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THE SCUOLA DEI MERCANTI:
SOCIAL NETWORKING AND MARITAL MOBILITY IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY VENICE

by

RACHEL D. ERWIN

Under the Direction of John Decker

ABSTRACT

Renaissance marriage is a much-studied subject, yet little attention has been given to the influence of marital practice on the civic affairs of confraternities. By considering the decisions of the Venetian Scuola dei Mercanti confraternity through the lens of Venetian marriage practice, I demonstrate how the Mercanti employed a multi-alignment advancement strategy in a manner similar to that employed by marriage partners seeking upward social mobility. Specifically, I argue that the Mercanti's maneuvers were carried out for the purpose of transforming itself from a *scuola piccolo* to a *scuola grande*. Viewed from this perspective, the Mercanti's artistic and architectural commissions appear as carefully executed maneuvers designed to elevate its social status. To demonstrate this thesis, I outline the Mercanti's strategy of aligning with the neighboring Madonna dell'Orto church, the prominent architect Palladio and, especially, the older, established Scuola Grande della Misericordia.

INDEX WORDS: Scuola dei Mercanti, Scuola Grande della Misericordia, Venice, Marriage, Andrea Palladio, Social mobility, Architecture, Art, Merger, Tintoretto, Lepanto.

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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1 INTRODUCTION

uring the *Carnevale* festival of 1572, an elaborate commemorative procession was held in Venice in honor of the Holy League's decisive victory over the Turks in the Battle of Lepanto in October, 1571. This procession was a significant opportunity for Scuola dei Mercanti confraternity to declare its new social identity. The procession of the festival began at the Madonna dell'Orto church, also home to the Mercanti's newly renovated building. Iain Fenlon writes that the procession seems to have certainly been organized by the Mercanti Scuola as a means to display its newly-acquired status. Descriptions record the procession as even more elaborate than the previous year's celebrations of the event.¹ Among the more than three hundred participants were a hundred citizens dressed as captive Turks, one hundred eighty musicians arranged into seven particular groups, and allegorical political and religious personifications. This particular victory at Lepanto was a source of exceptional pride for the citizens, who would certainly be in attendance in addition to foreigners who traveled to the city for the *Carnevale* festivities. The Mercanti used the occasion of honoring the city, and celebrating a victory over the Turks, to assert its perceptions of its importance within the city. Simultaneously, the Mercanti was able to appropriately proclaim its connections to prominent artists Tintoretto and Palladio, as well as to the church of the Madonna dell'Orto, which was locally famous thanks to its association with a miracle-working image of the Virgin.

The Mercanti also was especially proud of its recent merger with the prestigious Scuola Grande della Misericordia. The merger was between two unequal *scuole* and meant that the Mercanti, having the 'lower' status (a distinction which I will explore more thoroughly later in the paper), took advantage of such a momentous public occasion to assert its merit within the merger and to proclaim its desire to become a *scuola grande*. In order to do this, the Mercanti used several tropes from marriage practices prevalent in Venice as metaphors for its union with the Misericordia. Further, it activated these metaphors to ease its transition from a lower state to a more elevated position in Venetian society. Venetians would have understood the allusion to marriage in a civic context thanks to traditions like Venice's annual Marriage to the Sea. The marital themes central to the celebration prompted patricians to imitate its

elements in their own wedding festivities. The Mercanti's efforts during the 1572 procession traded on similar structures of civic marriage processions a means of celebrating its pride in its new union with the Misericordia, including candle-bearers, musicians, and specially clad participants. In this instance, we can see the Mercanti brothers as the proud 'bridal family' inviting the citizens' participation and observance and proudly displaying the confraternity and 'her' prestigious union.

Though its strategies for *grande* status were valid, and its expectations high, the Mercanti was not ultimately successful in achieving the higher title. One possible reason for this 'failure' could be that this union was, ultimately, more competitive than cooperative. The Mercanti desired to increase its status by overshadowing the Misericordia with its wealth. The Misericordia, at the same time, worked to keep its status and frustrate the Mercanti's ambition – while making use of its junior partner's financial resources. A clear example of these dueling agendas is the Misericordia's invitation to the Doge to attend a special mass at its new building in 1582. Though there was only a makeshift ladder to the second floor, and a temporary canvas ceiling, the brothers worked to convince the Doge to assist in funding the remainder of the project.² In other words, the Mercanti was not the only *scuola* making a case for itself as a *grande* in this 'union.' In addition, the unequal nature of the merger may have actually limited, rather than enabled, the Mercanti's ability to advance its status. While the Mercanti imitated the qualities and approaches of the previous two *scuole piccole* raised to *scuole grandi* status, San Rocco and San Teodoro, it also deviated from them by facilitating a merger with a *grande* that effectively placed it in an 'inferior' feminine role, the significance of which I discuss in Section 3.4. While we can never be sure of the reason for the Mercanti's failure, we can glean something about civic mobility in Early Modern Venice by examining its approach to advancement. To better understand the Mercanti's strategy, I will examine its history, the role of marriage in forming public identity, and the visual strategies it employed in order to further its advancement.

2 UPWARD AMBITIONS

The Mercanti's desire to elevate its status is most clear in the building the confraternity selected for itself. Not only did it carefully choose the location for its hall, but it also hired the city's most celebrated architect, Andrea Palladio, to renovate the existing structure. In 1570, the Scuola dei Mercanti hired the renowned architect for the renovation of its new building. In May of 1572, Palladio filed litigation for non-payment against the Scuola brothers. Palladio's claim clearly had merit, as he won the suit in which he asserted that he was not only responsible for the designs, but also supervised the work for eleven months.³ However, despite this period documentation, many historians overlook this commission because the appearance of the Mercanti building offers seemingly little evidence of Palladio's involvement compared to his better-known church façades and villas. I offer an explanation for this 'inconsistency' by considering the social and historical factors surrounding the Mercanti's choice of architect and building type. Specifically, I argue that the building's appearance stems partly from the Mercanti's desire to align itself visually, thematically, and socially to its adjacent church, the Madonna dell'Orto, which is similarly simple in design.

Another factor influencing the Mercanti's design was its commitment to maintaining a positive corporate image while seeking out and exploiting advantageous social and political alliances in the city. A prime example of the Mercanti's social maneuvering was its merger with the Scuola Grande della Misericordia.⁴ This union, I argue, was the reason the Mercanti decided to rebuild its meeting hall and decided to choose Palladio as its architect. Though the Misericordia was prestigious, critics had chastised it for excessive spending on its new building designed by Sansovino. In facilitating its connection to the Orto, the Mercanti Scuola intentionally chose a more conservative architectural scheme than the Misericordia. This choice allowed it to display its wealth and status in socially appropriate ways—through art and processions that cultivated greater piety and boosted the Venetians' civic and religious devotion. In this manner, the Scuola not only distanced itself from the criticisms leveled at the *scuole grandi*, but also successfully improved its meetinghouse in a manner that raised its status without controversy.

2.1 Connection to a Church

The church of the Madonna dell'Orto is situated in the Venetian sestiere of Canareggio on the northeast side of the city. Built in 1350, the church had originally been dedicated to San Cristoforo, patron saint of travelers (and gondoliers), and was overseen by the monastic order of the Umiliati, a humble, penitent order residing in Venice since the 10th century. In 1377, a 'glowing' *Virgin and Child* sculpture in the orchard nearby the church gained popularity as having miracle-working powers. The Bishop of Venice decreed that the statue be brought into the church—since known as the Madonna dell'Orto (Madonna of the Orchard).⁵ That same year, 1377, the Scuola dei Mercanti was originally formed under the title of Scuola San Cristoforo dei Mercanti, a devotional trade guild or *scuola*.⁶ It constructed a building in the 1450's attached to the left nave aisle side of the Madonna dell'Orto, and took the name of Scuola dei Santa Maria e San Cristoforo dei Mercanti (Fig. 1). Interestingly, its name now represented both patron saints of the Madonna dell'Orto: Mary and Christopher. The desire to align with the church is further confirmed in a commission for the Orto's main exterior portal by famous sculptor Bartolomeo Bon (Fig. 2). Bon's 1460 design was submitted not to the church, but to the primary patrons, the Scuola dei Mercanti. The two signatures on the contract were that of Bon himself and the current governor of the Mercanti.⁷ The portal, completed in 1483, was topped with a statue of Saint Christopher, patron saint of both Church and Scuola. The Mercanti's decision to use its funds to pay for a project to ornament the Orto is significant. Not only did it show the members' spiritual dedication to the church and the patron saints, but it also visually reinforced the connections between the Scuola and the church.

The Mercanti's choice of artistic commissions was also a conscious effort to align itself with the Orto, since many of the artists it chose had very close ties with the Orto. The Madonna dell'Orto was the parish church of Jacopo Tintoretto and his family, as they lived and worked on a nearby street. Jacopo's known works for the Orto's interior total eleven canvases, including two organ doors and two enormous, forty-eight-foot-high canvases flanking the chancel altar. Though now destroyed, the Valier Chapel also contained frescos by Tintoretto.⁸ Other prominent commissions to embellish the church were Giovanni Bellini's early *Madonna and Child*, Cima's *St. John the Baptist with Saints*, and a frescoed ceiling by the



Figure 1- Scuola dei Mercanti and Church of the Madonna dell'Orto, Venice, Italy. © Rachel Erwin, 2010.



Figure 2- Bartolomeo Bon, Exterior Portal, Madonna dell'Orto. © Rachel Erwin, 2010.

Rosa brothers, described by Vasari as “astounding all who see it.”⁹ Thus, the prominence and success of the Orto’s interior artistic program were widely known throughout the city and region. The Scuola took a similar approach with its new building, hiring artists associated with the Orto to link its space visually with that of its more prestigious neighbor. In addition to numerous works by Tintoretto and his workshop, the Mercanti also owned an altarpiece commissioned from Cima, a large polyptych of St. Christopher surrounded by six saints.¹⁰ We know that as early as the 1460’s when the Scuola commissioned Bon’s exterior portal, it also commissioned an altarpiece within the church itself, which reinforced the corporation’s values, lauded its reputation, and demonstrated its connection to the Orto.¹¹

The Mercanti’s 1570 plan for renovation shows a similar concern for aligning publicly with the Orto. Not only did the Mercanti adopt the church’s name, location, and artistic program, but it also, I argue, sought to imitate the Orto’s modest exterior and interior building program. Since *scuola* architecture in Venice is independent from strict civic or religious influence, *scuola* buildings varied in appearance. They could resemble churches by adopting various elements like relief portals, façade décor, or window arrangement, as in the Scuola Grande della Carità and the old Scuola Grande della Misericordia. Others could take on a secular appearance, or a blending of the two. Because of such ambiguity, the exterior votive figures, in addition to the banner stands or wellhead signs placed in the *campi*, helped to distinguish the *scuole* assembly halls from other types of buildings.¹² In the case of Spirito Santo and numerous others, the *scuola* façade could be strongly akin to the appearance of its neighboring church. When the Scuola San Marco rebuilt its *scuola* building in the late fifteenth century, for example, it used various architectural devices to connect it visually with Zanipolo church.¹³ I assert that the Mercanti sought to foster this same type of resemblance to its adjacent church. For the Mercanti, it was critical to its newfound prestige to draw a close association with the older and better-established Madonna dell’Orto.

The Madonna dell’Orto’s late fourteenth-century rebuilding program favored a modest, transept-less basilica plan. The church’s wooden truss roof, lightweight and ideal for the Venetian topography, was further representative of the “deliberate sobriety” associated with the monks at the Orto.¹⁴ In a time when

scuole, and citizens in general, were criticized for displays of wealth, it was certainly beneficial for the Mercanti to be associated with humble, penitent values, whether or not it always adhered to those values. Increasing moral reform and sumptuary laws aimed to prevent outward displays of wealth and indulgence that many in Venetian society felt degraded civic unity. Though not identical in style to the Orto, the Scuola used the same simplicity and restraint in order to keep from over-adorning in a more “profane” fashion that was likely to draw criticism from the populace, the clergy, or authors such as Caravia.¹⁵

Comparing the new Mercanti building to the proposed new Scuola Grande della Misericordia building will illustrate the deliberate choices the Mercanti made to distance itself from criticisms and retain its connections to the humble Orto. The intended Misericordia design and the actual Mercanti design both have rounded windows and visible string courses that make a clear visual division of the two distinct floors common to *scuola grande* building design in Venice. They also share the top triangular pediment with oculus, linking them to typical Venetian church architecture (Fig. 3). The Mercanti exterior, however, evidences a much more conservative exterior than the proposed Misericordia program. The row of columns lining the interior lower hall (*androne*) of the Mercanti Scuola was quite standard in *scuole* buildings. The Mercanti columns, however, are simpler and have more ample spacing than Sansovino’s more complex design in the Misericordia. I argue that the spacing of the Mercanti’s *androne* columns has a similar rhythm to the spacing of the Orto columns (Fig. 4). Thus, both the interior and exterior structures reflect the brothers’ hopes of thematically and visually joining with the Orto.

The Mercanti not only commissioned artwork to establish its presence visually at the Orto, but it also pursued deeper religious ties with the priests serving at the Orto. Upon renovation, the Mercanti further cemented its spiritual involvement with the Orto by increasing clerical involvement. The Scuola desired to enhance its devotion and praise to the Virgin through the presence and assistance of the canons of the Orto. Contractually, groups of clerics were required to perform masses and hymns at major feast days, every third Sunday, and for formal *Banca* meetings.¹⁶ Because this request for clerical aid occurred only after 1570, it seems that this, too, was part of the Mercanti’s self-promotion plan.



Figure 3- New Misericordia Building, unfinished (L) and New Mercanti building, 1570 (R). © Rachel Erwin, 2010.

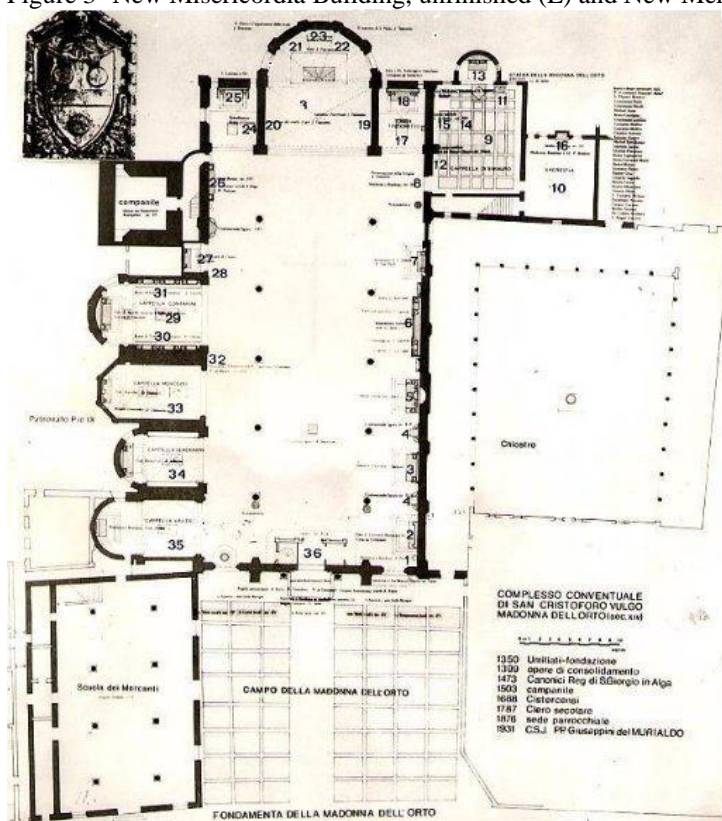


Figure 4- Plans of the Mercanti Scuola and Madonna dell'Orto church. Image by Parrocchia di S.M.dell'Orto.

2.2 Distinctions among *scuole*

The function and social activities of *scuole* in Venice help explain the importance of this union for the Mercanti Scuola's ambitions. *Scuole* were Venice's version of lay confraternities and usually were dedicated to a Saint. Unlike confraternal organizations in other Italian cities, Venetian *scuole* had greater control over, and participation in, civic matters. *Scuole* were the entry point for most citizens' participation in their community. There were over two hundred *scuole* in Venice at this time, divided into *scuole grandi*, *scuole delle arti*, and *scuole piccole*: the *scuole grandi* were larger in membership numbers and wealthier, whereas the *scuole piccole* were mostly artisan guilds.¹⁷ Most of the *scuole* were *piccole*; there were only six *scuole grandi* at this time.

The Mercanti Scuola was a *scuola piccolo*, but this new merger included a *scuola grande*—the Scuola della Misericordia. The Mercanti Scuola wanted to merge with the Misericordia from as early as 1556. In 1570, the Scuola della Misericordia was in such trouble economically that it decided to accept the Mercanti's longstanding merger offer.¹⁸ Therefore, a new Mercanti Scuola was formed from the existing Mercanti Scuola (Santa Maria e San Cristoforo dei Mercanti) and the Misericordia Scuola (Scuola Santa Maria della Misericordia e San Francesco dei Mercanti e Naviganti).¹⁹ While it was common for *scuole piccole* to join with other *piccole*, it was rare that *scuole grandi* merged with *scuole piccole*. Due to the popularity of *scuole grandi*, they did not require mergers. Rather, they often petitioned the Council for permission to accept more members due to the financial benefits they hoped to attain by membership fees. Special circumstances surrounding the Misericordia's poor finances, however, even after it had added many more members, at last provided the Mercanti the chance to become associated with a *scuola grande*.

But being associated with a *scuola grande* was not the ultimate goal for the Mercanti. I argue that the Mercanti not only wanted to merge with a *scuola grande*, but also wanted to become a *scuola grande*. Precedent suggests that it was entirely plausible for the Mercanti to actually achieve *grande* status. Three *scuole grandi*, the Carità, San Marco, and San Giovanni Evangelista, were formed around 1260, followed by the Misericordia in 1261.²⁰ These four *scuole* remained the only *scuole grandi* in the Republic until a

fifth, the Scuola Grande San Rocco, was added in the late fifteenth century in response to plagues. Despite its later establishment date, San Rocco grew quickly in wealth and prestige during the next century. Its wealth and power, in fact, led it to become one of the primary *scuole* to ‘top’ in the building competitions, which I discuss later in greater depth. The Mercanti witnessed the overwhelming success that San Rocco had managed to acquire in less than a century. In 1552, yet another *scuola grande* was added—San Teodoro.²¹ Thus, at the time of the Mercanti’s merger with the Misericordia in 1570, the formation of a new *scuola grande* was not unprecedented. There was every reason for the Mercanti to believe that another *scuola grande* could be added to the existing roster in the city. In fact, two more *scuole grandi* were added after the Mercanti’s attempts: the Carmini in 1767 and Santa Maria del Rosario in 1765.

It is important here to clarify the categories of *scuole*. While it is easier to discuss the distinctions among *scuole* as *grande* and *piccolo*, these categories, as Richard MacKenney notes, evidence a great deal of complexity and fluidity.²² The original *scuole* labeled as *grande* were formed as part of the *battuti* (flagellant) movement.²³ Though their institutions date from the mid-thirteenth century in Venice, the label of ‘*scuola grande*’ was not applied until as late as 1467.²⁴ As the flagellant movement in Venice shifted to a more symbolic rather than physical set of practices during the sixteenth century, the particular distinctness that set apart the *battuti* was diminished. Religious piety was available and practiced by all *scuole*, therefore presenting the possibility for all pious *scuole* to be considered for elevation to *grande* status. Evidence of this shift can be seen in the case of the Scuola San Rocco, whose founding motivations were fundamentally different than the previous four *grandi*. Though formed only in 1478, by 1489 it already had submitted a petition for elevation to *grande* status and a *grande* membership allowance of five hundred brothers.²⁵ What began as a confraternity devoted to a plague saint ended as a *scuola grande* in a matter of only eleven years due to its pious fervor. The Mercanti took note of the factors involved in the Council’s permission for promotion: assisting the citizens in devotion and religious ideals. The importance of these factors is further proven by the Carmini and Rosario *scuole*,

which were elevated to *grande* status in the eighteenth century due to pious works and sufficient financial funds.²⁶

The Rosario provides an excellent example for understanding the path the Mercanti wished to follow. Like the Mercanti, it too was also comprised mostly of mercers and had connections to a *scuola grande*, in this case the Scuola Grande San Teodoro.²⁷ Its founding stemmed from a public holiday mandated by Pope Pious V in 1571 in honor of the Virgin's role in the victory at Lepanto. In response to Venetian growth of the Virgin's cult, the Council of Ten formed the confraternity in 1575 in devotion to the Virgin of the Rosary. Since the Rosario Scuola was formed after the Mercanti-Misericordia merger, it is possible that it followed the example of the Mercanti and attached itself to an established *scuola grande* in hopes of later advancement from *piccolo* to *grande*. The Rosario likewise commissioned art in its meeting place of its prestigious church—San Giovanni e Paolo (Zanipolo). In 1582, it dedicated the Chapel of the Rosary in Zanipolo filled with works by Jacopo and Domenico Tintoretto, Palma il Giovane, and other renowned artists.²⁸ The Rosario's ultimate success in elevation to *grande* status in 1765 confirms that the Mercanti's strategy was, indeed, legitimate despite its ultimate failure.

2.3 Palladio and Paintings

Besides reflecting the Mercanti's desire to foster an alliance with the Orto, the simplicity of the architecture of its meeting house served another purpose—to manage carefully public perception. The Misericordia had hired Jacopo Sansovino in 1531 for its new building, but in 1570 at the time of the merger, it remained incomplete due to lack of funds.²⁹ To commemorate the newly formed Scuola, and to improve its standing, the new Mercanti Scuola immediately hired Palladio to act as on-site overseer of its building and renovations. This is no surprise, as Sansovino died earlier that same year, making Palladio the area's most sought-after architect. However, compared to Palladio's better-known Venetian façades like San Giorgio Maggiore, the Mercanti Scuola building is of a different character. The exterior view of the Mercanti building is simple and unassuming. To explore fully this seeming discrepancy, we must first consider the history and functions of similarly purposed buildings.

Scuole Piccole and *Scuole Grandi* held different statuses, played slightly different social roles, and therefore required different types of buildings. *Scuole grandi* buildings had two floors, featuring one large hall on the bottom floor for everyday use, such as dispersing charity, and one large hall (*sala del capitolo*) directly above it on the second floor for meetings. The *sala del capitolo* was also equipped with an altar for religious gatherings. *Scuole grandi* added to the upper meeting hall an *albergo*, a small room where the *Banca*, a sixteen-member governing committee, managed daily duties.³⁰ *Scuole piccole*, as the *Mercanti* were classified, often consisted of only one floor with one large main room.³¹ The *Mercanti*'s existing building at the time it consulted Palladio was consistent with those of the other *scuole piccole* (Fig. 5). The *Mercanti*'s merger with the more prestigious *Misericordia* helped to raise the *Mercanti*'s status and reputation.³² In its plans for expansion, the *Mercanti* offered these telling instructions—that its building be “*Immitando le Vistigie della scole grande*.”³³ Even though it remained classified as a *scuola piccolo* after the merger, the decision was made not only to expand the existing building, but also to add the *albergo* normally reserved for *scuole grandi*. That the *Mercanti* wanted to associate itself with grander things is no surprise, as competition between *scuole* was common during the sixteenth century. A scandal associated with the *Misericordia*'s earlier, pre-merger building efforts was even the subject of one of Caravia's satirical poems. Published in 1541, Caravia's poem mocked the building competitions and other ostentatious misdeeds of the *scuole grandi* that resulted in neglect of their primary beneficent purposes.³⁴ The *Misericordia*, like other *scuole*, had used designated charity funds for building projects and, as a result, earned the satirist's disdain.

The *Mercanti*'s goal of establishing its own prominence can further be seen in the decorations carried out for the interior of the edifice. Soon after renovations commenced, the *Mercanti* council commissioned numerous works from prominent Venetian artists. The current governor of the *Mercanti* announced his desire to fill the finished Scuola “*con qualche bella pittura*,” setting the pattern of future artistic patronage by the Scuola.³⁵ Not surprisingly, the *scuola grande*-type *albergo* was chosen as the first room to be decorated after the completed renovation. The program kicked off with a 1575 commission of a (now lost) *Assumption* by Jacopo Tintoretto that contained many portraits of the *Banca*

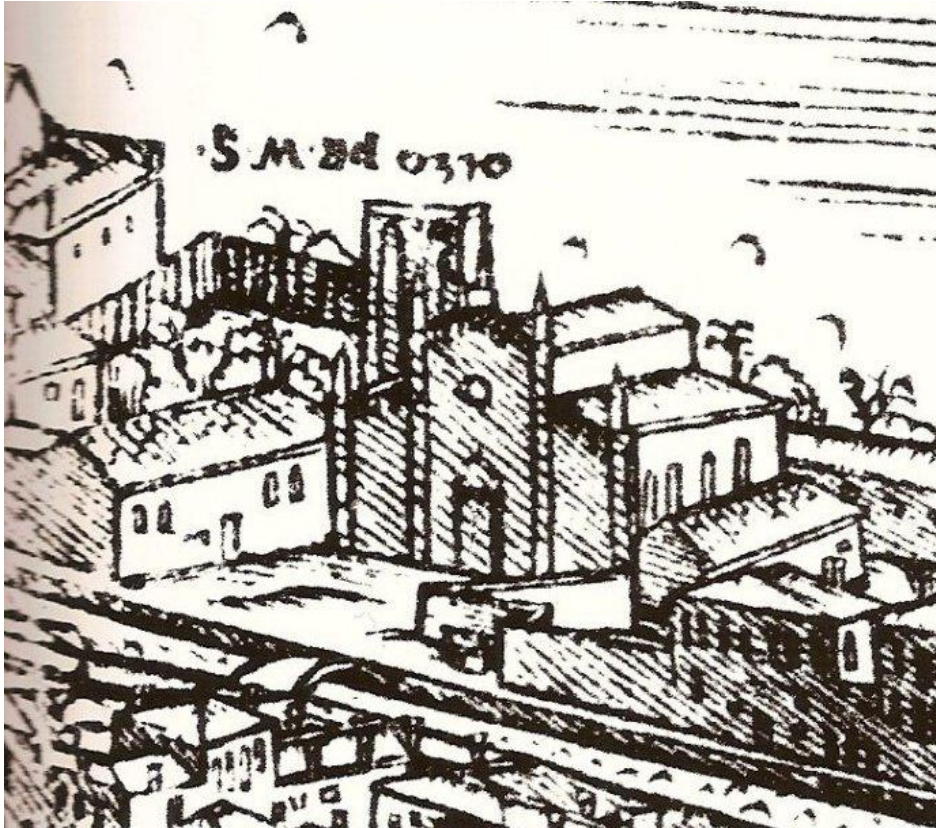


Figure 5- Jacopo Barbaro, *View of Venice* (detail), engraving, 1500. Image by Osvaldo Bohm.

officers. The narrative portrait hung above the bench where the *Banca* sat in the *albergo*.³⁶ Soon after, the brothers added a grand soffit, new walnut benches, and a *Nativity of the Virgin* altarpiece by Paolo Veronese's brother.³⁷ Veronese himself was commissioned for an *Annunciation* to hang over the main door (Fig. 6). In the work, the coat of arms of the Mercanti and two of the painting's commissioners can be seen on the loggia and the top of the arch. The painting's Palladian architecture of the temple façade and surrounding features is also significant. In 1664, Boschini wrote of the painting's "most majestic architecture" and divine, heavenly quality.³⁸ Later writers described the painting's Renaissance loggia with the "most stately and Palladian architecture" to enclose the Virgin's symbolic garden.³⁹ It is likely that the reference to Palladian architecture was not lost on period viewers. The Marian cycle culminated in the ceiling's centerpiece, a *Coronation of the Virgin* by Domenico Tintoretto surrounded by four Evangelists and Doctors of the Church by Aliense.⁴⁰

Pictorial cycles in the Mercanti building continued to be commissioned, even to the point that the current governor's inscription plaque became hidden and had to be relocated due to the abundance of extant paintings in 1581. Thus, in a mere six years, the Mercanti had furbished its meeting hall with works that approached the quantity and quality of those owned by *scuole grandi*. The Mercanti were the only *scuola piccolo* at this time that commissioned narrative painting cycles, and it certainly had the most extensive prestigious interior decor of any other *scuola piccolo*.⁴¹ Such precious decoration prompted Boschini and other writers of the time to recommend the Mercanti Scuola for visit in their guidebooks thanks to these and further decorations carried out in the 1590's. Among the more than ninety significant works inside were three major works made for the next room chosen to be adorned—the upstairs *sala superiore* dedicated to the *Madonna della Misericordia*.⁴² In 1591, the Mercanti commissioned Jacopo Tintoretto's son Domenico to paint two group portraits of members of the Mercanti Scuola to flank the altarpiece of the *Nativity of the Virgin* painted by both father and son (Fig. 7).

These two flanking group portraits deviate from previous *scuole* portraits in both quality and content in that the pose, clothing, and compositional formality of the Mercanti leaders are akin to portraits of governmental magistrates.⁴³ Additionally, as Cooper points out, these portraits show another unusual



Figure 6- Paolo Veronese, *Annunciation*, Accademia Gallery, Venice. © Rachel Erwin, 2010.



Figure 7- Domenico Tintoretto, *Brothers of the Mercanti Scuola*. Image by Cameraphoto Arte, Venezia.

departure in that the symbolic vestments of some members are those normally awarded to the *scuole grandi*, deep red “ducal vestments with long fur-trimmed sleeves,” two of which have the *stola* indicating titles of governor and vice-governor of the *Banca*.⁴⁴ The Mercanti took its aspirations even further by directing that the ceiling of the Mercanti *sala superiore* imitate the *sala superiore* ceiling in the Scuola Grande San Rocco, including a central image of the *Brazen Serpent* commissioned from Tintoretto. The similarities between the two ceilings were no coincidence, demonstrating the Mercanti’s strategy of ‘deliberate’ imitation.⁴⁵ After all, Tintoretto’s San Rocco cycles were said to have ‘won’ that Scuola the competition among the *scuole grandi*.⁴⁶ The Mercanti continued its deliberate use of Tintoretto and son in the ground floor *androne* by commissioning from them narrative wall scenes of St. Christopher and a ceiling of the *Passion of Christ* and *Evangelists* by Domenico, complemented by a *Virgin and Child with St. Christopher* altarpiece by Jacopo.⁴⁷ Therefore, the Mercanti constructed two associations with the *scuole grandi* through explicit visual terms—a physical, architectural space as well as illustrious portraits and painted cycles.

These parallels, however, often go unnoticed in the scholarly literature. It is primarily because of the simplicity of the Mercanti’s structural design that several scholars dismiss the importance of Palladio’s connection to the commission. In answer to these objections, I offer a parallel visual connection by turning to another of Palladio’s works for a group desiring a simpler plan. In 1560, Palladio began work for the refectory of San Giorgio Maggiore. Construction had begun on the walls when Palladio was brought in, and he completed the project through supervision and construction as he had done for the Mercanti. In the refectory, Palladio topped the round-headed refectory windows with straight cornices combined with large bracketed moldings (Fig. 8).⁴⁸ On the Mercanti exterior, we see the same window proportions and fenestrations, topped with the straight cornices (Fig. 9). Palladio repeated this feature consistently on both primary façades of the Mercanti for a quite similar effect. Because the building program at San Giorgio predates the renovations to the Mercanti’s meeting house, this particular detail shows that Palladio could, and did, use simple design solutions even though they do not seem “Palladian” to later scholars.

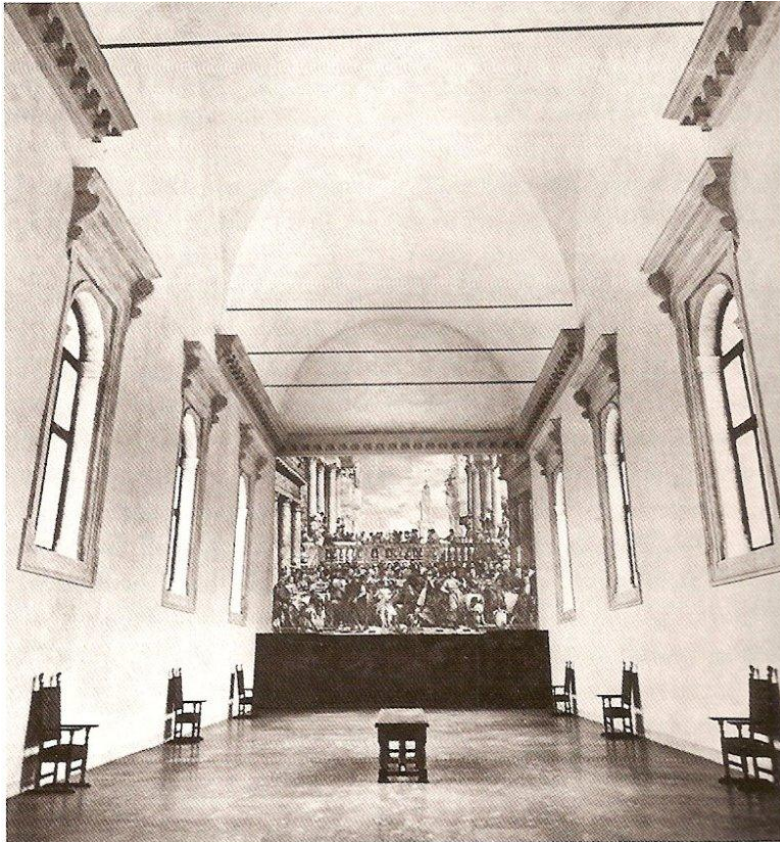


Figure 8- Palladio, San Giorgio Maggiore monastery interior. Photo source unknown.



Figure 9- Mercanti exterior windows. © Rachel Erwin, 2010.

Given the documentation, the issue is not whether or not Palladio was involved but, rather, to what extent Palladio was allowed to be involved. Due to Venice's somewhat conservative tradition and adherence to its Gothic precedents, architects in Venice often encountered difficulties in completing projects. This was especially true for non-native Venetians like Sansovino and Palladio who were aware of neither the local preferences nor the site conditions. Venetian patrons frequently rejected Sansovino's plans, for example, because he proposed vaulting, an element that was not always practical in the Venetian lagoon.⁴⁹ In *scuole* buildings, the faithfulness to tradition sometimes reigned supreme as well. Sansovino planned for freestanding columns to be incorporated along the canal-facing side of the new Misericordia Scuola, but the element was immediately dismissed due to the brothers' distaste for the style.⁵⁰ Sansovino endured years of revisions to his plans for the new Misericordia Scuola. As Manfredo Tafuri has noted, the role of architects working in Venice was reduced to that of a *proto*, more akin to a construction overseer.⁵¹ In Sansovino's commission for the Misericordia's new building, in fact, his role was referred to as that of *proto* in 1532.⁵² Since the nature of the Venetian architect is inherently different than that of an architect working in Florence or Rome, for example, we must not assume that Palladio exercised full artistic freedom in any Venetian commission he received. The Mercanti, not being able to construct an entirely new building, hired Palladio to design and carry out the full extent of its renovations. Given the restraints of the typical *scuole* buildings and the role of architects in those building processes, Palladio's input and room for 'innovation' was necessarily limited. These restraints raise an important question—why use Palladio at all? Not only did the Mercanti gain a building that it could afford, and had the specifications it desired, but it also bought access to a famous architect's reputation. Palladio's standing as preferred architect of church and state enhanced the Mercanti's reputation by association, especially since the Mercanti were the only *scuola* with a connection to Palladio.

The Mercanti were certainly aware of grander designs but deliberately chose a visually simple approach. A surviving sketch by Palladio (Fig. 10), for example, is a copy of Sansovino's drawing of the new Misericordia Scuola façade. After rejecting Sansovino's designs for vaulting and freestanding columns on all façades, the Misericordia finally agreed on Sansovino's design for the front façade. Mired

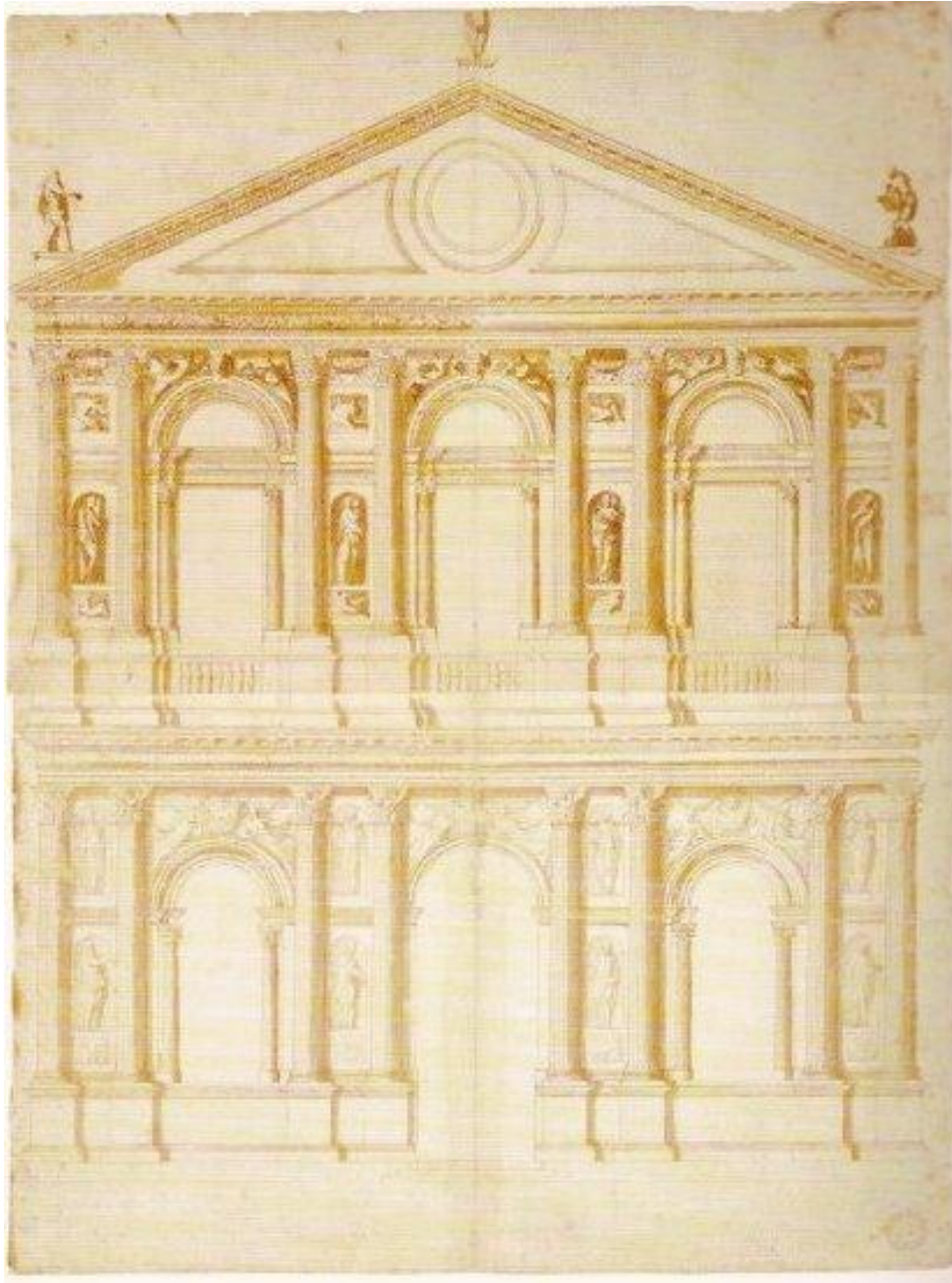


Figure 10- Palladio, drawing of Sansovino's new Scuola Della Misericordia façade.
Image by Musei Civici del Comune di Vicenza, Pinacoteca Civica.

as it was in the building competitions with other *scuole*, however, it ran out of money before the front was completed. It remains incomplete today, though at the time of Sansovino's death in 1570, when the Misericordia joined with the Mercanti, it had intentions of finishing the building. Palladio presumably copied Sansovino's original drawing, though the purpose is debatable. It appears that Palladio intended to publish the drawing in a future book on 'public architecture' and various other ancient and modern buildings not included in the first printing of the *Four Books*, showing that he clearly knew and admired his predecessor's design for a more lavish *scuola* façade.⁵³ Cooper suggests that the drawing could have even been used to encourage the Mercanti towards a similar type of *scuola grande* design.⁵⁴

2.4 Palladio and a Procession

Palladio's sketch not only proves his knowledge of grander designs but also serves as an additional visual image evidencing Palladio's tie to the Mercanti. The Mercanti made sure to publicize its affiliation with the architect in the most public manner possible. Howard theorizes that the Mercanti had the drawing made into a banner and used it as an "ephemeral façade" for use in a festive procession.⁵⁵ I find Howard's theory compelling due to the Mercanti's connections to the Lepanto celebration and the opportunities that it presented. As mentioned, the 1572 celebration of the victory at Lepanto held tremendous meaning for the Mercanti and for the city. In addition to temporary displays and memorials, permanent projects were erected throughout Venice and its surrounding areas. Venice's Arsenale erected various temporary visual memorials, statuary, and friezes, as did Vicenza to Palladio's newly built Loggia del Capitaniato.⁵⁶ This connection is interesting because Venice commissioned Palladio to design and construct an elaborate temporary triumphal arch for the visit of King Henry III of France in 1574.⁵⁷ Therefore, I find it reasonable to conceive of Palladio's drawing being commissioned or used as a visual architectural image for this political celebration. The Mercanti's use of such a banner, and even its existence, must remain conjectural, unfortunately. The ephemeral nature of such banners, as well as the loss of archival records, makes it impossible to say with complete certainty that my reading of this object is accurate. Given the wide use of similar banners by confraternities throughout Europe (e.g., those shown in Bellini's well-

known image of a procession in St. Mark's square), however, it is well within the realms of possibility that a socially self-conscious organization like the Mercanti would have desired, commissioned, and used such a banner to promote itself during a major public festival.

Such visual objects were frequently used in civic processions, yet the Mercanti were sure to employ only certain artists to produce images that especially announced its prominent connections. In the case of Palladio's ephemeral banner, the image represented the Mercanti's connection to the Misericordia Scuola and to the architect himself. Tintoretto, as a member of the Scuola and Church, probably provided visual images for the celebration, as well.⁵⁸ Tintoretto's contributions not only suggested his membership in the Scuola, but also showed that the Mercanti could attract someone who had membership in, and performed work for, *scuole grandi*, the State, and the Orto church.

The Mercanti's social aspirations, therefore, were achieved through a variety of visual elements. The result of the Mercanti renovation is one that is in keeping with both its original building and the church façade next to it. Though the exterior and general plan of the Mercanti Scuola remained faithful to the decorum of *scuole piccole*, the addition of elements like an *albergo* and painted portraits with nobler references pointed towards the Mercanti's perception of its status as more akin to a *scuola grande*. At the same time, it removed itself from the criticisms against the *scuole grandi* by not asserting its wealth through sumptuous architecture. The visual architectural conventionality also served to reinforce its social and spiritual tie to the church of the Orto. Finally, a quite timely procession allowed for an opportune display of its wealth, piety, and new facilities. As a result, its vision of an improved facility therefore successfully included exterior and interior adornments that resulted in suitably raising its status in the competitive world of Venetian citizenry.

3 APPLYING THE MARRIAGE METAPHOR

The union of *scuole* was common, but the unequal status of these two particular *scuole* is particularly intriguing. We are left with the task of trying to understand how such seemingly mismatched partners could ever hope to unite successfully. One possible framework for explaining this type of union is that of

contemporary marriage practice. I assert that sixteenth-century Venetian marriage practice provides a good model for understanding events such as the Mercanti merger. With an understanding of the Mercanti's goals and motivations as explained in the previous sections, I will examine the union in terms of typical aspects of Venetian marriages.

3.1 A Processional Announcement

Looking again at the 1572 Lepanto festivities, I argue that the Mercanti not only used the procession as an opportunity to glorify itself and prove its worth, but also used ephemeral objects in a manner similar to marital processions. The festivities surrounding a proper marriage glorified the bride and put her on display. One of the most important parts of the extended nuptial rite was the *parentado* display in which the finely dressed bride, accompanied by a dance master and instruments, was ceremonially presented to the entire extended family over several days. Francesco Sansovino wrote of the subsequent gondola visit to present the bride to relatives in monasteries, a public spectacle witnessed by many in the city.⁵⁹ Prints from the period record such gondola processions. A 1565 "Marriage to the Sea," for example, clearly shows a bridal gondola as part of the event.⁶⁰ An impressive procession followed the *parentado*, consisting of torch-carrying servants, musicians, and the bridal party processing to the church for the ceremony and subsequent feast at the groom's house.⁶¹ Artists were commissioned to produce original poetry verses (*epithalamia*), songs, and theatrical displays for the new couple's banquet party celebration. Sources note the superior quality of the *epithalamia* booklets that were printed and handed out to the guests, often with an original print for the frontispiece that rivaled any master work of the day.⁶² Such pamphlets were abundant throughout Italy and were just as important as any food or spectacle arranged for wedding guests.⁶³ Marriage was a series of public and semi-public events accompanied by tangible items that represented the pride and satisfaction of the union.⁶⁴

In the same manner, the 1572 procession organized by the Mercanti was a celebration of the pride in its new union, complete with visual accompaniments similar to those used in civic marriage processions. Also, as the origin of the procession, the Scuola building would have certainly had its doors

opened for all to observe and would have put the reconstructed interior, furnishings, and art from prominent artists on display as a sign of the Mercanti's worthiness as a partner for the Misericordia.⁶⁵

Further, I argue that the Palladian-drawn banner used by the Mercanti in this procession also functioned like the commissioned *epithalamia* frontispiece for wedding guests. Triumphal banners were important objects in the Venetian world, so the use of a banner carried with it various implications. Since Doge Orseolo introduced banners to Venice in 1000 A.D. when he concurrently instituted the beginnings of the Marriage to the Sea festivities, banners had long been associated with marital themes.⁶⁶ Sources record that banners constituted part of the doge's *trionfe* and were also frequently carried by *scuole* in processions.⁶⁷ Some banners announced the *scuole* by an emblem (*stemma*), but exceptional versions with religious images were commissioned from celebrated painters. Titian painted a processional canvas banner of *Christ Carrying the Cross* for the Scuola Grande S. Rocco in 1510. Only ten years later, Marin Sanudo recorded that the banner, also used as an altarpiece, brought about many miracles. Many people flocked to see it and gave alms to the Scuola for its plague protection. The Scuola Grande della Carita commissioned a painted banner in 1506 using the following justification: "Because it is necessary first to honour God and then to be equal to the other confraternities."⁶⁸ The Mercanti were aware of the potential prestige that banners provided a *scuola*, and by modeling the practice of banners commissioned by *scuole grandi*, it likewise announced prominent connections. Since banners could be associated with victorious political, religious, and marital themes, the Mercanti's use of the Palladian banner in the Lepanto procession was consistent with each of the three themes. Its use was wholly appropriate for the occasion and gave the Mercanti the opportunity to project its desired image publicly in the same way that couples used printed *epithalamia*.

3.2 Physical Identity and Proximity

In addition to choosing the Misericordia due to its vulnerable financial condition and *scuola grande* status, the Mercanti selected the Misericordia because of the benefit of physical proximity. The Mercanti building sat just around the corner from both the old and new Misericordia buildings. Due to this

proximity, the Mercanti had the chance to observe the habits and activities of the Misericordia, acquiring deep knowledge of the requisites of a *scuola grande*.

The use of coats of arms throughout the city, as well as the division of Venice into districts, demonstrates the importance of physical location in the creation and maintenance of identity. Venice was proud of its nobility, especially those with a long lineage in the city. A coat of arms (*stemma*) signified the family's status and ancestry, but it was common practice for non-nobility to invent and display a crest, as well.⁶⁹ *Stemme* projected the identity of the family or *scuola*, and were placed on furnishings, books, shields, and in commissioned paintings such as the previously discussed *Annunciation* by Veronese. *Stemme* were also placed on the exterior of buildings to indicate the owner. In many cases, *stemma* appeared on multiple sides of a building and adjoining properties in order to delineate the extent of each family's land holdings. A particularly illustrative example of this principle is a sculpted arch with *stemma* of the Foscari and Mocenigo families (Fig. 11). Placed at the base of a small bridge near the Rialto, the Gothic arch announces the owners of the street. The two rows of property (twenty-six houses) that constituted the *calle* were part of Pellegrina Foscari's dowry for her 1491 marriage to Alvise Mocenigo. Both sides of the arch feature the Madonna della Misericordia type sheltering a donor. On one side is visible a single kneeling donor and two coats of arms of the Foscari family. The reverse shows both the Foscari and the Mocenigo coats of arms, plus a pair of donors thought to be the new couple themselves.⁷⁰ Since everyone walking the streets of Venice encountered daily these public appearances of *stemma*, a family came to be associated with the physical place and area in which they resided. Therefore, the family's physical identity was often expressed by area, by palace location, and by proximity.

The primacy of physicality and locationality sheds light on some of the choices made by the Misericordia and the Mercanti when creating identities. When the Misericordia brothers planned to build a new building, they opted for the location right across the canal from the old one, on the site of the hospital they owned.⁷¹ It also helps explain why the Mercanti set its sights on merging particularly with the Misericordia Scuola, as opposed to another *scuola grande*, since the Misericordia and the Mercanti were both within the same parish of S. Marcilian in Canareggio.⁷² The Mercanti's building can also be



Figure 11- Front and Reverse of Foscari/Mocenigo arch, Calle del Paradiso, Venice. Photo courtesy of Daniel Priore.



Figure 12- *Madonna della Misericordia with Donors and Saints*, Relief above portal, Scuola dei Mercanti, 15-16th C.
© Rachel Erwin, 2010.

examined in terms of this notion of physical identity. For Venetians, location was laden with meaning. This may have largely driven the Mercanti's decision to have its building attached to the Orto, which was a 'miraculous' site and, therefore, an important part of the city's fabric. Likewise, when the Mercanti later decided to enlarge and renovate that initial building, it did so on-site. Just as families transformed their private palaces into expressions of their identity, the Mercanti renovated its *scuola* building as a statement of its newly reconfigured identity. In the same manner that important families employed *stemma*, *scuole* applied their coats of arms to the exterior of edifices they owned and managed. The Misericordia Scuola was meeting at the Frari while its new building was under construction, but when it joined with the Mercanti, it brought its fifteenth-century sculpted *Madonna della Misericordia* plaque (Fig. 12). The plaque, functioning like a *stemma*, was transferred to a place of importance above the new Palladian portal on the building's campo-facing side, just above another plaque with an inscription documenting the new Scuola's first governor in 1571.⁷³ This further suggests that the Mercanti considered the renovation of the building not only as a means of renovating its image but also as a way to mark its new merger and the creation of a new corporate 'lineage.'

3.3 Noble status

The Mercanti's merger with the prominent Misericordia parallels other issues of nobility in Venetian marriage practice. One of the more fraught was that of "noble" status. Noble status was of paramount importance when pairing couples for marriage, as marriage was a primary factor that determined nobility. The government repeatedly enacted restrictions to protect or define noble status. Late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth-century laws, the so-called 'closing' of the *Serrata*, limited the patriciate to preexisting governmental families. Patrician qualification had been based on the lineage of the male, but more laws designed to ascertain lineage more precisely were implemented in 1414 and 1430, and a law of 1422 stated that the mother's status must be considered as well as that of the father.⁷⁴ Similar laws continued into the cinquecento, with a dowry restriction in 1505, the creation of the *Libro d'Oro* in 1506, and two

1526 and 1535 follow-up laws which ultimately shifted control of birth and marriage to the state, making marriage a civil (and therefore public) act.⁷⁵

Hence, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the social scene began to change in Venice as more and more marriageable females were forced into convents due to, among other things, dowry regulation issues. Since a large majority of these girls were from the upper classes, the pool of ‘available’ patrician women declined greatly. Certainly patricians were encouraged and expected to marry from within their own class, but the shortage of bridal candidates resulted in what Hunecke calls a “rapid decline in officially registered patrician marriages.”⁷⁶ While patrician women were expected to marry within their class, patrician men were allowed to take ‘commoner’ (*popolani*) brides who had ample funds. Stanley Chojnacki points out that *popolani* girls were “explicitly invited” by the Venetian government to choose such elite husbands, even allowing them to pay ¼ larger dowry than patrician brides.⁷⁷

In actuality, the incidence of ‘outsider brides’ marrying patricians had been happening since the beginning of the fifteenth century, if not earlier.⁷⁸ The practice of taking non-patrician brides was prevalent enough to prompt legislation in 1589 that disqualified status to non-patrician wives and their mothers who had been slaves or engaged in immoral sexual behavior. For heirs to be eligible to sit on the Great Council, the women must have lived “modestly and honourably.”⁷⁹ Intended, as it were, to secure the high caliber of the council by restricting certain women, the law in essence substantiated the already recognized notion that both the marriage and heirs of non-patricians could be legitimate.⁸⁰ These were the issues of concern at the time of the Mercanti-Misericordia merger in 1570, less than two decades before the enforcement of the 1589 laws. No longer was a stigma attached to marrying a bride of lower class, so long as she demonstrated social values and sufficient material goods. Though some of the patrician class fought for exclusivity, the reality was that it was common practice for non-nobles to be granted status due to special financial, military, or monetary situations, especially as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries progressed.

Yet, at the same time, just as classifications of *scuole* were sometimes fluid, several authors have recently argued against a strict tripartite division of social classes, instead favoring a view that allows for a blurring of the lines in regard to patricians, *cittadini* (citizens), and *popolani*.⁸¹ Alexander Cowan, in *Marriage, Manners and Mobility*, describes the *huomini civili* as a larger, elite social group with a range of social and financial similarities. Though they were not *cittadini* by name, most considered these qualifying factors sufficient to consider such people equivalent to *cittadini*, if not more. Many were wealthier merchants, invested in land or owned housing in Venice which, as Cowan points out, many patricians could not afford.⁸² Due to the trade-oriented society of Venice, merchants and traders were not looked upon as having lowly professions, as may have been the case in other Italian regions. Rather, people spoke proudly of their mercantile dealings by virtue of the fact that they were the foundation of the elite. Since patricians likewise engaged in merchant activity, the activities of merchants were sometimes linked to those of patricians, exemplified by Vidal Vidal's 1591 petition regarding his daughter in which he asserted that his father-in-law had undertaken "large-scale trading in wool in the same way as many Venetian nobles."⁸³

Cowan cites several examples of close, friendly relations between patricians, *cittadini*, and *huomini civili*, including patricians attending weddings and stepping up as godparents for their *cittadini* friends. Moreover, they "proudly recorded their links as fellow members of the *scuole grandi*,"⁸⁴ attesting to the commonality and goodwill that they shared for each other. In fact, Doge Cristoforo Moro in his time was a member of the Mercanti Scuola.⁸⁵ Like most *scuole*, the Mercanti contained brothers from all classes, but instead of mere "craftsmen," the Mercanti were known for being primarily "merchant-entrepreneur type(s)."⁸⁶ Given this broad membership (from merchant to Doge), the Mercanti had no reason to believe that there would be any real impediment to becoming a *scuola grande*. It even had recent precedent in its favor, since the most recent *scuola* raised to *grande* status, San Teodoro, was comprised mostly of artisans and merchants.⁸⁷

3.4 An Attractive Dowry

Amicable as the relations between classes might have been, it is hard to deny that cash from a large dowry was the principal cause for men with superior status to wed women from ‘lower’ social strata. As Cowan aptly writes: “It was one way in which wealthy families outside an elite could gain access to it in exchange for an infusion of cash or real estate.”⁸⁸ Marrying a wealthy merchant’s daughter could reverse a patrician family’s financial misfortunes, as was the case of Francesco Grimani who rose in rank to a *Consigliere* because of marital benefits he gained from his union.⁸⁹ Cowan also notes the letters of Englishman Sir Henry Wotton which describe the rise in success of Doge Giovanni Bembo from a poverty-stricken patrician family to supreme ruler, owing to his union with a rich *cittadini* daughter.⁹⁰ For a patrician groom whose family had fallen on hard times, marriage with a wealthy merchant’s daughter provided more financial benefits and a higher standard of living for the couple than would marrying another struggling, financially-strapped patrician bride.

The Mercanti-Misericordia merger, like some patrician marriages, may not have been ideal for the ‘nobler’ Misericordia, but was mutually beneficial for all parties involved. The Mercanti gained the status and prominence it desired while the Misericordia was able to stave off some of its financial woes. Though direct records of the Misericordia using the Mercanti’s vast funds may not exist, the Misericordia would not have agreed to the merger unless it had something significant to gain. Records do indicate that work continued on the new Misericordia building due in part to finances from a preexisting trust fund, but the Misericordia may have also been given funds from the Mercanti to aid in the progress of the building.⁹¹ The Mercanti also probably assisted the Misericordia in fulfillment of dues, fees related to the Turkish war, and expenses necessary for upkeep and daily functions of the Misericordia brothers. Given the predominate social pattern of noble marriage, it is likely that the Mercanti aided the Misericordia monetarily in some manner—otherwise the *scuola grande* would have had little use for merging.

The exchange of benefits and use of money is strikingly similar to the function of a dowry in marriages. The bride’s dowry was used, among other things, to acquire real estate or prepare the house for inhabitation. In some cases, especially with nobles, part of the décor of the couple’s home included

painted *soffitto* with nuptial themes.⁹² Both the Misericordia and the Mercanti continued to decorate the interiors of their ‘houses’ with distinguished art and architectural designs. I have suggested that the Misericordia likely used funds from the Mercanti for its building during this time, and I further assert that the Mercanti’s extensive painted cycles carried out in the two decades after the merger represented the celebration of its ‘marriage’ and assertion of its status by lavishly furnishing its space. Kent Lydecker and others regard Renaissance marriage as “the most important social occasion for the purchase of art and furnishings.”⁹³ In addition to *soffitto*, painted portraits or allegories of marriage were popular items commissioned by couples to decorate the interior of their homes.⁹⁴ By the end of the 1590’s, the Mercanti’s painted cycles rivaled those of *scuole grandi*, an indication that the Mercanti not only saw and imitated ‘noble’ taste, but used the same method of *soffitto*, furnishings and commissioned paintings for its marriage-like social maneuver.

In addition to a dowry, the value of the bride’s *corredo* (part of the *trousseau*) influenced early Renaissance marriages in Venice. According to Chojnacki, in the fourteenth century the *corredo* shifted from bridal accoutrements to a monetary amount given to the groom, thus becoming another manner in which to add value to a bride and obtain a more desirable patrician groom.⁹⁵ Precedent for using marital unions to attain “distinction, influence, or patronage” was both extensive and longstanding in Venice, as Chojnacki has shown.⁹⁶ In the fifteenth century, the motivation for ‘marrying up’ was related to governmental benefits; families of brides accordingly pursued grooms from a higher patrician tier.⁹⁷ One example is the 1410 union of Luca Falier to Moretto Bragadin’s illegitimate daughter, Isabetta. Falier’s family was of the ‘*casa vecchia*’ patriciate of Venice but was enticed into a very handsome deal due to Isabetta’s 1,000 ducat *corredo* along with the 1,500 ducat dowry.⁹⁸ Isabetta’s brothers and heirs would have also reaped socio-civic opportunities from the connections formed through the marriage.

Besides having the status of *scuola grande*, the Misericordia was also one of the older *scuole grandi*, comparable to a ‘*casa vecchia*’—old nobility with a long lineage in the city. The Mercanti recognized that certain level of prestige and aimed to become a *scuola grande* just as brides like Isabetta Bragadin hoped to ‘marry up’ for the benefits that a union provided. The increase in status and

connections gained by the bride's family parallels the same increases that the Mercanti desired and hoped to attain through its union with a more prominent 'groom.' The Mercanti did achieve benefits resulting from its merger, yet it inaccurately judged that it could officially attain equal status by stepping into the lesser, 'feminine partner' role. In Isabetta's case, her male brothers and heirs were the ones who stood to inherit significant advanced social position, not the 'bride' herself.

3.5 Religion, Paternal Roles and Male Identity

Coinciding with the move to safeguard the status of the patriciate in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, governments of Italian city-states began redefining and implementing increased measures of criminal justice.⁹⁹ Venice was no exception, and sexual morality was especially enforced. Whether this was in response to troubles in the socioeconomic sphere, as some scholars suggest, or in response to issues of ecclesiastical reform, officials probably did not expect the backlash that resulted in a "culture of illicit sexuality."¹⁰⁰ The key to the moral and social reform was proper male identity, focusing on paternal authority to provide a disciplined household.¹⁰¹ In light of this, it makes sense that the Mercanti would stress propriety in its actions. Using caution in how it would be perceived regarding its building renovation, the Mercanti ensured that the structure did not become subject to scrutiny and criticism. At the same time, aligning with the well-respected Orto church encouraged an association with its piety and religious devotion. Merging with the Misericordia provided elevated status for the Mercanti, but its goals of advancing fully to *scuola grande* status would result in greater responsibility in the Republic since *scuole grandi* were in close relationship with the Council of Ten and participated in more civic affairs. The Mercanti might have perceived a promotion to *grande* status as inheriting a position even closer to the mythical ideal of 'Venice' herself. Though the Doge took on the male role of 'marrying' Venice and her sea, the whole governmental structure was enveloped in the identity of the female figure of 'Venetia,' a female personification who appeared in many allegorical paintings. Thus, a view of the Mercanti as a 'bride' like Venice is not at odds with the Mercanti having the potential to inherit male authority.

Even the structure of the Venetian government demonstrates how invested it was in encouraging moral and stable marriage alliances. Life-long bachelors, for example, tended to hold lower posts while married men achieved the higher offices of Senator and member of the Council of Ten. During the years of 1438-1455, for example, only one of seventy-four men who filled these high positions was unmarried.¹⁰² Those in positions to enact reformatory laws in Venice were charged with rehabilitating social order in their own homes. Indeed, it was difficult to conceive of lifelong bachelors possessing paternal authority. Therefore, suitable male identity equaled paternal male identity.

Male identity was not new in Venice, as the office of doge was associated with supreme male power. Venice and her government were further associated with paternal roles in their displays of 'marriage.' *La Sensa*, Venice's marriage to the sea, was an annual celebration on Ascension Day that, more than any other ritual, suggested what Chojnacki calls the "symbolic grandeur of patrician husbandhood."¹⁰³ The origins of the feast date back to approximately 1000 A.D. at the church of San Nicolò al Lido when Doge Orseolo blessed the Adriatic Sea upon returning from a foreign expedition. When the rite of blessing later evolved into the lavish feast of *La Sensa*, the association with San Nicolò remained.¹⁰⁴ Edward Muir points out that the importance of the cult of Saint Nicholas in Venice was related to fertility, making the marriage to the sea festival even further connected with marital and sexual themes.¹⁰⁵ The actual marriage moment took place at the mouth of the lagoon near the Lido when the doge threw his golden ring into the sea with a vow of both betrothal and domination.¹⁰⁶ The groom and his retinue then disembarked at the church of S. Nicolò for prayer and an extended feast. This practice has striking similarity to patrician unions in which the couple processed in extravagance on gondolas and held a large banquet after their ceremony. It is easy to understand why noble citizens would want to imitate this time-honored celebration of the *Sensa* due to its prestige and implications of divine right to rule. Couples even desired to wed during the Ascension feast season due to its nuptial association.¹⁰⁷

In the thirteenth century, another nuptial-themed event was founded when Doge Ziani, upon the behest of Bishop Ugolino, built a church (and later added a convent) in honor of a demolished one in Jerusalem honoring the Virgin. Doge Ziani began the tradition of marrying every new abbess of the

convent as a display of authority as their patron; the ceremony likewise involved rings and was followed by a large banquet.¹⁰⁸ Not only were the Doge and Signoria present, but several patricians attended the ceremony and subsequent festivities. Similar to the *Sensa*, this practice modeled for the citizens a display in which marriage signified authority, responsibility, and a safeguarding of morality. Those carrying out these exemplars were the highest leaders of the city, but some of the patriciate was allowed to participate in the event, as well.

Just as patricians were given rights to carry out rituals, an elevation in status for the Mercanti granted it a heightened identification with those responsible for the welfare of the Republic and her citizens. The Mercanti appears to have mistakenly believed that it also gained paternal authority through its ‘marital’ union, and it advocated its desires for further advancement by displaying its religious fervor. Therefore, the Mercanti perceived itself to be assisting in the conservation of morality—and thus, conservation of the Republic—through proper moral restraint. While other *scuole grandi* were forsaking their civic responsibilities, the Mercanti exhibited self-discipline. Now equal to *scuole grandi* in other categories that brought the city honor, the Mercanti proved that it was also capable of handling the moral responsibilities required of the *scuole grandi*. The Mercanti’s desire for growing authority aligned with the Republic’s ideal of cultural and moral stability, but because the Mercanti considered itself equal to other *scuola grande*, it did not deem that a ‘marital’ union would prevent it from gaining that paternal authority. Publicly performing religious devotion and economic restraint aided in the perception that the Mercanti espoused virtues consistent with the Republic’s moral reform program. An unforeseen consequence of this performance was that these values more accurately reflected the role of an uncorrupted, virtuous female rather than a supreme male power. Though the Mercanti was on the right track by acting in a morally admirable manner, it took on an unexpected role in its marital merger, unable to display male roles and advance through the male-dominated governmental system.

4 CONCLUSION

As marriage was central to nobility, a strategic merger was central to the Mercanti's desire to raise its place in society. Given the increasing prevalence of unequal marriages, the diminishing distinctions between classes, and the economic factors benefiting the Misericordia, it is easier to accept that a *grande* would merge with a *piccolo*. Italian marriage at this point in time, as Adrian Randolph writes, revolved around the union of "two complex family networks," not solely the individual mates.¹⁰⁹ Merging with the Misericordia was not an end in itself but, rather, a means to access the benefits that its 'network' and status could provide. Its union could only elevate the Mercanti's participation in the stability of the city. With that participation and responsibility came opportunities for the Mercanti to justify and prove its capability of succeeding as a *scuola grande*. In a document, the Mercanti explicitly stated that it did not consider itself inferior to other *scuole grandi*.¹¹⁰ Social identity formation in this era required a delicate balance of presenting public piety and economic competency. The Mercanti successfully exploited connections and occasions to increase its prestige but still managed to maintain a positive public image. There is much research to carry out regarding how the Mercanti continued its upward pursuits into the seventeenth century. Perhaps there are documents related to a Mercanti petition for *grande* status, overlooked by past historians not considering these aspects of mobility that I have presented. In addition, I suggest that we can gain greater understanding of the decisions of other *scuole* by considering the reciprocal influence of marital practice. Art and architecture also provided fruitful means for social and political advancement. By imitating the look of well-known buildings and images, patrons like the Mercanti could create a visual kinship with prestigious civic monuments and evoke an ideological association with religious traditions and political ideals. Hopefully, this paper will be a starting point for many future studies on the interrelation of marital culture and civic culture.

ENDNOTES

¹ Iain Fenlon, "Public and Private: The Musical World of Jacopo Tintoretto" (Padova: Il Poligrafo Casa Editrice, 1996), 248-50.

² Deborah Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino: Architecture and Patronage in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 111.

³ Archivio di Stato Venezia (hereafter referred to as ASV), *Scuole piccolo e suffrage*, B. 417, fasc. C, 7r-v; in R. Gallo, "Andrea Palladio e Venezia," *Rivista di Venezia*, N.S., I, (1955), 39-41. See also: Tracy E. Cooper, *Palladio's Venice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 265. In December, 1572, Palladio's lawsuit claimed that he had designed ("fatto li disegni nella fabrica") and overseen the construction ("architetto al servizio"); Juergen Schulz, *Venetian Painted Ceilings of the Renaissance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 137.

⁴ Previous scholars have not seen eye to eye on the identity of the Misericordia Scuola. Due to the popularity of the Madonna of Mercy type, several *scuole* adopted the name Misericordia. This has led to some archival confusion. Founding dates for the *scuole piccole* named Scuola Santa Maria della Misericordia e San Francesco date back to 1261. Brian Pullan finds that the Scuola Grande della Misericordia probably grew out of this older scuola: "The early career of the Misericordia may have been similar, for it probably descended from a Scuola dedicated to the Virgin Mary and to Saint Francis, founded in 1261." (*Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971, 38). Gramigna, 125, writes that the founding date of the Scuola Grande della Misericordia was in 1261 as a *scuola* dedicated to the 'Madonna e a San Francesco,' meeting at the Frari until 1308 when they were 're-formed in Cannaregio.' (Silvia Gramigna and Annalisa Perissa, *Scuole grandi e piccole a Venezia tra arte e storia: confraternite di mestieri e devozione in sei itinerari* (Venezia [Italy]: Grafiche 2am, 2008), originally published *Scuole di arti mestieri e devozione a Venezia* (Venezia: Arsenale cooperativa, 1981). Archives note that the Scuola Grande della Misericordia was meeting temporarily at the Frari while their new scuola building by Sansovino was under construction. Since the Misericordia started out meeting at the Frari, it makes sense that they would return there later for their temporary meeting place. However, Tracy Cooper and Manuela Morresi believe that the Scuola Santa Maria della Misericordia e San Francesco was a *scuola piccolo*, distinct from the Scuola Grande della Misericordia. They do, however, note that the *scuola* who merged with the Mercanti was meeting temporarily at the Frari (Cooper, 263). Deborah Howard and others find that the Misericordia that merged with the Mercanti was indeed the Scuola Grande della Misericordia (and possibly that the *scuola piccolo* Scuola Santa Maria della Misericordia ai Frari was mislabeled as still a *piccolo* and therefore one and the same Scuola Grande della Misericordia) Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 110. I find in favor of Pullan and Howard's conclusions, especially due to similar historical foundation patterns of other *scuole grande*, which I will later discuss. See footnotes n.6 and 18, below.

⁵ Ashley Clarke and Philip Rylands, *Restoring Venice: The Church of the Madonna dell'Orto* (London: Paul Elek Ltd., 1977), 9-14. The word for orchard is *orto*, thus giving the church its name. Diarist Marin Sanudo recorded the prior event. The statue, by Giovanni di Santis, was rejected by the Prior at the church of Santa Maria Formosa, and was left "unpaid for" in the orchard. It can still be seen (now restored) in the Orto church's Chapel of San Mauro.

⁶ Founding dates for the Mercanti are problematic, as well. While many sources cite 1377 as the date of origin for San Cristoforo dei Mercanti, Richard MacKenney attributes a date of 1261, "The *scuole piccole* of Venice: Formations and Transformations," in Nicholas Terpstra, ed., *The Politics of Ritual Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 172-89; also Richard MacKenney, "Continuity and Change in the Scuole Piccole of Venice, c.1250-c.1600," *Renaissance Studies* 8 (1994): 388-403. In their article, Linda Guzzetti and Antje Ziemann give the Scuola di S. Maria della Misericordia e S. Francesco a founding date of 1261 and the Scuola Grande della Misericordia a founding date of 1308, yet they then cite a statement of the Scuola di S. Maria della Misericordia e S. Francesco from the archives of the Scuola Grande di S. Maria della Misericordia. Guzzetti and Ziemann, "Women in the Fourteenth-Century Venetian 'Scuole'," *Renaissance Quarterly* 55, No. 4 (Winter, 2002): 1151-1195. This confirms my conclusion that the two *scuole* are one and the same—that the Scuola di S. Maria della Misericordia e S. Francesco was reformed in 1308 as the Scuola Grande S. Maria della Misericordia. Therefore, those that cite the Scuola di S. Maria della Misericordia e S. Francesco at the Frari as the *scuola* that merged with the Mercanti (whether they believe it is the Scuola Grande or not) are correct. It could also be that the attributed date of 1261 for the Mercanti derives from their adoption of the Misericordia's founding date when they merged. If, though, the true founding date for the Mercanti was 1261, they would have even more reason to claim similarity with other *scuole* who were founded in the same year and later elevated. See footnotes n.4 and 18.

⁷ Richard Goy, *Building Renaissance Venice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 130-1. The price agreed upon was 250 ducats. Goy writes that the church was “expected to contribute half of the cost,” even though they were not the main patrons. The portal was finally raised and completed in 1483. Clarke and Rylands note that the Saint Christopher with Child, the Virgin, and Angel Gabriel statues (latter two on the lower level) are considered to be by Antonio Rizzo. Added later to the Orto façade were the windows near the cornice and the five virtues in the aedicules (virtue sculptures date from 1719, but were brought to the Orto in 1845 from a church on Murano), Clarke and Rylands, 11.

⁸ Clarke and Rylands, 12. All of the canvases are still in the church, having been restored in the late 1960’s. Vasari called the *Presentation of the Virgin*, originally one of the organ doors, the finest work by Tintoretto. There is a memorial to Tintoretto near the high altar. He and his family are buried there.

⁹ Clarke and Rylands, 12-13. The Bellini *Madonna* was stolen in 1993, after at least one prior attempted theft. The ceiling, of course, no longer survives since the mid-1900’s. There are no extant drawings or prints of the Orto ceiling, but there are constructed diagrams of the Rosas’ probable technique like those used in the Orto. Based on Vasari’s description and the Marciana Library’s ceiling appearance (also by the Rosa brothers), we can gather that they were of similar character. Vasari describes a “...colonnade of double twisted columns on the flat ceiling like those of the Porta Santa at St. Peter’s in Rome; which, rising from some projecting cornices, form in the church a superb corridor with cross-vaults; it is in the middle of the church with fine foreshortenings which astound all those who see them, and the ceiling, which is flat, looks deep; above all, it is adorned by a fine variety of cornices, masks, festoons, and some figures which most richly decorate the whole work...” (Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite III*).

¹⁰ Peter Humfrey, *Cima da Conegliano* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 152-3. The surrounding panels were taken apart under Napoleon’s regime. Most are unknown or lost. The central panel of St. Christopher is in the Accademia; a replica is in the Orto church, next to the altar of the original in-situ *St. John Altarpiece* by Cima.

¹¹ Humfrey, *Cima*, 112. The work, carried out in 1460-74 by the German sculptor Niccolo, is lost.

¹² Norbert Huse and Wolfgang Wolters, *The Art of Renaissance Venice: Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting, 1460-1590* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 89-90. The Carità was begun in 1461; the old Misericordia after 1441. The original 1435 Scuola S. Marco façade is unknown.

¹³ The Scuola San Marco’s portal dimension meets the first cornice level of Zanipolo. Thanks to Lorenzo Buonanno for sharing this insight, seen in Ralph Lieberman, *Renaissance Architecture in Venice: 1450-1540* (New York and London: Abbeville Press, 1982), Plate 66 (overleaf).

¹⁴ Ennio Concina, *A History of Venetian Architecture* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 109.

¹⁵ I discuss Alessandro Caravia’s work later in this paper. Huse and Wolters use the word “profane” in quotation marks, as referring to those *scuole* who did not follow church models, 106.

¹⁶ Christopher Black, *Italian confraternities in the sixteenth century* (Cambridge, England and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 90. The 1578 contract stated that the Mercanti wanted to increase “la divotione et Religione à Laude de la divina Maestà.” Black cites the merger date as 1576, though most other sources cite the 1570 date.

¹⁷ Membership in a *scuola grande* or *piccolo* was not strict and could often overlap. Sansovino joined the Misericordia upon his election to the role as *proto*. Giovanni Bellini, Zane and Bartolomeo Bon, Alvise Vivarini, and Gentile da Fabriano were members of the Scuola Grande di San Marco and the Mercanti Scuola. Bon worked on the façades of the former Misericordia Scuola, Mercanti Scuola and Madonna dell’Orto, and Scuola Grande della Carità, without any conflict of interest arising. Goy, 65-6, 122, 129. See also: Deborah Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 96-7.

¹⁸ The Mercanti wanted to merge with the Scuola Grande from as early as 1556. Scuola Grande della Misericordia, b.9, “Mariiegola Riformata,” c.52-56, Nov. 1570 and c.27, 25 Jan. 1555 m.v.(1556). See also: Scuole Piccole e Suffragii, b.436, c.94-99, in Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 110, 180 n.82. Cooper, 265, mentions that the Mercanti wanted to join the “proud Misericordia,” and also cites Howard’s same source in 346, n.20. Howard, though, refers to these sources as the Scuola Grande della Misericordia, a conclusion to which I also adhere. The Mercanti’s decades-long desire to merge with the Misericordia only makes sense to me, given the stated ambitions of the Mercanti, if that Misericordia was a *scuola grande*. See footnotes n.4 and 6.

¹⁹ Schulz, 137; Gramigna, 127; also Cooper, 263, 345 n.9.

²⁰ The Misericordia’s founding date is discussed in footnotes n. 2 and 4.

²¹ Gramigna, 27; also MacKenney, “The *scuole piccole*,” 181.

²² MacKenney, “The *scuole piccole*,” 180-81.

²³ For more on the *scuole grandi* and the *battuti* origins, see Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, esp. ff 37.

²⁴ Brian Pullan, "The *Scuole Grandi* of Venice: Some Further Thoughts," in Timothy Verdon and John Henderson, eds., *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, 272-301. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 274; MacKenney, "The *scuole piccole*," 181.

²⁵ Pullan, "Further Thoughts," 273-74.

²⁶ Gramigna, 69 for the Carmini, 110 for the Rosario.

²⁷ MacKenney, "The *scuole piccole*," 181.

²⁸ See Gramigna, 110, for the history and commissions of the Rosario.

²⁹ Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 96-112. Cooper, 264.

³⁰ Deborah Howard, *The Architectural History of Venice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 112.

³¹ Though certain *scuole piccole* could not afford buildings, many could and did construct their own meeting houses. For more on *scuole piccole* and their altars in churches, see Peter Humfrey, "Competitive Devotions: The Venetian *Scuole Piccole* as Donors of Altarpieces in the Years around 1500," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (Sep., 1988): 401-423; Peter Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993); Black, 239-41.

³² Huse and Wolters, 104-5. In Sansovino's 1581 city guide, he goes so far as to separate the six *scuole grandi* into a different chapter from the various other *scuole*, thus implying their distinctiveness of decoration.

³³ "Mariiegola riformata," 59, 10 December 1570, in Cooper, 265. I roughly translate the phrase as "with a visual trace/evidence of a *scuola grande*," associated with giving the feeling of a *scuola grande* building.

³⁴ Alessandro Caravia, *Il Sogno di Caravia* (Venice, 1541), in Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 117-24. Alessandro Caravia's 1541 published poem, *Il Sogno di Caravia*, criticizes all of the *scuole grandi* but specifically the Misericordia's continual competition to keep up with the Scuola San Rocco's lavish building project going on at that time. Besides Pullan, see Huse and Wolters, 104-14, for details on San Rocco's lavish expenditures, even the fact that the Scuola S. Rocco attempted to outnumber both the rooms and paintings of the Ducal Palace.

³⁵ ASV, Scuole piccole e suffrage, B. 413, 30, in Cooper, 267-8, 347, n.36. For a painting inventory of the Mercanti interior, see Gramigna and Perissa, 127-29. For possible ceiling reconstructions of the Mercanti interior, see Schulz, 136-38.

³⁶ The work and its location is recorded by Raffaello Borghini, *Il Riposo* (Florence, 1584), 556, and later by Marco Boschini, *Le minere della pittura* (Venice, 1664), 453, in Cooper, 267-8, 347 n.36.

³⁷ Boschini, 453, identifies the altarpiece as that of Benedetto Caliari, Paolo Veronese's brother. See Cooper, 268, 347 n.37.

³⁸ Gramigna, 128, describes the work as reported by Cigogna, that it was the main section of a larger piece flanked by *grisaille* panels of the Misericordia Madonna, St. Mark (in Brera Gallery, Milan) and Faith and Charity (in Accademia, Venice). Boschini, 453, similarly describes the work. The Cadabrozzo and Cottoni families' coat of arms are those present in addition to that of the Scuola. See also: Cooper, 268, 347, n.38.

³⁹ Grant Allen, *Grant Allen's Historical Guides: Venice* (London: E.G. Richards, 1906), 165. The description is regarding the works in the Veronese wing in the Accademia, Venice, where this painting remains today. Cooper discusses modern comparisons of Palladio's painted architecture (347, n.38, 348, n.69), relying on Nepi Scirè's analysis of Palladio's San Francesco della Vigna and Puppi's comparisons between the architecture in the painting and Palladio's Santa Maria Nova in Vicenza.

⁴⁰ Schulz, 137-38.

⁴¹ Gramigna, 127, writes that the interior of the Mercanti scuola was "preziosamente decorata." See also: Patricia Fortini Brown, "Le Scuole," *Storia di Venezia: dale origini alla caduta della Serenissima. 5: Il rinascimento, società ed economia*, ed. A. Tenuti and U. Tucci (Rome, 1996), 307-54, in Cooper, n.39, 347. Peter Humfrey and Richard MacKenney, 318, 321, write that the Mercanti was the "only trade-associated *scuola* to have commissioned a narrative cycle and painted ceiling in the manner of the *scuole grandi* before the end of the sixteenth century." Humfrey and MacKenney, "The Venetian Trade Guilds as Patrons of Art in the Renaissance," *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 128, No. 998 (May, 1986): 317-330.

⁴² Boschini, 449-54. Pietro Edwards' 1819 inventory lists more than ninety-two significant works, attesting to its importance. Most are now lost due to the Napoleonic suppression in the nineteenth century. See also: Gramigna, 127-29; Gustav Ludwig, *Archivalische Beiträge zur Geschichte der Venezianischen Kunst*, ed. W. Bode, G. Gronau, D. von Hadeln (*Italienische Forschungen*, IV, Berlin, 1911), 129-30, 146, in Schulz, 137-38.

⁴³ Wolfgang Wolters, *Storia e politica nei dipinti di Palazzo Ducale: aspetti dell'autocelebrazione della Repubblica di Venezia nel Cinquecento* (Venice, 1987), 157, trans. of *Der Bilderschmuck des Dogenpalastes: Untersuchungen zur Selbstdarstellung der Republik Venedig im 16. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden, 1983, in Cooper, 268, 347 n.40.

⁴⁴ Cooper, 268. A *stola* here refers to the distinguishing sash worn over the robes of the two kneeling figures in the left painting. The man in the red on the right painting without a *stola* was a "chancellor," another 'elevated title' for an officer in a *scuola piccolo*. See Cooper, 347 n.42.

⁴⁵ Schulz, 137, points out this important comparison.

⁴⁶ Black, 248.

⁴⁷ Schulz, 138. Aliense only aided in one *Lamentation*.

⁴⁸ Cooper, 111, 315 n.24. Cooper examines his S.G. Maggiore work in her book, but does not make the comparison between it and the Mercanti building as I have.

⁴⁹ ASV, Scuola Grande della Misericordia, B. 166, 284-85 and 409-10, in Cooper, 264. Sansovino's original plans for the Scuola della Misericordia were criticized for vaulting. See also: Deborah Howard, "La Scuola Grande della Misericordia di Venezia," In *La Scuola Grande della Misericordia di Venezia: Storia e progetto*, ed. Gianni Fabbri and Paola Piffaretti (Milan: Skira Editore, 1999), 30-31 and Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 104. For Sansovino's vaulting disaster in the Library Marciana (and his difficulty in regaining the Venetian trust and respect), see Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 20-21.

⁵⁰ Cooper, 264. On p.346, n. 15, Cooper points out Howard's observation from Rosand that the Scuola S. Rocco's "exploited this setback" (the Misericordia's rejection of Sansovino's freestanding columns) by using the element in their own later Scuola façade in the 1540's.

⁵¹ Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989, trans. of *Venezia e il Rinascimento*, Turin, 1985), in Cooper, 264. Howard, in *The Architectural History*, defines *proto* as "the architect in charge of the upkeep or construction of the buildings and other real estate property belonging to a Venetian institution or public body," xv. For Sansovino's role of *proto*, see Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, ff.101.

⁵² Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 101-02.

⁵³ Paolo Gualdo, "Life of Andrea Palladio," in Douglas Lewis, *The Drawings of Andrea Palladio* (New Orleans, 2000), 11; Silla Palladio, 27 Jan 1581, in Vicenza, BBV, Archivio dell'Accademia Olimpico, B. 1, reg. D, by date; Lionello Puppi, ed., *Andrea Palladio: scritti sull'architettura (1554-1579)* (Vicenza, 1988), 61; Puppi, *Palladio Drawings* (New York, 1990), 16, in Cooper, 269-71.

⁵⁴ Cooper, 269. Cooper discusses theories about the use and authorship of the drawing.

⁵⁵ Howard, "La Scuola Grande," 37-52; also Cooper 347 n.48.

⁵⁶ Fenlon, 248.

⁵⁷ Several paintings and prints feature this celebration, as do period writings. See, for example: Edward Muir, "Images of Power: Art and Pageantry in Renaissance Venice," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 84, No. 1 (Feb., 1979): 16-52; 43-45.

⁵⁸ Fenlon, 249.

⁵⁹ Sansovino, *Venetia*, 1968 (ed.), 401, in Andrea Bayer, ed., *Art and Love in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 148.

⁶⁰ Jost Amman (1519-1591), *Procession of the Doge to the Bucintoro on Ascension Day, with a View of Venice, ca. 1565, 1697*. Woodcut (posthumous third state). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, 1949 (49.95.5); in Bayer, ed., *Art and Love*, 148.

⁶¹ Bayer, ed., *Art and Love*, 145-48.

⁶² Francis Haskell notes several authors' comments on such pamphlets or "trousseau of verses," popular well into the eighteenth century. Haskell, *Patrons and Painters* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 333-34.

⁶³ For a Milanese example, see Bonino Mombrizio's *Epithalamium on the Wedding of Pietro Conte and Elisabetta da Vimercate*, Milan, ca. 1450-64. Parchment, 10 fols. The Morgan Library and Museum, New York. (MS M. 1148), illustrated in Bayer, ed., *Art and Love*, 140-41. For more documented fifteenth century *epithalamia*, see Anthony F. D'Elia, *The Renaissance of Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Harvard Historical Studies 146, 2004) and "Marriage, Sexual Pleasure, and Learned Brides in the Wedding Orations of Fifteenth-Century Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 55, No.2 (Summer 2002): 379-433.

⁶⁴ For an interesting record of period weddings, see Marin Sanudo's accounts in P.H. Labalme and L. Carroll, "How to (and How Not to) Get Married in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Selections from the Diaries of Marin Sanudo," *Renaissance Quarterly* 52, No. 1 (Spring, 1999): 43-72.

⁶⁵ Though the accumulation of interior cycles was an ongoing process culminating in the 1590's, at the point of the Lepanto procession in 1572, the interior would have been completed to Palladio's specifications. The extant commissioned art would have been on display, as well.

⁶⁶ Banners were thought to have migrated from Byzantium to the Western world where they were afterwards used in a liturgical manner. Doge Orseolo subsequently used them for the ceremony over two hundred years later. Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 116-19.

⁶⁷ For more on *trionfe* and usage of banners, see, for example, Muir, *Civic Ritual*.

⁶⁸ Translation by W.B. Wurthmann, "The Scuole Grandi and Venetian Art, c.1260-c.1500" (PhD Thesis, Chicago University, 1975), 150, 194, in Black, 249.

⁶⁹ Richard A. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and Demand for Art in Italy, 1300-1600* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 168-69, in Patricia Fortini Brown, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 13.

⁷⁰ The Mocenigo coat of arms is represented with two flowers; that of the Foscari has a single lion. See also: Brown, 13-15.

⁷¹ Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 100.

⁷² See the map of Venetian parishes by Michael Feeney, in Monica Chojnacki, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 2-3.

⁷³ The plaque honoring the first governor of the merged Scuola was both approved and installed in 1571, coinciding with the building's completion. See the pen and ink drawing by Giovanni Grevembroch, "Monumenta Veneta," 1759, Venice, Biblioteca del Museo Civico Correr, Cod. Gradenigo-Dolfin, 228, 3:59. For documents regarding the April-May 1571 approval for the inscription, see ASV, Scuole piccole e suffrage, B. 436, 101v; Rizzi, *Scultura Esterna a Venezia* (Venice, 1987), 274, notes the flanking saints as Francis and Mark, in Cooper, *Palladio's Venice*, 267, fig.283. See Gramigna, 127, who mentions that the sixteenth-century plaque (versus fifteenth-century attribution elsewhere) was transferred from the previous site at the Frari.

⁷⁴ For more on patrician laws, see Stanley Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). See also: Alexander Cowan, *Marriage, Manners and Mobility in Early Modern Venice* (Burlington, Vermont and Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).

⁷⁵ Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, 67, 72; Cowan, 29, 152.

⁷⁶ Hunecke, Volker. *Der venezianische Adel am Ende der Republik (1646-1797): Demographie, Familie, Haushalt* (Tubingen, 1995), 391, table 12, in Jutta Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 19. Sperling has estimated that in 1581 over half of patrician women in Venice lived in convents.

⁷⁷ Stanley Chojnacki, "Social Identity in Renaissance Venice: the second Serrata," *Renaissance Studies* 8 (1994): 341-58, 350; in Sperling, 23.

⁷⁸ Cowan, 86.

⁷⁹ ASV, AdC 108, in Cowan, 14. Also excluded in the 1589 law were those fathers and grandfathers who had been affiliated with manual occupations (*arte meccanica et manuale*). A few might have considered merchants in this category, but most did not, as I have already mentioned. See Cowan, especially 30, for more information.

⁸⁰ Cowan, 12.

⁸¹ See John Jeffries Martin and Dennis Romano, eds., *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797* (Baltimore, MD and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 9, in Cowan, 15, 73. Cowan also has changed his position on this topic, as he explains in Chapter 4, especially p.73ff.

⁸² Cowan, 15, 76-77. Many patricians rented their homes.

⁸³ ASV, AdC 356, in Cowan, 77.

⁸⁴ Cowan, 76. See also: Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 84-131.

⁸⁵ Humfrey, "Competitive Devotions," 402. I suggest that the Scuola's previous name before the 1570 merger, San Cristoforo ai Mercanti, likely appealed to the Doge because of his namesake.

⁸⁶ For the Scuola's membership lists for the period 1377-1520, see ASV, Scuole Piccole, B.406, Santa Maria e San Cristofalo, Mariiegola 1377-1545, in Humfrey and MacKenney, "The Venetian Trade Guilds," 318, 321.

⁸⁷ Gramigna, 27.

⁸⁸ Cowan, 86-89.

⁸⁹ Cowan, 86.

⁹⁰ L.P. Smith, *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton* (Oxford, 1907), vol. 2, 133; in Cowan, 86.

⁹¹ The Tomasi trust, established in 1398, is mentioned in Pullan, *Rich and Poor*, 129, and Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino*, 110.

⁹² Juergen Schulz has documented many of these *soffitto* in *Venetian Painted Ceilings of the Renaissance*. Thanks to Esther Gabel for pointing this out to me.

⁹³ John Kent Lydecker, "The Domestic Setting of the Arts in Renaissance Florence" (PhD Diss.: The Johns Hopkins University, 1987), 145, in Bayer, *Art and Love*, 64.

⁹⁴ Numerous Venetian ceramic, wooden, and glass objects also feature marital themes and stories. Other Venetian works like Titian's *Venus and the Organist* (ca. 1550-55), have been suggested to be marriage-related. For a catalogue of such items, see Bayer, *Art and Love*.

⁹⁵ Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, 87-88.

⁹⁶ Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, 76-94. Chojnacki gives numerous examples of marital contracts and the usage of fifteenth-century Venetian *corredo* and dowries.

⁹⁷ Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, 91.

⁹⁸ ASV, CI 193, Soris, prot. 1410, f. 2r (17 April 1410), in Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, 92-93, 280 n.63.

⁹⁹ Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, 34-5.

¹⁰⁰ Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, 34.

¹⁰¹ Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, 31-4.

¹⁰² ASV, Voci 4, in Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, 253, 342 n.43.

¹⁰³ Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, 247.

¹⁰⁴ Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 98.

¹⁰⁵ Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 100-101, 118-20.

¹⁰⁶ For more on the Marriage to the Sea, see Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 101, 118-130.

¹⁰⁷ Bayer, 148.

¹⁰⁸ See Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, 39; Muir, *Civic Ritual*, 127-128.

¹⁰⁹ Adrian W.B. Randolph, "Unpacking Cassoni: Marriage, Ritual, Memory," in Cristelle Baskins, ed., *The Triumph of Marriage: Painted Cassoni of the Renaissance* (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum; Sarasota: The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2008), 18.

¹¹⁰ From MacKenney's translation of the ASV, Provveditori di Comun, reg.N, fol.603v: "imitando le vestigie della Scole Grande delle quail questa non si riputa inferior." MacKenney, "Continuity and Change," 400, n.34; also "The *scuole piccole*," 181. MacKenney notes that the Scuola S. Cristofalo thought highly of themselves. I take this further, stating that S. Cristofalo (the Mercanti) actually wanted to advance to *grande* status.

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