealthier citizens reached fifteen to twenty rooms. The residential district of Dorsoduro itself is also indicative of a high standard of living.

⁴² ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, cc. 9r-10v.

⁴³ ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, cc. 1v, 5r.

⁴⁴ ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, c. 5v.

⁴⁵ ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, cc. 2v, 3r-v, 5r, 8r.

⁴⁶ ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, cc. 2r-v, 3r-v, 4v, 5v, 6v, 7v, 8r.

search (2008, 25), this collection far surpasses the average number of possessed paintings among citizens during 1610-15, which stands at around 10.9 units. It can be assumed that such a collection was gathered over the course of more than one generation. The list includes: five portraits, an *Annunciata*, the Adoration of the Magi, the Marriage at Cana, a depiction of Mary Magdalene, two representations of Christ, one of them on the cross, a “retrato de cupidine vect chio”, four paintings of the Seasons, two Madonnas, one referred to as “greca”, a *Pietà*, two Madonnas with Child, eleven small paintings, and another four larger ones not further identified, along with nine paintings labeled “di divotione” and “un quadro de hebano in vero con una pittura dentro”. Notably, there is a certain variety in subjects: although religious themes predominate (not always in traditional ways, as will be discussed), mythological subjects and portraits are also present.

Among the religious paintings, we find some highly popular themes, such as the Annunciation, the Magi, Mary Magdalene, the *Pietà*, Christ on the Cross, and the Madonna with Child. Therefore, many variants of paintings for meditative prayer appear, which focus interest on one or at most two figures, showing a strong connection to the Venetian tradition of private devotions from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The presence of a Greek Madonna,⁴⁷ that is, a Byzantine icon, still suggests the existence in the household of a group of paintings acquired at least one or two generations before Elena's. Moreover, a Marriage at Cana is mentioned,⁴⁸ which indicates an interest in the narrative aspect of religious painting. The popularity of the theme of *cene* reached its zenith in Venice between 1560 and 1575, and for this specific episode from the Gospels, examples such as Veronese's work at the Prado come to mind, where sacred events, social life, and grand scenography are combined (Brown, Elliott 2002, 263). Furthermore, the vague references to “quadri di divotione”,⁴⁹ in two cases, as Corsato (2013) aptly pointed out, do not solely frame works of ‘openly’ religious subject matter. Such references can include paintings of diverse nature, where “subjective devotion was more important than its object” (Corsato 2013, 170 fn. 28). In this context, it's significant to note the presence of a Cycle of the Seasons in the *portego*.⁵⁰ The adherence of this iconographic series to meditative themes has been extensively discussed, particularly in relation to the “‘genre’ iconography” by Jacopo Bassano, inherited by

47 ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, c. 6v.

48 ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, c. 3v.

49 ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, cc. 7v-8r.

50 ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, c. 8r.

his workshop.⁵¹ The proximity of these four paintings to “doi quadri del signor et della madonna” and “cinque quadretti de devotion piccoli” confirms this reading. Similarly, as in the case of Simone Lando discussed by Corsato (2013), we encounter a family of *cittadini originari* strongly linked to the chancellery. Elena’s cousin, Giulio, a ducal secretary, appears on the back of the sheet containing Lando’s will,⁵² suggesting an affiliation with a similar cultural milieu. These were cultivated collectors capable of a devotional interpretation of the Seasons cycle that did not necessarily require explicit religious references within the paintings.

Moving on to the group of mythological paintings, the notaries only mention a representation of Cupid,⁵³ although we cannot exclude the possibility that other examples might have been present amidst the “quattro altri quadri de pictura parte fornidi et parte desfornidi”.⁵⁴ The little god of love is common in Venetian collections, both in sculpture and painting.⁵⁵ For example, he appears in the collection of the *cittadino* Francesco Zio, also from a chancellery family, who possesses other works with ancient subjects, such as a nymph and a *quadretto de Mutio Scevola, che brusa la propria man, finto de bronzo* (Michiel 1800, 63). The identification of the work as a portrait and the addition of the attribute *vecchio* suggest that the painting could depict Cupid in a portrait-like style and could have been passed down through multiple generations within the family. This work might even be attributed to the same period when Zio commissioned his painting from Giovanni Cariani (Michiel 1800, 63). Considering the fondness for antiquity of Elena’s grandfather, Bartolomeo, who, as we have seen, owned an extensive library of Greek and Latin texts, it is plausible that he acquired this artwork. Inventories such as this one allow us to perceive the accumulation of interests and predispositions within families over time.

Lastly, it is worth highlighting the presence of five portraits. As we know, the presence of this genre of painting is not uncommon in Venice and is documented in houses of various social classes.⁵⁶ Their mention within the residence of *cittadini originari* is particularly appropriate, given the value placed on *mediocritas* and *onorevolezza* by this group: it is essential for them to demonstrate the continuity

⁵¹ Aikema 1996, 131-8; Corsato 2010; 2013; Eskelinen 2014; Corsato 2016; Nichols 2018; Heimbürger 2022.

⁵² ASV, Notarile Testamenti, Notaio Secco, b. 119, 572.

⁵³ ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, c. 8r.

⁵⁴ ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, c. 7v.

⁵⁵ Michiel 1800, 17, 20; Schmitter 2004, 925; Lauber 2008, 326.

⁵⁶ Hochmann 2008, 31; Cecchini 2008, 174; Humfrey 2011; Palumbo Fossati Casa 2013.

of these attributes over time. In no case does the notary provide the name of the depicted figure, specifying, however, that two of the paintings represent a woman, leading us to conclude that the other three had male subjects. In the room above the garden, we find “un retrattin legado in hebano”, “un retratto de donna in un bossollo de rame indorado”, and “un retratto in un bossollo di bosso tondo”, all stored within a “scrigno de noghera bollado”.⁵⁷ These are artworks of diminutive size, intended for private and intimate contemplation rather than public display. They are characterized as precious objects, with two of them stored in boxes – one in gilded copper and the other, a circular one, in boxwood.⁵⁸ These portraits may evoke the solutions of Jacometto Veneziano or the *Giovinetto* in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts in Birmingham by Bellini (Baseggio Omiccioli 2015). They might have featured an allegory or a motto on the cover of the case. Therefore, the Zamberti family were sophisticated patrons who fully understood the value of such artworks, as evidenced by their decision to store them alongside coins and jewelry within a chest.⁵⁹ This choice contrasts with the opulent sixteenth-century portrait favored by non-native *cittadini, nouveaux riches*, who emulated patrician models in their self-representation – exemplified by Titian’s *Portrait of Alvise Gradignan* (DeLancey 2017). Regarding the two female portraits,⁶⁰ which are quite common in Venetian inventories (Palumbo Fossati Casa 2013, 20), the absence of identification with a specific woman should not lead us to think that they are allegorical or impersonal images (Palacios Méndez 2018, 101-2). Rather, they most likely represent unidentified family members. The role that this genre of painting played for the Zamberti family must have gone beyond the mere remembrance of relatives. The notaries report in the *portego* “cinque quadretti de devotion piccoli computado un quadretto de retrattin”.⁶¹ The inclusion of a small portrait among devotional paintings seems to confirm what Morse suggests – that private portraiture was integrated into the spirituality of early modern Italy, highlighting the frequent association of portraits and religious images in the *portego* and the “shared formal strategies” (2019, 128) of the two genres.

In addition to the comprehensive inventory of movable goods, the notaries from the *Ufficio di Petizion* provide an extensive index of family archive documents.⁶² These include records concerning gener-

⁵⁷ ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, cc. 1v, 2r-v, 7v.

⁵⁸ ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, cc. 2r-v.

⁵⁹ ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, c. 2r.

⁶⁰ ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, cc. 2r, 7v.

⁶¹ ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 45, c. 8r.

⁶² ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 51.

ations preceding Elena's, ranging from Bartolomeo *quondam* Alvise's will to the "albero della discendenza Zamberti".⁶³ This index extends even to the marriage contract between Alvise *quondam* Filippo and Brigida, dating back to 1470.⁶⁴ The number of writings from Elena's generation is also quite substantial, and among them, one document stands out as significant to conclude this article. It pertains to a grant by the chapter of the church of San Barnaba to Giulio Zamberti *quondam* Camillo, Elena's cousin.⁶⁵ The grant involves "un loco in terra all'Altar della Beata Vergine Maria in ditta chiesa nel qual possi far costruir una sepoltura": this adds a final piece to the visual culture of these *cittadini originari*. By constructing their own *casa da stazio*, playing prominent roles in the commissions of the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista, and acquiring private artworks, the Zamberti family did not miss the opportunity to establish a concrete and visible sign of their devotion and prestige in the public environment of their parish church. Information about San Barnaba is scant, making it currently impossible to identify the family tomb. The church underwent multiple renovations until the mid-fourteenth century due to repeated fires. It was later rebuilt in 1749 based on a design by Lorenzo Boschetti (Cornaro 1749, 5: 379-83; Tassini 1872, 70-1). Sansovino (1663, 246) reports the presence of a *pala à guazzo* in the left chapel, depicting the *Coronation of the Virgin amidst Angels and Saints*, painted by Giovanni (probably d'Alemagna) and Antonio Vivarini; of a painting featured on the main altar portraying *Saint Barnaba and Saints*, attributed to Damiano Mazza or Tintoretto; and additionally, of Antonio Foler's *Nativity of the Virgin* (prior to 1591) and Palma il Giovane's *Last Supper*. With the mention of this document, the lively cultural panorama of these *cittadini originari* is further defined. Remaining attentive to conveying a virtuous and recognizable self-image in both private settings and public contexts, while maintaining prominent roles in the chancellery and the Scuole la Grande until the end of their lineage, the Zamberti family demonstrated a sustained commitment to artistic practice, constructing an enduring image of *mediocritas* and *onorevolezza* that has persisted to the present day.

63 ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 51, cc. 4v, 13r.

64 ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 51, c. 13r.

65 ASV, Giudici di Petizion, Inventari, b. 345/10, 51, c. 3r.

Abbreviations

ASV = Archivio di Stato di Venezia
SGSGE = Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista

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