Alberti Before Florence: Early Sources Informing Leon Battista Alberti’s *De Pictura*

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

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De pictura by Leon Battista Alberti (1404?-1472) is the earliest surviving treatise on visual art written in humanist Latin by an ostensible practitioner of painting. The book represents a definitive moment of cohesion between the two most conspicuous cultural developments of the early Renaissance, namely, humanism and the visual arts. This dissertation reconstructs the intellectual and visual environments in which Alberti moved before he entered Florence in the curia of Pope Eugenius IV in 1434, one year before the recorded date of completion of De pictura. For the two decades prior to his arrival in Florence, from 1414 to 1434, Alberti resided in Padua, Bologna, and Rome. Examination of specific textual and visual material in those cities – sources germane to Alberti’s humanist and visual development, and thus to the ideas put forth in De pictura – has been insubstantial. This dissertation will therefore present an investigation into the sources available to Alberti in Padua, Bologna and Rome, and will argue that this material helped to shape the prescriptions in Alberti’s canonical Renaissance tract. By more fully accounting for his intellectual and artistic progression before his arrival in Florence, this forensic reconstruction aims to fill a gap in our knowledge of Alberti’s formative years and thereby underline impact of his early career upon his development as an art theorist.
This dissertation of Peter Francis Weller is approved.

Peter Stacey

Robert Williams

Charlene Villaseñor Black, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014
Dedicated to my extraordinary wife, Sheri and beautiful son, Teddy, both of whom never allowed reading Latin in bed;

To my own personal ‘Pietro Bembo,’ Mark Hime of Biblioctopus;

and to Stan and Brian Shuster of the Grand Havana Room who loaned me the “office” for seven years to complete the bulk of this toil.
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Introduction

Leon Battista Alberti’s *De pictura* is the earliest treatise on visual art written in humanist Latin rhetorical prose by an ostensible practitioner of painting (Fig. 0.1).¹ We surmise from a note in Alberti’s hand in his copy of Cicero’s *Brutus* that he finished *De pictura* in August 1435, around twelve months after his first documented visit to Florence, the city from which his family had been exiled from 1387 to 1428.² Alberti was Florentine by lineage only. Scholarship places his birth in Genoa in 1404.³ He studied in Padua and Bologna and worked in Rome before living in Florence from 1434 to 1436 and again from 1439 to 1441.⁴ He subsequently accomplished major works in Mantua, Ferrara, and Rimini, passed time in Venice and Urbino, dying in 1472 in


² Mancini, *Vita*, 66. The copy is in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. Lat. 67, cl. XI, ex. 3859, Cicero, *Ad Brutum*. The inscription reads: “This Friday, the 26th hour and three quarters I did on the day of 26th of August, 1435, complete the work *De pictura*, Baptista, Florence.” (*Die Verneris ora xx 3/4 quae fuit dies 26, Augusti 1435, complevi opus De pictura Florentiae, B[aptista]*)

³ Passerini, 132. See also Mancini, *Vita*, 30. The assumed date of Alberti’s birth is derived from a note of Genoa, February 14, of 1404, on the cover of a MS of *De re aedificatoria*, found in Urbino in the 1480s, now in Florence.

⁴ For an approximate time line of Alberti’s life see Franco Borsi, 375.
Rome where he had resided for several decades.

An Italian text of De pictura entitled Della pittura, was completed, according to a note at the end of the book, around July 1436.\(^5\) Whether Alberti’s 1435 Latin note on the Brutus referring “opus Picturae Florentiae” refers to his Latin version of the text or his Italian version of the work is not clear.\(^6\) The standard scholarly view, endorsed by Anthony Grafton in his intellectual biography of Alberti, is that the Latin text came first, in 1435, and that Alberti amended his Latin treatise in Italian to accommodate those less literate in the ancient language.\(^7\) As recently as 2011 Rocco Sinisgalli has argued for the opposite sequence. Alberti’s initial intention was to write the work in vernacular and, subsequently, hone his precepts in Latin.\(^8\) Notwithstanding that debate, this work focuses on explicating the Latin text for reasons that will be discussed. I thus adhere to Grafton’s and the conventional view.

One dominant historiographical assumption about De pictura is that the book is best explained as the product of a Florentine intellectual working within that city’s artistic context. Kenneth Clark, for instance, claimed that the preface to Alberti’s vernacular edition:

… rather implies that what he found there [in Florence] took him by surprise. It seemed reasonable to suppose that he spent the next two years frequenting the company of artists, and it was from this experience that, in 1435-6, Della pittura was written.\(^9\)

Clark’s account continued in hagiographical mode:

… such was the formidable young man who, in the summer of 1434, returned to Florence and resumed his

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\(^5\) See Grayson, “The Texts,” in On Painting and On Sculpture, 3. See also Spencer, “Sources,” in Leon Battista Alberti On Painting, 33. Two surviving redacted manuscripts of Della pittura are based upon a third and the most reliable copy, MS II.IV, 38 in the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence.

\(^7\) Grafton, Leon Battista Alberti, 97-101.

\(^8\) Alberti, On Painting, ed. Sinisgalli, 9.

friendship with the circle of humanist artists. After less than a year spent in studying their work and listening to their conversation he was prepared to give theoretical shape to what he had learnt.\textsuperscript{10}

Here Clark refers to Alberti’s ostensible homage to Masaccio (Tomaso di Ser Giovanni di Simone, 1421-1428) Donatello (Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi, 1386-1466), Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446), Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455) and Luca della Robbia (1400-1482) in his prologue to the vernacular \textit{Della pittura} (1436). The relevant passage reads:

\begin{quote}
But after I came back here to this most beautiful of cities from the long exile in which we Albertis have grown old, I recognized in many, but above all in you, Filippo, and in our great friend the sculptor Donatello and in the others, Nencio, Luca and Masaccio, a genius for every laudable enterprise in no way inferior to any of the ancients who gained fame in these arts.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

In attempts to contextualize his book within the values and precepts of Florentine art, previous scholarship on the visual sources informing \textit{De pictura} have suggested purely local Tuscan works such as: Donatello’s \textit{predella} relief of his \textit{St. George} for the Or San Michelle (Figs. 0.2 and 0.3); his \textit{Feast of Herod} for the Baptistery of Siena (Fig. 0.4); Ghiberti’s panels on the east doors of the Florence baptistery (1425-1452, Fig. 0.5); or Masaccio’s \textit{Trinity} in the church of \textit{Santa Maria Novella} in Florence (Fig. 0.6) and \textit{St. Peter} cycle in the Brancacci Chapel. While it is certainly true that historians must account for this praise of Florentine artists and their works, there are methods of doing so which may reduce the relative importance of Alberti’s brief experience of local Florentine environs. Alberti may have encountered the works of both Masaccio and Donatello in Rome, for example, before he ever saw anything of their oeuvre in

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., \textit{Leon Battista Alberti On Painting: Annual Italian Lecture of the British Academy} (London: Cumberledge, 1944), 4.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{11} Grayson, \textit{Leon Battista Alberti: On Painting and On Sculpture}, 4, 32-33. “Ma poi che io dal lungo essilio in quale siamo noi Alberti invecchiate, qui fui in questa nostra sopra l’altra ornatissima patria ridotto, compresi in molti ma prima in te, Filippo, e in quel nostro amicissimo Donato scultore, e in quegli altri Nencio e Luca e Masaccio, essere a ogni lodata cosa ingegno da non posporli a qual si sia stato antique e famoso in queste arti.”
\end{flushright}
Florence in 1434, an idea also postulated by Richard Krautheimer.\(^{12}\) In addition, the “Masaccio” to whom Alberti refers may refer, not the seminal painter of early-Quattrocento realism, but to a sculptor who, alongside the other artists heralded in the passage, worked on the Duomo in Florence. Both of these arguments will also be developed in chapter 5 addressing Alberti’s influences in Rome.

In any event, despite Clark’s assertions, to accept *De pictura* as the result of only twelve months in Florence is implausible. In his 1972 edition of the book, Grayson argued that, since Alberti arrived in Florence with the papal legate only around June of 1434 and *De pictura* was completed in 1435, the book is neither the result of a single year’s residence nor the “encounter with Florence and her artists.”\(^{13}\) In 2011, furthermore, Francesco Furlan recently minimized the importance of a Florentine context altogether regarding Alberti’s life:

> The fact is that it appears that there is no evidence of a physical or emotional or mental connection of Alberti to Florence, any more than to Venice, Ferrara, Bologna, Mantua, Rome …\(^{14}\)

As Furlan reminds us, Alberti did not consider himself a Florentine at all, even after having lived there. In *De iiciarchia* (1468), the last surviving work he ever penned, Alberti wrote:

> Of these customs of land and city of Florence, it never happened to me to encounter them elsewhere or get to know them. I’m like a stranger (to Florence). Rarely would I go there and little (time) would I stay...\(^{15}\)

In fact, Alberti admitted in his own *Vita anonyma* (1437-38?) that, when writing the first book of his social treatise, *Della famiglia* (c. 1435) in Rome in ninety days, he attempted to write it in


\(^{14}\) Francesco Furlan, “Per Un Ritratto dell’Alberti,” *Albertiana* 14 (2011): 43-44. “Ma il fatto si e che l’Alberti non pare e non risulta ne materialmente ne forse idealmente legato a Firenze più di quanto non lo sia a Venezia, a Ferrara e Bologna o Mantova, a Roma...”

Tuscan “to help those who were ignorant of Latin,” but adds that:

… the language was rough and unpolished and could hardly be called Tuscan; for the long exile of the Alberti meant that he had not been raised in the language and it was hard for him to write it elegantly and properly when he was unaccustomed to writing it at all.16

Even the Florentine language appeared alien to him. Alberti’s aim in De pictura, however, was not to impress local Italians in a painter’s classroom, workshop or studio but, on the contrary, to educate a cultural elite who had studied the classics and would view his Latin work as a refined neo-classical argument designed to lift the status of painting to be equal to that of the liberal arts.

The aim of this dissertation is to follow those recent historians – Grayson, Grafton, and now Furlan – who insist on the crucial importance of Alberti’s education and early career, prior to his arrival in Florence. In so doing, the lines of transmission of ideas in his education in both textual and visual art help us elucidate the fundamental sources of Alberti’s theories and prescriptions for painting in his seminal text. Even if we allow the possibility, notwithstanding the absence of any evidence to support it, that Alberti returned to Florence in 1428 – the year of termination of his family’s exile – before his first documented presence in the city in 1434, scholarship remains in need of an extensive reconstruction of Alberti’s intellectual and artistic education in his pre-Florentine years. This dissertation will provide a more profound account of both the intellectual and visual milieu in which Alberti passed his formative years in the two decades prior to De pictura’s completion. In so doing, the research will refine understanding of the sources in the book’s development. This process, however, demands turning away from the Florentine Renaissance and focusing on three other centers of intellectual and artistic endeavor, which were crucial in shaping the terms of Alberti’s treatise: Padua, Bologna and Rome.

16 Ibid., Vita anonyma, ed. Bonucci, 94. See also ibid., trans. Watkins, 8. “Scripsit praeterea et affinium suorum gratia, ut linguae latine ignoris prodesset, patrio sermone animi ante trigesimum aetatis suae etruscos libros, primum, secundum, ac tertium de Familia, quos Romae die nonagesimo, quam inchoarat, absolvit; sed inelimatos, et asperos, neque usquequaque etruscos.”
My work, consequently, is divided into five chapters. The first three are devoted to Padua. The initial chapter will paint the political and intellectual backdrop of Padua before Alberti’s arrival. The second chapter will elucidate the context of Alberti’s humanist education and the third chapter the visual sources in Padua. The fourth and fifth chapters will then explore the intellectual and visual material which Alberti either certainly encountered, or may have encountered, in Bologna and Rome, respectively. Therefore, after the initial chapter – a discussion on the broad shape of Padua’s humanist evolution – each of the remaining four chapters examines the intellectual and art-historical contexts of Alberti’s early years: during his time in Padua, from 1414 to perhaps 1421; in Bologna, from 1421 to perhaps 1428; and his early employment in Rome from 1431 to 1434. Each chapter begins with discussion of the dates of Alberti’s movements and offers preliminary contextual remarks regarding the relevant historical, institutional and artistic developments in each of the three cities. The chapter is then divided into an assessment of the texts, which either certainly informed or may have informed Alberti’s work, as well as the visual material that Alberti may have seen. Those textual and visual materials, in turn, divide into two groups: the ancient and the post-classical, either medieval or Renaissance. The sum of the chapters and conclusion will demonstrate how these materials are endemic to *De pictura*. By correlating context, text and art to the book’s prescriptions that painting should “hold and charm the eyes and minds of spectators,” this dissertation will demonstrate how these early sources generated the concepts, framework and vocabulary of *De pictura*.17

In sum, this work argues that Alberti began with notes, observations of art, mathematics, and antique figures – both legendary and real – as well as text, descriptions and vocabulary. Thus, holding with Grayson and others that the Latin manuscript, *De pictura*, preceded the

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17 Alberti, *De pictura*, III.52, 94-95. “Finis pictoris laudem, gratiam et benivolentiam vel magis quam divitias ex opere adipisci. Id quidem assequetur pictor dum eius pictura oculos et animos spectantium tenebit atque movebit.”
vernacular version by a year, and that the tract was not the product of twelve months in Florence, my work views *De pictura* as the final solidification of these studies and observances gleaned from and gestated in Padua, Bologna and Rome. The culmination of this knowledge would be a Latin text serving Alberti’s ultimate goal – to raise painting as equal in humanist status to the liberal arts. My work, therefore, presents a forensic reconstruction of textual and visual sources that, by more fully organizing Alberti’s intellectual and artistic progression before 1434, will re-evaluate the impact of his early career upon his evolution as an art theorist. Moreover, as a work of interdisciplinary research, this study means to further conjoin intellectual with visual art history and thus offer a clearer comprehension of Alberti to both disciplines.

**Defining the Context: Two Polemics Regarding *De pictura* in Historical Time**

Erwin Panofsky argued the difficulty in obtaining a correct understanding of a work of art without “having divined, as it were, its historical locus… we subject our practical experience to a controlling principle which can be called the *history of style.*”18 Panofsky’s basic point regards the importance of historical context in the act of interpretation. Two persistent polemics surround *De pictura*’s interpretation and use of classical aesthetics within historical context. The primary debate regards the extent of mutual influence between humanism and the visual arts. Recent scholarship aims to correct the common notion that the two disciplines were intertwined during the early Quattrocento.19 The instructional manual *Il libro dell’arte*, penned in Italian by Cennino da Andrea Cennini (1370-1440), believed begun in Padua in the late 1300s, and Ghiberti’s *Commentarii* of 1450, are the major surviving discourse concerning the visual arts in

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the early Quattrocento. However, these are not humanist texts. This absence of surviving humanist discourse, however, does not invalidate a possible bilateral influence of antique aesthetics that might have furthered mutual awareness in humanists and artists. There are two methods by which the disciplines may have intersected. Art may have affected early humanists by transmitting aspects of the visual history of antiquity. On the other hand, those humanists may have subsequently influenced the early-Quattrocento discussion and criticism of art and architecture. In other words, if antique art and its post-antique imitation impacted early humanist thinking in the Trecento, art and text would begin to interchange values, and the resulting conjunction would inform the work of a theorist like Alberti.

Consequently, the distinctions with Alberti as regards history of style are twofold. First, as opposed to Cennini, Ghiberti, Piero della Francesca (1415-1492), and Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) – all of whom were artists who wrote notes, diaries and expanded technique as *addenda* to their artistic exploits – Alberti did not come from a workshop but from a long, studious apprenticeship in the liberal arts in Padua and Bologna and as papal scribe in Rome. He was, therefore, primarily the converse – a *writer-humanist* who then applied the rhetorical craft to the visual art process. Rhetoric is material to this thesis because, as Robert Williams reminds,

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21 Francis Ames-Lewis, *The Intellectual Life of the Renaissance Artist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 41. Ames-Lewis remarks, “beyond the occasional letter” there is no work from an artist between these two exempla. See also Troncelliti, 25. Troncelliti argues for Cennini completing *Il Libro* two years after *De pictura* in Florence, in 1437 the date on the oldest surviving manuscript of the opus, now in the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence.

22 Hope and McGrath, 161. Humanists may have occasionally consulted on visual art subjects. Bruni, as Chancellor of Florence, advised the *Arte de Calimala* regarding Lorenzo Ghiberti’s *Gates of Paradise* for that city’s baptistery.

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“the entire vocabulary of literary stylistics, soon to be adapted to the visual arts [via Alberti] derives from it.”\(^{23}\) Secondly, however, there is no obvious contemporary progenitor for *De pictura*. The book’s domain of antique personages, paintings and precepts, points to a text conceived and developed in humanist Latin, yet there is no Latin tract or argument, so precisely laid out in neo-classical rhetorical fashion with which to compare Alberti’s book on painting. If, therefore, we are looking to contextualize *De pictura* within Panofsky’s *history of style*, we must look to Alberti’s humanism – his education in the Renaissance cycle of studies revived from Roman antiquity, the so-called *studia humanitatis* of grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy. This educational ideal had been resurrected by humanists before, including, and after Petrarch (1304-1374).\(^{24}\) Alberti’s immersion in humanism began, crucially, in Padua with humanist teacher, Gasparino Barzizza (1360-1431), and clearly continued in both Bologna and Rome. The effect of this is visible in the text of *De pictura* in two essential respects – in form and in content, inclusive of even the language of text and title.

A second debate surrounding *De pictura* concerns the book’s didactic and practical impact on contemporary painters. Either Alberti’s theory subsequently evolved into practice or his theory evolved from practice. One body of opinion argues that the advent of Alberti’s methods, such as fixed perspective, preceded or at least coincided with the practical application of the technique by innovators such as Brunelleschi and Masaccio; hence, Alberti was the theoretical progenitor of a technical practice in early-Quattrocento art.\(^{25}\) However, no discourse


survives from contemporary painters referring to Alberti’s theories on art. Moreover, Alberti includes no illustrations in *De pictura*, unlike, for instance, Piero’s *De prospectiva pingendi*, (1480). Hence, the contradictory position holds that Alberti was an intellectual observer who analyzed and elaborated on techniques already fundamental to the applied art of the craftsman.26

**Audience of Humanists**

This second polemic raises the important question of *De pictura*’s purpose. Some scholars argue that the book’s language is derivative and general – that Alberti did not intend to instruct artists at all but to inform an audience of humanist aristocrats.27 As J.V. Field sees it, Alberti’s long exposition on the subject of *historia* (narrative) indicates the book’s focus on the patron – the dictator of subject matter as opposed to the artisan who was only the recipient of an order of what to paint.28 Michael Baxandall’s *Giotto and the Orators* (1971) remains the definitive study of the confluence of these two paradigms and the subsequent influence of classical and humanist text upon early modern painting.29 In view of Alberti’s humanist education, we can appreciate more the profundity of Baxandall’s argument that while humanists viewed visual images as well as precepts regarding visual images founded upon rhetorical precedence, the opposite was rare:

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There was not much reason why the general run of Quattrocento painters should be directly influenced by any text; they learned from visual things, from models, tricks, formulas, groupings.\footnote{Ibid., 133.}

The aim of *De pictura* is to instruct an educated class of readers about painting and convince those readers of its importance. This adheres to Cicero’s view about the purpose of rhetoric with regard to an audience: to instruct; delight; and move (*docere, delectare, movere*). However, Cicero follows with: delighting an audience is free; moving them is indispensable, but “the orator is duty bound to *instruct*.”\footnote{Cicero, *De optimo genere oratorum*, trans. H.M. Hubbell (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), I.3, 356-357. “Optimus est enim orator, qui dicendo animos audientium et docet et delectat et permovet. Docere debitum est, delectare honorarium permovere necessarium.”}

Alberti, like Cicero, does not dictate but rather exemplifies, reminding of his own efforts while leaving conclusions to the reader. On the other hand, as John Spencer points out, we know more about Alberti’s *intellectual* past than we know of his *pictorial* past.\footnote{Alberti, *On Painting*, ed. and trans. John Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 1-8. See also Field, *The Invention of Infinity*, 29.} Experience in centers of major visual art transformations signify periods of incubation for his painting theory before his arrival in Florence that would meld the two paradigms of visual and discursive art within those geographical contexts. What Alberti puts forth in this regard reflects the central task of the painter to organize images in pictorial representation, just as it was for the orator in rhetorical presentation. These objectives come together most significantly in Alberti’s theory of *historia*, clearly illuminated by articles by both Grafton and Hope.\footnote{Grafton, “*Historia and Istoria*: Alberti’s Terminology in Context,” *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 8 (2000): 37-68.} This theory of *historia* will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5 of this work on Rome.

*De pictura* thus stands as an early humanist tract aimed at a humanist cultural elite. Stating that the book “grows directly out of the system… of rhetorical humanism,” Baxandall stressed...
that *De pictura* impressed humanist students like Federigo da Montefeltro (1422-1482) in Urbino.\textsuperscript{34} Montefeltro studied in Mantua from 1434 to 1437 with Vittorino da Feltre (1378-1446, Fig. 0.7), an associate of Barzizza in Padua and probable teacher of Alberti as well.

Alberti, an exiled aristocrat fortunate enough to be educated by seminal humanists, did not immediately alter the entire course of art with *De pictura*; on the contrary, he infused humanist education with an *appreciation of art appreciation* and, consequently, virtually began the discipline of art criticism. *De pictura* marks a seminal attempt to extract the pictorial arts from the grip of religiosity and put them on a secular footing. Alberti attempted to construct a critical science about the replication of three-dimensional nature on a two-dimensional plane. In so doing *De pictura* changed the way in which art would henceforth be appreciated by connoisseur, prince, collector and humanist. Thereafter, painters would become increasingly subject to the universe of written opinion. In this regard *De pictura* again stands apart from Ghiberti’s notes in his *Commentarii*, Piero’s dense *De prospectiva pingendi* as well as Leonardo’s tracts from 1489 to 1511. As the first fusion of humanist intellectual concerns with painting, *De pictura* significantly altered the terms visual art discourse in the early modern era.

Illuminating this breakthrough, Charles Hope and Elizabeth McGrath maintain a strong distinction between the development of visual art in the Renaissance and the development of humanist culture.\textsuperscript{35} How this argument affects our attempt to contextualize Alberti’s work demands review of some questions about the source of the book’s structure insofar as that structure relates to the sources of Alberti’s vocabulary. For instance, depending upon the

\textsuperscript{34} Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, 122.

\textsuperscript{35} Hope and McGrath, 161-165.
scholarship, De pictura has been labeled treatise, theory, science and moral edification. D.R. Edward Wright, however, states that De pictura is neither treatise, nor theory, nor science, since it does not describe itself as a tractatus, ars, or ratio. Wright argues that the form of De pictura follows the Institutio oratoria of Quintilian, especially in its tripartite organization of elementa, ars, and artifex. The similarity to Quintilian is closest in Book III of De pictura, in which Alberti transfers the rhetorician’s two prerequisites for good oratory – philosophy and civil law, expounded in Book XII of the Institutio – to geometry and poetry as prerequisites for good painting. Alberti’s very first sentence calls his work both a commentarium and an oratio. An oratio, however, does not have a tri-partite composition, which De pictura employs. Evolving from Aristotle’s idea of “generalities to particulars,” the pseudo-Cicero Rhetorica ad Herennium specifies the tripartite exemplum, wherein there is an introduction of the art and its intent, followed by an outline of the art’s divisions, concluded with the body of exposition and details.


38 Quintilian, Institutio oratoria, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 12.2.5, 222-223. Regarding philosophy, Quintilian cites Cicero’s 3rd book of De oratore. (Neque enim frustra in tertio de Oratore libro L. Crassus… Idem tamen confiteetur ea iam esse a philosophia petenda…) For the importance of civil law, see ibid., 12.3.1, 236-237. (Iuris quoque civilis necessaria… quam capesset.)

39 Alberti, De pictura, I.1, 36-37. “De pictura his brevissimiis commentariis conscripti, quo clarior sit nostra oratio, a mathematicis ea primum, quae ad rem pertinere videbuntur, accipiemus.”

40 Aristotle, Physics, I.20.184a, in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon, trans. R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye (New York: Modern Library), 218. See also Harry Caplan ed., [Cicero] Rhetorica ad Herennium, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press), II.1.2, 60-61. “It remained for me, as it seemed, to show by what method we can adapt the means of invention to each type of issue or its subdivision… both these departments belong to Proof and Refutation. Then finally I have explained what kind of Conclusions to speeches to employ.” (Reliquum videbatur esse ut ostenderemus quae ratio posset inventions ad unam quamque constitutionem aut partem constitutionis accommodare, et item quales argumentations… quorum utrumque pertinent ad confirmationem et ad confutationem. Deinde ad extremum docuimus cuiusmodi conclusionibus orationum uti oporteat…)
Mark Jarzombek views that the methods of *De pictura* are medieval in origin, and that the book relates more to the “setting into practice” of cultural theory than to art itself. ¹⁴¹ Jarzombek does not address the inheritance of Aristotle or Quintilian in structure, but only points out that the book’s genre, in its invention of an instructive jargon, is inherited from medieval scholasticism. If the genre of *De pictura*, despite its debt to classical structure, is indeed medieval in origin, then the book can only be so in the context of imposing language on a craft that was evolving into a more precise naturalism while using the medieval technique of scholastic treatise to enlighten a learned public. Given, however that Alberti’s very first sentence calls the work both *commentarium* and *oratio*, if the structure were most closely derived from Quintilian, then the book’s organization and purpose could be considered neo-classical, deriving from Padua where Alberti first encountered the works of Quintilian, and then evolving in Bologna where the humanist continued those studies. Furthermore, if we lay out the lineage of humanism in Padua and Bologna, we begin to detect a current of humanist appreciation for visual arts that inspired Alberti’s vocabulary in *De pictura*. Therefore, despite any medieval formalism, the indisputable contribution of *De pictura* to the Italian Renaissance is the book’s union of method and subject as the first modern discourse incorporating classical concepts and vocabulary concerning visual art. In so doing, the book is the pivotal tract raising painting to an eminence equal to the liberal arts. As Baxandall observed:

Drawing analogies between painting and writing was one of the first devices of Latin rhetoric revived by the humanists of the fourteenth century. Indeed, after Petrarch the habit of doing so can never be seen as in itself implying an active interest or familiarity with the painter and his procedures; it was already the

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common place which by conversion had such serious consequences for painting of the later Renaissance.\footnote{Baxandall, “ Guarino, Pisanello, and Manuel Chrysoloras,” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 28, (1965), 183.}

If we want to understand Alberti’s language and the origins of De pictura’s structure, syntax and ideas, we must recreate, piecemeal, his pre-Florentine environs in Padua, Bologna and Rome. This dissertation is divided into five chapters: three chapters on the Paduan context; one on the Bolognese context; and a final chapter on the Roman context.

**Chapter 1: Padua: Historical and Intellectual Context**

The investigation into pre-Florentine sources for De pictura by Alberti pivots upon examination of the humanist culture of Padua, the site of Alberti’s first encounter with antiquity. First, this work will extend current research into the political context of Padua’s commune and the subsequent Carrara dynasty under which humanism in Italy began to flourish. Secondly, this work will examine the profound importance of Padua to early humanism within the intellectual and pedagogical Renaissance history, that is to say the lines of transmission from the central values of civic humanism up to the early 1400s. These indicate a Paduan tradition that begins with Rolandino Patavino (1200-1276) and continues with Lovato Lovati (1240-1309), Albertino Mussato (1261-1329), and others of the early Trecento. Under the Carrara, a dynamic humanism and humanist pedagogy took root with Petrarch, and continued with Giovanni di Conversino da Ravenna (1343-1408) and Pier Paolo Vergerio (1370-1444). In 1402, for example, Vergerio authored the first humanist endorsement of painting and drawing as an art in *De ingenuis moribus et liberalibus adulescentiae studiis liber* (The Character and Studies Befitting a Free-Born Youth).\footnote{Pier Paolo Vergerio, *Ad Ubertinum de Carraria de ingenuis moribus et liberalibus adulescentiae studiis liber*} Both George Holmes and Ronald Witt hold that the century from Lovato to

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43 Pier Paolo Vergerio, *Ad Ubertinum de Carraria de ingenuis moribus et liberalibus adulescentiae studiis liber*
Vergerio constitutes the apogee of early humanism and that humanists working in and around Padua were responsible for a new scholarship in the Renaissance, restoring Padua to a position of intellectual prestige, which it had not enjoyed since Roman antiquity.  

**Chapter 2: Alberti in Padua I: Alberti’s Intellectual Education (c. 1414-1420)**

This chapter will explore and extend the current research into the antique and medieval textual sources that informed Alberti’s vocabulary in *De pictura*. (The following chapter will examine the visual sources.) Four crucially important humanist teachers bequeathed Padua its legacy of humanist pedagogy: the aforementioned Conversino and especially Barzizza, who taught Alberti along with Alberti’s humanist contemporaries, Francesco Barbaro (1390-1454, Fig. 0.8) and Antonio Beccadelli (known as Il Panormita, 1391-1474, Fig. 0.9), among others. Padua’s intellectual legacy continued with innovations in humanist teaching from Guarino da Verona (1374-1460) and Vittorino, both of whom were also lecturers at Barzizza’s school during Alberti’s studies, assisting in bringing Alberti’s attention to classical texts, mathematical precepts, and, perhaps, the monuments and painting in that city that engendered his lexicon.

**Early Access to Classical Authors**

Alberti’s numerous references to classical authors in *De pictura* raises the question of how and when antiquity began to inform the book’s precepts. For example, during Alberti’s residence at the boarding school of Barzizza, from around 1414 to 1421, two events that represent transformative moments in the evolution of humanist education. First, Guarino’s 1411

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translation of Plutarch’s *De educatione puerorum* (*On The Education of Children*) into Latin became, in essay form, one of the more popular treatises of the ancient author’s *Moralia*.\(^{45}\)

Secondly, in 1416 Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459) discovered the complete text of the *Institutio oratoria*, Quintilian’s monumental handbook on rhetoric and the education of the orator, in the monastery of the Swiss Abbey of St. Gall. Both Barzizza, as well Vittorino who lived in Barzizza’s house for a period during Alberti’s residence at the school, had early access to these manuscripts through friendships with both Guarino and Poggio.\(^{46}\) Both texts were cornerstones in the humanist effort to add definition to their concept of classical studies and to liberate the Latin language and ideology of the ancients from the restrictions of medieval scholasticism.

Alberti’s humanist schooling in Padua, and the role of visual art within his education, informed his views regarding the importance and use of *imitatio* or imitation. Alberti developed this motif from Barzizza who had addressed the topic in that humanist educator’s tract *De Imitatione* (1413-1417).\(^{47}\) Barzizza’s treatise, particularly in its use of the metaphor of *bees* is, like the tract on the same subject in Book I, letter 8 of Petrarch’s *Rerum familiarum libri* (1325-1361), heavily dependent upon the ideas expressed in letter 84 of Seneca’s *Epistulae morales*.\(^{48}\)

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\(^{46}\) Ibid., 25-27.

\(^{47}\) Alberti, *De pictura*, II.35, 72-73. “In order to achieve this [*historia*] there seems to me no surer way than to look at Nature… the wonder maker of things has composed the surfaces in beautiful members. We should apply ourselves with all our thought and attention to *imitating* her…” (*Quonam vero pacto id assequamur, nullalia modo mihi visa est via certior quam ut naturam ipsam intueamur… mira rerum artifex, in pulcherrimis membris superficies composuerit. In qua imitanda omni cogitatione et cura versari veloque...*)

\(^{48}\) Petrarch, *Rerum familiarum libri* (*Letters on Familiar Matters*), trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), I.8, 41. “If after a trial you discover that it is ineffectual, you must blame Seneca… His loftiest advice about invention is to imitate the bees which, through an astonishing process, produce wax and honey from the flowers they leave behind.” See also Lucius Anneaus Seneca the Younger, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*, trans. Richard Gummere (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), Ep. 84, 278-279. “We also, I say, ought to copy these bees, and sift whatever we have gathered from a varied course of reading, for such things are better preserved if they are kept separate; then, by applying the supervising care with which our nature has endowed us; in other words, our natural gifts, we should so blend those several flavors into one delicious
The usefulness and advantages of imitation are the subject also of the entirety of 10.2 in Quintilian’s *Institutio*. Barzizza was highly familiar with Seneca’s ideas, having begun his commentary on the philosopher’s *Epistulae Morales* in 1408. Furthermore, a letter of 1416 from Barzizza to a student’s father, to be discussed in chapter 2, delivers the seminal surviving humanist recommendation for imitation as an explicit basis for painting practice.

Barzizza taught both Cicero and Quintilian to Alberti. *De Pictura* contains eight references to or citations from Cicero, which I will list here as evidence of Alberti’s classical training in Padua: one from *De Inventione* regarding the lesson of the ancient painter Zeuxis; one from *De Oratore* regarding the importance of using good models in training; one from *Orator*, in which Cicero refers Apelles as the ancient painter who advises on knowing what is too much (although Alberti confuses Zeuxis with Apelles); one from *De Natura Deorum* about representing the lameness of Vulcan; two from the *Brutus* – one regarding painters Polygnotus and Timanthes using only four colors, and a second included in Alberti’s penultimate statement

compound that, even though it betrays its origin, yet it nevertheless is clearly a different thing from that whence it came.” (… nos quoque has apes debemus imitari et quaecumque ex diversa lectione congessimus separare (melius enim distincta servantur), deinde adhibita ingenii nostri cura et facultate in unum saporem varia illa libamenta confundere, ut etiam si apparuerit unde sumptum sit, aliud tamen esse quam unde sumptum est appareat.)


in *De pictura*, referring to the aphorism of “nothing, they say, was born perfect;”\(^54\) and two from *De amicitia* – the first at the very beginning of Book II regarding painting possessing “a truly divine power” and the second regarding the trait of Nature as “rapacious,” a word that Alberti lifts directly from Cicero.\(^55\)

Furthermore, *De pictura* uses eight direct references from the *Institutio*, including a virtually verbatim quote in Book II, 42, regarding Timanthes of Cyprus.\(^56\) In addition to mentioning Quintilian once by name, Alberti also nominated Diogenes Laertius, whose *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* Alberti sources, as well as Vitruvius.\(^57\) *De pictura* also contains one direct mention of Pliny the Elder when Alberti stresses the difference between his

\(^54\) Alberti, *De pictura*, II.46, 86-87. See also ibid., III.63, 106-107. For the antique reference see Cicero, *Brutus*, trans. G.L. Hendrickson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), xviii.70, 66-67. “Simul enim ortum atque perfectum nihil esse ait.” See also ibid., xviii.71, 66-67. “The same thing as I take it is true of all the other arts; nothing is brought to perfection on its first invention.” (*Et nescio an reliquis in rebus omnibus idem eveniat; nihil est enim simul et inventum et perfectum.*)

\(^55\) Alberti, *De pictura*, II.25, 60-61. “Nam habet ea quidem in se vim admodum divinam non modo ut quod de amicitia dicunt.” For the antique reference see Cicero, *De amicitia*, trans. William Armistead Falconer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), VII.23, 133-133. “Again, he who looks upon a true friend looks, as it were, upon a sort of image of himself. Wherefore friends, though absent are at hand.” (*Verum etiam amicum qui intuetur, tamquam exemplar aliquod intuetur sui. Quocirca et absentes adsunt et egentes abundant.*) See also Alberti, *De pictura*, II.41, 80-81. “Fit namque natura, qua nihil sui similium rapacius inventi potest…” For the antique reference see Cic., *Amic.*, XIV.50, 160-161. “For there is nothing more eager or more greedy than nature for what is like itself.” (*Nihil est enim appetitum similium sui nec rapacius quam natura.*)

\(^56\) Alberti, *De pictura*, II.42, 81-82. “The praise Timanthes of Cyprus for the painting in which he surpassed Colotes…” (*Laudatur Timanthes Cyprius in ea tabula qua Colloteicum vicit.*)

\(^57\) Ibid., II. 27, 62-63. “Quintilian believed that the earliest painters used to draw around shadows made by the sun, and the art eventually grew by a process of additions.” (*Censebat Quintilianus priscos pictores solitos umbras ad solem circumscribere, demum additamentis artem excrevisse.*) See Quint. *Inst.* 10.2.7-8, 324-325. “… and the only painting would consist in drawing outlines round the shadows cast by objects in the sun.” (*... non esset pictura nisi quae linearis modo extremas umbrae quam corpora in sole fecissent circumscriberet.*) In the same chapter Alberti says, “Diogenes Laertius tells us that the philosopher Demetrius also wrote about painting.” (*Refert Laertius Diogenes Demetrium quoque philosophum picturam commentatum fuisse.*) See also Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R.D. Hicks (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), V.5.83, 537. Among the several notables in antiquity of that name, this Demetrius is that one called the graphic writer, clear in narrative; he was also a painter…” For Vitruvius, see Alberti, *De pictura*, II. 36, 74-75 wherein Alberti refers to Vitruvius, “The architect *Vitruvius* reckons the height of a man in feet.” (*Vitruvius architectus hominis longitudinem pedibus dinumerat,*), and Vitruvius *De architectura*, trans. Frank Granger (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), III, I, 153-154. “... if there is no precise relation between its members, as in the case of those of a well shaped man.” (*... nisi uti ad hominis bene figurati speciem membrorum habuerit exactam rationem.*)
own work and that of the Roman. In fact, Alberti makes no fewer than twenty-one indirect references to Pliny’s *Natural History*, the seminal classical text that explicitly engenders precepts and ethics *de pictura – on painting*. Although scholarship attends to Pliny’s influence on Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria*, this dissertation will draw attention to Pliny as a crucial source of pedagogical instruction for Alberti’s book on painting. As an example, in the first chapter of Book XXXV of the *Natural History*, Pliny heralds painting but chastises gold by stating:

> We must speak first to what remains [to be said] about painting, an art which was formerly noble, when it was held in esteem both by kings and peoples, and ennobling those whom it considered to bequeathed to posterity. Now, indeed, it is completely banished for marble, and even gold.

Alberti states this criticism in II.49 of *De pictura*: “There are some who make excessive use of gold because they think it lends a certain majesty to painting. I would not praise them at all.”

**Non-Humanist Textual Sources**

If we turn to another central set of doctrines in *De pictura* – those offering instruction in fixed perspective – we find Alberti in I.5 of *De pictura* discussing the change of a shape’s appearance as explained by “*the opinions of philosophers*.” In I.9, Alberti’s discussion of color makes another reference to “philosophers,” asserting the distinction between light and color.

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58 Alberti, *De pictura*, II.26, 62-63. “But it is of little concern to us to discover the first painters or the inventors of the art since we are not writing a history of painting like Pliny, but treating of the art in an entirely new way.” (*Sed non multum interest aut primos pictores aut picturae inventores tenuisse, quando quidem non historiam picturae ut Plinius se artem novissime recenseamus.*)


60 Pliny, *N.H*. 35.1.1, 26-261. “*primumque dicemus quae restant de pictura, arte quondam nobili – tunc cum expeteretur regibus popisque – et alios nobilitante, quos esset dignata posteris tradere, nunc vero in totum marmoribus pulsa, iam quidem et auro.*”

61 Alberti, *De pictura*, II.49, 92-93. “*At sunt qui auro inmodice utantur, quod aurum putent quondam historiae afferre maiestatem. Eos ipse plane non laudo.*”

62 Ibid., I.5, 39-41. “… *quas res omnes intuit metimur… exordiamurque a philosophorum sententia*…”

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contrast. He proceeds to “leave aside the disputes of the philosophers” and their polemic about the source of color. However, he adds that he does not consider “those philosophers unworthy of respect” who maintain that colors are seven in number with white and black as the two extremities. We may inquire as to the identity of these philosophers. Alberti, most certainly, did not first read or encounter them in Florence. His investigations into geometry and light derive from the theories of the thirteenth century, reworked, in particular, in the Trecento by Biagio Pelacani da Parma (c. 1365-1416). Pelacani taught mathematics at Padua’s university into the second decade of the 1400s, and the precepts in his 1390 Quaestiones perspectiva communi distilled, from the works of John Peckham (1214-1294), Roger Bacon (1214-1294) and Erasmus Ciolek Witelo (c. 1235-1314), were penned and popularized in Padua during Alberti’s time there. David Summers and Robert Klein arguing on the wide circulation of Pelacani’s theories in early-Quattrocento Padua, maintained that they were instrumental in a lost treatise on art theory dedicated to Jacopo Bellini (1400-1470) composed by engineer, Giovanni Fontana, who lived and studied in Padua during Alberti’s tenure. Alberti’s education in optics began in Padua and continued in Bologna as this dissertation will show.

63 Ibid., 1.9, 44-45. “Dicunt philosophi posse videri nil quod ipsum non sit lumine coloreque vestitum. Maxima idcirco inter colores et lumina cognatio est ad visum agendum, quae qua sunt hic intelligitur, quod lumine pereunte colores ipsi quoque pereunt, redeunteque luce una et ipsi cum viribus lumini colores restaurantur.”

64 Ibid. “Missam faciamus illam philosophorum disceptationem qua primi ortus colorum investigantur.”

65 Ibid. “Neque tamen eos philosophantes aspernandos putem qui de coloribus ita disputant ut species colorum esse numero septem statuant.”


Chapter 3: Alberti in Padua II: Visual Education (c. 1414-1421)

Chapter 3 will examine the antique, medieval and Renaissance visual sources informing De pictura. Given Alberti’s career, it is inconceivable that he would not have observed the famous fine art of Padua. Vergerio was the first humanist to draw attention to the evidence of sarcophagi and other works of antiquity visible in late-Trecento Padua. In an unfinished letter of 1398, Vergerio laments the sad state of antiquities in the city of Rome. Whereas earlier, in his De dignissimo funebri apparatu of 1393, he lauds the surviving antique monuments in Padua. An example of such is the Roman circular altar, depicting reliefs of maenads, that follows neo-Attic models copied of fifth century BCE works of Callimachus (Fig. 0.10). Jacopo Bellini copied these maenads in a drawing apparent when the two are viewed together. (Figs. 0.11 and 0.12) Alberti also sourced images from ancient sarcophagi, actually referring in in II.37 to a relief of Meleager (Fig. 0.13). The correspondence of works by Bellini and Pisanello (Antonio di Puccio da Cereto Pisano, 1395-1455) to Alberti will be addressed here in chapter 4 on Rome.

The Carrara dynasty fostered a recovery of antique Rome in literature and painting

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69 Vergerio, “De dignissimo funebri apparatu, in Rerum italicarum scriptores ab anno aerae Christianae 500 ad 1500, vol. 16, eds. Ludovico Antonio Muratori, Andreas Dandulus, Jacobus de Malvetiis, et al. (Milan: Societatis Palatinae, 1730), 189A-B. “Soleo saepe maiorum nostrorum res animo volvere, singulaque cum facta tum dicta judicassent, sedulus recognoscere; apud quos, cum optima ratione facta omnia intelligam, ille in primis percelbris antiquitatis mos ingenue mihi probatus est, ut, cum claros viros et bene de virtute meritos munere, laudibus honoribusque vivos decorassent, plurimum tamen et mortuis officiorum praebent, et diuturnae, quoad possent, claris nominis memoriae consulerent. Qua ratione cernimus vestustas illustrium virorum imagine, exsae situque ruentia sepulcra maiorum videmus, ac perpetua litterarum monimenta legere avidi aliquando solemus, in quibus, et de summis pace belloque confectis rebus et de amplissimis superiorum nostrorum laudibus agitur.” See also ibid., Oratio in funere Francisci Senioris de Carraria, Patavii principis, 192-198, and McManamon, Pierpaolo Vergerio the Elder, 43, n.30.

almost a century before the Medici, cultivating, for example, neo-classical portrait medals fifty years before Alberti’s image by Matteo di Pasti (1420-1467) or Pisanello’s portrait of Lionello d’Este (1407-1450), patron of Alberti’s 1452 treatise, *De re aedificatoria* (See Fig. 0.1 and Fig. 0.14). The sophistication of the Carrara medals is evident in their having been struck from engraved dies, whereas medals that followed were only cast and chased (Figs. 0.15-0.18).

**Medieval and Renaissance Visual Sources**

In number 75 of Vergerio’s epistles penned in Padua in 1396, the humanist stresses the need to “look to the painters of our own age, who, although they may look with attention at famous paintings by other artists, yet follow the examples of Giotto alone.” The only modern artist mentioned in *De pictura* is Giotto di Bondone (c.1266-1337), specifically his now-lost *Navicella* mosaic executed for the west wall of the oratory of Santa Maria in Turri of Old Saint Peters in Rome (Fig. 0.19). In Padua, Vergerio, Alberti, and Barzizza would have had access to the most heralded narrative cycle in their day, Giotto’s frescoes of the *Lives of Mary and Jesus* in the *Capella Scrovegni* in Padua (Figs. 0.20-0.25). Moreover, as Alberti’s teacher and the favored academic of Venice and the Venetian podestà, Barzizza would have had access to the

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74 Alberti, *De pictura*, II.42, 82-83. “They also praise in Rome the boat in which our Tuscan painter Giotto represented the eleven disciples struck with fear and wonder at the sight of their colleague walking on the water, each showing such clear signs of his agitation in his face and entire body that their individual emotions are discernible in every one of them.” (*Laudatur et navis apud Romam ea, in qua noster Etruscus pictor Giotus undecim metu et supere percusso ob socium, quem supra undas meament videbant, expressit, ita pro se quemque suum turbati animi inditium vultu et toto corpore preaferentem, ut in singulis singuli affectionum motus appareant.*)
Chapel of St. James (Figs. 0.26-0.31) as well as in the nearby Oratory of St. George, both displaying the late-Trecento frescoes by Altichiero da Zevio (da Verona, 1330-1390) and his gifts in exterior and interior space, as in the Death of St. Lucy (Fig. 0.32). In the halls of the Palazzo Carrarese, Altichiero painted frescoed scenes including Roman personages based upon his own previous work informed by the Jewish Wars of Josephus in the Sala Grande of the Palazzo Scaligero in Verona. Those 1360s frescoes in Verona are lost but are survived by fifteenth-century copies of Altichiero’s drawings of Roman emperors, like that of Hadrian. (Fig. 0.33)

In Padua, inspired by De viris illustribus – Petrarch’s account of ancient heroes, imitative of Plutarch’s Lives of Notable Greeks and Romans – Altichiero replicated imperial images in the Sala Virorum Illustrium (Figs. 0.34 and 0.35). Vasari said that Altichiero’s classicizing work was of such “invention” that Paduan humanist Girolamo Campagnola (1433-1522) insisted Mantegna praised them with the “rarest merit.”

Margaret Plant and John Richards hold Altichiero’s work as a crucial episode in the early Renaissance adaptation of classical motifs and realism. Altichiero honored Petrarch as the source of his work by painting the humanist’s portrait in the Sala, the single fresco that survives from Altichiero’s original work (Fig. 0.36). Both the Palazzo Scaligero in Verona and the Palazzo Carrarese in Padua became the respective seats of the Venetian podestà after 1404. The frescoes in Padua were accessible to Barzizza –


cherished as he was by the Venetian government as the key humanist teacher of their elite progeny. Padua promoted a culture of political humanism decades before the flourishing of Florentine civic ideology. In this setting one sees vital elements of a transformation in Renaissance visual art – the composite realism of Giotto at the launch of the fourteenth century and the classicizing, composition, color and portraits of Altichiero toward the end of the century.

Chapter 4: Bologna (1421-1428?)

The fourth chapter will examine the intellectual context and visual sources extant in Bologna during Alberti’s residence in the city. Although Bologna was overwhelmed in the 1420s by the patronage of Ferrara, Mantua, Milan and Florence, David Drogin argues that a deficiency in study falsely suggests Bologna languishing in a “state of provincial mediocrity.” For instance, in 1989 James Beck asserted that: “Alberti the humanist was first and foremost a writer, trained in letters, in Latin… in the classics, and in canon law, at the universities of Padua and Bologna.” Alberti neither attended Padua’s studium, and, furthermore, although he did attended, no document attests that he ever was graduated from Bologna’s either. As there is no clear record of Alberti’s movements in this pivotal period of the 1420s, a consideration of the possible textual and visual influence on De pictura during these years is warranted.

77 Benjamin Kohl, Padua Under the Carrara: 1318 – 1405 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 329-336. See also R.G.G. Mercer, The Teaching of Gasparino Barzizza: with Special Reference to his Place in Paduan Humanism (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1979), 21, and Grañón, Leon Battista Alberti, 39-42. Barzizza had served as the private tutor for the Barbaro family in Venice in 1412. He was supported by the Venetian podestà in Padua and may have had a continuing access to the room as well as other works by Altichiero.

78 Alberti, Commentarium Philodoxeos fabula, in Bonucci, Opere Volgari, vol.1, cxxiii. After Lorenzo’s, death, he studied canon law in Bologna. (“Mortua Laurentio Alberto patre meo, cum ipse apud Bonoium iuri pontificio opeam darem, in ea disciplina enitebar ita proficere, ut meis essem carior, et nostrae domui ornamento.”)


Intellectual Context

Mancini and further scholarship also maintained that Alberti’s studies at that city’s university initiated *De pictura*’s precepts for perspective.\(^{81}\) Given that as the documents regarding that period are lost, and no research to date has delivered Alberti’s precise curriculum at the university during his years there we have no record of his studies, this assumption is highly problematic. Despite the lines of transmission, which will be addressed, of Alberti honing geometric skills that may have begun in Padua. Although Alberti encountered the *Institutio* as early as 1417 at Barzizza’s school, his acquaintance with Quintilian’s rhetoric matured in Bologna after Poggio’s copy of the work was circulated in universities.\(^ {82}\) Furthermore, Alberti’s play, *Philodoxeos fabula* (early 1420s) finished in Bologna, as well as his second treatise, *De commodis litterarum atque incommodis* (late 1420s), emphasize the humanist goal of personal glory that turned the student from a legal career to a full-time obsession with visual art.\(^ {83}\)

Visual Sources

The extant visual sources in Bologna available to Alberti during the 1420’s include such pivotal works as the classicizing marble reliefs by Jacopo della Quercia (1374-1438) for the Porta Magna of the Church of San Petronio. (Figs. 0.37 and 0.38) The genre of the so-called *professor’s tomb* displays funerary reliefs imitating Roman sarcophagi (Fig. 0.39). Drogin’s

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\(^{81}\) See Mancini, *Vita*, 85. Mancini presumes Alberti “stayed until 1428” and was “probably graduated.” “Si può supporre che intorno al 1428, anno in cui Battista probabilmente si laureò.”


work gives a rare overview of this topos in Bologna.\textsuperscript{84} By the early 1400s the city distinguished itself as the center of secular manuscript illumination due to a demand for books in the field of canon law, studied by Alberti (Figs. 0.40 and 0.41). The end of \textit{De pictura} asks for a portrait of Alberti if those who read him are grateful:

If it is such as to be of some use and convenience to painters, I would especially ask them as a reward for my labors to paint my portrait in their \textit{historiae}, and thereby proclaim to posterity that I was a student of this art and that they are mindful of and grateful for this favor.\textsuperscript{85}

Here Alberti lifts his notion of portraiture as an adjunct of fame, from Pliny:

And indeed, it is my opinion, that nothing can be a greater proof of having achieved success in life, than a lasting desire on the part of one's fellow men, to know what one's features were.\textsuperscript{86}

Since Cardinal Niccolò Albergati (1373-1443) employed Alberti, one assumption is that the humanist accompanied Albergati on diplomatic missions to France and the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{87} Albergati sat for a portrait by Jan van Eyck (1395-1441, Fig. 0.42). Indeed Alberti may have seen portraiture by Van Eyck in the \textit{Adoration of the Lamb} from the Ghent Altarpiece (Fig. 0.43), wherein included are not only the donor portraits (Figs. 0.44 and 0.45), but also faces painted from the life (Fig. 0.46). The unique plasticity in Flemish panels introduced a realism, a “level of informational density” as Nagel and Wood describe, that may well have heightened

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{84} See Drogin, 244-355.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Alberti, \textit{De pictura}, III.62, 105-107. “\textit{Ea si eiusmodi sunt ut pictoribus commodum atque utilitatem aliquam afferent, hoc potissimum laborum meorum premium exposco ut faciem meam in suis historiis pingant, quo illos memoriae benefici et gratos esse ac me artis studiosum fuisse posteris praedicent.”
\item \textsuperscript{86} Plin., \textit{N.H.}, 35, 2.10. “\textit{Quo maius, ut equidem arbitror, nullum est, felicitatis specimen quam semper omnes scire cupere, qualis fuerit aliquid.”}
\item \textsuperscript{87} Franco Borsi, 316. Borsi maintains travels of Alberti with Albergati are suggested in the introduction of \textit{De re aedificatoria} in his overview of building. See also Alberti, \textit{De re aedificatoria}, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press 1988), 88, 172, and 389, n. 80. See also Mercer, 135.
\end{itemize}
Alberti’s passion for portraiture as well as spatial volume (Fig. 0.47).  

Chapter 5: Alberti in Rome (Late 1420s?-1434) 

The fifth and final chapter will address Alberti’s intellectual and visual evolution during his first period of residence in Rome.

Textual Sources 

The administration of the curia (chancery) employed Alberti as a secretary to write, edit, abridge and gloss papal bulls. Alberti’s humanist contemporaries in Rome, Poggio and Flavio Biondo (1292-1463), wrote on extant monuments and antiquities of the city. Poggio, although completing his De varietate fortunae in the 1440s, began the opus in Rome in 1431 while Alberti was working for the curia. In addition, Alberti’s precepts on art theory were certainly gestating by time he encountered Biondo during the latter’s work on his catalogue of Roman monuments Roma instaurata (1435). During this time in Rome, Alberti began his own textual panorama of the city, Descriptio urbis Romae (1440s-50).

Visual Sources and Historia

All visual references in De pictura, save one, are classical. They specifically include: 1) the Sacrifice of Iphigenia, 2) the Calumny by Apelles; 3) relief of the Death of Meleager; 4) Diana and her attendant nymphs, and 5) the Three Graces. We may speculate that Alberti’s

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89 Mancini, Vita, 85. “… il questore lo impieghasse presso il cardinale Aleman legato di Bologna, seppure non lo collocò subito presso l’Albergati, nella cui famiglia forse il giovane dottore s’infervorò sempre più del culto.” See also Grafton, Leon Battista Alberti, 48-59.

prescriptions for *historia* with its demand for horses, dogs, columns, nudes and drapery were informed by antique sculpture. Luigi Mallè, in 1950, was among the first scholars to suggest certain sarcophagi in Rome as the source of Alberti’s reference to the *dead Meleager* (Figs. 0.48 and 0.49; See also Fig. 0.13).\(^91\) Antique sculpture also informs the vocabulary in Book I regarding fixed perspective. Alberti’s prescriptions of *historia* in Book II acknowledge antique artists such as Euphranor, Apelles and Timanthes of Cyprus. The only non-classical reference is to Giotto’s mosaic of the *Navicella* (See Fig. 0.19).\(^92\) Giotto is important to this thesis, not only as the author of the mosaic but as a collaborator, possible protégé and employee of Pietro Cavallini (Pietro dei Cerroni, 1240/50-1330s). Alberti certainly viewed the radical delineation of color, surface and negative space in fresco of Cavallini’s *Last Judgment* for the church of Santa Cecilia as well as his *Nativity of the Virgin* mosaic, the latter of the *Life of the Virgin* cycle in the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere (Figs. 0.50 and 0.52). Giotto probably assisted in both works before working in Padua. Alberti’s tenure in Rome for the curia would have given him access to the frescoes of the *Life of St. John the Baptist* (lost) with its fictive antique columns and arches for St. John Lateran begun by Gentile da Fabriano (1370-1427) and finished by Pisanello (Fig. 0.52). Alberti probably observed the illusionistic porticoes in fixed perspective therein, that Meredith J. Gill anoints as the “first real artistic enterprise of the Roman Renaissance.”\(^93\)

**Historiography**

\(^91\) Alberti, *Della pittura*, ed. Mallè, 89, n. 2. See also ibid., *De pictura*, II.37, 74-75. “They praise a historia in Rome, in which the dead Meleager is being carried away…” (*Laudatur apud Romam historia in qua Meleager defunctus asportatur…*)

\(^92\) Ibid., *De pictura*, II.42, 82-83. The mosaic measured around thirty feet high by thirty-six feet across.

The first complete edition of the corpus of Alberti’s works is the *Opere Volgari di Leon Battista Alberti* edited by Anicio Bonucci. The first modern source of documents regarding Alberti is in Mancini’s *Vita*. Additionally, Gaetano and Carlo Milanesi republished the first early-modern handbook on painting by Cennino Cennini (1370-1440), *Il libro dell’arte o trattato della pittura di Cennino Cennini* (1859), the only other opus on the subject contemporary to Alberti. Paola Benigni, Roberto Cardini, and Mariangela Regolios produced the *Corpus Epistolare e Documentario di Leon Battista Alberti* (2007), a collation of all extant documents and letters regarding Alberti. Cardini’s edited collection of essays in *Moderni e Antichi: Quaderni del Centro di Studi sul Classicismo* (2006) analyze primary sources, inclusive of problems regarding Alberti’s date of birth as well as the attributed date of the completion of *De pictura*. Leonard Smith’s edition Vergerio’s letters include seminal humanist views on painting. Early humanism scholarship relies upon Remigio Sabbadini, of the first historians to collate documents on many subjects including Barzizza, Guarino, and antique codices. Primary source research on the history of Padua is indebted to work on the civic and university

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94 Bonucci, vols. 1-5.
95 Mancini, *Vita*.
archives compiled by paleographer and studium professor Andrea Gloria (1821-1911).\textsuperscript{101}

Views of Alberti in the last two centuries have ranging from Jacob Burckhardt’s depiction as ideal Renaissance scholar to Julius von Schlosser’s tempered opinion of Alberti as a gifted dilettante, critical of his lack of real mathematical skills.\textsuperscript{102} Although Schlosser calls into question Alberti’s credentials, this dissertation takes the view that Alberti is both a systematic theorist as well as a explorer of precepts. Some scholars have followed Panofsky’s argument that Alberti was attempting to give painting a scientific basis. Krautheimer, Clark and Blunt view Alberti in the twentieth century as an early pioneer of the inclusion of visual arts within humanities by reason of the humanist’s instruction in mathematical aesthetics.\textsuperscript{103}

Latest monographs include Franco Borsi’s methodological analysis, 	extit{Leon Battista Alberti: The Complete Works} (1977).\textsuperscript{104} Grafton’s monograph, 	extit{Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Renaissance}, is the most recent and insightful account of Alberti by a leading Renaissance intellectual historian.\textsuperscript{105} Although emphasizing the general background of Alberti in Padua, Bologna and Rome, both Borsi and Grafton focus, for the most part, on the humanist’s works of architecture, which, in the face of dearth of research on Alberti as a painter, remains the


\textsuperscript{104} See Franco Borsi.

\textsuperscript{105} Grafton, 	extit{Leon Battista Alberti}.
strongest foundation for the study of the humanist’s surviving artistic work. The study of humanism in Padua depends upon the fundamental scholarship of Giuseppe and Guido Billanovich.  

106 Reconstruction of the humanist political thought in Italy at the time is found in Quentin Skinner’s *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*.  

107 More recently, Ronald Witt’s *The Two Latin Cultures and the Foundation of Renaissance Humanism in Medieval Italy*, as well as his *In the Footsteps of the Ancients* present the most comprehensive analysis of Padua’s intellectual culture.  

108 Recent work on the central humanist figure of Vergerio include both John McManamon’s *Pier Paolo Vergerio: The Humanist as Orator* and Michael Katchmer’s analysis of Vergerio’s connections to the late Quattrocento comedy, *Paulus*.  

109 Roberto Weiss, for example in his *Dawn of Humanism in Italy* and *Renaissance Rediscovery of Antiquity*, was of the first scholars to stress Padua as a center of humanism prior to Petrarch.  

110 George Holmes attends to Paduan intellectual influences in so far as he holds that Petrarch, Guarino da Verona (1374-1460), and Vergerio constituted the apogee of humanism before Florence.  

111 Barry M. Katz’s 1977 work, *Leon Battista Alberti and the Humanist Theory of the Arts*, produces a composite of intellectual influences upon Alberti’s significance as both theorist and humanist.

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107 See Skinner, 3-53.

108 Witt, *The Two Latin Cultures*. See also ibid., *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*.


111 Holmes, 1-36.

112 See Katz.
Hope, Wright, and Jarzombek examine the structural aspects of *De pictura* and their relationship to classical texts.113 Stefano Borsi discusses Alberti’s possible access to the antique monuments in Rome by way of the antiquarian work of Flavio Biondo.114 Samuel Edgerton, in *Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* and his more recent re-evaluation, *The Mirror, the Window and the Telescope*, produce a lucid analyses of the early 1400s evolution of Euclidian optics and fixed perspective within social and religious context.115 Rensselaer W. Lee regarded Alberti’s ideals of beauty and morality as originating in poetry. Others, like Spencer, view him as a neo-classical, humanist rhetorician, originating in assimilation of ideas from Cicero and Quintilian.116

Both Paul F. Grendler and Paul Oskar Kristeller have given us comprehensive works on Renaissance education, pertinent to reconstruction of Alberti’s early years, for example Grendler’s *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600* and *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* in 2002.117 In addition, Olaf Pedersen’s 1997 book, *The First Universities: Studium Generale and the Origins of University Education in Europe*, reconstructs early-Quattrocento mathematics and optics curricula and its subsequent humanist divorce from medieval theology.118 R.G.G. Mercer’s concise record of Barzizza’s school,”

113 Wright, 52-71. See also Jarzombek, *On Leon Battista Alberti*, and ibid., “The Structural Problematic of Leon Battista Alberti’s *De pictura,*” 273-287, and Hope, “The Structure and Purpose of *De pictura.*”


115 Edgerton, *Renaissance Rediscovery*. See also ibid., *The Mirror, the Window*.


orthography, and inventory is invaluable.\textsuperscript{119} John Kenneth Hyde’s *Padua in the Age of Dante* (1966) and Benjamin Kohl’s *Padua Under the Carrara: 1318 – 1405* (1998) remain the two comprehensive works on Padua’s intellectual history.\textsuperscript{120} The single comprehensive political analysis of the period is Cecilia M. Ady’s *The Bentivoglio of Bologna: A Study in Despotism* (1937).\textsuperscript{121} *The Court Cities of Northern Italy*, edited by Charles M. Rosenberg (2010) contains a rare overview, by David Drogin, of Bologna’s contribution to Renaissance art history.\textsuperscript{122}

Leonard Barkan’s *Unearthing the Past: Archeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* of 1999 is significant to the interdisciplinary study of text and monuments.\textsuperscript{123} Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood’s 2010 *Anachronic Renaissance* considers the period’s early attitudes toward ancient art.\textsuperscript{124} Regarding antique monuments known during Alberti’s time in Padua, Bologna and Rome, Phyllis Pray Bober and Ruth Rubinstein’s *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture* is the most informative compendium of reference.\textsuperscript{125} As much of early modern painting hinges on the power of Giotto’s work, Eva Frojmovic, Paul Hills, Ann Derbes and Mark Sandona have covered Giotto’s social and visual impact.\textsuperscript{126} For Altichiero and his collaborator Jacopo Avanzo of Verona (1350s-1415)

\textsuperscript{119} See Mercer.

\textsuperscript{120} John Kenneth Hyde, *Padua in the Age of Dante*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), and Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*.


\textsuperscript{122} See Drogin.


\textsuperscript{124} See Nagel and Wood.

\textsuperscript{125} Bober and Rubinstein.

Francésa Flores d’Arcais’s monograph, *Altichiero e Avanzo* attend the brilliance of both Plant and Richards in heralding that artist’s paradigm of innovation in the early Renaissance.127 Richards has also given us invaluable research regarding Petrarch’s influence in the massive visual scheme of the rooms of Carrara Palace.

### Methodology

One aim of this research is to counter the tendency in Renaissance art history to offer only nominal consideration of intellectual and historical contexts when, in fact, those contexts might point to political, educational or economic factors in relation to patronage and iconology. A similar absence of contextualization of visual arts within Renaissance intellectual history is illustrated by frequent compartmentalization of *De pictura* only within the canon of Alberti’s other works on art.128 Scholars of intellectual history tend to focus on Alberti’s humanist tracts or discuss his books on art solely within humanist context. Insofar as Alberti was attempting to elevate the visual arts to an esteem equal to that of the liberal arts – indeed to meld the two – it is paradoxical that modern scholarship tends to sequester Alberti’s cultural and philological context from art history, and vice versa. Hence, this study will also consider *De pictura* within the corpus of Alberti’s books started or completed before *De pictura*. In so doing, my account of Alberti’s formative humanist instruction will suggest how his predisposition to the viewing of

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128 Grafton, “Histria and Istoria,” 37-68.
painting and monuments as sources for his vocabulary.\textsuperscript{129}

This dissertation, therefore, marries intellectual history with art history to systematically contextualize one book, \textit{De pictura}. Wedding these two disciplines requires reconstruction of the visual context within the archeology and history of a city and of the political and social context that Alberti inherited as well as the institutions with which he associated. Reconstructing the visual evidence from 1300 to 1400 will postulate exactly what Alberti may have seen.\textsuperscript{130}

As an inquiry into the textual and visual sources in \textit{De pictura}, this work first demands a delineation of the notion of a \textit{vocabulary}. The \textit{Oxford English Dictionary} defines the word as “a collection or list of words with brief explanations of their meanings.”\textsuperscript{131} In addressing the specific key terms in Alberti’s vocabulary – for example, \textit{circumscription} and \textit{composition} – or thematic collection of terms (\textit{mathematics}) as well as the prescriptive phrases in which the terms are employed, this work will investigate: 1) the antique or pre-humanist textual source of specific terminology; 2) the humanist or educational source that may have provided that text and thus generated the term; and 3) the specific visual works within the art historical realm of Padua, Bologna and Rome that illustrate the terminology. Although the terms in \textit{De pictura} were not of Alberti’s invention, his experience and exposure to art and text certainly gave function and form to this terminology, thereby creating a language for painting theory.\textsuperscript{132}

This work employs an interdisciplinary methodology. My training in Renaissance intellectual history enables me to navigate the myriad of humanist works in Latin available to Alberti. Classical texts will be analyzed within a context of humanist developments in Padua,


\textsuperscript{130} Hills, \textit{The Light of Early Italian Painting} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).


\textsuperscript{132} See Cennini.
Bologna and Rome. In addition, the history of late-medieval and early Renaissance Italian education in both Padua and Bologna provides the pedagogical context of Alberti’s intellectual journey. Curial history under Pope Eugenius IV may more extensively reveal Alberti’s proclivities toward the antique during his residence in Rome. Paleography is required to examine the extant documents regarding Alberti’s curriculum in both Padua and Bologna in order to ascertain his exposure to the mathematics and optics of Euclid. The archaeological history of antique monuments is pertinent to all three cities. The iconology of visual evidence from the 1300s to 1400s may help to identify ancient as well as medieval works, themes or elements that galvanized Alberti’s predilection for the antique.

To summarize, my thesis is that Alberti’s book transformed the figure of the painter as an artisan and craftsman into that of the artist as a theorist and executor of his own vision. Grayson argued that the vital distinction between De pictura and its surviving near-contemporary tract on painting, Cennini’s Il libro dell’arte, lies in Alberti’s creation of a distinctively new humanist vocabulary. In so doing, De pictura itself is a determining example of interdisciplinary exercise in the early modern era. Correspondingly, the shift in the social perception of art criticism would have not occurred but for the neoclassical form and humanist content of De pictura as a result of Alberti’s training in Padua, Bologna and Rome. De pictura set the mark for Renaissance aesthetics in visual arts. Simply put, my fundamental argument is that Alberti did not go to Florence, discover the works of the city’s artistic community, and then write a compendium on mathematics, composition, lines, points, circumspection, narrative, portraiture, incorporating the ideas, form, style, syntax of Seneca, Cicero, Quintilian, Pliny the Elder,

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Vitruvius and Lucian all in the span of one year. *De pictura* used the liberal arts to engender a humanist education in the visual arts. Just as Alberti synthesized into theory those ideas from humanists before him, the pedagogy of observing visual art also derived from educators before him. Far from speculation that Alberti walked a city looking at visual images, we must begin to see that his principle humanist education encouraged him to do just that. Encouraged to observe painting and sculpture, his visual education hardly ended with Giotto and Altichiero in Padua; it endured in Bologna with Niccolò Pisano, Jacopo della Quercia, as well as Van Eyck in northern Europe and continued in Rome with Cavallini, Giotto, Pisanello, Masolino, and Donatello. Even considering the serious historical problem in assuming that the Masaccio in the dedication of *Della pittura* is Masaccio the painter – Alberti would have initially seen his work in Rome.

The aim of this dissertation is to bring two bodies of scholarship – those of intellectual history and art history – to a more proper and specific dialogue. In so doing, many of the underlying assumptions of *De pictura* as a sole product of Florence begin to fall apart. In fact to place *De pictura* in historical time demands almost an exclusion of Florence and to look at Alberti as an exile from that city. Florence and her treasures would only evidence that which had been born in the previous cities of that exile and education in both text and painting – Padua, Bologna and Rome. *De pictura*’s intent was to elevate the practice of painting into the realm of the liberal arts, and in accomplishing this the book itself became a work of art. Whether Alberti was originator or proselytizer – *De pictura* represents the key moment that picture theory entered into the canon of the liberal arts. Alberti accomplished feat through appropriation of mathematics, rhetoric, poetry and ancient ethics gleaned from classical texts and the art itself. His process of this appropriation began in Padua.
Chapter 1

Padua: Historical and Intellectual Context
Structure

This chapter will initially give an overview of essential political developments of Padua, from the city as commune in the mid-1200s to the Carrara family’s submission to the Republic of Venice in 1405. Secondly, the chapter will describe the intellectual evolution of early humanism within that political context in order to emphasize significant elements, both prior and subsequent to Petrarch’s transformation of emerging humanist culture in northern Italy. These elements provide the literary and rhetorical foundations of Alberti’s *De pictura*. Lastly, within this setting of a crucially formative intellectual evolution after Petrarch, the chapter will illustrate how educational theory began to shape along neo-classical lines to a degree unrivalled almost anywhere else in Italy, thus making the city the principle environment of humanist pedagogy.

Three successive periods of Paduan history that demand examination are: 1) Padua’s liberation in 1256 from two decades commonly described as the tyranny of Ezzelino III da Romano (1194-1259) and return to commune and self government until 1328; 2) the commune’s demise under the Carrara family in 1328 until the rise Francesco Il Vecchio da Carrara (1325-1393) in 1355; and 3) the Carrara dynasty under Il Vecchio until subjugation of Padua by Venice in 1405. These successive phases in the political history of Padua provide the setting for the development of Paduan humanism and, furthermore, provide the subject matter for both pre-humanist and humanist elaboration.

Padua’s Antique Foundation

Legend has it that the founder of Padua, *Antenor*, the single Trojan who attempted to reason the immorality of the kidnapping of Helen, came to northern Italy to found the city.¹

¹ Homer, *Iliad*, trans. Samuel Butler (London: Longmans-Green, 1898), 7.347-353, 112. “Antenor spoke. ‘Hear me Trojans, Dardanians, and allies, that I may speak as I am minded. Let us give up Helen and wealth to the sons of
Lovato Lovati heralded ancient human remains uncovered in 1283 to be those of Antenor and a tomb to the mythical hero was proclaimed the founding father of the city, a fiction that persisted well into the 1600s. Lovato’s inscription on the tomb reads:

Inclitus Ant(h)enor patriam vox nisa quietem
Transtulit huc Enetum Dardanidum(ue) fugas,
Expulit Euganeos, Patavina(m) (con)dedit urbem,
Quem tenet hic umili ma(r)more cesa domus

Alberti would write his treatise on architecture, *De re aedificatoria*, for Lionello d’Este of the ruling nobility of Ferrara, whose origins began in Padua and continued there well into the mid-Trecento. According to early Paduan chronicler, Giovanni da Nono (1275-1346) and his narrative history of medieval Padua, *Visio Egidii regis Patavie* (1314-1318), Antenor was proclaimed genitor by the Este in Padua, whose family name derives from the castle in the southern extension of the Paduan *comitatus* or feudal system.

According to St. Jerome’s translations of Eusebius, Livy was born in Padua. Sometime between 1318 and 1324 an inscription from a sepulcher bearing the name *T. Livius* was conveniently discovered. The combination of the tomb of Antenor and the Livy inscription created, as Giuseppe Billanovich states, “an ardent passion in Paduans for the domestic glory

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3 *Corpus delle Epigrafi Medievali di Padova*, http://cem.dissgea.unipd.it. “This sepulcher excavated from marble contains the body of the noble Antenor who left his country, guided the Eneti and Trojans, banished the Euganeans and founded Padua.”


from their classical past [and] the countryman, Livy.”

The city by the 1320s would contain roughly 35,000 citizens, a middling-sized commune half the size of Bologna and a third of Florence. The wealth of Padua derived from its countryside or *contado*, one of the richer agrarian areas in Italy producing olives, grapes and grain. The *contado*’s abundance of agricultural goods, transported to the city markets by a sophisticated system of canals and waterways as opposed to roads, sustained an agrarian population throughout the communal years. There is no record of Padua within the context of international banking or finance. The alignment of guilds with trade in conjunction with finance or mercantile wealth did not exist, for the most part, in medieval Padua. That said, money lending was practiced by certain Paduan families like the Scrovegni; however, as Hyde points out, there is no evidence that usury, nor any sophisticated banking mechanisms were endemic to the overall growth of the city’s economy in the 1200s and 1300s.

**Liberation and Return to Commune (1256-1318)**

The initial stage in the evolution of Paduan humanism begins with the civic upheaval, a result of ridding the dominance of Ezzelino an event that celebrated, like Rome with the Etruscans, the liberation of the city from tyranny to a restoration of its free and communal way of life in neo-classical and, specifically, neo-Roman terms (Fig. 1.1). A progressive age regarding roads and collective provincial association in parts of northern Italy and all of southern Italy appears during the era of Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily, Frederick II Hohenstaufen.

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8 Hyde, 220-251.
(1194-1250). No less a dictator yet major player in Frederick’s political agenda in northern Italy, Ezzelino took power in Padua in 1237 by means of the largesse from the emperor. Failing to enlist support of the core of Paduan nobles, Ezzelino ran the city by force. During his two decades of rule, he controlled the markets by means of his own approved faction of administrative families. His nineteen years of notable cruelty ended in 1256 at the hand of Paduan ex-patriots as well as Guelph fighters under Pope Innocent IV. Ezzelino’s subjugation of Padua was motivated by no more than greed. He laid no inheritance or land claim to Padua, as was the usual case in usurping of territories. Subsequently there was little change to the city’s constitutions to justify, post facto, his grasp of land and city. In other words the shell of the commune was left intact; consequently, upon his overthrow, restoration of the commune under the constitution was assembled within twenty years.

For the following half-century, Padua entertained a political stability, and its civic guilds were given greater voice. The late thirteenth and early fourteenth-century political apparatus in Padua fostered a secular group of notaries, accountants and lawyers within the commune and saw the return of the podestà, a single individual, empowered to run that political body. The reconstituted Paduan commune supported an economic and political prosperity that would endure from 1256 to 1328. Under a system of republican self-government, reclamation of farmland generated wealth for both nobile and popolo. The Consiglio Maggiore, established in 1277, consisted of around one thousand members drawn from an adult male population of over ten times that number, allowing for a remarkable expansion of political participation. Paduan

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10 For the origins of the podestà, see Vittorio Francini, *Saggio di Ricerche sull’Istituto del Podestà nei Comuni Medioevale* (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1912).
thinkers considered this enhanced element of civic involvement a crucial exponent of a legitimate *res publica*. Political revival was accompanied by territorial growth in the annexation of Vicenza to the northwest in 1266 and Rovigo to the south by 1308. These territories doubled Padua’s *contado*. The ensuing wealth was visible in public and ecclesiastical building projects such as the Palazzo Communale and the Basilica of Sant’Antonio as well as private endowment of public monuments by merchant families like the Scrovegni who would build their chapel housing Giotto’s seminal narrative fresco cycle, germane to Alberti’s visual education.

**Commune Demise and Rise of the Carrara (1310-1338)**

The post-Ezzelino commune, a golden age of sorts, came to an end through a variety of factors. Padua’s political and territorial unity was first undermined by interference of emperor-elect Henry of Luxembourg (1275-1313) in 1310 and a revolt in Vicenza, supported by the Scaligeri regime of Verona (1308-1405). In April of 1311, Vicenza, abetted by Verona, ousted the provincial government and Paduan citizenry. Cangrande della Scala (1291-1329), as both an able general and *signore* of Verona, applied increasing pressure on Padua until the unity of the city eventually collapsed (Fig. 1.2). From internal political conflicts, class strife might have subsided were it not for the continuing antagonism from Verona. Factions and parties that had functioned well in previous years were now mutually antagonistic regarding the means to stop an encroaching Verona. A final attempt to arrest the Veronese assault would bring the election of Giacomo *Il Grande* da Carrara (1294-1324) in July of 1318 as *defensor, protector* and *gubernator* of the Paduan commune. By 1328, tired of confusions and factionalism incited by the additional German presence – under Giacomo’s nephew, Marsiglio da Carrara (1294-1338),
by secret treaty, Padua surrendered to Verona and Cangrande.\textsuperscript{11} Hyde points out that the following decades of Carrara humanism and heroism should “not be allowed to obscure” the historical record of political turmoil.\textsuperscript{12} Padua was contested repeatedly by powerful neighbors – harangues between Verona and Milan on the one hand and between Verona and Venice on the other. Throughout this period Padua was ruled as no less than a monarchy by the Carrara clan.

**Carrara Dynasty under Francesco Il Vecchio to Venetian Dominance (1338-1405)**

The third phase of Padua’s political history, marked by the rule of Francesco *Il Vecchio* da Carrara, begins after Verona’s wars with Venice when the della Scala were ousted and Padua invested Marsiglio as lord of the city, now essentially a satellite of Venice. With Marsiglio’s death in 1338 his cousin, Ubertino, became lord of the city working with Doge Marino Falier (1285-1355) to solidify peace with Verona. Upon Ubertino’s death in 1345 leaving no heirs, a distant cousin, Marsilietto Papafava became lord for several months before his murder by Giacomo II da Carrara in 1345. Territorial expansion by means of treaty with the Visconti of Milan was cut short by Giacomo’s murder in 1350, leaving both his brother Giacomino and his son Francesco Il Vecchio to joint rule. Discovering an assassination plot perpetrated by Giacomino and his wife, Margherita Gonzaga of Mantua (d. 1399) over succession rights for her son, Francesco arrested Giacomino and jailed him for life at the Carrara fortress at Monselice where he died in 1372. Once seizing power alone in 1355, a major shift in the fortunes of the Paduan city-state under Carrara government can be seen in Francesco Il Vecchio’s rule. He began a state policy of Paduan independence from previous allegiances to Venice or Verona. Venice, in its own interest for peace in the Veneto arranged a pact of eternal grace at a meeting

\textsuperscript{11} Hyde, 3.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
in 1354 at the Ducal palace. Finally at good terms II Vecchio fronted a league of Venice, Verona, Ferrara and Padua against Milan and Genoa.

As Kohl points out, in wrestling control of Paduan politics and economy both in the city and the *contado*, away from previous obligations to the Veneto, the Carrara significantly consolidated their grip over an individualized northern political city-state.\textsuperscript{13} This state was distinct from previous political structures, as lawyers, judges and notaries, so central to the government of the commune and early Carrara leadership, were now relegated to the role of bureaucrats with no power to legislate. The actual political class consisted of supporters, handpicked from II Vecchio’s friends and allies. Guilds were beholden to the state for military expenses, while II Vecchio subsidized the city’s growth in textiles by loans to the cloth and wool guilds. By 1362, Francesco II Vecchio restored legislation from the commune to support the university through tax and military exemptions for scholars.\textsuperscript{14} The economic strain, however, placed upon the majority of the *popolo* by the Carrara fiscal policies that exempted the elite, effectively weakened the family’s grip on the city. Abdicating to his son, Francesco Novello, II Vecchio passed the remainder of life in a Visconti prison. Novello, forced out by Milan, retook Padua, once citizens wearied of Visconti rule. Yet the Carrara, having eventually lifted the Scalagieri and then the Visconti yokes, moving Padua through hostilities from Verona, Milan and Venice for three quarters of a century until Venice aggravated by aggression in Treviso by Novello arrested and executed him in 1406, thereby closing the chapter of Carrara rule in Padua.

This finale of this third phase of Paduan political history brings us to the state of affairs when Alberti arrives in the city. A measure of continuity was allowed, recorded by noted

\textsuperscript{13} Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, 30-35.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 40-45.
historian and notary, Sicco Polenton (1375-1447), as the majority of agrarian population continued ownership of their land. Venice legislated benign rule over Padua from 1405 under the supervision of their own podestà, administering in the Palazzo Communale, the location of Sala Vivorum Illustrium (Hall of Illustrious Men). Both room and building would display the innovative paintings of Altichiero, inspired by Petrarch and viewed by Alberti.

**Paduan Intellectual Culture: c. 1250-1400**

**Rolandino to Petrarch**

In 1204 Bologna lost an aggregate of students and teachers to the founding of the University of Vicenza due to stringent fiscal policies ordered by the city upon students, and another exodus from Bologna, again rebelling against the academic stringencies, established Padua’s university in 1222. As the center of studies in the Veneto from that day to this, Padua’s university enjoyed a continuum of professors and students from foreign lands as well as the protection of the commune – expanded under legislation in the 1300s. If the University endowed pre-humanism with any direct influence it derived from the College of Artists and not the College of Jurists. There are no surviving letters of significance from the jurisprudence staff at Padua’s studium in the Trecento. The College of Artists, on the other hand, would bestow upon Albertino Mussato his laurel of poetry. Although Padua’s position as urban incubator for classic revival was marked by its College of Arts, aside from Mussato there no writers of note.

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16 Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe*, vol. 2, 6.

17 Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, 31-32 and 370, n. 54.

18 Hyde, 283-285.
during the commune who shine in Padua’s stunning heritage of intellectualism.

**Jurors and Notaries**

On the contrary, the city’s intellectual legacy was laid down by the inventive civic writers during the commune. Paduan intellectualism derives from its public annals and notes, the work of that lesser intellectual group – notaries – who recorded, in various contexts, the urban economic growth in northern Italy. After the wave of finance and culture from the courts of Frederick II, the second half of the 1200s saw the initiation – almost in the form of rebellion against an entire medieval ethic – of *preumanesimo padovano*.\(^{19}\) Despite the tradition of vernacular works, notaries writing in Latin revealed an obsession with antique texts; herein is the essential line of transmission to the legacy of humanism in Alberti’s education in Padua.

The organics of Padua’s intellectual culture lay within its long history of civic analysts – the recorders of family events, of both *nobile* and *popolo* who developed a corpus of literature on civic affairs. In the mid-twelfth century, the role of the notary rose to legal prominence in Italian civic affairs. A public official serving as the binding witness in any Italian court, the notary’s signature evolved as the most immutable form of written legalese in both the secular and ecclesiastical dealings regarding property and commerce. Of note, early Florentine humanist notables – Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) and Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459) – were all notaries. This should only be so, as the exposure and referential demands of the profession to texts, both legal and rhetorical, would leverage an interest beyond medieval education in Latin. Promising students of the profession in Padua were also handed the task of

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 100-200. See also Weiss, *The Dawn of Humanism in Italy*. 
book copying for the city’s university, as did the young Mussato.\textsuperscript{20} Although notarial archives have been central to the history of Italian city-states, the position of notary as purveyor of cultural stimulus is crucial to the context of humanist evolution. The distinction among notaries as analysts was their obligation to keep copious detail of their own civic actions. Thus the context of notarial works lay within the record of local political and cultural scrutiny. Subsequently, the discourse of Paduan thinkers such as Rolandino, Lovato, and Mussato live in the communal-civic realm and not the following religious-civic era of Petrarch.

**Humanist Historiography in Padua**

Lovato’s interest in classics is part of a pre-existing intellectual current in Padua. The historiography of early Paduan humanism begins with the chronicle of events before, during and after the revolution against Ezzelino until 1270 in the *Chronicles of the Facts of March of Treviso (Cronica in factis et circa facta Marchie Trivixane)*, commonly called the *Rolandina*.\textsuperscript{21} Mussato would then further record the Paduan commune’s growth in the *Historia Augusta* (c. 1315). Events until 1320 continue in an account entitled *De gestis Italicorum post Henricum VII*. Thereafter *De traditio...* records the signoria of Marsiglio da Carrara until 1328.\textsuperscript{22} The writings of Giovanni da Nono also record the commune until 1318. Da Nono’s *De generatione aliquorum civium urbis Padue* delivers the unique municipality social record, a cornerstone of civic information in its prototype of volumes to come during the

\textsuperscript{20} See Hyde, 283-285. Hyde references Modena, Biblioteca Estense MS 1271 Lat. ff. I.

\textsuperscript{21} Angelo Zardo, *Albertino Mussato: Studia Storico e Letterario* (Padua: Angelo Drachi, 1884), 70-74. See also Hyde, 297.

Renaissance registry of citizenry and municipal political dealings as well as social history.\(^{23}\)

Although da Nono’s book represents one of the first panegyrics of a city and civic leadership, in the attempt at deference to distinctions of political power and wealth the *De generatione* revealed disproportionate government and commerce in civic rule of Padua. The apogee of pre-humanist literature in Padua lies in Mussato’s neo-classical tragedy, *Ecerinis* (c. 1313) a reinvention of Rolandino’s account of Frederick II and Ezzelino in the characters of Henry of Luxembourg and Cangrande della Scala. The correlation of antagonists was not unique to Mussato; the concept of communal ideals was ever present as a Paduan zeitgeist long before the della Scala and Marsiglio da Carrara brought the commune to an end.\(^{24}\) The discourse of da Nono and Mussato indirectly reveal the antagonism of class – da Nono blaming the *podestà* and Mussato the guilds – both of these historians contradicting the unity of class paradigm stressed by the *Rolandino*.\(^{25}\)

Above all, the literary legacy of Padua was born of a secular tradition wherein the links between culture and politics were inextricable. Kristeller was of the first scholars who insisted that humanist culture emerged, not from a philosophical, institutional setting but from the professional skills among notaries and lawyers.\(^{26}\) This is certainly true of Padua. The ethics inherent in classic texts were superfluous to the grammar and rhetoric taught by medieval *dictatores*, whose task was to redact texts to the leanest of instruction. On the other hand Paduan professionals, began to explore the ancient literature as a model in socio-political practice, using

\(^{23}\) Da Nono, *De generatione*, 14-17.

\(^{24}\) Hyde, 220-251.

\(^{25}\) Ibid. 260. Hyde quotes from Da Nono, *De Generatione*, 21. See also Mussato, *De gestis Italiacorum post Henricum VII Cesarem* ed., Luigi Padrin (Venice: Spese della Società, 1903), col. 587. Mussato states; “*Ad Tribunos quidem, quos Gastaldiones (guildsmen) vocitabant, omnia publica privataque iudicia transulere, et hi omnes opifices erant et qui sordidis commerciis vitabundi volabantur.*”

classical texts in letters and orations for immediate tangible results. Witt observes, “theirs was an eloquence without a conscience” relying more upon a Roman, neo-Senecan stoic tradition rather than an overtly Christian canon. Padua consequently began to emerge as an increasingly avant-garde center for secularization of the arts of antiquity.

**Albertano da Brescia and Giovanni Mansionario: The Libraries at Pomposa and Verona**

This set of classical interests was, to some extent, a continuation of interests in antique texts which one can see, for example, in the work of Albertano da Brescia (c. 1195-1251) one of the first jurists in northern Italy with an appetite for classical moral thought and Seneca in particular. The moral consequence preached in Seneca’s thinking is evident in Albertano’s “On Love and Delight in God and in Neighbor and Other Matters Concerning the Rule of Life” (1238), which influenced students like Dante’s teacher, Brunetto Latini (1220-1294). Peter Stacey argues that Albertano, availing himself of the extant corpus of Senecan texts, was of the earliest thirteenth-century jurists to lift Seneca’s philosophy out of the monastic context and into the public sphere – delivering a civic morality applicable to political rulers as well as laity.

Albertano’s ethic centers upon emphasis on civic life lived without violence (*Liber consolationis et consilii*, 1246) within the confines of commune and urban matrix, marking a paramount injection of humanistic ideology into Italian society. The ancient social and political

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ideals now assumed prominence within the communal construct, imparting to communal ideology a strongly classical bias, which would become the source of humanistic principles of *virtue* in Padua, an ideology that would also serve as the sub-textual engine of *De pictura*.

Albertano would affect Lovato’s preoccupation with Seneca, most likely accessed from copies stowed at the ninth-century Benedictine Abbey of Pomposa between Padua and Ferrara. Lovato had Pomposa, as well as the Chapter Library of Verona, at his disposal.\(^{30}\) The Pomposa library cannot be overstressed as one of the richest medieval depositories of humanist literature. A letter of 1093 from the chapter’s chief cleric, Enrico, to an associate Stefano, stated that “no church, no city, no province, not even Rome the center of the earth can compete with the richness of [Pomposa’s] collection of books.”\(^{31}\) Originally conceived as a repository of ecclesiastical works, by the eleventh century monks were transcribing works of Seneca and Livy (Titus Livius Patavinus) along with annotated sheet music. Billanovich insists, that Lovato and Paduan pre-humanists “reconstructed certain sections dealing with classical texts in the [Pomposa] library,” and it was here where Lovato would have read the plays of Seneca.\(^{32}\)

In addition to Pomposa, Lovato would have accessed works in the Cathedral of Verona, which, according to Sabbadini, possessed “one of the richest libraries in the entirety of the

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\(^{30}\) Alfred Dunston, *Four Centres of Classical Learning in Renaissance Italy* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1972), 8-9.


Middle Ages.” Under the auspices of Verona’s collection, the sacristan of the Cathedral, Giovanni Mansionario (Matociis, d. 1337) composed the *Historia imperialis* (1306-1320) from research on Suetonius. Mansionario was the first post-antique historian to distinguish between the elder Pliny, natural historian and naval commander and the younger Pliny, magistrate and epistle author in his *Brevis annotatio de duobus Pliniis*. Weiss contends that this could have only occurred in Verona due to the Cathedral’s massive inventory of Roman imperial history. Thus, the *Brevis* came to the attention of humanists in Padua in the early fourteenth century. In addition the *Historia* had drawings, albeit in medieval garb, accompanying biographies. For example, in an autograph copy of Mansionario’s work we see illustrations of the dual emperors, Marcus Pupienus (165-238 CE) and Clodius Balbinus (165-238 CE) (Fig. 1.3). Here we find one of the earliest surviving examples combining humanist interpretation of antiquity with visual source. This attempt to *illustrate* antiquity’s discourse with antique images will be magnified in the work of Altichiero in a much more advanced humanistic setting later in the century.

The exploration of classical texts in Verona’s chapter library extends, furthermore, to a bulk of studies on Catullus, Livy, Lucan, Statius (Publius Papinius Statius, 45-90 CE), Priscian, and Eusebius. An anonymous Veronese produced an anthology, *Flores moralium autoritatum*, penned around 1329. In this volume, along with the *Historia Augusta* and *Letters of Pliny the

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37 Ibid., 88-89.

Younger, were Cicero’s *Epistulae ad Atticum* and *Epistulae ad M. Brutum*. A cornerstone of early humanist inquiry was the re-interest in antique poet, Ausonius, author of *Mosella* and *Ephemeris*. Benzo da Alexandria (active mid-1300s), head of the chancery of the della Scala and one-time employer of Dante, discovered the Ausonius text, so-called Codex Veronensis, around 1310 in Cathedral’s rich chapter library. ³⁹ Both Boccaccio and Petrarch, familiar with Ausonius, would access the author from Verona’s chapter house.⁴⁰

In truth Petrarch, writing during his periodic stays and final years in Padua (1367-1374) represents not the beginning but an apogee of a humanist movement evolving in the city for well over half a century before him. Humanists were not philosophers but regenerative thinkers, writers, extrapolators and purveyors of ancient texts.⁴¹ Rhetoric was the foundation of Italian humanism. Classical Roman grammar and rhetoric would become central to the study of ancient literature. As Roman law codified by Justinian became crucial to Italian legal studies, and – considering that Italian cathedral schools as well as the universities of Padua and Bologna were not controlled by the Church to the extent of their French or English counterparts – the teaching of law in Padua was increasingly left to secular-minded jurists. Therefore, a simpler form of Latin in the *ars dictaminis*, served as a short hand for letter writing among those bureaucratic professionals educated in Latin and was, consequently, taught by those same professionals. The *ars dictaminis*, prepared by medieval teachers, called *dictatores*, only subsumed rhetorical rules from Latin – particularly Latin letters – for the intrinsic purpose of extracting prose for


contemporary contracts and discourse. Latin syntax, for example that had been found in Cicero, was not adhered to until the latter-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries.

The evolution of antique styles in Padua spanning from Lovato to Barzizza mirrored the same among the ancient writers – be it the epistolary or dramatic aestheticism of Seneca to the oratorical precision of Cicero. In Witt’s analysis, this blend of neo-classical poetry and prose in thirteenth and fourteenth-century Padua, produced by the likes of Lovato and Mussato, has been labeled “pre-humanism” – that they predate Petrarch. Furthermore, those who pursued a study of antiquity without attempting to emulate style were antiquarians rather than humanists. Accordingly the term humanist is applicable only to Lovato and the later generations – those who would influence Alberti’s De pictura. The pursuit of antique style would both affect the philology of humanism in Padua and inform the political and social thought of their epoch.

Rolandino

The intelligence of the urban record-keeper informs the rise of humanism in Padua. The early elevation of Paduan annals to a marked intellectual and rhetorical status may be most noted by the thirteenth-century rhetorician, Rolandino Patavino. His Rolandina is the primary historical source for the period of despotism over Padua from Ezzelino. Although Rolandino bows to chroniclers before him, the element that puts the historian a notch above other chroniclers is the civic heroism inherent to his work, reminiscent of late republican rhetoric from Rome. As a graduate of Bologna’s studium, Rolandino compiled the notes of his professor, Boncompagno da Signa (1165-1240) who, Hyde maintains, probably instilled in his student, by

42 Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, 18. Witt points out that only Weiss included Paduan intellectuals previous to Petrarch as “humanists” not “pre-humanists.” Witt defines Petrarch as a “third-generation” humanist.

43 Ibid., 21.
means of his own work *Liber de Obsidione Ancone* (1201-1202), a respect for history as written art. Through narrative reconstruction, as opposed to dry recording of events, Boncompagno’s dialogues and metaphors in his description of the siege of Ancona in 1174 by Frederick Barbarossa (1122-1190) represented a republican political stand in defence of the commune’s resolute independence from the Holy Roman Empire.

Rolandino is the single Paduan of pre-humanist note to serve as both a notary and professor (of grammar and rhetoric) at the city’s university. The *Rolandina*, laying out an historical account of political and social division, is not an accumulation of antecedent facts, opinions or oral tradition, but a narrative of events as he witnessed them. As opposed to linear-chronicled, scholastic accounts characteristic of most Italian communes, the history of Padua began to resemble a neo-classical treatise. The *Rolandina*, building upon da Signa’s chronicle, initiates a civic tradition heralding socio-political success and generating considerable communal pride. In this way Paduan notaries, writing in Latin, formed the basis of a pre-humanist culture, which began to dominate Padua’s intellectual life. The republican ideals of Rome were now held to be revived in Padua and victorious over tyranny. Following da Signa, the *Rolandina’s* narrative became integral to the city’s civic history, celebrating the restored commune as a return to political justice and was read aloud in civic ritual to government and studium faculty alike.

**Lovato Lovati**

To find the locus of early humanism in Padua demands focus upon the figure of Lovato and his circle. A jurist deeply immersed in classical literature, Lovato’s work represents the

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keystone of Paduan humanism, as the scholarship of Billanovich, Hyde and Kohl have demonstrated. Witt holds Lovato and Padua responsible for the entire turn of new scholarship indicated by sophistication beyond that of any since Roman antiquity, and, in fact, Lovato could be regarded as the veritable founder of humanism in Padua.\textsuperscript{46} Lovato is first recorded in 1257 as a notary; a decade later, he is listed as a member of the College of judges.\textsuperscript{47} His fame in Paduan politics began with his appointment as a knight and podestà of Vicenza. Thenceforth, he would participate in the politics of the popolo and subsequent advantages of political prominence.\textsuperscript{48}

Although Lovato, was the key humanist involved in the revival of Seneca as the principal classical author for the following generation of humanists, his works offer no evidence of any particular mentor.\textsuperscript{49} He stands as a intellectual titan in his efforts to restore Latin to an elevated literary and social status. This is evident in his poetry – derivative in style and rhythm from the tragedies of Seneca, an almost entirely lost paradigm of literature that he helped restore.\textsuperscript{50} Perhaps his supreme achievement lies in his creation of a network of friends and followers who would provide the fabric of and intellectual movement based upon antique moral ideals. Lovato’s legacy was to help liberate the ancient written word from the grip of scholasticism, restoring the pre-eminence of classical texts as rhetorical, grammatical and ethical models. In

\textsuperscript{46} Witt, \textit{In the Footsteps of the Ancients}, 116. See also Weiss, \textit{The Renaissance Discovery}, 18 and ibid., “Lovato Lovati (1241-1309), \textit{Italian Studies: An Annual Review} 6, no. 1 (1951), 4-5. “Durante la seconda metà del Duecento... come vedremo nel ‘attività letteraria e culturale di un giudice padovano, Lovato Lovati, con cui si inizia quel movimento che conosciamo con il nome di preumanesimo padovano.”

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 156, n.2.


\textsuperscript{49} Witt, \textit{In the Footsteps of the Ancients}, 116. Witt holds Lovato’s use of Seneca’s form and meter as the apex of classical revival in the early 1300s.

seizing the lessons from letters and oratory, Paduan humanists provided an innovative approach to classical literature that would come to fruition in _De pictura_. The taste for ancient culture in Trecento Padua can be seen elsewhere: Marchetto da Padova (1274-1319) and his tract on music, _Lucidarium_ (1315); the jurist Geremia da Montagnone (1250/60-1320/21) and his _Compendium moralium_, a collection of Roman writings; and in the work of the visiting Ferrarese, Riccobaldo da Ferrara (c.1313) with his historical _Pomerium_. All wrote their signature works in Padua. Lovato, however, was distinct; his manuscript of Seneca’s tragedies was a cornerstone in the revival of the ancients; thus, heading a revival of Seneca’s dramas, Lovato became increasingly political. The pertinent illustration of this transition is the poems he exchanged with his noted pupil, Mussato, in 1302. Surveying Padua’s civic strife, the result of wars between Charles of Valois and Tuscany, Lovato, fretting over internal factionalism that would destroy Padua’s political equilibrium, wrote in one exchange with Mussato that “liberty thrives, unmoved” (_libertas immota viget_) only in times of peace. Here begins the rebirth of classical morality in humanist Latin, handed on to Mussato, Petrarch and, eventually, Alberti.

**Albertino Mussato**

Mussato, a professor at the _studium_, is first recorded as a Paduan notary in October of 1282. By 1293 Mussato was politically ensconced well enough in Padua to be handed the task

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51 Witt, _In the Footsteps of the Ancients_, 135. Witt surmises that Hohenstaufen and papal documents influenced Lovato’s style of prose. See also ibid., 100 and n. 51.

52 Ibid., 109. For the pace of chronological development in Lovato’s humanist poetry see the entire chapter, “Padua and the Origins of Humanism,” in _In the Footsteps of the Ancients_, 81-117. See also Padrin, _Lupati de Lupatus, Bovetini de Bovetinis, Albertini Mussati, necnon Jamboni Andraeae de Favafuschis_ (Padua: Tipografia del Seminario 1887). The poem is no. 26.

53 See Nancy Siraisi, _Arts and Sciences at Padua: The Studium of Padua before 1350_ (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1973), 48-49 and Witt, _In the Footsteps of the Ancients_, 119 and n.9. Witt reprints Mussato’s letter to professors at the _studio_ therein calling them _consortes studii_.

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of documenting the remaining members of the Este family in the *comitatus*.\footnote{Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, 119, n.9, references Modena Biblioteca Estense MS 1271, ff. 1-42.} Around 1296, Mussato entered the Consiglio Maggiore. His rise to prominence was due to his connection to the wealthy Lemici family, for which Mussato became legal guardian to an heir, Guglielmo.\footnote{Ibid. The source AS Padua, Archivi Privati 61, n. 13 and Archivi Vescovile, Vicenza Feudorum IV, f. 168v.} His facility at oration and diplomacy had Mussato emerging as a prominent orator in the commune around 1310.\footnote{Hyde, 168.} After a period of self-imposed exile in 1314 due to riots against Guelfs whom he supported, Mussato returned to Padua only to leave again in 1318 after another family with whom he had associated, the Maccaruffi, had sided with the della Scala and were purged from the city. Rejecting ties with the Maccaruffi, Mussato returned and, on behalf of the commune, went to Tuscany to find assistance against the della Scala, remaining there during the 1318 siege.\footnote{Mussato, *De Gestis*, 39-40 and 53.} During his diplomatic work in Germany, the Carraresi had Guglielmo Lemici murdered and his followers run out of Padua. Consequently a steadfast critic of the Carrara, Mussato, now noted historian and poet, chastised the violence of the lords.\footnote{Mussato, *De Tradizione*, col. 725. See also Vergerio, *De principibus Carrariensisibus*, 416, and Conversino, *De dilectione regnantium*, 152.} Supporting the Lemici against the Carrara, he was exiled for good in 1324, dying in 1329.

Mussato’s later work, *De gestis Italicorum*, would report only politics in Padua; yet the high point of early humanist literature is represented by both his *Historia augusta* and the neo-Senecan play, *Ecerinis*, both written between 1311 and 1315. The themes of civic engagement and moral government in these works represents a distillation of the political rhetoric of Seneca and the historical rhetoric of Livy. These themes were mediated by correspondence with Lovato.
Partly inspired by the *Rolandina*, Mussato’s *Ecerinis*, a contemporary response to Verona’s increasing domination over Padua, was the first Latin tragedy since antiquity. However, the distinction between the *Rolandina* and the *Ecerinis* is that the former records an immediate past and the latter uses that past to warn, much more explicitly, of a current political danger. The *Ecerinis*, taking up Lovato’s obsession with Seneca and penned after Mussato’s return from the prisons of Verona in 1314, allegorized the tyranny of Ezzelino in Rolandino’s chronicle. Excoriating the oppression of his city under Cangrande, Mussato’s coalition of poetry and narrative history was the first rhetoric of its kind in the post-classical era. Knowing Seneca’s own bouts with tyranny, Mussato reprised Seneca’s moral themes of ambition, and resistance from the *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon*, imitating Seneca’s five-act construction of tragedy as well as its complicated meter, in replication of the *Thyestes* theme of the mutual destruction of brothers. Mussato’s play was the principle instrument in re-popularizing Seneca’s tragedies in Trecento Italy. Later Petrarch, regarding Seneca’s tragedies, would state that they hold “next, if not the highest merit.” Furthermore, the ideas of studium professor of mathematics and astrology, Pietro d’Abano (1257-1316), also influenced the *Ecerinis*. Mussato’s contemporary, d’Abano bequeathed to Padua an study in natural science, and, subsequently to Mussato who, with the *Ecerinis*, inaugurated a distinguishing humanist paradigm – the city as a natural phenomenon and thus subject to natural law. For this profound civic work, the College of Artists


60 Ibid., 125. From Mussato’s attack on Verona from the *Ecerinis*, 34.174-176. “O, Verona, always the ancient scourge of this march, dwelling-place of enemies and road to wars, seat of tyranny.” (*O, emper huius Marchiae clades vetus / Verona, limen hostium et bellis iter / Sedes tyranni*). For Mussato’s use of Seneca see ibid., 129.

61 Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, 122. Witt says; “Mussato’s Senecan *Ecerinis* marked the highest literary achievement of the Paduan circle and played a major role in exporting the ancient author’s work beyond the Veneto.”

62 Petrarch, *Rerum familiarium* IV.16, 222. “*apud poetas profecto vel primum vel primo proximum locum tenent.*”
bestowed upon Mussato the title of *poeta et historiographus*. Berthold Ullman commended Mussato’s *Ecerinis* as the “first and best play to imitate Seneca,” and that its success endows Mussato as the father of Renaissance tragedy.” However, Hyde points out a paradox regarding the *Ecerinis* and its contemporary audience. By recreating the Latin of antiquity, Mussato’s neo-classical style remained relatively inaccessible to a wider audience of civic elites. In other words, in his attempt to enroll the most important players in the political transformation of Padua, Mussato lost those potential allies due to his erudition in text. Even though the College of Artists bestowed an honor upon Mussato for his Senecan revival, that school would never be the effective agent of change for the desperate political horizon in Padua. To be understood by a large contemporary audience, the *Ecerinis* would have needed a vernacular gloss. The converse would occur for Alberti. Had Alberti intended to write for painters, he would have not written in Latin, nor followed an ancient style, structure and form. Like Mussato, Alberti wrote a neo-classical tract that required erudition to be understood; but while Mussato placed heavy demands upon an elite audience who could not fully understand his Latin play, Alberti relied upon more fully formed humanist audience who, by 1435, could indeed understand his Latin treatise.

**Mussato’s *Historia Augustae* and the Historical Present**

Mussato’s *Historia Augusta* is equally original. In the *Historia* a Paduan, extrapolating the Republic-to-Empire narrative of Livy, hailed as native son of the city, chronicles the violent

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63 Joseph M. Berrigan, “A Tale of Two Cities: Verona and Padua in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Art and Politics in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy, 1250-1500* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 72.


65 Hyde, 298-299.
dissolution of the commune in his own time. The work begins with an account of Henry of Luxembourg’s descent into Italy but quickly moves to Padua’s political stage. Although again following a tradition dating back to the Rolandina, the work differs in matters of rhetoric and style. Rolandino had heralded Padua as a second Rome. Mussato, now incorporating a more classicizing and tighter Latin prose, adopted the technique of historical present, thus giving immediate life to expository action. Despite notable pessimism, Mussato’s contribution to humanism in the Historia lies in its imitating antique political discourse. As Witt remarks, Mussato’s innovation was the inclusion of his own times within the bounds of his narrative. This perspective was generative of a characteristic in subsequent humanist historiography from Petrarch to Alberti. In addition, the template for the city or state as an anthropomorphic body would reach far into the Cinquecento by way of Marsiglio Mainardini (Marsiglio of Padua, 1275-1342?), pupil of d’Abano, friend to Mussato, and last writer of note during Padua’s commune with humanist associations and shared intellectual preoccupations.

Antiquarianism: Pietro da Moglio and Guglielmo Pastrengo

The tragedies of Seneca would further be explored in Petrarch’s generation in the courses of Pietro da Moglio (d. 1383) at Padua’s studium where he became chair of rhetoric in 1362. Born in Bologna, Da Moglio most likely taught pre-humanist and Dante correspondent, Giovanni del Virgilio (late 1200s-1327) in that city and at the university from 1352 until 1362 and again from 1368 until his demise in 1383. He also tutored Salutati from 1345 to 1348 at his boarding

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66 Ibid., 178. Mussato voiced a dour outlook for the Paduan commune in his later works, such as De gestis.

67 For Marsiglio’s connections to Paduan humanist culture, his attack on the papacy and the Defensor Pacis see Annabelle Brett, Marsilius of Padua: Defender of the Peace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also Nicolai Rubinstein, Marsilio da Padova e il Pensiero Politico Italiano del Trecento (Padua: Antenore, 1979).

68 Calcaterra, 137-139.
school. A friend to Petrarch, Da Moglio wrote commentaries on the Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* as well as Cicero’s *De inventione*, the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the pseudo-Senecan *De quattuor virtutibus*, as well as the plays of Terence. Giuseppe Billanovich showed that Pietro, in Padua in 1364, wrote a commentary on Valerius Maximus, historian under Tiberius and author of *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium novem libri*. The influence of Valerius was to be seen in Petrarch’s *Rerum memorandarum libri*, written throughout his career and left unfinished at his death. We may consider Da Moglio as a transitional figure in the teaching landscape of Padua because of his insistence on the primacy of Cicero and his exchange of ideas with Petrarch.

According to Sabbadini, the first humanist collections begin with Guglielmo Pastrengo (1290-1362). Pastrengo studied jurisprudence in Avignon with Oldrado da Ponte (d. 1343), an influential papal jurist in Avignon who became friend to Petrarch and who also taught at the University of Padua. Pastrengo’s *De originibus rerum libbelus* was something of a forerunner of his friend Petrarch’s *De viribus illustribus*. A major personality and lawyer in political affairs during the reign of the Della Scala in Verona, Pastrengo put together an impressive collection of Latin volumes of Josephus Flavius, Virgil, Valerius Maximus, Ovid, Vitruvius,

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70 Sabbadini, *Guarino*, 176-177.

71 Ibid., 4. “Ma sopra tutti si elvò Gugliemlmo da Pastrengo.” See also ibid., 5, n.13.


73 Ibid., 5, n. 14. The original title held the addendum, “Explicit liber de originibus editus a Gulielmo Pastregico cive Veronensi eiusque urbis fori causidico.”
Pliny, Plautus, Lucian and Juvenal among others which Sabbadini reconstructed, including Cicero’s letters to Brutus, Atticus and Quintus, exceeding that of his contemporaries.74 He also had in possession or access, by means of the Verona Chapter House, the rhetorical works of De inventione, De officiis, as well as the Rhetorica ad Herennium.

Weiss claims that we cannot call Mansionario or Pastrengo “professional” antiquarians, but perhaps that qualification needs rethinking.75 To some extent – in relation to their time – these men are antiquarians in terms of their dedication to an antique past. Benzo, Mansionario and Pastrengo stand not only as incubators of an antiquarian enthusiasm to come at the end of the century but as critical links in the entire legacy of antique research in Padua’s environs from whom the next generation – including Dondi and Petrarch – would revive a topography of Rome.

**Petrarch and the “Studia humanitatis”**

Tommaso Parentucelli (Pope Nicholas V, 1397-1455) in gathering texts for the library of Cosimo di Medici (1389-1464) in San Marco around 1438 wrote:

> The *studia humanitatis*, therefore, one considers grammar, rhetoric, history and poetry and, also, morals [philosophy] authorized as worthy.76

The *studia humanitatis* began as a late-medieval educational cycle of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy.77 Although never writing a treatise on rhetoric, Petrarch’s grasp of the *studia humanitatis* was considerably enriched by his discoveries of Cicero’s *Pro Archia*

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74 Sabbadini, *Guarino*, 10-12 and 176-177.


poeta, at Liège in 1333, as well as the letters _Ad Atticum, Ad Brutum,_ and _Ad Quinctum fratrem._

Yet another find, _Ad familiares_ was sent, after his death, to Salutati in the 1390s. Salutati authored a body of letters following Petrarch’s model of Senecan style, dealing with ethics. The earliest surviving humanist use of _studia humanitatis,_ comes from Salutati’s letter of September 30, 1369 to Ugolino Orsini d’Conte di Manupello, heralding Orsini’s dead father, Napoleone:

> … and almost like a two-headed Parnassus attained both kinds of wisdom not in a sophistic or inflated fashion, but truly with the solid existence of the real thing, and thereafter through long practice he came to grasp all the _studia humanitatis,_ and provided for every aspect of life for myself and for others.

Two weeks later, Salutati included oratory study in a letter to his teacher, Da Moglio, in Padua:

> In this way nature produces and chooses culture, such that art and nature remind us it is not toil but attempting the delight in writing... Do you believe that hours of rhetoric have gone from mind? Oh, counsellor and master who taught the sacred dogma, the power of a letter... what rule renders the _cursus sonorus_ and what punctuation must be set? These things from you high lectern you once taught me.

Salutati drove the term into Renaissance lexicon, employing Cicero’s words in several subsequent letters, the most famed of which is the homage to Petrarch after the latter’s death in 1374 in an epistle to Roberto Guidi, Count of Battifolle:

> But let us move on and let us consider eloquence, which he [Petrarch] preferred over the other _studia humanitatis._ I have reserved my praise for this last, since in my opinion, it was his greatest achievement.

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“...quasi Parnassus biceps periter continentis, utriusque sophie non sophistico, non ventoso sensu, sed verre realitatis solidam existentiam attingebat, et denique omnia humanitatis studia longa exercitatione complexus ad universas vire partes et sibi et certe ris consulebat.”

80 Salutati, _Ep._ 2.18, 115-116. “ad hoc munus natura produxit et elegit humanitas, ut et arte et natura moneremur non labore, sed delectatione ad scripturam appellendum fore... perdidi quecunque in rhetoricis lectionibus te monente collegeram; excessit pene memoria illius tui suavissimi stili. Reduc precor me in recordia temporum letiorum et, nisi molestum sit, rescribe, et per exhibitorem presentium...”

81 Salutati, _Ep._ 3.15, 179, “Sed omittamus ista, et eloquentiam, si placet, ipsius contemplatur, qua quantum in ceteris
Salutati, thereafter used the term in letters to Padua and even Florentine exiles in Padua like poet Alberto degli Albizzi (1360s-1430s?) while a student in Padua’s *studium*.\(^{82}\) Salutati also employed the motif in letters to Lombardo della Seta – Petrarch’s amanuensis who completed Petrarch’s *De viris illustribus* in Padua – as well as Petrarch’s scribe, Giovanni Malpaghini da Ravenna (1346-1412), later a Latin tutor to Poggio.\(^{83}\) As Salutati had with Petrarch, so Poggio consoled Niccolò Niccoli (1363-1437) when Salutati passed in 1406, “but there is something else which compels all of us who are devoted to the *studia humanitatis* to be in the depths of grief and mourning.”\(^{84}\) In sum, many scholars believe that Salutati founded the term, extrapolated in either Cicero’s *Pro Murena* 61 as “discussing the liberal studies,” or in *Pro Caelio* 24:

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\ldots \text{two young men of the highest possible sensibility and scholarship... of the finest literary training... attached to him Dio as much by his devotion to learning and to the principles of human conduct...}^{85}
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However, due to incomplete translations of these sources, the term, *studia humanitatis*, was not seen until Poggio’s discovery of a manuscript in Cluny in 1415. On the other hand, while never literally writing “*studia humanitatis,*” it is Petrarch who nonetheless revived the syllabus in which Alberti’s would be educated thanks to his 1333 discovery of the *Pro Archia*, a copy of which he probably gave to Salutati. The *exordium* of the *Pro Archia*, as Michael D. Reeve

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elucidates, “provided classical scholarship in the Renaissance with its charter.”\textsuperscript{86}

I entreat you in this cause to grant me this indulgence, suitable to this defendant, and as I trust not disagreeable to you, the indulgence, namely, of allowing me, when speaking in defense of a most sublime poet and most learned man, before this concourse of highly educated citizens, before this most polite and accomplished assembly, and before such a praetor as him who is presiding at this trial, to enlarge with a little more freedom than usual on the study of polite literature and refined arts…\textsuperscript{87}

Salutati and others, therefore, accessed the term by way of Petrarch who had marked it in his copy. After Petrarch the dynamics of studia humanitatis would change by way of Padua, and, specifically, Barzizza and his pedagogic methodology.\textsuperscript{88}

\textit{De inventione} and the \textit{Rhetorica ad Herennium} were staples of the \textit{ars dictaminis} throughout the thirteenth century. However, the archaeology of Cicero’s letters and orations would also give early humanism its start. Along with the \textit{Pro Archia} at Liège, Petrarch found Cicero’s \textit{Epistolae ad Atticum} in 1345, the latter of which Barzizza owned by 1408.\textsuperscript{89} In addition Salutati prompted the re-discovery of Cicero’s \textit{Pro Cluentia} at Vercelli in 1355.\textsuperscript{90}

Throughout Petrarch’s travels in Italy, France and Flanders, he searched monastery libraries for codices of antique authors. By way of Naples, Avignon, Paris and elsewhere, at the end of his life he owned copies of Terence, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Lucan, the tragedies of Seneca, and Juvenal. In addition he had pieces or complete histories of Suetonius, Julius Caesar and Pliny, as


\textsuperscript{87} Cic., \textit{Pro Archia poeta}, in \textit{Orations}, trans. Neville Hunter Watts (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), ii.3, 8. “…quasi a vobis ut in hac causa mihi detis hanc veniam accommodatam haec reo, vobis, quem ad modum spero, non molestam, ut me pro summo poeta atque eruditissimo homine dicentem hoc concursu hominum litteratissimorum, hac vestrae humanitate, hoc denique praetore exercente iudicium patiamini de studiis humanitatis ac litterarum paulo loqui liberius.”

\textsuperscript{88} See Kohl, “The Changing Concept of the \textit{Studia Humanitatis},” 186.

\textsuperscript{89} Sabbadini, \textit{Storia Critica di Testi Latini}, Padua, 1971, 84.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., \textit{Le Scoperte dei Codici Latini}, 121.
well as a partial copy of the *Institutio*, given him by Lapo da Castiglionchio (1336-1381) the elder, whose son knew Alberti since the latter was fourteen, studying with Barzizza – around the same time that Petrarch’s copy of the abridged *Periochae Liviane* would come into the hands of Barzizza. 91 Ullman points out that Petrarch’s role in humanism lays not so much in the volume of his library but the antique authors whom he favored most, namely Cicero and Livy. 92

Sabbadini maintains that Cicero was the author with whom Petrarch was most obsessed. 93 Aside from Petrarch’s famous finds in 1333, he had in is possession the *Pro Plancio, Pro Milone, Pro Marcello* and *Pro Ligario, Pro rege deiotaro*, and *De imperio Cn. Pompei*.

Rhetorical works of Cicero in Petrarch’s possession included *De inventione*, ubiquitous in the Middle Ages, the *De officiis*, *De senectute* and *De amicitia*, as well as the *Academics*. However, Seneca is the initial source of Petrarch’s moral philosophy evident in his *Epistulae familiares*. The strata of morality and virtue standing against the seductions of the physical world is a direct distillation of Seneca. Ullman argued that Seneca was the fulcrum of the corpus of Petrarch’s work. 94 Although Petrarch claimed Cicero as his favourite – and even Ullman says that if Petrarch is “the father of humanism then Cicero is the grandfather” – the morality of Seneca remains the consistent guide to Petrarch’s advising and admonishing in his *Letters*. 95 Traces of these Senecan concerns persist into Alberti’s work. Although Alberti concedes near his

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95 Ibid. 27. For example see Petrarch, *Rerum familiarium*, III.3, 124 on ‘accomplishment.’ “Deeds accomplished never satisfy… nothing has been accomplished so long as anything remains to be accomplished.”
conclusion of Book III that “the painter’s work is to please the public” he, like Petrarch who would distinguish immortal fame from the pursuit of ephemeral glory, stresses the reward of good painting on a moral note of “perpetual fame.”96 This immortal fame, as Petrarch admonishes, “follows virtue like a shadow follows a solid body” is only “worthy of free men.”97

**Humanism and *De viribus illustribus***

The outstanding mark in historical time of Petrarch is his service as the exemplum of success to immediate generations following, including Alberti. That a humanist analyst of the ancients could make a living and also embrace wealth and glory was no small impetus for Vergerio, Barzizza, Guarino and Alberti. Petrarch’s first outstanding gift to the ideology of Italian humanism and legacy of Rome was the *Africa* (1337-1343), his homage to heroism of Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus in the Second Punic War. His second seminal contribution to early modern appraisal of antiquity was the *De viris illustribus (On Illustrious Men)*, revised by the author and left unfinished at his death. *De viris illustribus* and its celebration of ancient virtue and glory are the truest legacy of Petrarch to Alberti. As Petrarch saw himself in this book as somewhat of a contemporary to that of Livy, so his period addressed history as communal, biographical and universal. Petrarch’s copy of Livy’s *Ab urbe condita* was clearly the source for *De viris*.98 Witt points out that there were four points of departure from previous medieval works on ancient history in the *De viris*: 1) Petrarch wrote in depth on each personage; 2)

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97 Petrarch, *Rerum familiarium*, I.2, 20. “…virtutum fama, ceu solidum corpus umbra consequitur.”

Petrarch’s Latin was closer to ancient syntax and vocabulary; 3) Petrarch concentrated only on military and civic heroes – no ecclesiastical or mythical personage; and 4) save Pyrrhus and Alexander, all the subjects were Roman. Removing ecclesiastics later in life, Rome is represented in discourse by a Paduan humanist saluting the triumph of antiquity’s morality.

Petrarch’s motives, “to point out those things that are to be followed and those to be avoided,” reflects his social conscience – a mainstay of Paduan political legacy. Just as the Africa was motivated by disappointment and rejection of the politics and character of his age – not only from the Babylonian captivity of the papacy in Avignon, but from his perception of the subsequent degeneration across Italy, the De Virus heralded a reborn Roman history. Petrarch’s two works on history, marking the epitome of his renaissance of classical antiquity, are symbolized by the humanist’s retort to French criticism of both his stance on education and the heralding of his country. Pope Urban V arriving in Rome required French contingency to rebut Petrarch’s lauding Italy. The papal ambassador brought Jean de Hesdin’s work to Padua in 1373 and had Petrarch read the opus. Petrarch’s Invectiva, proclaimed the Roman Empire as greater than France and Latin literature as greater than French with the simple rhetorical query, “What is all history but the praise of Rome?” (Quid est enim alius omnis historia, quam romana laus)?

The most vibrant follow-up to De viris is Petrarch’s letter of 1373 to Francesco II Vecchio remanding him, initially, to source Cicero’s De officiis and the Philippics for his


100 Ibid., 109-110.

101 Petrarch, De virus illustribus, ed. Guido Martellotti (Florence: Sansoni, 1964), 4. “Apud me nisi ea requieruntur, que ad virtutes vel virtutum contraria trahi possunt; hic enim, nisi fallor, fructuosus historicorum finis est, illa proseque que vel sectanda legentibus vel fugienda sunt.” See also Kohl, “Petrarch’s Prefaces.” 143.

ethics. Petrarch goes on to leverage Marcus Brutus, Julius Caesar, Augustus, Marcus Agrippa, Vespasian, Titus and Marcus Aurelius to name a few in his leveraging the greats of Rome as exempla for *Il Vecchio* to whom to aspire. Herein the *De viris* and its litany of antique heroes, who would be depicted by Altichiero in the *Sala Virorum Illustrium*, is used in pedagogical service for a prince. The *De viris*, by importing the opinions of a poet so aggressively famous as Petrarch – whose personal copy of the book would end up in the hands of Barzizza – provided the forensic accountability for Alberti’s use of the ancients, both in text and image.

The legacy of Petrarchan humanism delivered a vigorous educational ethos in Padua stemming directly from: first, his stay in the city and friendship with the Carrara court, which resulted in, secondly; the *De viris illustribus* whose exempla would inform Altichiero’s work in the Palazzo Carrarese (to be addressed in chapter 3) and, finally; his library, much of which would end up at the *studium* in Pavia under Visconti supervision and available to Barzizza. Petrarch’s works and library may be considered to have transformed the intellectual orthodoxy of grammar school and university study in Padua. Petrarch not only endorsed the texts themselves, but the buildings, events and historical places to which the texts referred, and this compendium Barzizza and Padua would bequeath to Alberti. The knowledge of discourse would prevail upon the knowledge of *place* – buildings and architecture, interiors and paintings or sculpture – all of which are cogent to the entire corpus of Alberti’s inspiration and discourse on art. By the early 1400s, the texts were mined not simply for their application to business but for their historical and moral context. Petrarch’s letters would shift epistolary Latin from dry business affair to

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104 Ibid., 522-538.

philosophical endeavor, adding a new verve to the study of classical discourse. As Petrarch and Vergerio bemoaned the relegation of oratory to a role of legal curricula, so pedagogy in Padua would raise classical oratory back to a place of capital importance as a mainstay of education.

**Pedagogy in Late-Trecento Padua**

Of the three types of schools in the 1300s – communal (city government), ecclesiastic or independent (privately-paid master) – the communal school was most prevalent until Conversino who will be addressed later. Renaissance cities did not have a system of education in the twentieth-century sense; smaller communities sought out a master, hired by a city to educate commercial middle-class children if the parents had the wherewithal, financially, to support the effort. Communal schools might educate thirty students a year, independent schools perhaps more. The majority of children lived in academic ignorance. Petrarch’s remarks denouncing the occupation of school teaching reveals a humanist problem with late fourteenth-century education:

> Let those men teach boys who can do nothing greater, whose qualities are a plodding diligence, a rather dull mind, a muddled intellect, ordinary talent, cold-bloodedness, a body tolerant of labor, and a min contemptuous of glory, desirous of petty gains, and indifferent to boredom… pity those who wasted nearly all their lives in public school.  

Penned in 1352, this incarceration pre-dated by half a century the transformation, particularly in Padua, of primary education. Pedersen argues that Albertus Magnus (1206-1280) started the process to separate classical studies from religious scholarship. Endemic, nonetheless, to the

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106 Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, 7


108 Pedersen, 180, 254, and 280.
Padua’s legacy of humanism were four teachers who, by the early 1400s, would provide a pedagogical transformation: Conversino, who will be discussed shortly; as well as Barzizza; Guarino; and Vittorino who will be discussed in Chapter 2 concerning Alberti’s education.

Between the time of Lovato and Alberti, from 1300 to the mid 1400s, there existed in Venice and Padua more private grammar schools than anywhere else in Italy.\textsuperscript{109} Conservative estimates say there were between forty and fifty at any given moment in both cities. The charter of private grammar schools was to educate a boy between the approximate ages of seven to fourteen years in preparation for notarial or legal career or even a degree at university, which Alberti subsequently pursued in Bologna. By the mid-twelfth century ecclesiastical schools in Padua had fallen behind in popularity, evidence again of how church interference with education had been marginalized by Padua’s civic and business priorities. The teacher or grammaticus, under the Carrara, served also in some official civic function, as Conversino would.

Attached to the school of law, rhetoric, as a study, escaped the restriction tied to the agenda specific to notaries. Rhetoric now enjoyed a broader appreciation under the school of arts and medicine. Thus the rise of the school of arts, along with the fame of Petrarch and the importance of classical texts, all supported by court of the Carrara, ushered in a proclivity for a fresher look at antique discourse in the private grammar school – like that run by Da Moglio who taught Salutati and Conversino. Conversino would open his classroom to intramural discussion, invite outside teachers to join and counted among his students, Vergerio, Guarino, Vittorino.

\textbf{Giovanni Conversino da Ravenna}

One aim of the humanist educator was to develop a harmony of intellectual comprehension

\textsuperscript{109} Mercer, 8, n. 2, and 138. See also Vittorio Cian, \textit{Della Santa: Storia della coltura in Venezia} (Bologna: Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1905), 175. Records of payments and attendance at the onset of 15\textsuperscript{th} century Venice stress regard for private elementary education there.
and character.\textsuperscript{110} Conversino was a student of Da Moglio at the \textit{studium} in Bologna. Having followed his mentor to Padua, we subsequently know of Da Moglio’s work through Conversino’s lectures at the University of Bologna on Valerius Maximus in the late 1360’s before the teacher’s return to the Carrara court in the late 1370s.\textsuperscript{111} Conversino treated the entire opus as a lesson on public morality as evidenced by his appended, “The histories of the ancients are useful in giving good advice to the city.”\textsuperscript{112} Kohl, reiterating Billanovich presents the argument that a copy of Valerius by Poggio in Florence in 1397 originated from Conversino as the copyist wrote, “\textit{aliter processarum in lucem virtutem, Io. Ra [Iovannem Ravena]}.”\textsuperscript{113} This suggests that the Valerius manuscript, a constant companion of Conversino, made its way to Florence by way of Padua. Alberti studied Valerius with Barzizza whose copy may very well have originated from Conversino as well. Although Sabbadini saw humanist education begin with Barzizza, Conversino was plausibly the first humanist educator:

\begin{quote}
The school of the man from Ravenna (Conversino) at Padua was not humanistic; humanism penetrated Padua in 1408 with Barzizza. The Latin [taught by Conversino] was that of theology and the jurists.\textsuperscript{114}
\end{quote}

Kohl regards Conversino the “Paduan equivalent of Salutati,” in that as Salutati was eclipsed by Bruni and civic humanism in the early Quattrocento.\textsuperscript{115} Consequently Petrarch, Vergerio and Guarino have overshadowed Conversino’s importance to the educational and literary legacy of

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{110} Woodward, \textit{Vittorino da Feltre}, 36-38.
\bibitem{112} Ibid., 541. “\textit{Historie antiquorum utiles sunt ad danda bona consilia ciitati}…”
\bibitem{113} Ibid. The manuscript in Rome is MSS Vat. Pal. Lat. 903.
\bibitem{115} See Kohl, “The Ms. Tradition of Giovanni da Ravenna (Conversino),” in \textit{Culture and Politics}, 610, 611.
\end{thebibliography}
northern Italy. Conversino, in fact, taught both Vergerio and Guarino. Greek studies by way of Manuel Chrysoloras (1355-1415) were studied and dispersed by three Paduan scholars: Vergerio in Padua, Guarino later in Ferrara and Vittorino later in Mantua, Conversino’s father was in possession of Greek works. Indeed, the influence of Conversino reaches Bruni, Francesco Barbaro, Francesco Filelfo (1398-1481), and Poggio.

Born in Buda, the son of a physician at the court of King Louis of Hungary (painted by Altichiero in the St. James Chapel of the Santo in Padua), Conversino was raised by his uncle Tommaso, a Franciscan priest in Ravenna. Conversino studied at the studium in Bologna, following, in 1360 to a course on Cicero and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. A prodigious student, he was teaching the book a year later as a student lecturer. He was graduated with a notarial degree two years later. His combination of notary skills and erudition on Roman classics as well as the foundational *ars dictaminis* prepared him for work with the Carrara as chancellor and teacher. His first job was as a teacher in Conegliano and then Belluno where he penned his first treatise, a work on Franciscan values, introduced to him by his uncle. Through friendship with Latin professor, Carletto Galmarelli, and an introduction from one Montorso Guglielmo Montorso, a guarantor of loans and attendant to the Carrara, Conversino was presented to Francesco Il Vecchio. Therein followed three years at the Carrara court, when, upon leaving he would teach for an interim in Venice, become chief notary back in Hungary, thence returning to Venice in 1388 to be reacquainted with earlier pupil, Guistiniani. In 1392, Conversino assumed his first employment as professor of rhetoric and Latin literature at the University of

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Padua where he would teach the major figures of post-Petrarchian humanism; Vergerio, Guarino, Vittorino, and Polenton. Sabbadini’s reducing Conversino to a mere proponent of scholastic Latin overlooked a foundational connective chapter of early humanist education in that city.

Conversino Humanist Treatises with the Carrara Court

Conversino wrote an embellished court history of the Carrara for Francesco II Vecchio around 1380 entitled *Familia Carrariensis natio edita per Johannem de Ravenna Seniori Francisch*. Conversino’s mention of visual art in the dedication says he admires the paintings of Guariento d’Arpo (c. 1310-1370) in the Palazzo Carraresi:

> Here in this palace where Umberto the Sixth, prince of Padua took care of the court with the marvellous columns and ceilings and the paintings of Guariento during the middle of the fourteenth century.

Conversino is most likely referring to the *Angel Cycle* of the 1350’s now in the Museo Civico of Padua (Figs. 1.4-1.7). Arriving in Padua in 1379 amidst the city’s War of Chioggia with Venice, two surviving treatises written during his years in the Carrara court deliver a concise history of Conversino’s Paduan contribution. These documents represent the first written account of court life in the early Renaissance, thus assisting the revelation of context through which Barzizza (and Guarino while in Padua) would proceed with instruction to Alberti. The first treatise, *De primo eius introitu ad aulam* of 1385 and addressed to a Venetian contemporary, Marco Giustinian reports his demeaning tenure under Francesco II Vecchio and the subsequent

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119 Cortese, trans., Weller, 76. “Huic regiae quo Ubertinus sceptiger Paduae Sextus miris quidem columnis lacunaribus Guarentisque figuris in medio prope XIV saeculo curiam...”.

120 Conversino, *De dilectione regnantium*, 129.
reasons for departure. The second work, *De dilectione regnantium* of 1399, in the model of his mentor Petrarch’s *Seniles*, 14.1 – that letter written to Francesco Il Vecchio – examines the motif of popular disenchantment with a prince, this being Francesco Novello who would perish at the hands of Padua’s nemesis, Venice. Having initially contacted Petrarch ten years previously in Padua through his Ravenna humanist school-master Donato Albanzani (c 1328-1411), Conversino met him for the second time in Arquà in 1373, the year the latter penned his letter of antique archetypes to Francesco Il Vecchio. Leaving Padua in 1404, Conversino, in a letter of conciliation at his departure, would invoke Horace’s warning from the weasel to the fox, who had entered the hen house and eaten too much to get out by the same hole, “You must go back,” he says, “lean by the narrow gap which you entered when lean.” The use of Horace taught by Barzizza, is metaphorically developed by Alberti when he writes that *historia* must “move the soul of the beholder (*animi motu*).” Court complexities during his first three-year tenure incited by jealousy of others, particularly overseer of the house distribution of food and salary, Niccolò Curtarolo, regarding Conversino’s role as Francesco Il Vecchio’s personal teacher and confidant wore on Conversino’s sensibilities, and he left for Venice in 1382. Even the promise of a new wife, home and ecclesiastical position for his son could not dissuade his departure. After serving as chief notary in Ragusa from 1383 to 1388, Conversino returned to Venice. Receiving an offer in 1389 from the Visconti, now controlling Padua, to teach Latin at

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122 Alberti, *De pictura*, II.40, 78-79. “A ‘historia’ you can justifiably praise and admire will reveal itself to be so charming and attractive as to hold the eye of the learned and unlearned spectator for a long while with a certain sense of pleasure and emotion.” (Historia, vero quam merito possis et laudare et admirari, eiusmodi erit quae illecebris quibusdam sese in amenam et ornatum exhibeat, ut oculos docti atque indociti spectatoris diutius quadam cum voluptate at animi motu detineat.) Alberti writes “animi motu” Grayson translates this as “sense of emotion.”

123 Conversino, *De primo eius*, 22-83. See also Kohl, *Padua Under the Carrara*, 156-157.
the *studium*, Conversino declined, possibly as allegiance to the deposed Carrara. Instead he went to Friuli to become the master teacher at a grammar school. By 1392 he was back in Padua lecturing at the university on Latin poets, and counting among his students Polenton, who would pen in Padua the *Argumenta super aliquot orationibus et invectivis Ciceronis* (1413), one of the foremost treatises on Cicero since Petrarch, finished around the time that Alberti commenced studies with Barzizza. Polenton studied with Vittorino after Conversino; Vittorino, in turn studied with Barzizza and worked with him. Thus, Ullman believes, based upon Barzizza’s reputation as the foremost Cicero scholar of his day, that, “whether Polenton was a pupil of his or not [Barzizza] must have been of importance in shaping Sicco's interests.”

From 1393 to the fall of Padua in 1405, Conversino served as the city’s chancellor. A 1397 document reports his address in the *Contrada Erimitani* near the Cappella Scrovegni housing Giotto’s famous fresco cycle. Of the first humanists to utilize John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* on the substance of the state and duties of a prince, Conversino’s *De dilectione regnantium* is the first surviving humanist treatise to incorporate Vergil, Ovid, Horace, Lucan, Statius as well as historians Sallust, Valerius Maximus, and Suetonius – all within a single tract on morality of a prince. The work foreshadowed Vergerio’s *De ingenuis moribus et liberalibus studiis* (1401) and the treatise *De felicitate tres libri* (early 1400s) by humanist Cardinal Francesco Zabarella (1360-1417) on the same subject; and it furthermore points to Alberti’s introduction in *De pictura* to Lionello d’Este. *De dilectione* uses pictorial arts as metaphor for a prince’s need of judicious yet elegant demeanor:

Nor does that reasoning apply only to men but holds in everything: where precious stones are concerned

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precious metal befits them; a base metal diminishes their lustre. The handsomeness of a horse requires proper setting off; it is disfigured with cheap tackle. *A fine picture demands a choice setting with the right colors about it;* failing these it is looked at but with contempt. Meaning that is the more forceful for being written up with full verbal ornament carries its own grace; that meaning is obscured if meanly put.\(^{126}\)

Among these verbal pictures he acknowledges painters but denies their place in a court:

For just as many instruments are required for the exercise to perfection of any art... so in the art of ruling it is fitting that various and diverse classes of persons be kept at hand... harpers, singers actors, *painters* and *other foolish people* are acquired at court more for the pleasure they give than for anything else; they are people who should earn regard not so much for their intrinsic values as for their very numbers.\(^{127}\)

Conversino makes a rhetorical argument for a corresponding ornamentation in just relationship to the grandeur of the job. In this he also uses the metaphor of precious stones in need of deserving elaboration - a metaphorical comparison ubiquitous in *De pictura*. Before dying in Venice in 1408, Conversino would teach Latin grammar and classics until 1406 to the likes of Francesco Barbaro who would go on to study with Barzizza alongside Alberti. In his last years in Padua he would teach both Vergerio and Vittorino. Kohl argues that Barbaro, a collector of Conversino’s library, used the works as prototypes for his own writings.\(^{128}\) Conversino’s last work in Padua in 1404 endorses humanism as the primary crucial instrument of education:

Certainly never would poetry, oratory, philosophy, history and other studies of high attainment have

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\(^{127}\) Ibid., 167. “Nam quemadmodum in qualibet artium ad perfeccionem eius organa plurima requiruntur... sic in arte principandi uaria diversaque genera adhiberi conuenit... cantores, hystriones, pictores, ceterique ridiculi homines, uoluptate magis asciscuntur, qui non quidem tam in estimacione quam in numero habendi sunt.”

\(^{128}\) Kohl and Day, 251-259. Glosses on two manuscripts are now in the Biblioteca Marciana and the second copy of Aristotle’s *De animalibus* is in the Biblioteca Lolliniana at Belluno.
reached the degree of honor and wealth without the love and generosity of princes. \(^\text{129}\)

Humanist historian Polenton’s *Scriptorum illustrium Latinae linguae libri XVIII*, the most thorough extant historical reference work of Latin writers (c.1426) was certainly the result of studies with Conversino, whom Polenton endorsed as a mentor in *humanism:*

… as a student of rhetoric, I heard the lectures of Giovanni da Ravenna, son the grammarian, Conversino. This man was both from the sanctity of his morals and in his learning in all that pertains to rhetoric and the *studia humanitatis* the prince on lecturing of all those scholars who lived in Italy in his time. \(^\text{130}\)

**Pier Paolo Vergerio and Rhetoric of the Court**

Student of Conversino, Vergerio was born in Capodistria (Koper), the Aegean sea port of what is now Slovenia but what was a commercial mainstay of Venetian commercial activity. \(^\text{131}\) Vergerio studied at the Padua *studium*, later taught in both Florence and Bologna, studied Greek with Chrysoloras in Florence, and returned to Padua by the late 1390s before eventually leaving after Venetian control of the city in 1405. Vergerio returned to Hungary to serve Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg (1368-1437) until the former’s death around 1445.

A document of June 3, 1381 has Vergerio’s father in Padua paying a debt to a

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130 Polenton, *Scriptorum illustrium*,166. “…eloquentiae studens audiebam Iohannem Ravennatem, Cursini grammatici filium. Erat hic et sanctimonia morum et his litterias quae ad studia humanitatis ac eloquentiae pertinent omnium qui ea memoria in terra Italia viverent peritorum sententia princeps.”

grammatician professor named Zamonus on behalf of a notary named Rantulfo del Tacco.\textsuperscript{132}

Perhaps receiving scholastic instruction by this time or shortly thereafter, Vergerio only became a doctor of the arts in Padua in 1405, although he was referred to as such as early as 1389.\textsuperscript{133}

The first surviving documentation of Vergerio’s professional proclivities is the humanist’s epistles that record his employment as a teacher of dialectic in Padua, around 1386 when he most likely met Salutati as well as his friend Zabarella for the first time.\textsuperscript{134} The two resounding influences on Vergerio as a formative teacher were Salutati and Zabarella. Whereas Salutati discovered his passion for rhetoric as a government employee and Zabarella as a canon, Vergerio, bridges one century of humanism to another. He was the first humanist of note to bring the new endeavors of rhetoric onto the courtly and political stage, and so it was that he arrived in the Veneto during the hectic disbursement of Venetian-Paduan conflict. Chrysoloras arrived in Florence in February of 1397 for a five-year stay at the behest of Salutati to teach Greek to Vergerio, Bruni and Niccolò Niccoli.\textsuperscript{135} Chrysoloras left early in 1399. Vergerio returned to Padua in April of 1400 and would pass the next five years there.\textsuperscript{136}


\textsuperscript{134} Smith, 485.

\textsuperscript{135} Vergerio, \textit{Ep. LXXXXVI. 8-17}, 244. “…que ab Grecis nondum sunt ad nos translata aut olim fortasse translata pereunt; ... ablato tempestive per metum ingruentium bellorum, nescio an dicam amisco preceptore nostro Manuele Chrisolora, viro et optimo et doctissimo, quem ex intimo Grecie sinu ad seminandas in Italia grecas litteras tua civitas advocarat.”

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., \textit{Ep. LXXXI}, 232-234. The letter to Michele Rabatta is dated May 1, 1400. See also \textit{Ep. LXXXXII}, 235-
Vergerio in Context

Vergerio condemns the titles punctuating academic pursuits:

For those who are given to studies of disciplines, the doctorate and certain titles are offered at the advice of wise men. All these were established to rouse people and idle minds… there were many truly outstanding philosophers who lacked the trappings of the doctorate and the rest of the displays, which are really in vogue these days. Did they have any less virtue or fame? These things, therefore, are vain and not directed towards virtue, even though wise men established them for a good purpose, so that apathetic minds, which cannot see beauty of virtue with their own eyes, may be motivated by these good appearances.\footnote{Ibid., Ep. XXXX. 17-27, 88-89 \textit{.. his qui disciplinarum studiis dati sunt, consio sapientium doctorus et quidam tituli proponntur, que omnia ad ignavos homines inertesque animos exuscitandos constituta sunt... multi etiam fuere clarissimi philosophi qui et doctoratus insignis et ceteris pompis, que his temporibus in usu maxime sunt caruere, numquid idcirco minoris virtutis aut fame fuerunt? Vana sunt igitur hec et ad virtutis esse nihil spectantia, a sapientibus autem in bonum finem instituta, ut desides animi, qui suis oculis virtutis venustatem videre nequeunt, his apparentibus bonis moveantur.}}

Herein following Petrarch is a forerunner of the virtues of Alberti’s painter rewarded with \textit{perpetua fama}.\footnote{Alberti, \textit{De pictura}, II.29, 66-67.} Vergerio’s initial literary connection to Petrarch initially lays within his remarkable letter in Cicero’s name, wherein, he responds to Petrarch’s chastising Cicero for the latter’s return to chaotic politics in Rome. Possibly justifying his own return to Padua to work for Francesco Novello, Vergerio defends Cicero by insisting his only recourse was to follow political destiny on behalf of friends and country, even if it meant death.\footnote{See Smith, “P.P. Vergerio in Nome di Cicerone a Francesco Petrarca,” 436-445. “… sed ut civium meorum robatos mores imitater, et virtuti, si qua in me erat, accederet auctoritas maio qua possem philosophiam et ceteras bonas artes quas me studio nactus eram non ad mei solius molle otium sed ad communem salutem accommodare? Ea enim michi matura semper et prestans philosophia vias est, que in rubibus habitat et solitudinem fugit, que cum sibi tun communibus studet commodis, et prodesse quam plurimis cupit, atque it de perpetua quidem, non de mortali, non de exigua vita cogitat.”}

Upon Francesco Novello reconquering Padua in 1390, Vergerio commenced his public orations in Padua which include three speeches before his 1393 departure for Florence: the defense of Bartolomeo Cermison before Francesco Novello, the 1392 oratory of Novello’s re-
taking of Padua, and the 1393 funeral oration for Francesco Il Vecchio who perished in a prison under the Visconti.\textsuperscript{140} By 1398, Vergerio was in Rome with Zabarella on a mission of diplomacy regarding the papal schism where he met Cardinal Cosma Migliorati of Bologna, later Pope Innocent VII (Giovanni Battista Cybo, 1404-1406) and observed the major buildings of antiquity, recorded in the aforementioned De statu vereris et inclytae urbis Romae.\textsuperscript{141} When Vergerio returned to Padua in 1400, possibly on invitation from Zabarella, he tutored the children of Francesco Novella da Carrara.\textsuperscript{142} Vergerio was given the post of archdeacon of Piove di Sacco at Padua, which he was still holding by January of 1408.\textsuperscript{143}

Having met his mentor Zabarella around 1386, the latter was teaching canon law in the city’s university. Zabarella, a young canon lawyer and member of the Paduan embassy to end the War of Chioggia with Venice, first arrived at the forefront in Paduan politics as the orator before the doge and legislature of Venice in August of August of 1382 and would administer the University’s 1390 funeral proceedings for Francesco Il Vecchio Carrara. McManamon notes that, whereas Zabarella’s oration was predicated on standards of argument within the methods of medieval-ecclesiastic justification, Vergerio used no syllogism in his oration.\textsuperscript{144} Rather than support a scholastic rationale, Vergerio delivered an emotional oration resonant of a Ciceronian oration, to depict an image, ad hoc, of a Carrara who would inspire his citizens forever. Vergerio’s was the first recorded oratory in Italy to fully incorporate the tools and invigorate


\textsuperscript{142} Katchmer, 26. There is no extant documentation that Vergerio was contracted to the Carrara in 1400-1404.

\textsuperscript{143} Smith, 286.

\textsuperscript{144} McManamon, \textit{Pierpaolo Vergerio}, 49.
rhetoric of classical antiquity. Zabarella departed Padua in the final months of 1404 to request aid of Charles VI against Venice; Conversino left in late spring of 1405. Paradoxically, Vergerio himself abandoned the turmoil in Padua and a new Venetian podestà to join Innocent VII, in turmoil during the schism. Vergerio received an archdeaconry at Piove di Sacco in Padua in February 2 of 1404 and, although leaving Padua upon Venetian take-over of the city in 1405, he held this position until 1408.145 Departing Padua soon after receiving his doctorate in March of 1405, he requested work in Naples, and finally found employment as secretary in the papal curia under Popes Innocent VII and Gregory XII (Angelo Correr, 1406-1415).146 After an altercation involving schismatic tension in Venice, he returned to Capodistria. Zabarella’s appointment to Cardinal had Vergerio back in Italy, first in Bologna and the curia of anti-pope John XXIII (Baldassarre Cossa, 1410-1415) and later at the Council of Constance from 1414 to 1418. On April 15, 1415, Chrysoloras died at Constance. Guarino wrote to Vergerio in a letter of August 27, 1415, commiserating in Chrysoloras’ death.147 Zabarella passed away at Constance on September 26, 1417. Siding for reform, the death of Zabarella and election of Martin V in 1411 jeopardized Vergerio’s standing with the Curia but not the Holy Roman Emperor. Sigismund crowned him poet laureate in 1417. Leaving Constance with the Emperor, he was the first Italian humanist to spend his last twenty-five years north of the Alps. He died in Buda in 1444.

**Vergerio and De ingenuis moribus**

Returning to Padua by 1400 possibly under the employment of Francesco Novello to


tutor his son Ubertino as suggested by a letter to the youth.\textsuperscript{148} Vergerio wrote his tract on education \textit{De ingenuis moribus} between 1402 and 1405, the latter date marking the reception of the work by Salutati.\textsuperscript{149} This book is the first surviving treatise on Renaissance pedagogy the popularity of the tract is evidenced by its record as the single most copied piece on education into the Cinquecento.\textsuperscript{150} The subsequent use of the work by Barzizza and Alberti is ordered by Grendler’s summation of the text “as the most frequently copied and reprinted Renaissance pedagogical treatise before the works of Erasmus.”\textsuperscript{151}

Although never using the terminology of \textit{studia humanitatis} in his tract, Vergerio, nonetheless uses the \textit{studia liberales}, \textit{bonae artes} and \textit{artes liberales} as the focus and engine of the tract. He begins his description, “we call these studies liberal.”\textsuperscript{152} In Vergerio defining the liberal arts, as well as endorsing the study of history, music and drawing, the pioneering methodology of humanist education was born in Padua. Padua, more than any other city in Italy, became fodder for a correlative between the liberal arts and painting. Remanding the importance of painting in the scholar’s progress, the insistence on education in visual arts in Vergerio’s \textit{De ingenuis moribus} represents the earliest endorsement of this view in Renaissance humanism.

\textbf{Vergerio’s Paulus and Alberti’s Early Works}

The query of where and from what might Alberti have been inspired to write his Latin

\textsuperscript{148} Vergerio, \textit{Ep. LXXXXVIII}, “P.P. Vergerio ad Ubertino da Carrera,” 249-251. The letter begins, “\textit{Deber tibi hoc videor cum pro benivolentia ac fide nostra quam ad te tuosque, Ubertine, habeo tum pro indulgentia atque favore quem indoli tue preclare atque ingenio bene...}”

\textsuperscript{149} Smith, 253-254. The letter from Salutatti has only the day and month. Smith approximates the year.


\textsuperscript{151} Grendler, \textit{Schooling in Renaissance Italy}, 118.

\textsuperscript{152} Vergerio, \textit{De ingenuis moribus}, 28-29. “\textit{Liberalia igitur studia vocamus.”}
comedy in Latin, *Philodoxeos fabula* (1421?) brings one immediately to Vergerio’s *Paulus*, by way of Padua. There is no sure date for Vergerio’s *Paulus*. However, like Alberti and the *Philodoxeos*, Vergerio most likely wrote his *Paulus* when he was a young student in Bologna, evidenced by the *Iuvenis* (“young man”) in the prologue, based upon the style of Terence which states: “While the poet shyly handed over this play to be reviewed said ‘I fooled with this as a young man, now fuller age will give it a mature experience.’” The veritable staging of a *play*, revived by recreating the *Passion* by Franciscans around Siena and Pisa, is first recorded in the twelfth century in Montecassino, although the first outdoor event took place in Padua in 1243.

The *Paulus* deals with the machinations of temptation and one’s subsequent downfall as a result of temptation. The setting of the play occurs outside between two abodes, following a Roman trope. Vergerio’s work is the oldest surviving humanist comedy in Latin, post-dating Petrarch’s *Philologia* (lost); Alberti’s *Philodoxeos* is the second oldest extant of the same genre. Probably finished in Padua in the 1390s, as the *Paulus* deals with a youth’s dilemmas at a university, the case could be made that Vergerio penned the work while finishing studies at Padua, however his involvement with that city’s university was more than likely pre-empted by court politics with Francesco Novello. In any case, the work was begun as a young man, and, as suggested by Katchmer, by the inclusion of the sense of a mature objectivity in a “fuller age” (*plenior etas*), finished in Padua. The comedies of Terence and Plautus were present in archives of the middle ages. By the 1300s, the six plays of Terence: *Andria* (Girl from Andros); *Hecyra* (Mother-in-Law); *Heauton Timorumenos* (Self Tormentor); *Phormio*, *Eunuchus*, and

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154 Alesandro d’Ancona, *Origini del Teatro Italiano*, vol. 1 (Torino: Loescher, 1891), 87-88. See also Katchmer, 93.

155 Katchmer, 80.
Adelphoe (Brothers) were taught as part of the trivium for their moral addenda and what was thought to be correct Latin grammar. The seventh-century Etymologiae by Isidore of Seville (560-636 CE) addressed the distinctions of what constituted comedy, and, as Barzizza taught Isidore’s tome, that work was available to Alberti as well.\(^{156}\) Furthermore, the theme of the Paulus resembles, in addition, the admonishment of Alberti to his brother Carlos in De commodis, in that the temptations of lust and secular seduction as a whole disseminate the discipline of study of letters and arts.

Holmes considered Vergerio among the humanist “avant-garde;” those who, like Petrarch figured an aesthetic distance between antiquity and his contemporaries in Rome who had degraded the city.\(^{157}\) Says Holmes, the radicalism apparent in De ingenuis moribus that makes Vergerio distinctively modern, lies within the “spirit” of the piece, aimed not so much at curriculum as much as an overall charter of character-building for the young. While this is true, Holmes errs in attempting to have Vergerio, Barbaro, Chrysoloras and Guarino as followers of Bruni, Salutati and early 1400s Florence. The opposite is the case; when Vergerio is taken in context with the Paduan forensic chain of humanism, he looks like both a radical as well as the culmination of the flow of ideas that simmered in that city’s intellectual compost for a century. Holmes argues that Vergerio’s humanist roots lie with Salutati and a short symposium around Chrysoloras in Florence, but that is not the case either. Chrysoloras spent three years in Florence, from 1397 to 1400, departing never to return. Guarino left in 1410 after a short stay. Indeed Salutati may have begun his humanist flavor at the university of Padua, which he attended during Petrarch’s time there. Furthermore Bruni dedicated his Dialogi to Vergerio. Holmes concedes that “Guarino, Barbaro and Vergerio remind us that Florence was only one of a

\(^{156}\) Mercer, 61.

\(^{157}\) Ibid., 15-18.
number of humanist centers in northern Italy,” but he does not concede names of those centers, such as Padua, the mainstay in Alberti’s early development in rhetoric and the *studia humanitatis*.  

**Florentine Humanism in Paduan Context**

Due to late-Trecento intramural trade among the eastern Tuscan cities, promoting wealth and a flurry of civic transformation, Florence would eventually become a vortex for the examination of classical texts among the wealthy in the Quattrocento. Indeed, although Dante’s *Commedia* used Virgil and the Aeneid as its impetus and appeared to serve as the *sine qua non* of ancient intellectual reprise, the work hinged on a mode distinct from that of the scholarship of Lovato and Mussato. Argument can further be posited that Dante’s regard for invigorating the *Commedia* with classicism only occurred after his Florentine exile in 1302. Subsequently, only after travels to Bologna and Padua did his poetry ring with the ancients. In fact, recorded by Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375), Virgilio around 1319, requested Dante, residing in Ravenna, to write a poem in Latin dealing with armed conquest.  

The Paduan intellectual roots of the likes of Lovato and the following generations would help foster the coalescence of classical rhetoric and science in the early 1400s with *De pictura*. Florence, before the Quattrocento, essentially provided a vernacular translation of ancient texts whereas Padua continued their study in Latin. Witt further argues that the continuation of Latin in Padua – as opposed to the vernacular translation trend in Florence – accounts for a more

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158 Ibid., 16.

trenchant affect on the overall absorption of antiquity in the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{160} Although the comparable literacy of Florentine aristocracy would eventually transform the city’s appreciation of classics in the Quattrocento, the Trecento demand in Florence for vernacular translation simply slowed the evolution of humanism in that city. The early fifteenth century in Italy would usher in a humanism of literature and aesthetics for the most part, of which \textit{De pictura} would become pivotal, as the book includes science. This would occur, paradoxically, in Florence – a city which, when compared to Padua in the 1300s resembles something of a cultural backwater. This is remarkable considering that the fifteenth century would see Florence emerge as the Olympus of humanism. Granted the great gift to Florentine humanism was Salutati’s bringing Chrysoloras to the city to begin the first serious study of Greek language and discourse in Italy since antiquity. He would tutor and mentor both Bruni and Poggio.\textsuperscript{161} Although no evidence points to Salutati’s facility with Greek, he exposed the ancient culture to the likes of Bruni, Barbaro and others, including his friend, Vergerio who took whatever he gleaned from Chrysoloras back to Padua where Greek would be continued in that city by Guarino.

\textbf{Conclusion to Chapter 1}

The coalescence of text and art that fostered \textit{De pictura} began with Alberti’s exposure to humanism in Padua that would further evolve with his education in Bologna and his employment with the curia in Rome. The fourteenth century delivered a velocity of enthusiasm for classical literature replacing a tired \textit{ratio} of studies in church schools, and the center of this enthusiasm was Padua. Fourteenth-century Padua, the genitive era of Renaissance humanism, was the

\textsuperscript{160} Witt, \textit{In the Footsteps of the Ancients}, 208-209.

crucible for Alberti’s debts to antique discourse as well as visual arts. A simple understanding of classical texts was not, in and of itself, the promulgating motive for humanism; before the Padua of Petrarch, political rhetoricians like Lovato and Mussato, revitalizing the materialization of neo-Senecan tragedy and other classical motifs, placed antique history in visible relief, enlisting ancient Latin syntax as the fulcrum to balance antiquity in perspective. From a demonstrative interplay of art and communal ideas of government informed by intellectual precepts of republicanism, Padua birthed a distinctive lay culture immersed in neo-classicism from early humanists who derived a unique concern for self-generated and communal morality.

As the fourteenth century assimilated more pieces of the antique political puzzle, socio-political humanism took on a significance that would serve the subtext of Alberti’s application for employment in the Este court of the 1430’s. Lovato and Mussato’s decisive course of early humanism drove this progressive intellectual environment in Padua. The prominent distinction in both men is their having worked under the auspices of a republic, however short-lived. Mussato’s recreation of inquiry into the nature of a substance, such as historical Padua or Rome, would eventually open the door for Alberti to produce De pictura, a primer on the nature of painting principles. In addition, Mussato’s incorporation of historical present, giving an author first-person temporal time, would resound, for example, in Alberti’s own plea to be immortalized by portrait. The gift of the pre-humanist movement under Padua’s commune to neoclassicism was the shift from simple use of Latin grammar in a commercial or ecclesiastic venue to its incorporation of history and style in civic politics. Francesco II Vecchio – friend to humanists Petrarch, Zabarella and Vergerio, caster of neo-classical medals, and patron of neo-classical

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163 Alberti, De pictura, III.63, 104-107. “I would especially ask them as a reward for my labors to paint my portrait in their historiae.” (… hoc potissimum laborum meorum premium exposco ut faciem meam in suis historiis pingant.)
motifs in paintings by Altichiero – endured the longest term of Carrara rule. With the end of the Carrara Padua would continue to be a safe haven for humanism by means of its educators.

Giuseppe Billanovich maintains that as soon as Petrarch passed time in Padua in the winter of 1349, the history of the famous in rhetoric – Rolandino, Lovato, and Mussato – and the city of Livy captivated him for good.\textsuperscript{164} While Rolandino, Lovato and Mussato were the intellectual giants of Padua’s commune, the humanists to follow, Petrarch, Conversino, and Vergerio, were literary members of a court, the Carraresi. Under the auspices of reading the comedies of Terence to the tragedies of Seneca, Petrarch would befriend and correspond with other humanists, such as Da Moglio and Dondi, subsequently bequeathing this body of interests to Conversino, Vergerio, Guarino, Vittorino and Barzizza, just as his predecessors in Padua had given to him. The demand for Latin assessment of the ancient authors in Padua drove a more specific and astute replication; Lovato would begin the poetical side of this replication, Mussato the theatrical – further culminate with Petrarch, Conversino, Vergerio, and, later, Guarino, Barzizza, Vittorino and, finally, Alberti. To conclude, five events transformed Padua into a virtual birth-place for early humanism in Italy: 1) an independence of the arts faculty at its studium; 2) the consequential gain of importance of rhetoric through Padua’s early civic freedoms and its pre-humanists like Lovato and Mussato; 3) the works of Petrarch and the disbursement of his influence and library; 4) the support of the Carrara for early humanist antiquarians like Da Moglio and humanist teachers like Conversino and Vergerio; and 5) with the end of the Carrara, the lack of any responsibility by all propagators of classics to a court, thus freeing humanists in Padua for the single task of studying and teaching ancient Latin texts. The historical rejoinder of these events opened the doors in Padua for Barzizza, Guarino, Vittorino

\textsuperscript{164} Giuseppe Billanovich, \textit{Petrarch e Padova}, 33-36.
and Alberti to an unhindered world of literary and visual antique history. Vergerio stressed that grammar, logic and rhetoric were only preparatory for the higher and nobler learning of music, history and art. The inclusion of the fine arts was an entirely new slant on the requirements for education. Therefore, the context to be explored next is Vergerio’s contact with Barzizza and that teacher’s subsequent education bequeathed to Alberti.

As De pictura marks the watershed of humanist rhetoric regarding painting, so Alberti’s sensibilities were born of a predisposition to visual art before he even arrived in Bologna in the early 1420s. Spencer, of the few scholars to emphasize the earliest decisive period of Alberti’s education, clearly puts it: “Alberti… had already been prepared by his earlier education in the school of humanist, Barzizza in Padua, to accept and utilize the knowledge of antiquity.” As it is through Barzizza that Alberti would first encounter rhetorical art and visual art reference by way of the ancients such as Pliny, Cicero, Quintilian, Seneca, so Barzizza would represent the culmination of Padua as the starting grid for Alberti and De pictura.

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Chapter 2

Alberti in Padua I: Intellectual Education
Introduction

Having laid out the historical context in Padua – from the city’s existence as a republican commune in the late 1200s, through Carrarese domination in the 1300s, until final subjugation by Venice in 1405 – we can see that the establishment of a neoclassical cultural paradigm, within which the work of Seneca was particularly valuable, had shifted to embrace a new interest and emphasis on Cicero and Quintilian by the end of the fourteenth century. Alberti’s exposure to this classicizing climate, together with his immersion in the painting of Giotto and Altichiero, guaranteed the prevalence of antique and visual motifs in his intellectual and visual art education. In light of the fact that visual art helped shape humanist intellectual preoccupations, and that Alberti claimed to be writing *ex novo* to an erudite audience on art theory and terminology – synthesizing both what he had read and what he had *seen* – we must first examine the classicizing educational culture in the discursive realm in Padua from which *De pictura* derived. The following chapter will examine the educational paradigm of visual art.

Venice, the dominant power of north-eastern Italy in the early fifteenth century, had little neo-classical movement, even after that republic had absorbed Padua. In the early Quattrocento, humanists like Barbaro and Pietro Donato (1390-1447) were trained in Padua by Conversino, Vergerio, Barzizza, Guarino and Vittorino.¹ Padua had pioneered a stunning development in civic humanism, and Venice looked to that city to educate its youth in the articulate Latin of the ancients. Consequently, those in the Veneto who wanted to enter public life studied in Padua; even students from across the Alps began to proliferate in Padua by the early 1400s.² Henceforth, a culture dedicated to classics, ensured by Venetian economic support, lent Padua a


² Dunston, 10-11.
unique educational ethos, associated above all with the school of Barzizza.

Two surviving letters attest to Alberti having studied in Padua with Barzizza from around 1414 to perhaps as late 1419. Barzizza’s stature as a humanist intellectual can be conveyed by recalling the teacher’s humanist associations with Petrarch, Salutati, Niccolò Niccoli, and Antonio Loschi (1368-1441), the most noted humanist of the Visconti court, as well as his distinguished graduates – Filelfo, Beccadelli, Barbaro, Pier Candido Decembrio (1399-1477), and Alberti himself. Filelfo, in fact, studied with Alberti during the latter’s time with Barzizza. Over half a century after Barzizza’s demise, Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), in a 1489 letter on the noted dispute between Poggio and Valla, would hail Italy as the source of humanism and list Barzizza among its original purveyors.

Gasparino Barzizza: Pedagogy and Virtue in Renaissance Padua

Barzizza was born into a family of minor nobility but evident means in 1360 on the family estate of Barzizza near Bergamo. From 1387 to 1392 Barzizza studied grammar and

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3 See Benigni, et. al., Corpus Epistolare e Documentario. The first letter of 1414, Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 779, cc. 120v-121r, from Barzizza to Alberti’s father, Lorenzo, in Venice, commends the child and assures that Alberti will be well educated by Barzizza. “Quanta diligentia Albertus noster Baptismum filiam tuam mihi commendaverit… et ego curabo, ne illud meum officium in hoc tuo filio bonis Artibus ornando desideres. Vale.” The second letter, c. 147 rv warns Lorenzo of young Alberti’s concern for his father’s remaining in Venice during a pestilence, implores him to leave Venice and come to Padua. “… ut preclare scriptum est a Platone, non solum nobis nati summus, se partem nostri vendicat patria, parrem parentes, ac liberi, partem amici. Epistola in qua scribitur amico ut discedat propter pestem… Baptista noster flens heri ad me accessit… audivisse negotiatorem tuum, spatio horarum quatuor, pestifero morbo perissise, nec te velle ex tanto periculo vitam subtrahere…”

4 Grendler, Schooling in Renaissance Italy, 131.

rhetoric in Pavia with Giovanni Traversari da Cremona (1350-1418). Receiving his degree from the city’s university in 1392, Barzizza is first recorded in Padua in 1393 on a notarial document. From another document of 1396, Barzizza was back in Bergamo teaching at a cathedral elementary school. Barzizza was again in Padua in 1400, witnessing a donation by Margherita, wife of Paduan grammar professor, Lazaro de Conegliano (d. 1400), friend to Conversino as well as master at the studium. Barzizza is then believed to have worked at the studium in Pavia in 1403 until, in 1406, his former master, Traversari, was recalled by the Visconti to replace him. Subsequently departing for Venice in March of 1407 he worked as a private tutor until October when he commenced his position at the studium in Padua. Barzizza remained in Padua as chair of rhetoric for another fourteen years as well as presiding over his own private grammar school there. After 1421, he taught in Milan, again in Pavia and then Bologna. He died in 1430.

Of all Renaissance pedagogy, Barzizza’s teaching, as Grendler has argued, epitomized the “transition from medieval to Renaissance schooling.” Barzizza was revolutionary in the sheer volume of classical texts he expounded to students, substantially altering the primary and secondary school curriculum. While broadening the corpus of classical works, Barzizza, who ensured classical texts were appreciated for their own merit as Mercer points out, expatiated the

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6 Luigi Franchi, ed., Statuti e Ordinamenti della Università di Pavia dall’anno 1361 all’anno 1859 (Pavia: Tipografia Cooperativa, 1925), 124


11 Sabbadini, Giovanni da Ravenna, 99.

12 Grendler, Schooling in Renaissance Italy, 126.
substance of Latin material for the student in important new ways. Barzizza’s most enduring contribution to humanist teaching – and to Alberti’s education in particular – was his development of rhetoric. _De pictura_ is a rhetorical tract aimed at a courtly audience, in which we see a leap from Vergerio to Alberti with Barzizza as the pedagogic connection.

At Pavia’s _studium_, between 1387 and 1392, Barzizza would have studied both the _Rhetorica ad Herennium_ as well as Cicero’s _De inventione_. Although grammar and rhetoric were disciplines included in the scholasticism curriculum, Barzizza analyzed these disciplines within the historical and stylistic context of classical authors, evolving a methodology unique to his school. Loschi, also a student of Conversino in Padua between 1379 and 1382, was possibly the first humanist to pay serious attention to the orations of Cicero in his _Inquisitio super undecim orationes Ciceronis_ (c. 1395) a commentary on eleven of the orations. In its declination of genre, invention and style of rhetoric, the book stands as a seminal primer for humanist rhetorical pedagogy, prevalent in manuscripts during Barzizza’s tenure in Padua. Barzizza’s use of Loschi’s _Inquisitio_ points to two crucial influences from the Visconti territories ruled from Milan. First, the library in Pavia contained a considerable inventory of classical texts. Secondly, the bulk of Petrarch’s inventory was transferred there during Visconti rule over Padua from 1388 to 1392. Availing himself of this cache, Barzizza noted in his _De orthographia_ a copy of Petrarch’s _De viris illustribus_ that had informed Altichiero’s frescoes. A

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13 Mercer, 2.
14 Giovanni da Schio, _Sulla Vita e Sulli Scritti di Antonio Loschi_, (Padua: Seminario 1858), 1-15. See also Mack, 33-34.
15 Grendler, _Schooling in Renaissance Italy_, 208.
16 Mercer, 33.
gloss by Barzizza of a Neapolitan manuscript of *Periochae Liviane* points to his actually owning Petrarch’s own copy of *De viris*.\(^{18}\) The Visconti court used the ancients to sustain its political projects, as evidenced by Loschi’s *Invectiva in Florentinos* (1398), which produced Salutati’s riposte *Invectiva in Antonium Luschum Vicentinum* (1403).\(^{19}\) In this particular exchange, rhetoric began to displace the scholastic emphasis on logic, shifting emphasis from a remedial standard of Latin to an exalted Latin of ancient Rome. However, of Barzizza’s corpus, the only surviving political writings are a number of orations. He wrote no handbook of civic or courtly advice, as did Petrarch and Vergerio. By contrast, it is Barzizza’s rhetorical and philological work – on orthography, composition, imitation, genre and historical context – that transformed Latin teaching for his peers – Guarino and Vittorino especially.\(^{20}\)

**Barzizza, the *Studium* and His Private School**

As the chair in rhetoric, Barzizza worked according to the demands and syllabus of the *studium*, which was overseen by the College of Arts in Padua. Teaching Seneca, Cicero, Valerius Maximus, Virgil, Terence and Ovid, the university required Barzizza to give lectures (*lectio*) on ordinary days.\(^ {21}\) Vacations or afternoons were spent with students on his particular gloss on texts. He was also remanded to hold two disputations a year between himself and another professor or chosen scholar. Here the student witnessed oratory in practice. His salary was covered by Venice. (The Republic also underwrote the cost of the city’s university). Venice

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\(^{19}\) Sabbadini, *Studi di Gasparino Barzizza su Quintiliano e Cicerone*, 28.


\(^{21}\) Mercer, 113-114.
recognized Barzizza in its roll-call of great scholars that included Zabarella and Jacopo da Forli, (1364-1414), the latter of whom held the chairs of medicine and natural philosophy at the studium. Patrician support by Zaccaria Trevisan (1370-1414), the Venetian rector of Padua and a friend of the Barbaro family who had previously employed him, entitled Barzizza to have access to Padua’s civic rooms like the Sala Virorum Illustrium displaying frescoes by Altichiero.22

Barzizza began his private school, at the Via Pozzo Campione in the Prato neighborhood of Padua, at which elementary Latin grammar teaching would commence for boys between seven and fifteen years of age.23 In addition, the school tutored students from the university’s College of Arts.24 Barzizza would address both the syntax and the substance of particular texts in larger lectures, either public or at the university. Finally, the master used his collegium as a salon for friends and students to work on humanist antique texts. In view of this lies an important point about Alberti’s schooling. The domestic setting allowed for a powerful attention to grammar, rhetoric, and a close analysis of classical texts in discussions that would never be enjoyed by a student in a scholastic school. Within this exceptional environment, Barzizza’s principal contribution to Alberti’s formation lay within an interdisciplinary methodology working well beyond compartmentalized disciplines. His commentaries, resting upon this interdependence of rhetoric, poetry, and drama, thus provided the fertile approach to classics for Alberti to adopt.

In addition, the cross-references in Barzizza’s corpus point to an objective for students with a higher aptitude for Latin than those of Traversari. As Mercer puts it, Barzizza “saw his own

22 Kohl and Witt, The Earthly Republic, 180 and n.3.

23 Grendler, Schooling in Renaissance Italy, 116-120. See also ibid., “The Organization of Primary and Secondary Education in the Italian Renaissance,” 191.

24 Roberto Cessi, “Il Soggiorno di Lorenze e Leon Battista Alberti a Padova,” Archivio Storico Italiano 5, no. 43, (1909): 351-357. In several texts, including Mercer, the incorrect volume of “42” is noted.
currents of thought.”

As an editor and grammarian, Barzizza adopted Quintilian as a principal age as bound to the moral and intellectual heritage of antiquity… captured from humanist model. Early in Book II of the *Institutio*, Quintilian lays out the rhetorician’s aims of his school. The teacher is responsible for a student’s wellbeing to be protected from moral harm. Friendships are engendered to promote the student’s socialization. The youth learns history, an ability to compare his work with that of others; tenacity is rewarded. Upon these precepts Barzizza founded his method. Guarino would write that; “… under his [Barzizza’s] leadership and auspices Cicero is loved, read and flies with utmost glory through [his] Italian school.”

Barzizza, drawing on a number of antique disciplines – history and geography as well as poetry and rhetoric, endowed Alberti with the type of lessons that would transform a generation of thinking into a humanist language of exhortation into Alberti’s ideas of virtue in painting precepts. By the mid-fifteenth century, humanist oratory would be accepted study among the educated elite. Despite offers from other universities, Venice would hold Barzizza in Padua – valuable as he was to the elite who wanted to keep their Republic in the forefront of culture, commerce and politics through high intellectual standards. At the end of 1420, Barzizza appealed to the Doge who denied him permission to depart. Subsequently, as a citizen of Bergamo (under Milanese rule), the Visconti demanded his return and Venice released him.

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25 Mercer, 85.

26 Quint. *Inst.* 2.2.1-6, 268-271. “So as soon as the boy has progressed in his studies to the point when he can follow what I have called the first stage of instruction in rhetoric, he should be handed over to the teachers of that art. The first necessity will be to inquire into their good character… He should talk a great deal about what is good and honorable…” (*Ego cum ad eas in studiis vires pervenerit puier ut quae prima esse praecepta rhetorum diximus mente consequi possit, tradendus eius artis magistris erit. Quorum in primis inspicii mores oportebit... Plurimus ei de honesto ac bono sermo sit.*)

Alberti’s Facility as a Student

Alberti was immersed in classics throughout his life, assuredly beginning with his formative years in Padua. His facility in Latin alone presumes a precocity that began under Barzizza, with whom Alberti first encountered the vocabulary of the ancients – from Pliny, Seneca, Cicero, Quintilian and others – put into circulation by Petrarch and humanists before and after him in Padua. Yet, considering Alberti’s exposure to rhetorical and visual art during his formative school years in Padua, we must ask if he would have been old enough to understand what he studied at school in Padua. The ages of students in private schools as well as the studium were disparate. Vittorino began studies with Barzizza as a grown man. Barbaro and Alberti, on the other hand, were considerably younger. We must examine first the problems in documenting Alberti’s age during his stay in Padua, and, secondly, in light of his age, to what degree he could comprehend what he read and saw. Regarding the age at which Alberti commenced his education under Barzizza, even Mancini, upon whom every biographer from Gadol to Grafton has relied for the date of Alberti’s birth, is uncertain. Mancini states that Passerini establishes the year as 1402, however “sensa darne le prove.”28 As recently as 2004, Roberto Cardini reiterated this question.29 Thus Alberti was probably no younger and possibly older than twelve years of age when he commenced his studies with Alberti.

That said, even if he were only around twelve years old, one could nevertheless draw attention to Alberti’s mental facility at such a young age. Von Schlosser’s doubts about Alberti’s ability to grasp complex theoretical issues at such an age need to be balanced against the testimony of Alberti’s own friend, Lapo da Castiglionchio the Younger (1405-1438) who knew

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Alberti since he was fourteen years old. At that age, Alberti took no interest in the games of his fellows, but rather manifested a precocious intelligence and discipline that belied his years. In his 1438 invective in the year of his death, *Advantages of the Papal Court* satirizing Rome as a “republic of letters,” Lapo professed that Alberti was a figure of unparalleled ability among a very distinguished group. Lapo contextualized the genius around him:

Let me come then first of all to Ambrogio (Traversari) the prince of the monks of our day… As the pope’s domestic secretary there is Poggio of Florence in whom there is not only the highest erudition and eloquence… There is Flavio of Forli, (Flavio Biondo, 1392-1463) a man who is not only prudent and serious but also... There are two others of the same rank: Giovanni Aurispa (1376-1459) and Andrea [of Florence, papal secretary], my fellow citizen… And don’t let me pass over Rinuccio da Castiglione.

Remarkably, Lapo proceeded to lionize Alberti above all the rest, heralding his genius as unique:

There is also Battista Alberti who is the same age as I. I so praise his genius that I would compare no one with him. I wonder at his genius to such an extent that it seems to bespeak I know no what for the future. For his genius is of this sort: to whichever area of study he puts his mind, he easily and quickly excels the others. There are many other known to me similar to these men.

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30 Mancini, *Vita*, III, 60. “Vi ebbe compagno Lapo il giovane da Castiglionchio, che pochi anni appresso gli dedica una traduzione de' sacrifici di Luciano, dicendogli…” See also ibid., VII, 169, 170 and XV, 402.


32 Christopher S. Celenza, *Renaissance Humanism and the Papal Curia: Lapo da Castiglioncho the Younger’s De Curiae Commodis (On the Advantages of the Papal Court [1438]),* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002, 154-157. Veniam ac primum omnium ad Ambrosium monachorum huius aetatis principem... Poggium Florentinum, pontificis, maximi a secretis, in quo summa inest cum eruditio, eloquentia... Flavium Foroliviensem, virum non prudentem modo et gravem... Assunt duo reliqui, Johannes Aurispa et Andreas civis meus ex eodem ordine, quibus non praetermittam Rinuccium Castiglionum.”

33 Ibid., 157. “Et aequalem meum Baptistam Albertum, cuius ingenium ita laudo ut hac laude cum eo neminem comparem, ita admiror ut magnum mihi nescio quid portendere inposterum videatur. Est enim eiusmodi ut ad quanquamque se animo conferat facultatem, in ea facile ac brevi ceteris antecellat. Sunt alií mihi his similes complures et vitae socii et studiorum comites et quasi aemuli.”
Given this evaluation, it is highly likely that Alberti had acquired a remarkable aptitude for Latin and the language’s rhetorical form, vocabulary and syntax at a very young age.  

**Alberti’s Courses with Barzizza**

Barzizza did not so much invent a new curriculum but widened the spectrum of classical sources and then hone the orthography by analyzing or comparing those classical rhetoricians according to their specificity of syntax and meaning.  

Not only in his exposition of the moral letters of Seneca but also in his immersion in an array of classical texts, Barzizza became a master of early humanist teaching, initiating a profound inquiry into the intrinsic value of the classics, which became the core of studia humanitatis. The teacher enjoyed a degree of pedagogic freedom and expression equally within his privately funded lectures at the studium, as well as within the private school in which Alberti studied. His lectures attracted not only his humanist contemporaries, but also teachers from the studium. In this context, Barzizza lectured publicly twice on Seneca’s *Epistulae morales*, a work whose author he considered the finest moral philosopher of antiquity. Hankins terms Barzizza’s commentaries on Seneca’s letters as “the most important” Renaissance work on that ancient writer until the notes on his *Natural Questions* by Matthaeus Fortunatus (1480-1528), printed in 1532. Having owned Loschi’s *Inquisitio* for a decade by the time he began his school, the text gave Barzizza the model for his

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34 Altrocchi, 470. Alberti and Lapo may have inspired each other in their mutual use of Lucian in their works.

35 Mercer, 37-46.

36 Ibid., 4 and 141, n. 30. The introduction survives in Venice in the Museo Correr as MS 1437, fol.2r.

commentaries.\textsuperscript{38} That selections from Cicero’s corpus played a major role in the curriculum is suggested by Barzizza’s commentaries on several of the \textit{Orations} during the very years that Alberti is presumed to have attended (1414-1421).\textsuperscript{39} Barzizza also favored Terence, on whose work he based his own textbook, \textit{De orthographia}.\textsuperscript{40} Barzizza, in addition, wrote commentaries on Cicero’s \textit{De officis}, \textit{De amicitia}, \textit{De senectute}, \textit{De oratore}, \textit{Philippics}, \textit{Epistulae ad familiares}, as well as the tragedies of Seneca, works of Valerius Maximus, Pliny’s Natural History (lost) and even Dante’s \textit{Divine Comedy}. However, a precise reconstruction of his courses and their order is not possible. George W. Pigman notes that little evidence in Barzizza’s letters points to a commentary on Pliny or Dante, although Barzizza studied both.\textsuperscript{41}

Barzizza also studied epigraphs and numismatics. As Padua boasted Antenor’ lineage, the pseudo-Livian epitaph, as well as sarcophagi and Carrarese medals copied from Roman coins, Barzizza may have been the first to develop orthography from antique archaeology.\textsuperscript{42} Barzizza’s study of the Roman antique world is further evidenced by his association with his student, Polenton, and the teacher’s possible influence on the latter’s \textit{Scriptorum illustrium}, penned in Padua. Mercer further argues that two text fragments with a list of provinces in Italia of cities, towns, games, and a note that the work is “excerpted from Barzizza,” supports the idea of the humanist teacher as a progenitor of Biondo’s antiquarian project, \textit{Italia illustrata} (1448-

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\textsuperscript{38} Pigman, “Barzizza’s Studies on Cicero,” California Institute of Technology, 1980, 4-6. See also ibid., “Notes on Barzizza’s Correspondence,” 391-395.

\textsuperscript{39} Mercer, 48-49. See also Pigman, “Barzizza’s Treatise on Imitation,” 341-352.

\textsuperscript{40} Mercer, 48-49. See also 81-82.

\textsuperscript{41} Pigman, “Barzizza’s Studies on Cicero,” 4-6.

\textsuperscript{42} Weiss, \textit{The Renaissance Rediscovery of Antiquity}, 20 and 21.
Biondo was in Milan in 1422 translating a copy of Cicero’s *Brutus* for Guarino while Barzizza was there and in Pavia. In his book, Biondo exalted Barzizza’s gift for Cicero:

… he rendered this extraordinary service to the study of eloquence; an extremely old manuscript was found at Lodi… very few could read it and it was only saved from destruction by… Gasparino’s hands… it contained three books, *On the Orator, Brutus* and *the Orator*, by Cicero… the good Gasparino… filling in the gaps… just as long before he had laboriously filled in the gaps in Quintilian’s *Institutio*.

Considering the aforementioned laud by Guarino for Barzizza’s expertise with Cicero, it is not inconceivable that Barzizza assisted Biondo with the *Orator*. To take this evolution one step farther, Barzizza’s obsession with antique archaeology may well have nurtured those interests evident in Alberti’s own work on Rome, *Descriptio urbis Romae* (1440s).

**Cicero, Quintilian and the Structure of *De pictura***

Cicero’s didactic works on rhetoric can be sectioned into three groups: literary (*De Oratore*), polemical, (*Brutus* and *Orator*) and technical. The polemical works submit a defensive purpose for rhetorical oration (against neo-Attics) – the orator should master several styles, like Alberti’s painter – plain, middle and grand. The last group, however, begins with Cicero’s first major work on oratory, *De inventione*, whose themes are further explored in

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43 See Mercer, 68 and143, n. 71. Mercer quotes from BA MS H 56 sup., fol 91v. “Excerpta ex quodam libro domino olim Gasparini de pergamoviri doctissimi atque clarissimi de finibus Italiae.”


45 Biondo, *Italy Illuminated*, IV.29, 304-305. (... ut id maxime adiumenti studiis eloquentiae attulit, quod repertus Laude... multis maximisque in ruderi bos codex... pervertustus et cuibus litteras vetustiores paucissimi scirent legere... De oratore, Brutem, Oratoremque, M. Tullius Cicero libros... bonus ipse vir Gasparinus labore supplendi sicut diu ante in Quintiliani Institutionibus multo labore suppleverat.”)

46 Cic. *Orat.* 29.101, 378-379. “*Is erit igitur eloquens, ut idem illud iteremus, qui poterit parva summisse, modica temperate, magna graviter dicere.*” See also Rhet. *her.* IV.8.11, 252-253. “*Sunt igitur tria genera, quae genera nos figuras appellamus, in quibus omnis oratio non vitiosa consumitur: unam, grave, alteram mediocrem, tertiam extenuatam vocamus.*” (From Aristotle’s student, Theophrastus.)
Partitiones oratoriae. Here Cicero divides an oration (oratio) into five parts: exordium or introduction to the audience; narratio, or the statement of the case or argument; confirmatio or the putting forth of evidence and proof, reprehensio or refutation of negatives and peroratio or summation. 47 In De pictura, Alberti largely follows a Ciceronian rhetorical scheme. He delivers the exordium and narratio in Book I and part of II; the confirmatio and part of the reprehensio in the remainder of Book II, for example with his refutations and strictures of too much gold and too many ideals, and certainly a peroratio with his summation at the end of Book III.

Various debts to Ciceronian grammatical and oratorical style can be seen in De pictura.

The attraction of Cicero for early humanist pedagogues cannot be overstated, particularly after the discovery of new texts, like his Orator at Lodi in 1421, which lay out a clear ideal for imitation. 48 One particular rhetorical figure, which Alberti favors is paralipsis, the device of getting a subject mentioned by claiming to leave it out – another staple of Cicero’s rhetorical repertoire. A noted example appears in Cicero’s first Cataline oration where, in the opening third paragraph, he actually employs the word praetereo to illustrate his desire to “pass over” the subject of ancient murders. 49 The double irony here is that immediately preceding Alberti’s rejection of Pliny’s work, he actually copies the ancient author’s argument just as he did with Quintilian; in order to dismiss historiae picturae he must first dismiss the importance of the genesis of art – exactly as Pliny does. If Alberti’s literary and visual genesis begins with


48 Sabbadini, Le Scoperte dei Codici, 100-101.

49 Cicero, In catalinum, trans. C. MacDonald (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), I.3, 34-35. “I pass over precedents that are too old; the fact that Gaius Servilius Ahalia killed Spurius Maelius with his own hand when Maelius was planning revolution.” (Nam illa nimis antiqua praetereo, quod C. Servilius Ahalia Sp. Maelium novis rebus studentem manu sua occidit.)
Barzizza, it is easier to surmise where Barzizza inherited his textual inspiration. Barzizza perhaps sourced Pliny in his use of painting as an endeavor worthy of the scholar; in 1411 he attempted to write an \textit{emendatio} on the \textit{Natural History} delivered to him by former pupil, Giovanni Cornaro.\textsuperscript{50} However, no commentary on the work survives.

Quintilian was also a clear influence upon \textit{De pictura}. Poggio discovered the complete manuscript of Quintilian’s \textit{Institutio oratoria} in 1416 in St. Gall. We know from redactions and glosses referring to the \textit{Institutio} in Barzizza’s \textit{Orthographia} that the text was available to and taught by the schoolmaster by 1417.\textsuperscript{51} Barzizza introduced Quintilian to Alberti and mentored him through the precepts and vocabulary of the \textit{Institutio}. Although scholars have debated the greater influence of Cicero or Quintilian, it may be the latter who is progenitor of \textit{De pictura}’s rhetoric. Alberti certainly adapted his motif of \textit{historia} from Quintilian’s treatise on “narrative” in Book 2 of the \textit{Institutio}, where Quintilian, in the second paragraph speaks of the three parts of narrative: \textit{event}; \textit{plot}; and the third part as \textit{historia} or the “narration of actual event.”\textsuperscript{52}

At a more structural level, as stated here in my introduction, Wright has shown that the form of \textit{De pictura} replicates Quintilian’s \textit{Institutio} in its dividing the material into the three sections of \textit{elementa}, \textit{ars}, \textit{artifex}.\textsuperscript{53} These three categories correspond to the elements of mastering an art wherein there is a definition of the art, an outline of the material and a body of discourse regarding the arts. Wright shows that Alberti follows this tripartite structure of Quintilian in his three books in \textit{De pictura}. \textit{De pictura} further uses Quintilian’s motifs of

\textsuperscript{50} Mercer, 72.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid. For the inventory of Barzizza’s orthography curriculum see 48-53.

\textsuperscript{52} Quint. \textit{Inst.} 2.4.2, 280-281. “\textit{Et quia narrationum, excepta qua in causis utimur, tris accepimus species... fabulam... argumentum... historiam, in qua est gestae rei expositio...}”

\textsuperscript{53} Wright, 52-71.
exemplum and imitatio. Quintilian, warning about possible ineptitudes of professors, recommends small books of instruction called commentarii.\(^{54}\) Alberti’s very first sentence describes De pictura as commentarii.\(^{55}\) The book then follows Quintilian’s instructional program for “small children” to start with “small things” – with basic forms evolving to combinations of forms, thence to deductive oratorical principle.\(^{56}\) Wright points out that Book I of De pictura corresponds to these “first elements of rhetoric” (prima rhetorices elementa).

With Alberti, attention to the basic elements of the art to be instructed becomes the first eighteen chapters addressing optical elements and then chapters 19-24 containing Alberti’s summation of the first rudiments of the painter (prima picturae artis rudimenta pictor.)\(^{57}\)

In Book I of De pictura the elementa (fixed properties of vision) from chapters 2-4, immediately introduces and defines elements of optics such as point, line and surface, and the components of horizon and angle. Alberti then, in chapters 5-11, from defining variations in visual possibilities, introduces the forms of the surface components, as plane, convex and concave. Within the definition of ray, he further qualifies this component within the forms of median and extrinsic. Further qualifying the component of surface, Alberti introduces quantity

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\(^{54}\) Quint. Inst. 1.5.7, 124-125. “Ex quibus si quis erit plane inpolitus et vestibulummodo artis huius ingressus, intrahaec, quae profitentium commentariolis vulgata sunt, consistet.” See also Wright, 57. Wright suggests that the Institutio actually resembled the lost Studiosus of Pliny the Elder, the precepts of which trained the orator in three books divided into six sections. See also Pliny the Younger, Letters, III.5.6, trans. Betty Radice (Cambridge, MA: 1969), 174-175. We know of the Natural History by way of this letter of Pliny the Younger.

\(^{55}\) Alberti, De pictura, I.1, 36-37. “In writing about painting in these short books…” (De pictura his brevissimis commentariis...)

\(^{56}\) Quint. Inst. 1.1, 21, 74-75. “These are trivial recommendations for one who claims to be educating an orator. But study also has its infancy; and as the rearing of what will one day be the strongest bodies begins with breast feeding and the cradle, so the good speaker of the future once cried as a baby, tried to speak in an uncertain voice and was puzzled by the shapes of letters…” (Parva docemus oratorem insti tendum professi, sed est sua etiam studis infanta; et ut corporum mox fortissorum educatio a lacte cunisque initium ducit, ita futurus eloquentissimus edidit aliquando vagitum et loqui primum incerta voce temptavit et haesit circa formas litterarum.)

\(^{57}\) Alberti, De pictura, I.23, 58-59. See also Wright, 52-71.
and pyramid. From chapter 12-18, the operative term is comparison, whereby “all these are such as to be known only by comparison.”58 Chapters 19 and 20 give the exercises in optics for perspective. Chapters 21-24 summarize the “rudiments,” refuting opposing examples of “unlearned painters,” and moves the reader to Book II.59

Thus Book I begins with an introduction to optics, just as Quintilian begins the Institutio with an introduction to grammar, insofar as what oration exactly entails, and presents simple oratorical exercises. De pictura’s Book II begins with a digressio or encapsulation of the composite virtues of painting, invoking ancient examples. The book then addresses the ars, contextualizing the virtues of the lesson with analyses of ancient practice, and moves on to the three concepts of circumscription, composition and reception of light – all distilled into historia. Herein, too, the Quintilian model is visible. The second section of Quintilian’s Institutio also begins with a digressio before shifting to the ars rhetorica, dividing it subject matter and listing its parts in the central books of the work.

Book III of De pictura then specifies the pedagogical and moral requirements of the good artist and painting practice just as Quintilian’s work also closes by insisting on examining the moral character of the orator. The proximity to Book 12 of Quintilian is very noticeable here. Alberti replaces the rhetorician’s two requirements for good oratory – a knowledge of philosophy and civil Law – with geometry and poetry as pre-requisites for good painting.60

In III.52, Alberti caps the raison d’etre for the artist:

The aim of the painter is to obtain praise, favor and goodwill for his work much more than riches. The painter will achieve this if his painting holds and charms the eyes and minds of spectators. We explained

58 Alberti, De pictura, I.18, 52. “... huiusmodi sunt ut omnis earum cognitio fiat comparatione.”


how this may be done when talking above about composition and reception of light. But in order that he may attain all these things, I would have the painter first of all be a good man, well versed in the liberal arts.\textsuperscript{61}

Alberti specifies that the liberal arts are crucial to morals of a painter:

Everyone knows how much more effective uprightness of character is in securing people’s favor than any amount of admiration for someone’s industry and art. And no one doubts that the favor of many people is very useful to the artist for acquiring reputation and wealth… For this reason it behooves the artist to be particularly attentive to his morals… whereby he may obtain both the good-will of others, which is a firm protection against poverty, and money, which is an excellent aid to the perfection of his art.\textsuperscript{62}

Alberti gives us a foundation for the substance of his book. Morals are not simply equated with other tools but are the nec plus ultra in the service of painting. Alberti demands that the painter “first of all be a good man, well versed in the liberal arts.”\textsuperscript{63} Alberti’s moral education in humanism is the philosophical core of the entire tract. In so doing, Alberti follows Quintilian’s lesson on Alexander and Aristotle.\textsuperscript{64} The responsibilities of the orator, expounded in both Cicero’s De oratore and Orator as well as Quintilian’s Institutio, become apparent in De pictura.

The ultimate role of the artist was that of historian – to learn and use history. As Cicero said:

\textsuperscript{61} Alberti, De pictura, III.52, 95-96. “Finis pictoris laudem, gratiam et benivolentiam vel magis quam divitias ex opere adipisci. Id quidem assequetur pictor dum eius pictura oculos et animos spectantium tenebit atque movebit. Quae res quonam argumento fieri possint diximus cum de compositione atque luminum receptione supra disceptavitimus. Sed cupio pictorem, quo haec possit omnia pulchre tenere, in primit esse virum et bonum et doctum bonarum artium.”

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid. “Nam nemo nescit quantum probitas vel magis quam omnis industiae aut artis admiratio valeat ad benivolentiam civium comparandam. Tum nemo dubitat benevolentiam multorum artifici plurimum conferre ad laudem atque ad opes parandas… Quae cum ita sint, moribus egregie inserviendum erit artifici… et lucra, optimum ad perfectiendam artem auxilium assequatur.”

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., III, 52, 94-95. “… in primit esse virum et bonum et doctum bonarum artium.”

\textsuperscript{64} Quint. Inst., 1.1.23, 74-77. “Would King Philip of Macedon have chosen that his son Alexander be taught his letters by Aristotle, the greatest philosopher of the age or would Aristotle have accepted the commission, if he had not believed that elementary instruction is best given by the most accomplished teacher and that it is important for the ultimate outcome?” (An Philippus Macedonum rex Alexandro filio suo prima litterarum elementa tradi ab Aristotele summo eius acatissi philosopho voluisse, aut ille suscepisset hoc officium, si non studiorum initia et a perfectissimo quoque optime tractari et pertinere ad summam credidissent?)
For not to know what happened before one was born, *is to remain a boy all one's life*. For what is the worth of a human life unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?

These doctrines regarding the moral purpose and character of the painter and art itself speak to one argument concerning Wright’s interpretation of *De pictura*. While Wright correctly argues the book’s function as commentary and that the structure sources the layout of Quintilian, his supposition that *De pictura* is a “pedagogical manual for beginners” and that its purpose is really to serve as a primer for the student painter fails to account for the highly elevated humanist language and tone of the work. In its address of moral as well as technical instruction, *De pictura* was clearly aimed and an audience educated well beyond the artisan of the 1400s.

**Alberti and Inventio**

Of the several terms that come directly from Cicero (*arte, diligentia*, and *ingenio*), perhaps the most resonant prescription of Alberti that harkens to Cicero is *invention*, discussed at length in both *De inventione* and *De oratore*. Alberti uses the term *inventio*, eight times: three in Book II [twice in chapter 26 and once in chapter 37], and five times in Book III – [three times in chapter 53 and twice in chapter 54]. In II.26 Alberti states:

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65 Cic. *Orat.* xxxiv.120, 394-395. “He also must be acquainted also with the history of past ages, particularly of course of our state, but also so imperial nations and famous kings… For not to know what happened before one was born, is to remain a child all one's life. For what is the worth of human life unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?” (*Cum illa divina cognoverit, nolo ignoret ne haec quidem humana. Ius civile teneat, quo egent causae forenses cotidie… Nescire autem quid ante quam natus sis acciderit, id est semper esse puerum. Quid enim est aetas hominis, nisi ea memoria rerum veterum cum superiorum aetate contexitur?*). See also ibid., *De orat.* 1.34.158, 107-108. “We must also read the poets, acquaint ourselves with histories, study and peruse the masters and authors in every excellent art…” (*Legendi etiam poetae, cognoscenda historia, omnium bonarum artium scriptores ac doctores et legendi…*)

66 Wright, 53-54.

67 Cic. *De orat.* 1.5.18, 14-15. “Unless this faculty [invention] be placed in charge of the ideas and phrases which have been thought out and well weighed, even though as conceived by the orator they were of the highest excellence, we know that they will all be wasted.” (*Quae nisi custos inventis cognitisque rebus et verbis adhibeatur, intellegimus, omnia, etiam si praeclarissima fuerint in oratore, peritura.*)
For this reason I say to my friends that Narcissus who was changed into a flower was the inventor of painting. Since painting is the flower of every art, the story of Narcissus is to the point.68

He then continues:

They say that painting was brought to Italy from Greece after the victory of Marcellus over Sicily. But we are not interested in the inventor of art or telling stories like Pliny. We are building something new about art of which nothing has been written yet in this age as far as I can tell.69

In II.53 an even more crucial passage occurs. Describing inventio as a function of good historia, Alberti cuts to the heart of connecting visual art to textual art in a momentously important claim:

It will be of advantage if they [painters] take pleasure next to poets and orators [rhetoricians], for these have many qualities in common with the painter. Literary men, who are full of information about many subjects, will be of great assistance in preparing the composition of a historia and the great virtue of this consists primarily in its invention (praesertim in inventione). Indeed invention is such that even by itself and without pictorial representation it can give pleasure.70

This profound coalition of literary and visual art is stressed in the passage by Alberti inferring the two arts as interchangeable. Invention may give pleasure as a stand-alone tool, without pictorial representation (sola inventio sine pictura delectet.). Subsequently, using Lucian’s description of the Calumny, painted by Apelles, Alberti reiterates the story in order to advise the painter to take care with inventions (quo pictores admoneantur eiusmodi inventionibus) as

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68 Alberti, De pictura, II.26, 62-63. “Quae cum ita sint, consuevi inter familiares dicere picturae inventorem fuisse, poetarum sententia, Narcissum illum qui sit in florem versus, nam cum sit omnium artium flos pictura, tum de Narcisso omnis fabula pulchre ad rem ipsam perapta erit.”

69 Ibid. “E Graecia vero in Italian dicunt nostri venisse picturam post Marcelli victorias ex Sicilia. Sed non multum interest aut primos pictores aut picturae inventores tenuisse, quando quidem non historiam picturae ut Plinius sed artem novissime recenseamus, de qua hac aeate nulla scriptorum veterum monumenta quae ipse viderim extant.”

70 Ibid., III.53, 94-95. “Proxime non ab re erit se poeitis atque rhetoribus delectabuntur. Nam hi quidem multa cum pictore habent ornamenta communia. Neque parum illi quidem multarum rerum notitia copiosi litterati ad historiae compositionem pulchre constituendum iuvabant, quae omnis laus praesertim in inventione consistit. Atqui ea quidem hanc habet vim, ut etiam sola inventio sine pictura delectet.” See also Sinisgalli, 75 and 109, n. 4, Sinisgalli holds proxime as “near to” instead of Grayson’s translation as “next,” as in order.
Apelles’ work is the visual personification of words themselves:

The description that Lucian gives of Calumny painted by Apelles, excites our admiration when we read it.

I do not think it is inappropriate to tell it here, so that painters may be advised of the need to take particular care in creating inventions of this kind.  

Alberti summarizes his powerful conjunction of words and pictures with:

If this historia seizes the imagination when described in words, how much beauty and pleasure do you think it presented in the actual painting of that excellent artist?

Two further examples of invention appear in II.54. First, Alberti refers us to Hesiod and his nomenclature for the Three Graces – Egle, Euphronesis and Thalia – who were painted together (pinxere implexis) with hands intertwined, smiling while one gives, another receives and the third returns the gesture to the other two:

You can appreciate how inventions (creations) of this kind bring great repute to the artist. I therefore advise the studious painter to make himself familiar with poets and orators and other men of letters...

Secondly, after acknowledging from the gleaning of Phidias from Homer on how to paint Jupiter, Alberti argues that the reading of poets will make the painter richer provided he pays attention to learning in place of financial reward. Alberti suggests four elements to good oratorical invention; ratio, ars, diligentia, and ingenium. In De oratore Cicero enlisted three elements to

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71 Ibid., III.53, 94-95. “Laudatur, dum legitur, illa Calumniæ descriptio quam ab Apelle pictam refert Lucianus. Eam quidem enarrare minime ab instituto alienum esse censeo, quo pictores admoneantur eiusmodi inventionibus fabricandis advigilare oportere.”

72 Ibid., 96-97. “Quae plane historia etiam si dum recitatur animos tenet, quantum censes eam gratiae et amoenitatis ex ipsa pictura eximii pictoris exhibuisse?”

73 Ibid., III.54, 96-97. “Vides quæ huismodi inventa magnam artistici laudem comperant. Idcirco sic consulto poetis atque rhetoribus caeterisque doctis litterarum sese pictor studiosus familiarem atque benivolum dedat…” See also Sinisgalli, 76. Sinisgalli translates inventione as creation which, in Cicero’s prescriptions can mean the same thing.

74 Ibid. “Phidias egregius pictor fatebatur se ab Homero didicisse qua potissimum maiestate loven pingeret. Nostris sic arbitrò nos etiam poetis legendis et copiosiores et emendatiores futuros, modo discendi studiosiores fuerimus quam lucrī.”
invention: *acumen, ratio* or method, “which we may be permitted to call *art,*” and *diligentia.* Cicero, like Alberti, demands knowledge of historical precedent along with an armory of ideas.

The good *historia* must hold the eye and move the soul of both learned and unlearned beholder. So Cicero’s orator must instruct, entertain and move (*docere, delectare, movere*).

The orator must bring the audience to empathy “for the feelings… are to be won over… to goodwill.” Spencer points out that Alberti also used the technique of *good will* in III.52:

The aim of painting: to give pleasure, *good will* and fame to the painter more than riches. If painters will follow this their paintings will hold the eyes and the soul of the observer.

Both Cicero and Alberti desire to elicit emotion from the spectator. For Alberti the artist uses vivid representation in painting; for Cicero the orator uses vivid representation in language:

When one hears a real orator, he believes what is said, thinks it true, assents and approves; the orators words win conviction.

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75 Cic. *De orat.* II.35.147, 304-305. (“*Et sic, cum ad inveniendum in dicendo tria sint: acumen, deinde ratio, quam licet, si volumus, appellemus artem, tertium diligentia.*”)

Ibid., II.27.116-117, 282-283. “For the purposes of proof the material is twofold… one kind made up of the things which are not thought out by himself… the other kind is founded entirely on the orator's reasoned argument.”

77 Alberti, *De pictura*, II.40, 78-79. “*Historia vero, quam merito possis e laudare et admirari… ut oculos docti atque indociti spectatoris diutius quadem cum voluptate et animi motu detineat.*” See also idid., II.41, 80-81. “*Animos deinde spectatantium movebit historia…*”

78 Cic. *Opt. gen.* II.5, 356-357. There are several versions of Cicero’s triad, including *Brut.* xlii.185, 156-157.

79 Ibid., *De orat.* II.43.182, 326-327. “… *animosque eorum apud quos agetur conciliari quam maxime ad benevolentiam, cum erga oratorem tum erga illum pro quo dicet orator.*” See also ibid., Part. *orat.* Viii.28, 332-333. “*e quibus initia benevolentiae conciliandiæ comparantur…*”

80 Spencer, “*Ut Rhetorica pictura,*” 39.

81 Alberti, *De pictura*, III, 52, 94-95. “*Finis pictoris laudem, gratiam et benevolentiam vel magis quam divitiias ex opere adipisci. Id quidem assequetur pictor dum eius pictura oculos et animos spectantium tenebit atque movebit*”.

82 Cic. *Brut.* xlii.187, 158-159. “*Credit eis quae dicuntur qui audiet oratorem vera putat, assentitur, probat fidem facit oratio.*”
Alberti’s obsession with what is accessible, desirable and correct mirrors Cicero’s on decorum:

For the same style and the same thoughts must not be used in portraying every condition in life, or every rank, position or age, and in fact a similar distinction must be made in respect of place, time and audience. The universal rule, in oratory as in life is to consider propriety.  

Finally III.62, the penultimate chapter of *De pictura*, stresses elegance and diligence. In fact, virtually all of Book III is a lesson in correct deportment of the painter – appropriate demeanor of mind and practice (gesture, facial emotion, color or space) studied and adapted from *De inventione*, *De oratore* and *Brutus*. In sum, the entirety of incorporated structure and substance from the rhetorical writings of Cicero and Quintilian firmly ranks Alberti in the renaissance of antique oratorical arts and *studia humanitatis*.

**Guarino da Verona and Lucian: Apelles’ *Calumny***

As stated above, after III.53 of *De pictura* stresses the study of geometry, in order to illustrate *invention* as a function of *historia*, Alberti offers that, “The description that Lucian gives of Calumny painted by Apelles excites our imagination when we read it.” (*Laudatur, dum legitur, illa Calumniae descriptio quam ab Apelle pictam refert Lucianus*). Herein, Alberti conjoins the liberal arts to the visual as equals in mutual dependence and merit. The humanist, furthermore, invokes the text of a Greek writer, Lucian’s *On Not Believing Rashly in Slander* to elaborate on the morality and responsibility of painting. The work was not to be easily found in Italy, before Alberti and his contemporaries. The import of Greek manuscripts, translated into

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83 Ibid., Orat. xxi.71, 356-359. “Non enim omnis fortuna non omnis honos non omnis auctoritas non omnis aetas nec vero locus aut tempus aut auditor omnis eodem aut verborum genere tractandus est aut sententiarum, semperque in omni parte orationis ut vitae quid deceat est considerandum.”

84 Alberti, *De pictura*, III.56, 94-95.

the early Quattrocento Italian landscape points to scholars like Guarino and Vittorino, friends to Barzizza and periodic teachers in his school in Padua while Alberti attended. Barzizza’s connection with Guarino, by means of Chrysoloras, reached its apex during Alberti’s studies with Barzizza. Between 1414 and 1419, Guarino resided in Venice, most likely commuting at times to Padua and the *studium* or Barzizza’s school where Barzizza acknowledged Guarino’s contributions to orthographical study.\(^{86}\)

The sole purveyor of Apelles’ painting of *Calumny* to survive from antiquity, Lucian’s description delivers a tract that is precise, short, and moralistic. Legend has it that because of jealous antagonism from his rival, Antiphilis, Apelles avenged the former’s false accusation of Apelles having supported the rebellion of Tyre against Ptolemy IV Philopater. Apelles painted a picture of the king with the ears of an ass – thereby duped by Calumny.\(^{87}\) According to Lucian, the narrative is that Envy, led by Calumny, assaults Virtue while Slander stands by. The painting’s description, speaking to the betrayal of an artist’s ethics, resonated throughout the Quattrocento as a sign of the high esteem that visual art should demand in humanist social life. The two earliest surviving Renaissance visual representations were an illustration from Bartolommeo della Fonte’s 1472 translation of Lucian and Botticelli’s more famous work of 1495 (Fig. 2.1).\(^{88}\) Botticelli has the *Judge*, sporting ears like *Midas*, extending his hand toward *Calumny*. Alberti does not describe this last detail, which suggests that Botticelli had access to other available Latin editions of Lucian.\(^{89}\)

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86 Barzizza, *De Orthographia*, MS XIII, G 9, fol. 8r. “... de quibus certior factus fui a Guarino Veronensi Emanuili Chrisolorae discipulo magni quidem ingenij ac in utroque lingua viro egregie docto.”

87 Apelles was long dead by the time of the revolt (c. 219 BCE) so the story itself is false.


89 See Altrocchi, 471.
Alberti borrows from Lucian to reference Lucian, and then he describes from Lucian’s very description. In this he incorporates Quintilian’s rhetorical device of praesumptio upon which the entirety of De pictura hinges: to “show in words as if in a painting” his book about that very thing – painting. This double ekphrasis folds neatly into the text. As Alberti directly cites Lucian by name, we may presume that Guarino provided Alberti with the entire rhetorical universe here. David Cast, in his analysis of the early modern treatment of calumny, insists that, “certainly Alberti read Guarino.”\(^90\) However, the earliest Renaissance textual reference to Lucian, in the context and account of Apelles’ story, is in De pictura. Alberti would have certainly had access to Lucian’s text by way of Guarino, the first translator of Lucian into Latin.\(^91\) Returning from Greece with texts given him by Chrysoloras, Guarino translated the work as Calumniae non temere credendum, thus introducing the work to Italian humanism.\(^92\)

Aurispa, in Constantinople at the time of Guarino, returned with a Lucian codex around 1423; two years later he translated Lucian’s Comparatio of Alexander, Scipio, and Hannibal into Latin, giving copies to both Bruni and Guarino.\(^93\) Guarino, on the other hand, having taught Greek for three years in Florence, arrived in Venice in 1414 to lecture periodically at Barzizza’s school until his departure. In 1415 Guarino began work on Lucian’s Calumny, apparent in a

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\(^90\) David Cast, The Calumny of Apelles: A Study in the Humanist Tradition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 32. A misprint misdates Alberti’s return to Florence as “1478.” Alberti was long dead by then.

\(^91\) Altrocchi, 457.


letter to Bernardo da Montepulciano. Like Quintilian’s *praesumptio*, Lucian describes Apelles’ painting before discusses on moral lessons of *calumny*:

In order then, that we may as far as possible avoid being involved in it [calumny], I wish to show in words, *as if in a painting*, what sort of thing Calumny is, how it begins and what it does.”

The *ekphrasis* here, in its clearest description of visual art is imported into *De pictura*. If Barzizza brought Lucian to Alberti, the full endorsement of Lucian’s words came from Guarino whose realization of the importance of pictorial arts developed over some years. In a 1416 letter he bemoans that he is in Padua and not Greece, and that visual art is secondary to literary:

Yesterday I was wandering through the land of the Corinthians with your Pausanias as guide; for truly I should not have admitted to being in Padua at that moment. I surveyed events and buildings, temples and the images of gods… It made me reflect on how much more vivid is that image brought before our eyes through words than that presented by means of the brush; and the more so in that the brush shows only the mute lineaments of the physical body, while words portray sounds and living speech. How much more glory, then, and fame are due to Cicero and Demosthenes than to Phidias and Zeuxis.

Despite sublimating the visual arts, Guarino, nonetheless, observed them. The fact that he contextualizes visual art, albeit in a *paragone* with rhetoric, marks a further cursive milestone regarding visual art’s importance in humanist pedagogy – written in the year that he was at Barzizza’s school periodically while Alberti was a student. Thirteen years later, in a 1429 letter, Guarino, like Cicero, would describe the art of writing in a striking metaphor about sculpture:

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96 Sabbadini, *Epistolario*, 125-126. “*Heri Corinthiorum agrum duce tuo peragrabam; nam me tunc Patavii fuisse negaverim. Eorum nunc res gestas ac aedificia, nunc templae et deorum simulacra visebam. Qua in re versabam animo quanto vivacior sit quae litteris quam quae penniculo ante oculos affertu effigies et eo magis quod in hoc sola corporis et muta quidem lineamenta cernuntur, illis vero sonus et viva explicatur oratio. Quanto igitur maior Ciceroni atque Demostheni quam Phidiae aut Zeusi gloria celebritasque debetur.*”
… I have been proceeding in the manner of the sculptor, who first chisels at the marble so as to reveal, as yet only in form, the figure of a horse or lion or man without yet having added the luster and embellishment that completes the work.97

Finally, in a 1447 letter to the prince of Ferrara, Lionello d’Este, Guarino’s discussion of the Muses, to be painted by Angelo da Siena (d. 1456), is exemplary counsel at a humanist court:

When I learned recently from your Lordship’s letter of your noble and truly splendid project having paintings mad of the Muses, it was right and proper that I should praise this your invention, worthy as it is of a Prince, not stuffed with pointless or licentious figures… I am aware that many will distinguish other functions of the Muses. To them I shall reply with Terence’s remark: *quid capita, toto sententiae.*98

This letter attests to the increasingly strong humanist endorsement of visual art in Guarino’s discourse, evolving from an endeavor, initially inferior to rhetoric, to its ratification for a prince.

The seeds of Guarino’s transformation, evident in his Paduan epistle, probably bloomed with his long association with Pisanello. From around 1415 to 1422, Pisanello was working in Venice in the assistance of Gentile da Fabriano on frescoes in Great Council Hall in Doges Palace (repainted 1479). Alberti may have very well seen the frescoes, and this will be assessed further on. To stress Guarino’s evolution of visual art appreciation – beginning with his nominal reference in 1416 – by 1429, Guarino became the first known humanist to actually write a poem to an artist – Pisanello – a cogent humanist adaptation of pictorial works that includes:

When you paint a nocturnal scene you make the night-birds flit about and not one of the birds of the day is to be seen; you pick out the stars, the moon’s sphere, the sunless darkness. If you paint a winter scene

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97 Sabbadini, Epistolario, 71. “... Hactenus enim more sculptorum feci, qui principio ita marmora erudient, ut equi aut leonis aut hominis adhuc in forma detgant imaginem nondum splendor adiectus extremusque color. See also Cic. Brut. xiii.70-71, 66-67.

98 Sabbadini, Epistolario, 498-500. “Cum praeclaram vereque magnificam in pingendis musis cogitationem tuam nuper exliteris tuae dominationis intellexerim, laudanda erat merito ista principe digna inventio, non vanis aut lascivis referata figmentis... Scio plerosque fore qui alia musarum signent officia, quibus Terentianum respondebo illud: “quot capita, tot sententiae.””
everything bristles with frost and the leafless trees grate in the wind.\textsuperscript{99}

**Barzizza, Alberti and *Imitation***

Rensselaer W. Lee argued for the intersection of humanism and the visual arts in terms of poetry, stemming from Aristotle’s endorsement of *imitation* in painting from the *Poetics*:

Since objects of imitation are men in action, and these men must be of a higher or a lower type (for moral character answers to these divisions, goodness and badness being distinguishing marks of moral difference) we must represent men as better than in real life or as worse, or as they are. It is the same in painting. Polygnotus depicted men as nobler than they are, Pauson as less noble, Dionysius drew them true to life.\textsuperscript{100}

Lee also refers to the famed metaphor from Horace’s noted passage from the *Ars poetica*:

If a painter had chosen to set a human head on a horse’s neck, covered a melding of limbs everywhere, with multi-colored plumage, so that what was a lovely woman at the top ended repulsively in the tail of a black fish: Asked to a viewing, could you stifle laughter, my friends? Believe me, a book would be like such a picture… But painters and poets; Have always shared the right to dare anything.\textsuperscript{101}

The problem with Lee’s argument, relative to *De pictura*, is its adherence to a late sixteenth-century time frame, promoted by Lodovico Dolce (1508-1568) in his *Dialogo della pittura* (1557), by which time text and painting were much more integrated.\textsuperscript{102} In Alberti’s early 1400s, the humanist would have had difficulty accessing Aristotle’s *Poetics*; the author is listed in Barzizza’s inventory for instance. Aristotle and a poetic venue for the pictorial arts would only

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 555-556. “Noctis opus pingens circum volitare volucres: Nocturnas facis et nusquam apparere diurnas: Astra, globum lunae cernas, sine sole tenebras Si gesta hyberno fingis, glacialibus horrent: Omnia frigoribus, fremdet sine frondibus arbor.” For the poem’s popularity see also Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, 91.


\textsuperscript{101} Hor. *Ars.*, 11-13, 450-451. “Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam iungere si velit, et varias inducere plumas undique collatis membriis, ut turpiter atrum desinat in piscem mulier formosa superne, spectatum admissi risum teneatis, amici? Credite... iisti tabulae fore librum persimilem... pictoribus atque poetis quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas.”

\textsuperscript{102} Lee, 197-269.
return in the sixteenth century; while in the fifteenth, Aristotle had been eclipsed. The discourse of Cicero and Quintilian became the field stamp of disciplines in the early Quattrocento. The result would be for Alberti to apply the discipline to a book on painting.

The reference from Horace is provocative however and sends us back to Petrarch. *Imitatio* as a motif for Alberti derives from Seneca by means of Petrarch and then Barzizza.

Petrarch’s views on *imitatio* in the context of *De pictura* were succinctly laid out in *Epistle* XXX.19, from *Rerum familiarum* wherein *imitatio*, in his letter to Boccaccio, described as a tool through which rhetorical excellence is acquired by close but not slavish adherence, which distinguishes poets from apes. Petrarch presented himself to Boccaccio as one who “delights in imitation and not in sameness, in a resemblance that is not servile, where the imitator’s genius shines forth rather than his blindness of his ineptitude.” As Grafton suggests, “studying with Barzizza meant [Alberti] being inducted into a coterie culture.” Barzizza’s *De imitazione* (c. 1417) as Pigman points out, was the only educational treatise on *imitatio* between Petrarch and Poliziano in “more than one hundred years.” Barzizza’s treatise most likely mediated Alberti’s adoption of the motif of imitation, regarding looking at *Nature*; “We should look long and carefully…and apply ourselves with all our thought and attention to imitating her.”

Barzizza’s tract, particularly in the use of metaphor, is derived from Seneca and

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105 Ibid., XX.2, 214.


108 Alberti, *De pictura*, II.35, 72-73. “Quonam vero pacto id assequamur, nullalia modo mihi visa est via certior quam ut naturam ipsam intueamur... In qua imitanda omni cogitatione et cura versari veloque...”
Quintilian. However in a 1416 letter to one Francesco Bicharano regarding Bicharano’s son, Giovanni, Barzizza delivers one of the earliest surviving humanist endorsements of *imitatio* as a practice explicitly modeled on the activity of painters. Not only is the letter crucial to the coalescence of visual art to literary art, but it indicates that Barzizza was possibly Alberti’s very first advocate of painting – at the threshold of Alberti’s entire future in visual art:

If it had been possible, I should much like to have known something of your intention in advance. For the course you describe, and which in the case of our Giovanni’s progress you have pursued rather more rapidly that may be appropriate for him or indeed than I myself would consider proper, should not be taken to the point where his studies are such a great discomfort to him. I myself would have done what good painters practice towards their pupils: for when the apprentices are to be instructed by their master before having acquired a thorough grasp of the theory of painting, the painters follow the practice of giving them a number of fine drawings and pictures as models of the art, and through these they can be brought to make a certain amount of progress even by themselves.110

The significance of this letter was neatly summed up in the words of Baxandall: “in Padua at the beginning of the fifteenth century the scholar’s experience may have taken in more of the practical realities of image-making than was generally the case elsewhere.” Barzizza’s letter endorsing pictorial arts is anticipated only by Vergerio: in his *De ingenuis moribus* to Umbertino da Carrara of 1404 as well as his letter in the same year to Carrarese condottiere, Lodovico Buzzacarino (1362-1435) regarding the demerits of looking solely to Giotto as a source for the

109 Pigman, “Barzizza’s Treatise on Imitation,” 344. The bee metaphor is from Seneca, *Epistulae*, 84.5. See also Lee, 203-210. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, VI, 5. As a method in visual art *imitation* arrives in pre-humanism by way of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* during a lesson regarding Giotto’s facility at depicting reality. Poliziano’s letters were to Paolo Cortesio.


111 Baxandall, “Guarino, Pisanello and Manuel Chrysoloras,” 183-205.
gentleman’s scholarly approach to painting. As a method in visual art, Boccaccio discussed imitation in his *Decameron* during a lesson regarding Giotto’s facility to depict reality:

… He with his style and pen and pencil would depict its likeness such that it showed not as its likeness, but rather as the thing itself, insomuch that the visual sense of men did often err in regard thereof, mistaking for real that which was but painted.

Yet, Pigman correctly singled out Barzizza’s *De imitatione* as the only intensive work devoted to the subject that survives between Petrarch and the letters of Poliziano to Paulo Cortesio in the late fifteenth century. Although Barzizza’s tract is part of a pragmatic manual for the student, enabling him to avoid plagiarism, despite its lack of original concept, the treatise is noteworthy for its unique place on the subject of replication. Adopting the metaphor of bees, like epistle 84 of Seneca, Barzizza enlists only a student’s modification of borrowed material to obscure the original source, whereas Seneca and even Petrarch in *Familiares* 1.8.23 write of the newer product, the “honey” as it were, as possibly a complete transformation of the original source into something new and unrecognizable. Barzizza took the motif by way of Quintilian as well:

As soon as a boy is entrusted to him, the skilled teacher will first spy out his ability and his nature… the principle sign of talent is memory… Next comes imitation; this also is a mark of a teachable nature provided that it is exercised on what he is learning, not on someone’s… observable defect.

Barzizza’s teaching and practice may have also rounded out Alberti’s ideas on imitation by way

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112 Vergerio, *Ep.* LXXV.20, 177. For the letter, see also this dissertation, “Introduction,” 23, n.73.

113 Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans, James M. Rigg. (London: Navarre Society, 1921), VI.5, 85. “*e l’altro il cui nome fu Giotto, uno ingegno di tanta eccelenzia, che niuna cosa dà la natura, madre di tutte le cose e operatrice col continuo girar d’ cieli, che egli con lo stile e con la penna o col pennello non dipignesse si simile a quella, che non simile, anzi più tosto dessa paresse, in tanto che molte volte nelle cose da lui fatte si trova che il visivo senso degli uomini vi prese errore, quello credendo esser vero che era dipinto.*”

114 Sen. *Ep.* 84.3-4, 276-279. See this dissertation, 17 n.48 for the full translation.

115 Quint. *Inst.* 1.3.1-5, 96-97. “*Tradito sibi puero docendi peritus ingenium eius in primis naturamque perspiciet… signum in parvis praceipuum memoria est… Proximum imitationi: nam id quoque est docilis naturae, sic tamen ut ea quae discit effingat, non habitum forte et ingresum et si quid in peius notabile est.*”
of Cicero and Pliny. Alberti reminds that the art of Italy came by way of Greece. Pliny also expresses this view, but Alberti speaks of a new process, not simply reiterating Pliny’s history. But it is of little concern to us to discover the first painters or the inventors of the art since we are not writing a history of painting [historiam picturae] like Pliny but treating the art in an entirely new way.

Quintilian, meanwhile, like Cicero and Alberti, refers to the orator’s imitation of sculpture, in 2.19.3. As Alberti likens sculpture to that which delivers refinement, so Quintilian likens rhetoric to visual art using the sculptor Praxiteles as metaphor:

Had Praxiteles attempted to carve a statue from a millstone, I should have preferred a rough block of Parian marble to any such statue. On the other hand, if [he] had produced a finished statue from such a block of Parian marble, its artistic value would owe more to his skill than to the material… nature is the raw material for education: the one forms, the other is formed. Without material art can do nothing, material without art possesses a certain value, while the perfection of art is better than the best material.

Alberti certainly claims to be following Quintilian in his text; indeed in II.26 he says that the ancient “believed the earliest painters would draw around shadows made by the sun, and art grew by a process of additions.” Although no passage exits, this hyperbole is the sole reference to umbras in 2.12.7 of the Institutio, referring to “unlearned speakers” who seem not among “in the shade as Cicero says” but in utter darkness. What Alberti is suggesting in his attribution is the
practice of learned imitation. In addition, on a variation of *imitatio*, Alberti, in I.18, within his explanation of *comparison*, uses Protagoras, ostensibly adapted from Plato’s *Dialogues*. Yet knowledge of Plato’s opus was only fragmentary in the early 1400s, mentioned by Cicero, Seneca and Aulus Gellius. The full Latin text was only made available around 1456 by Ficino.

In Book II, Alberti then follows Quintilian’s specificity of antique works of art: Apelles painting Antigonus in profile to conceal his lost eye; Myron’s *Discobulus* for originality in philological eloquence; Timanthes of Cyprus “for the painting in which he surpassed Coltes, because he had made Calches sad and Ulysses even sadder and Menelaus the “most complete expression of grief that his art could produce” at Iphigenia’s sacrifice. By incorporating the method of citing works, *De pictura* imitates the *Institutio* in theory and specificity.

**Vittorino da Feltre and Science**

In the opening of Book III, Alberti invokes Pliny’s statement that among the liberal arts, the

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121 Alberti, *De pictura*, I.18, 53. “Comparison is made with things most immediately known. A man is the best known of all things to man, perhaps Protagoras, in saying that man is the scale and the measure of all things, meant that accidents in all things are duly compared to and known by the accidents in man.” (*Fit quidem comparatio ad res imprimis notissimas. Sed cum sit homo rerum omnium homini notissimus, fortassis Protagorus hominem inquiens modum et mensuram rerum omnium esse, hoc ipsum intelligebat rerum omnium accidentia hominis accidentibus recte comparari atque cognosci*).


123 Quint. *Inst.* 2.13.10 and 12-13, 342-345. “*Quid tam distortum et elaboratum quam est ille discobolos Myronis? Si quis tamen ut parum rectum improbat opus, nonne ab intellectu artis aferit, in qua uel praecipue laudabilis… Habet in pictura speciem tota facies: Apelles tamen imaginem Antigoni latere tantum altero ostendit, ut amissi oculi deformitas lateret. Quid? non in oratione operienda sunt quaedam, sive ostendi non debent siue exprimi pro dignitate non possunt? Ut fecit Timanthes, opinor, Cythnus in ea tabula qua Coloten Teium uicit. Nam cum in Iphigeniae immolatione pinxisset tristem Calchantem, tristiorem Vlixem, addidisset Menelaao quem summum poterat ars efficere maerorem: consumptis adfectibus non reperiens quo digne modo patris uultum posset exprimere, ueluit eius caput et suo cuique animo dedit aestimandum.***
most essential discipline for the painter is geometry:

I want the painter… to be learned in all the liberal arts, but I wish him above all to have a good knowledge of geometry. I agree with the ancient and famous painter Pamphilus, from whom young nobles first learned painting; for he used to say that no one could be a good painter who did not know geometry.\textsuperscript{124}

Alberti may have begun to learn his precepts of geometry, developed later in Bologna, in Padua. In the 1940s, John Randall argued that the mathematical construction of nature that arrived in the early modern period had very deep roots.\textsuperscript{125} Breakthroughs in scientific methodology were the fruit of generations of evolution in the universities of northern Italy. Indeed, the philosophers attending to science for three centuries around Padua, grounded concept and method of mathematics so much so that Randall maintained that humanism, in its attempt to wrest science from scholasticism, only found an already steadfast methodology and simply reiterated that methodology in the language of rhetoric. The two essential arms of mathematical science in the Middle Ages were the Ockhamites in Oxford in the 1200s who found a stronger bearing over the next century at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Paris. The Averroists, studying in Latin, began at the same university in the 1200s, yet had moved to the University of Padua by the early 1300s. Both movements became centers of science studies.

The Averroists of Padua in 1400, beginning with Paul of Venice (Paolo Nicoletti, 1368-

\textsuperscript{124} Alberti, De pictura, III.53, 94-95. “Doctum vero pictorem esse opto, quoad eius fieri possit, omnibus in artibus liberalibus, sed in eo praesertim \textit{geometriae} peritiam desidero. Assentiro quidem Pamphilo antiquissimo et nobilissimo pictori, a quo ingenui adolescentes primo picturam didicere. Nam erat eius sententia futurum neminem pictorem bonum qui \textit{geometriam} ignorariit.” See also Pliny, \textit{N.H.}, xxxv.76, 316-317. “We have, by Pamphilus,a picture of the Alliance and the Battle that was fought at Phlius; the Victory also that was gained by the Athenians, and of Ulysses in his ship. He was a Macedonian by birth, but was the first painter who was also skilled in all the other sciences, arithmetic and geometry more particularly, without the aid of which he maintained that the pictorial art could not attain perfection.” (Pamphili cognatio et proelium ad Phliumatem ac victoria Atheniensium, item Ulixes in rate. ipse Macedo natione, sed . . . primus in pictura omnibus litteris eruditus, praecepue arithmetica et \textit{geometria}, sine quibus negabat arte perfici posse, docuit neminem talento minoris — annuis.)

\textsuperscript{125} John Herman Randall Jr., “The Development of Scientific Method in the School of Padua,” \textit{Journal of the History of Ideas} 1, no. 2 (1940), 178.
1428) were absorbed in developing theories beyond the scope of traditional Aristotelian thought. Randall draws attention to “a fruitful critical reconstruction of Aristotelian theory of science, undertaken at Padua in particular” during this period.\textsuperscript{126} Padua’s support by Venice delivered unto that city the leading minds of science, particularly from southern Italy. As Venice was anticlerical insofar as socio-political influence, the secular study of science stood at the forefront for scholars in the early 1400s as well as scholars to come in the next century like Copernicus. In the hands of mathematician, d’Abano, Galen’s work became central to the study of medicine in Padua. Da Forli, whose \textit{Ars parva} was the first noted work on Galen, tutored the humanist pedagogue, Vittorino. Hugo da Siena (Ugo Benzi, 1370-1439), also teaching in Padua the time of Alberti, further developed mathematical ideas from Aristotle and Galen.

The science methods of Aristotle, taught in Padua through Alberti’s tenure with Barzizza, are no more than the assertion of the principles of nature stated in mathematical context – the premise of \textit{De pictura}. \textit{Principium}, as that from which a certain entity proceeds and, in fact, reveals a modus of understanding, constructed by \textit{priority} and \textit{origin}, depending upon context. Therein the distinct origins and methods define priority. D’Abano in the \textit{Conciliator differentiarum philosophorum, et praeceptae medicorum} (1310) maintained that science has two classifications: first the inclusion of \textit{cause} – the reason by which \textit{(propter quam)} a certain truth exists, revealed by the wherefore or why \textit{(propter quid)}, termed \textit{doctrina compositiva} by Galen; and, secondly, the demonstration of cause by that which is already known such that knowledge is acquired by that \textit{(quia)} which is demonstrated, termed \textit{doctrina resolutiva} (the resolute way of teaching). This \textit{cause} and \textit{effect of cause through demonstration} is the essence of \textit{De pictura}. The legacy of science in Padua began to supply Alberti’s modus of demonstrative proof in the mathematical essence of relief, composition, light-shade, color and narrative \textit{(historia)}.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 184.
D’Abano stressed three pedagogic doctrines – *resolution*, *composition*, and *definition*. With resolution, the mind is made up beforehand for satisfaction in a knowledgeable result – achieved through examination of all the relative information without which the thing proven cannot exist.

Composition, on the other hand is antithetical to resolution. One begins with the end result principle and then reconstructs relative information in an order that takes one back to the very principle first stated. The third modus is definition of principle or term. Galen and the Persian, Hali Abbas (Ali ben ‘Abbas, d. 994) appropriated the first two Aristotelian methods. Cicero also incorporated *resolutive* and *compositive* into rhetorical method. D’Abano maintained that *composition* method was science in its purest procedure. Da Forlì followed D’Abano and Hali in the two distinctions, *resolutive* and *compositive*. However, he further deconstructed the resolutive to a two-fold process resembling investigation: 1) *Real* resolution was simply the separation of an entity into components; and 2) *Logical* resolution is, in fact, a metaphor or discerning. Da Forli used a fever as an example wherein one resolves the fever into possible causes – a subsequent method of medical diagnosis. Hugo da Siena, professor of medicine at Padua during Alberti’s tenure, narrowed Galen’s methodology of resolution and composition, arguing that both processes are demanded and cannot be used individually. Both cause and effect (*quia* and *quid*) commence with *effects* – seeking the *cause* and then distinguishing the effects incepted by that cause. Paul of Venice lectured in Padua on mathematics during the entirety of Alberti’s time with Barzizza. As Aristotle maintained that the *cause-effect-cause* paradigm was circular proof, Paul defended that both knowledge of cause by means of effect (*quia*) and effect through cause (*quid*) do not lead to the same result necessary and thus are not circular. This demonstration of principle upon both investigation and details of establishment came to be known in Padua by the Averroistic term *regress*, in other words both a composition
and a division of things. The unique Paduan attribution of *De pictura* lies within its attempt at mathematical definition of components demonstrated by cause and effect. If humanism at least pointed to ancient and medieval treatises on mathematics, it must be noted that humanists after Alberti displayed little interest in mathematics. Alberti was, therefore, more the Aristotelian mathematics disseminator than humanists either before or after him. The pivotal evolution of mathematics in Padua before and during Alberti’s studies with Barzizza represents the principle of science as a composition of demonstrations proven by selected experience. In short what Euclid and Archimedes would term *analysis* and *synthesis*, the Padua school would call “resolution” and “composition.” This Paduan notion of *resolution*, or Aristotelian *analysis*, from precise mathematical examination and then subsequent regress for the confirmation of answers, provides much substance and method of *De pictura*.

Although he taught a composite of the *quadrivium*, there is no evidence that Barzizza taught Euclidean mathematics. However his associate, friend, guest teacher and the inheritor of his chair in rhetoric, Vittorino, was of the most proficient teachers of mathematics of his time. The son of a notary, Vittorino, born north of Venice in Feltre, had a humanist education in Latin along with mathematics. Having studied with Conversino from around 1390, he entered the *studium* of Padua in 1396 and received a degree in 1410. The year of his entry into the *studium* of Padua corresponded with, as Woodward asserts, “one of the great dates in the history of learning,” as in the spring of 1396 the *studium* of Florence invited Chrysoloras to take the chair of Greek studies. Even though no chair in Greek existed at the *studium* in Padua until well after Vittorino’s death, in the face of remarkable humanism in Padua, Florence was “curiously

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lacking in vitality.” Vittorino learned Greek from Guarino around 1415 in Venice and worked on the language and philosophy with the Greek humanist, George of Trezibond (1395-c.1473), whom Barzizza also trained during Alberti’s residence.

There is no evidence of Greek in Vittorino’s primer on orthography. The book is believed written between 1396 and 1415, during Vittorino’s association with Barzizza when the former was a repetitor. Both Vittorino and Barzizza may have mutually influenced one another; the two school-masters would have probably exchanged ideas on Latin grammar. Vittorino became the chair of rhetoric upon Barzizza leaving Padua in 1421. He remained as Barzizza’s inheritor of the chair until 1422 whereupon he taught in Venice for a year; until his death in 1446 he was court educator for Gian Francesco Gonzaga in Mantua (d.1444). Vittorino would also tutor Federico II da Montefeltro of Urbino (1422-1482) and Lorenzo Valla. This intellectual environment witnessed three seminal events in the early fifteenth century, which led to the circulation of new texts between Barzizza and Vittorino: 1) Guarino’s 1411 translation into Latin of Plutarch’s On The Education of Children, becoming a popular treatises adapted from the Customs and Morals (Moralia); 2) Poggio’s discovery of Quintilian’s complete Institutio in 1416. Barzizza and Vittorino possessed both texts in the very years of their discovery; and 3) the cache of Cicero’s De oratore, Brutus and Orator, discovered in Lodi in 1421.

Vittorino’s enthusiasm for Cicero and Quintilian was superseded only by his passion Euclidian mathematics. By the time Vittorino arrived in Mantua in 1423, he had enjoyed a

128 Ibid.
129 Ibid., 24.
130 Grendler, Schooling in Renaissance Italy, 130.
distinctive reputation as a teacher of geometry in Padua. Commercial mathematics teachers (maestri d’abbaco) had existed in northern Italy since the 1200s to deal with goods arriving from the Levant, the first noted association amalgamating in Bologna around 1265.\footnote{Ibid., 5 and n. 16.} However, Vittorino’s more sophisticated teaching on mathematics – trained by Pelacani, the most noted teacher of the period on the subject – is signaled by the inscription on the reverse of Pisanello’s 1446 medal of the humanist; “Humanitatis, pater, mathematicus et omnis.” (see Fig. 0.7, reverse) In addition, having judged astrology as interpretive doctrine, Vittorino became proficient in astronomy as an exact science of the physical universe.\footnote{Ibid., 43.}

Euclid’s third book on optics deals with angles while the sixth book is a treatise on proportions and the twelfth defines cones and spheres. Grayson maintains that one of Alberti’s sources for his thinking on geometry was Alkindi’s eighth-century redaction of Euclid.\footnote{Grayson, On Painting and On Sculpture, 140.} This suggests parallels between Alkindi’s work and the terminology in Alberti’s mathematical vocabulary. This intellectual relationship requires an explanation, however as to where, when and how Alberti was exposed to Euclidean precepts. Vittorino and Guarino were both in Padua in 1416, intermittently, at Barzizza’s school when Alberti was present. Because of the death of his father in Padua as well as the departure of Barzizza occurring in in 1421, Alberti may have left Padua for Bologna in that year. On the other hand, according to a document of 1428 wherein Alberti’s uncle, Antonio, was justifying his default on inheritance owed his nephew, Antonio claims that he had to support a studio for Alberti and his brother, Carlo, in the Veneto.\footnote{Mancini, Vita, 40.} In
sum, Alberti possibly first encountered science and mathematics, so prevalent in Book I of *De pictura*, with Vittorino in Padua. These disciplines became ever more important to Alberti at the *studium* in Bologna, to be addressed in Chapter 4.

**Conclusion to Chapter 2**

In his own treatise, Filarete (Antonio Averlino, 1400-1469) saluted Alberti’s humanism:

> For instance, Vitruvius, among others, wrote a worthy treatise on this subject, [as did] Batista Alberti. The latter is one of the most learned men of our times in many disciplines, very skilled in architecture and especially in design, which is the basis of every art done by the hand. He understands drawing perfectly and he is very learned in geometry and other sciences. He has also written a most elegant work in Latin.

The pointed fact is that the major works on the rebirth of Latin orthography, grammar as well as geometry were penned in and around Padua in the years preceding, during and following Alberti’s studies in the city. Padua was the home to the most pioneering humanist pedagogues of the early Renaissance: Vergerio in the 1390s; then Barzizza, together with his friends and visitors, Guarino and Vittorino, in the first two decades of the fifteenth century. In addition newer finds of major classical works on rhetoric were in Barzizza’s possession almost immediately during Alberti’s studies with the teacher. Vergerio, Barzizza, Guarino and Vittorino introduced Alberti to the entire universe of humanism, and his interests would be deeply shaped by the intellectual milieu of Padua in which he was educated. We have in Padua, therefore, a verisimilitude in the shift to an enlightened intelligence in humanist education and intellectual context which would enable Alberti to compose his legitimate neo-classical play, *Philodoxeos fabula* by 1420 and as well as begin to inform the sophisticated rhetorical structure

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and conceptual vocabulary found in *De pictura*.

The following chapter will examine the possible visual elements integral to Alberti’s education in Padua and, consequently, to his prescriptions for painting in *De pictura*. 
Chapter 3

Alberti in Padua II: Visual Education
Visual Context

Alberti uses the word *historia* thirty-seven times in the course of his text – twice in his first book, eight times in his last book and twenty seven times in Book II, including eleven times in Book II.40 alone.¹ He introduces the term *historia* in I.19 in terms of his rectangular *window* and its *subject* and continues in II.21 regarding criticism of the art of “our ancestors.”² In II.33, the term denotes an activity that is “the great work of the painter” and, finally in III.60, the “most important part of the painter’s work.”³ The preponderance of incidences in Book II deals with the prescriptions of *historia* within the function of *composition* (*compositio*). Arguments regarding the term’s translation, as well as the multitude of paintings that may have informed it, will be addressed in chapter 5. However it is important to clarify that only on one occasion in *De pictura* does the word mean, literally, *history*; in I.26 Alberti declares that he is “not writing a *history* of painting like Pliny the elder.”⁴ Elsewhere, we shall take the word to infer *narrative*.

Considering the word as organic to the great painter, we may ask what “great painter” or “work” Alberti had in mind. Alberti offers only one surviving antique and one surviving post-antique example to illustrate narrative, both in Rome: a “dead Meleager” sarcophagi in II.37; and Giotto’s mosaic of the *Navicella* in II.42. One pertinent view by Panofsky is that Alberti “coolly ignored” the entire period between ancient Rome and Quattrocento Florence.⁵ In actuality

¹ Alberti, *De pictura*. II. 40, 78-79. “… *in pictura et corporum et colorum varietas amena est. Dicam historia*…”

² Ibid., I.19, 54-55. “… *quod quidem mihi pro aperta finestra est ex qua historia contueatur…” See also ibid., I.21, 56-58. “… *eadem fortassis apud maiores nostros…* vix enim ullam antiquorum historia compositam…” Grayson translates *maiores nostros* as “former ages.” Alberti probably speaks of medieval artists.


⁴ Ibid., II.26, 62-63. “… *non historiae picturae ut Plinius se artem novissime recenseamus*…”

⁵ Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences*, 23.
Alberti never mentions Florence in *De pictura* either. Alberti’s omission, however, does not negate, but on the contrary, demands a forensic examination of *De pictura* in the paradigm of works of art that informed the book. For instance, regarding pictorial relief (*prominentiae*), Alberti suggests that sculpture was a crucial influence when he requests to “practice at sculpting rather than painting for sculpture is easier than painting.” Given Alberti’s evolution in Padua alone, it is scarcely credible that what he saw prior to Florence played no part in shaping his visual aesthetics in general and *De pictura* in particular. The evidence in the text itself suggests another, deeper story, which this chapter will attempt to uncover.

**Antique Sources**

The Renaissance did not entirely re-discover antiquity visually. Visually, the Middle Ages invested an assortment of Roman antiquities with considerable importance, often finding some symbolic Christian significance in them, particularly in those belonging to the age of Constantine. An example of this was the late-antique and so-called *Regisol* (*Sun King*) in Pavia (destroyed in 1796), an equestrian statue from Ravenna, subsequently taken and later returned by Milan, and believed to be of a Roman Emperor, perhaps Hadrian or Marcus Aurelius. Historical time was not necessarily a distinction to the Middle Ages. Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, for example, was generally considered no less or different in importance than

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6 Alberti, *De pictura*, III.58, 100-101. The prescription continues, “No one will ever be able to paint a thing correctly if he does not know its every relief, and relief is more easily found by sculpture than by painting… I prefer you to take as your model a mediocre sculpture rather than an excellent painting…” (*Ac fortassis conduceat fingendo exerceri quam peniculo. Certior enim et facilior est sculptua quam pictura. Prominentiae vero facilius reperiuntur sculptura quam pictura.*) Grayson’s translation is loose. *Fingendo* is the gerund of *fingo*, *fingere*, *fixi*, *fictum*, the verb meaning to “mold.” *Peniculo* is the dative use of the brush. See also Grayson, *On Painting and On Sculpture*, 9 and Alberti *Della pittura*, ed. Mallè (Florence: Sansoni, 1950), 5. Grayson and Mallè suggest medieval and antique sculpture.

7 Walter A. Liedtke, *The Royal Horse and Rider: Painting, Sculpture, and Horsemanship* (Norwalk: Albaris Books, 1990), 65. Liedtke maintains the rider may be Theodoric or late 3rd century.
Trajan. If, prior to the humanists, historical interest in antiquity was limited, Petrarch himself was aware of the antique value of the Regisol as a visual emblem of antiquity as well as its Ravenna origins. He described the work, along with the four antique horses of San Marco in Venice to Boccaccio in a letter:

In the middle of the main square an equestrian statue of gilded bronze, which seems to be pressing on at top speed to the summit of the hill, which as rumor has it, was seized long ago from your city of Ravenna.

Paduan oral tradition claimed the Trojan, Antenor, as its classical founder, and, although the inscription bears small relation to legitimate antique epigraphy, the veritable attempt at a founding legend illustrates the unique Paduan civic fervor for the antique. Tradition would perpetuate with the discovery of Livy’s tomb and be carried into the sixteenth century with busts, supposedly based upon the antique, surfacing – now mostly ascribed to Agostino Zoppo (1520-1572) (Fig. 3.1). Furthering the artifice a medal surfaced contemporaneously with a portrait of Livy by Domenico Campagnola in the Bassano Palace. The features of the face suggest replication of a death mask, a Paduan tradition for portrait modeling in the early Renaissance. The similarity of the busts proposed that they were modeled on an antique original. What one sees emerging in Padua, from the pseudo-classical tombs, inscriptions and statuary, is a passion for visual antique ceremony, epigraphy and art. The jurist, Rolando da Piazzola, Lovato’s nephew, not only deciphered an inscription not far from the basilica of San Paolo fuori le Mura

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8 Weiss. The Renaissance Rediscovery of Antiquity, 3.

9 Petrarch, Rerum senilium, V.1, 154.

10 Witt, The Two Latin Cultures, 463. See also Weiss, The Renaissance Rediscovery of Antiquity, 4-5.


12 See Nagel and Wood, 257 and n. 21, 430.
in Rome, but also revived the ancient custom of coronation of laurels by having the city bestow a
wreath upon Mussato in honor of his *Ecerinis*, the first surviving secular tragedy penned since
Antiquity. Mussato’s play, we have noted, was a republican denunciation of tyranny in neo-
classical form; his coronation could have only happened in 1315 in a city steeped in its own
Roman tradition as well as its ancient archaeology. Within this context Donatello in Padua of
the 1440’s would execute the *Gattamelata*, a warrior effigy of condottiere Erasmo da Narni
(1370-1443) and the first bronze equestrian statue since antiquity (Fig. 3.2).

**Giovanni Dondi del Orologio and Text on Monuments**

Chapter 5 of this work will argue that the narratives on ancient sarcophagi informed
Alberti’s vocabulary, particularly in Book II. In this chapter it is therefore important to underline
how archeological work in Padua was sustained among humanist circles – by Vergerio, for
example, who turned his scholarly attention to the evidence of antique sarcophagi visible in late-
Trecento Padua. His visit to Rome in 1398 peaked the humanist’s interests in monuments, but he
was hard-pressed to find anyone who could enlighten him as to specific histories of what he saw.
In an unfinished letter, *ad ignoto*, he bemoans Roman antiquities in dissolution from scavengers,
both rich and poor. Vergerio discerned enough to debunk the old myth of the pyramid of
*Cestius* as the tomb of Remus, saying; “those who read the inscription of marble letters, negated
it, with difficulty,” referring, perhaps to Vergerio’s attendant, Francesco da Fiano (1350-1421),
chancellor of Rome and humanist decrier of the entropy and looting in the city. Conversely,
Vergerio also brings us evidence of the sarcophagi still visible in late-Trecento Padua. In his *De

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13 Vergerio, *Ep. LXXXVI*. 23, 215. The letter is now called *De statu veteris et inclytae urbis Romae* and states
that… “unde vere dixerim nusquam minus Romam cognosci quam Roma.”

14 Ibid., 218. “… sed qui litteras marmoribus incriptas legerunt, id negeant.”
dignissimo funebri apparatu (1393) heralding the return of Francesco II Vecchio’s body by the Visconti, complete with ancient mask and sepulcher, Vergerio revealed at the plethora of sarcophagi still to be seen in Padua.¹⁵

Francis Ames-Lewis suggested that the distinction between the late-Trecento antiquarian and the archeologist was one of motive.¹⁶ The antiquarian was a collector, driven by a passion for fragments of antiquity due to a relic’s signification of a heralded past. The archeologist sought the object to endow a reformed present. An earlier endorsement of the idea of the monument as a vital supplementary to a text in the process of classical learning comes from yet another Paduan and friend to Petrarch, Giovanni Dondi dell’Orologio (1318-1388).¹⁷ Dondi’s father, Jacopo (1290-1359), a professor of medicine at the studium and noted for his text, Aggregator, that collated opinions of how to cure diseases, began the work on the astrological clock on the Reggia tower of Padua. Eventually becoming the foremost Paduan scientist and jurist at the Padua studium by 1349, the younger Dondi left Padua for three years to teach in Florence. Guided by his father, Dondi wrote the Tractatus astrarii and constructed his own famed planetary clock that tracked the movements of the five then-known planets according to Ptolemy’s system. In his Iter Romanum (c. 1375) Dondi measured dimensions of antique buildings.¹⁸ Despite Petrarch’s disdain for medicine and the studium, he called Dondi “princeps


medicorum,” a label also possibly reiterated by Barzizza.\textsuperscript{19} In fact Neal W. Gilbert believes that, due to Dondi’s library of Latin texts, we have further evidence of the interdisciplinary temper in Padua as well as the surviving copy of Boccaccio’s biography of Petrarch.\textsuperscript{20} Ending his career as court physician to the Visconti, Dondi possessed around 120 volumes of science texts, including classical works such as Livy and Ovid as well as of Dante and his friend, Petrarch.

Most importantly, his noted epistle (1380s) to Fra Guglielmo Centueri da Cremona (d. 1402) begins to debate the relative merits of works of antiquity in comparison to those of his contemporary time.\textsuperscript{21} The letter stands as a neoclassical invective against the arts, both liberal and visual, of his own day; “Thus you [Fra Guglielmo] and I differ with respect to these matters. I prefer the Ancient times, you defend the Modern,” writes Dondi heralding the texts and art of antiquity as evidence of a better age.\textsuperscript{22} The letter resembles his friend Petrarch’s rhetoric:

The best evidence [of the superiority of the ancients] consists of the writings which outstanding minds have left to the memory of posterity; their authority and majesty is so great that no one can fail to trust them. If you should ask my own opinion, their credit is so great, believe me, that I seem somehow to have seen those things that I have read.\textsuperscript{23}

Dondi then introduces the remarkable visual monuments of Rome that have survived to his day:

Moreover, proof of this is given by those objects which remain in Rome to this day as testimony to the honors that used to be conferred upon outstanding actions… For although time has consumed many of them – even many of the more magnificent – and only ruins of others appear… those who decreed them must have

\textsuperscript{19} Gilbert, 300, n.1.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 326.

\textsuperscript{21} See Gilbert, 301, n. 1.

\textsuperscript{22} Gilbert, 331. “Sic tu et ego aliud hac in parte sentimus. Ego vet era prefero tempora, tu moderna defendis.”

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 333. “In primis indicio stant scriptores quas eximia ingenia ad posterorum memoriam edidere, quarum quibusdam tanta est auctoritas atque maiestas ut eisdem fides negari non possit. Apud me autem si queras tam grandis hercle fides ut quaudam modo ilia putem vidisse que legi.” See also ibid., 342-345 and Barkan, 47-49. Barkan points out that the force of the Dondi’s statement, “I seem, somehow, to have seen those things that I have read” infers that the reading of description stresses the desire for visual antiquity.
been of great virtue... I mean the statues which, either cast in bronze or chiseled in marble, have lasted to the present, and the many fragments of those that have been shattered lying about everywhere, the marble triumphal arches of impressive workmanship and the sculptured columns showing the histories of great deeds, And you similarly... perhaps have said to yourself, "Surely these are proof of great men." 24

This is, perhaps, the most precise and articulate endorsement of ancient art in Rome in the early Renaissance. Dondi’s letter is among the first surviving discourse derived from direct experience to personally commend antique art as of critical value to contemporary culture:

Of the artistic products of ancient genius, few survive... and if you compare them with those of today, it will soon become obvious that their authors were by nature more powerful in genius and more learned in the mastery of their art. I am speaking about ancient buildings and statues and sculptures, with other things of the sort. When some artists of this time scrutinize the productions of that age carefully, they are struck with amazement. I knew a certain well-known worker in marble who was famous for his ability in that art among those whom Italy had at the time, especially in the creation of figures. I have heard this man tell many times about the statues and sculptures that he had seen at Rome... he would tell of the great excellence... and praise their authors beyond measure... as if to say that nature had been not only imitated by the genius of such artists but even surpassed. 25

The letter, like Dondi himself, was well known in Padua in the early 1400s and possibly accessed by Barzizza. We may wonder about the identity of Dondi’s “well-known worker” mentioned in the text. Whoever he may be, Dondi’s description in his Iter Romanum of reliefs on triumphal arches and statues of bronze and marble joins visual antiquity to the textual. The work includes

24 Gilbert, 333-334. “Ceterum eiusdem rei indicio sunt ea que de decretis olim ob actus egregios honoribus usque hodie Romana in urbe perdurant... iam tempus consumerit, et quorundam ruinae tantum modo que vestigia quedam prebent eorum que antea stetere antostendantur, alia tamen paucia minusque magnifica que supersunt abunde testantur nisi magne virtu... statuas dico que velere conflate vel marmore cese usque in diem duravere presentem et frusta plurima passim iacentia diruptarum, arcusque marmoreos magni operis triumphales et columnas insculptas grandium gestorum historias indicantes... te me forte dixisse; hec profecto sunt magnorum argumenta virorum.”

25 Ibid., 336. “De artificiis ingeniorum veterum quamquam paucia supersint... ab his qui ea in re sentiunt cupide queruntur et videntur magnique penduntur et si illis hodierna contuleris, non latebit auctores eorum fuisset ex natura ingenio potiores et artis magisterio doctiores. Edificia dico vetera et statuas sculpturasque cum aliis modi huius, quorum quedam cum diligenter observant huius temporis artifices obstupescunt. Novi ego marmorarium quendam famosum illius facultatis artificem inter eoa quos unum haberet Italia presertim in artificio figurarum. Hunc pluries audivi statuas atque sculpturas quas Roma perspexerat tanta cum admiratione atque veneratione narrantem... nararet et auctores laudaret ultraque modum commendaret ingenia ad extremum huc solebat addicere, ut verbo utar suo... ac si diceret a tantorum artificum ingenios non modo imitatam fuisset naturam, velum etiam superatam.”
measurements of Trajan’s tower, the Pantheon and notes on antique edifices across northern Italy, including the size of Tiberius’s bridge at Rimini and the late-antique mosaics in Ravenna. Alberti’s understanding of antiquity in *De pictura* stems from this rich backdrop of archaeology; he would walk more closely in Dondi’s footsteps with his own *Descrip­tion urbis Romae*.\(^{26}\) Gilbert surmises that a commentary on Dondi’s glosses on Seneca’s *Epistulae morales* including Seneca’s very first letter, a very dense opus on *time* no less, comes from Barzizza.\(^{27}\) In fact, given that Barzizza perhaps referred to Dondi himself as *princeps medicorum*, one might surmise that during his early classical education in Padua, Alberti received initial instruction in antique archeology and architectural measurement by means of the material in Dondi’s *Iter Romanum*, perhaps even coming from the text itself in that classroom.\(^{28}\)

The survey of early Renaissance historical foundations of antiquarianism demands mention of Ciriaco d’Ancona (de’ Pizzicolli, 1390-1462; Fig. 3.3) in light of his friendship with Alberti’s employer Eugenius IV and his correspondent time in Rome and Florence with Alberti. Ciriaco’s surviving drawings of antiquity were dedicated to Pietro Donato, Bishop of Padua. Mary Bergstein argues that Ciriaco’s antiquarianism influenced Alberti, as well as other humanists such as Barzizza’s student, Barbaro.\(^{29}\) The two certainly met later in life; Ciriaco and Barbaro penned epitaphs to accompany Donatello’s bronze equestrian statue, *Gattamelata*. Ciriaco’s begins: “Stephanus da Narni il Gattamelata, captain general of the Venetian army.”\(^{30}\)

\(^{26}\) Alberti, *Descrip­tion urbis Romae*, eds. Jean-Yves Boriaud, Mario Carpo and Francesco Furlan, trans. Peter Hicks (Tempe: Arizona State University Press, 2007). The 1450 work was perhaps begun around 1430 in Rome.

\(^{27}\) Gilbert, 322-323, n.51. The commentary is MS 128, in the Biblioteca Governativa e Libreria Civica di Cremona.

\(^{28}\) Barkan, 31. Barkan argues Alberti extrapolated his mathematics from other earlier texts, not from actual practice.

\(^{29}\) See Mary Bergstein, “Gattamelata” and its Humanist Audience,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2002), 841-847.

Enjoying access to the workshops of both Ghiberti and Donatello, Ciriaco’s poem on the *Gattamelata* pays homage to both sculptors: “now within our seas, through Nencio and Donato.”\(^{31}\) That Alberti returned to Padua in the 1440s and was in further contact with Donatello, after both Rome and Florence, suggests, perhaps, a mutual influence or at least mutual cognizance between the statue and Alberti’s 1440s work *De equo animante*, that may have begun with Ciriaco.\(^{32}\) In addition Ciriaco’s stay in Florence in 1433 would coincide with Alberti’s arrival in 1434 with Eugenius IV. Ciriaco also encountered Alberti at the court of Este around 1449. Niccolò Baroncelli and Antonio di Cristoforo di Firenze sculpted the *Arco del Cavallo*, an equestrian homage to Niccolò III d’Este. (Fig. 3.4) The very next line in his poem to Donatello continues with Ciriaco’s honor to Baroncelli on the *Arco*: “Niccolò Baroncelli in your honor gives worldly splendor to Lionello together with his father.”\(^{33}\) Alberti, arbitrating judgment of the *bozzetti*, deeming that Baroncelli execute the horse and Cristoforo the rider, designed the base of the statue as a triumphal arch, only ten years after *De picture* (Fig.3.5).

### Carrara Medals and Pisanello

In addition the first surviving neo-classical medals came not from Pisanello but from Padua in the representations of Francesco Novello da Carrara and his father, Francesco I – both

\(^{31}\) Bodnar, 363. “*Hor per Nencie et Donato a nostri mari*…”  


\(^{33}\) Ibid., 363. “*Nicolò Baroncielli en tuo decore. fa Leonel col patre al mondo clari*…”
of whom were given the attributes of Roman Imperial toga and fibula. From Petrarch and Dondi, perhaps, derived an obsession on the part of the Carrara to replicate ancient Roman coinage by self-portraiture. Here in Carrara Padua was Alberti’s first exposure to an idiom that he would directly copy. While he may have been later influenced by Matteo di Pasti and Pisanello, he was probably first inspired by the Carrara innovations in Padua for they virtually instituted the pre-Renaissance portrait medal based upon antique coinage (See Figs. 0.10-0.13). Hill explains their perfection as well as the “first attempt at modern commemorative medals” to Padua due to the city’s strong tradition of classical learning. As opposed to later medallions clumsily cast and then bluntly chased, the Carrara medals were exquisitely executed by engraved dies, the most perfect of their day, fooling antiquarians into the sixteenth century. Francesco Novello’s recapture of Padua from the Visconti inspired the distribution of medals with his image and that of his father, Il Vecchio. The direct inspiration certainly came from Altichiero’s frescoes in the Sala Vivorum Illustrium and Petrarch’s De viris. The medals, imitating the style of first-century Roman bronze imperial sestertii, depicting their subjects in Roman attire, are the antecedents of the Quattrocento works by Pisanello of John IV Palaeologus and Lionello d’Este (Fig. 3.6; See also Fig. 0.14).

Patricia Fortini Brown further equated the antiquarian interests and sources of Jacopo Bellini’s early Quattrocento drawings of antique elements with those of Altichiero (See Figs. 0.26-0.31). In fact some evidence linking the Paduan and Veronese cultural context of the study of antiquities, in which Altichiero worked, to Bellini can be seen in a Roman altar with its

34 Ames-Lewis, 112. The medal of Francesco Novello in Paris at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. The medal of Francesco I is at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz Münzkabinett.
35 Ibid.
fifteenth-century base, now in the Museo Civico in Padua (See Figures 0.11-0.12). This work offers further proof of the exemplary function of antique monuments during Alberti’s tenure in the city. Bober and Rubinstein record this circular altar as being known in Padua as early as the first decade of 1400s. The reliefs depict maenads, following neo-Attic models copied from fifth-century BCE works of Callimachus (See Fig. 0.10). Bellini’s drawings of these maenads attest to a possible visual correspondence from Bellini to De pictura. Alberti describes: the demand II.40 for historia to include “virgins… hands turned upward… faces turned away;” and in II.44 for “pleasing and graceful movements… In young maidens movements and deportment should pleasing and adorned with delightful simplicity;” as well as the three Graces in III.54 whom “the ancients represented… dressed in loose transparent robes.”

**Giotto to Altichiero**

By July of 1452 painting as oratory’s equal was endorsed by the distinguished humanist, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (1405-1464; Pope Pius II in 1458) in a letter to the German humanist Niklas von Wyle (1410-1479, Figure 3.7), his publisher:

> These arts, painting and oratory, love each other mutually. The genius of both painting and oratory desires not to be common but lofty and great. It is a strange thing that as oratory flourishes so does painting. This is seen from the period of Demosthenes and of Cicero. After eloquence was cut down, painting fell… After Petrarch letters emerged; after Giotto the hand of the painter arose; and we already see both arts have arrived at a very high point.40

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37 Ibid., 72 and 67, fig. 3.

38 Bober and Rubinstein, 121.


Piccolomini conjoins the two disciplines: oratory, informed by Demosthenes and Cicero, and painting by reference to two pioneering figures in their respective arts, who achieved their ascendancy in Rome, the final city of Alberti’s sources for *De pictura*. Petrarch would do so with his *Africa* and Giotto would do so with the *Navicella*. However, before Rome, Alberti would have encountered masterpieces by both of them in Padua.

**Context for Alberti’s Visual Experience**

Prior to Barzizza, the literary endorsement of visual art reaches an apogee with Vergerio and the *De ingenuis moribus*, the first surviving tract to endorse the actual *craft* of visual art within a humanist curriculum.41 First lamenting that his era sees drawing as a practice only relegated to the lowly business of painters, Vergerio then endorses a Greek syllabus, including wrestling, music and *drawing*, honored by Aristotle, on the grounds that visual art had allowed Greeks to discern the beauty of artificial creation and to create a discourse regarding aesthetics.

There were four things which the Greeks used to teach their boys: letters, wrestling, music, and drawing, which some call sketching… Drawing as it is now practiced is not worthy of a freeman, except perhaps insofar as it pertains to writing (for penmanship is actually a form of drawing and sketching); for the rest, it is the business of painters. *However, among the Greeks, Aristotle tells us, this kind of business was not only useful, but also honorable.* For the skill in design helped in the purchase of vases, paintings, and statues, which the Greeks took much pleasure in, and prevented their being deceived about price, and it gave them great appreciation for the beauty and charm of things both natural and artificial. Great men need to be able to talk among themselves and make judgments about matters of this kin. 42

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41 Vergerio, *De ingenii moribus*, 2-91.

42 Ibid., 48-51. “Erant autem quattuor quae pueros suos Graeci docere consueverunt: litteras, luctativam, musicam, et designativam, quam protractivam quidam appellant… Designativa vero nunc in usu non est pro liberali, nisi
Vergerio’s treatise for Umbertino provides for the education of a prince. He is working in the *institutio principis* tradition instilling virtue from the Senecan tradition, “geared toward rhetorical character,” as Stacey maintains. As Skinner elaborates, advice-books like this were “for kings and princes to cultivate,” flourishing throughout the Renaissance from Petrarch to Machiavelli. Yet McManamon argues that Vergerio included two new precepts to this genre. First, Vergerio insists that education is the task of the state and, secondly, that acquiring freedom was a personal process more than a public one. Vergerio’s postulate is echoed in Alberti’s first two known works, *Philodoxeos fabula* and *De commodis litterarum atque incommodis*, to be addressed here in Chapter 4. Vergerio’s treatise is crucial for its endorsement of a curriculum combining poetry, history, philosophy, grammar, rhetoric, music, and painting into the overall development of the cultured person. This is the gift of the tract to painting and Alberti. The interrelation of the arts was the foundation of Barzizza’s curriculum that exposed Alberti to Vergerio’s remands.

**Giotto**

Before the *De ingenuis moribus* Vergerio had ratified visual art in his 1396 letter to

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quantum foristan ad scripturam attinet (scribere namque et ipsum est prostrahere atque designare), quoad reliqua vero penes pictores resedit. Erat autem non solum utile, sed et honestum quoque huiusmodi negotium apud eos, ut Aristoteles inquit. Nam et in emptionibus vasorum tabularumque ac statuarum, quibus Graecia maxime delectata est, succurrebat, ne facile decipi pretio possent, et plurimum conferebat ad deprehendandam rerum, quae natura constant aut arte, pulchritudinem ac venustatem; quibus de rebus pertiner ad magnos viros et loqui inter se et iudicare posse.”

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43 Stacey, 198-199.


45 Vergerio, *De ingenuis moribus*, 109-111.

46 Mercer. 18.
Buzzacarino, discussing Seneca’s thoughts about *imitation* in connection with Giotto:

Though Seneca considers one should not follow a single model but form new style out of various models, I do not think this is so: rather one should have a *single writer* and him the best whom one imitates before all others because the more one follows an inferior model and departs from the best, the worse one becomes. So one should do what the painters of our own age do, who though they may look with attention at famous paintings by other artists, yet follow the model of Giotto alone.47

Vergerio would have had easy access to Giotto’s lost secular frescoes in the Palazzo della Ragione as well as his famous cycle of the *Lives of Mary and Jesus* in the Cappella Scrovegni (See Figs. 0.20-0.25). Executed over a century before Alberti’s arrival in Padua, as Lauro Martines remarked, “pride of time and place” in art patronage occurred in Padua wherein Enrico Scrovegni (d. 1336) commissioned a fledgling genius to execute a fresco cycle in the family’s private chapel.48 With Giotto, as Weiss put it, “the first morning lights appear on a medieval sky.”49 The only modern artist in *De pictura* is Giotto and his *Navicella* mosaic (see Fig. 0.19):

They also praise in Rome the boat in which our Tuscan painter Giotto represented the eleven disciples struck with fear and wonder at the sight of their colleague walking on the water, each showing clear signs of his agitation in his face and body that their individual emotions are discernible in every one of them.50

We see that *De pictura*’s inclusion of Giotto alone within its genealogy of several antique painters, testifies not solely to the emergence of a *new art*, but to a convergence between the antique and the new artist. Although lauding the antique, Alberti would go on to subsume

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47 Vergerio, Ep. LXXV.20, (ad Ludovico Buzzacarino), 177. “… et quanquam Anneaus neminem velit unum sequendum, sed ex diversis novum quoddam dicendi genus conficiendum, michi tamen non ita videtur, se unum aliquem eundemque optimum habendum esse, quem proculum imitemur, proterea quod tanto fit quisque deterior quanto inferiorum secutus a superiore defect. faciendum est igitur quod etatis nostre pictores, qui, cum ceterorum claras imagine sedulo spectent, solus tamen loti exemplaria sequantur.”


50 Alberti, *De pictura*, II.42, 82. “Laudatur et navis apud Romam ea, in qua noster Etruscus pictor giottus undecim metu et supore percusso ob soicum, quem supra undas meentem videbant, expressit, ita pro se quemque suum turbati animi inditium vultu et toto corpore preaferentem, ut in singulis singuli affectionum motus appearant.”
medieval elements into the articulation of his architectural style just as he did with his painting precepts – because he had before him an array of periods and styles from which to draw. Nothing exemplifies this Albertian ability to synthesize more than the *Tempio Malatestiano* in Rimini (1450s), his first architectural work, where a shell of mimicked antique elements engulfs a Gothic Franciscan church (Fig. 3.8). In other words, just as Alberti’s later architectural design of the 1467 *Holy Tomb of Christ* in San Pancrazio in Florence (Fig. 3.9) is entirely a fictional construct in neo-classicism – a sort of architectural amalgamation of the antique and medieval Baptistery of Florence, so *De pictura*’s visual sources would be an amalgamation aspiring to create a unique art history book.

Although Giotto is lionized by the likes of Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch, it is Alberti and *De pictura* that first endowed the artist with bearing and substance within the paradigm of painting in the Renaissance. Giotto’s modern historiography truly begins with *De pictura*. There are four textual mentions of Giotto contemporary to the artist. Possibly the eldest extant reference comes from Dante’s *Purgatorio*, XI, 94-96:

*Credette Cimabue ne la pittura tener lo campo
tener lo campo, e ora ha Giotto il grido,
si che la fama di colui e scura.*

Dante’s reference to Giotto’s *fama* may predate the following earliest references, which arrive around 1313 in Riccobaldo da Ferrara’s (1251-1318) *Compilato cronologica* and Francesco Barberino’s (1264-1348) *Liber documentorum amoris*. Riccobaldo’s entry reads, in short, “a Florentine painter, who worked for the Friars Minor in Assisi… and in Rimini and Padua at the

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51 Dante, *Purgatorio*, XI, 94-96.
A later Roman manuscript adjoins “a famous painter from Florence who worked in Assisi, Rimini and Padua.” Riccobaldo, a contemporary of Giotto in Padua, may have written the above as early as 1306 around the time of completion of Giotto’s work. He most likely edited the piece around 1318, the year of the rise of the Carrarese. In addition the Purgatorio, known to Riccobaldo, appeared in manuscript possibly around 1313; thus we might assume that Dante may have seen the Cappella frescoes himself. Riccobaldo’s words pinxit cois suggest a contraction of palatio communis, which may mean that he is referring to Giotto’s work (lost) in the Palazzo della Ragione. Barberino lived in Padua from 1304 to 1308. Dante was also perhaps in the city during this period. Barberino penned the Amoris in Provence between 1309 and 1312. Barberino mentions both Cimabue and Giotto by name, thus possibly having been influenced by – or, conversely, influencing – Dante. A separate passage contains the first mention of a particular picture by Giotto, that of the Envy in the Arena Chapel. As Barberino left Padua in 1308, and, as the Virtues and Vices in the dado were, according to buon fresco order, low on the wall thus the last executed, 1308 may be the year of the work’s completion.

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53 Ibid. Murray sources Biblioteca Laurenziana, MS Plut. LXXXIII, 2. “Cottus pictor eximius florentin (us) agnoscitur. Gl’ in arte fuit testat (ur) op. Fia peae (per eum) in eccl’iss minorum assisiij. Arimini Padue ac peq (per ea que) pinxit palatio cois padue et in ecclia arene Padue.”

54 Ibid. Murray references MSS Compilatio Cronologica, Frome, f. 202, 1474. “Ioctus pictor eximius Florentinus agnoscitur qualis in arte fuerit restantur opera facta per eum in ecclesia minoru Assisi Arimini Padue et in ecclesia arene Padue.” The legend of Giotto’s authorship of the St. Francis cycle in Assisi may derive from the Franciscan General Chapter in Padua at the Santo. Perhaps Riccobaldo received the Giotto attribution from the Assisi Friars.

55 Ibid., 61. The mention of Emperor Henry VII who assumed power in 1312 may allude to a redaction.

56 Ibid., 59.


58 Murray, 62. Murray argues that “the chronological order may be tentatively put” as Dante, possibly before 1308 or as late as 1314, then Barberino, between 1308 and 1313 and, lastly Riccobaldo, between 1312 to 1318.

59 Barberino, II, 165. “Unde invidiosus invidia comburitur intus et extra hanc padue in arena optime pinsit Giotuss.”
The fourth and final reference to the work comes from the second part of the Visio Egidii regis Patavie of Da Nono’s Cronica, the primary source for our knowledge of Giotto’s paintings in the Palazzo della Ragione. Da Nono, because perhaps he disliked Scrovegni, gives only a pithy mention of the Cappella:

in this place what they call the Arena, a most beautiful church was built in honor of Blessed Mary
(in hoc loco, qui Arena dicetur, edificabitur ECCLESIA una pulcherrimus in honorem BEATE MARIE)\(^61\)

Albeit terse, the Visio Egidii relates the building of a roof in the Palazzo della Ragione in 1306 with painted allegories of the Zodiac and planets executed by Giotto.\(^62\) The paintings, probably executed after the Cappella as the roof was begun in 1306, were destroyed by fire in 1420. Alberti would have seen this original and rare secular work by Giotto, while in Padua.

**Hypothesis for Giotto only**

Remarkably, De pictura refers to Giotto’s single work in mosaic, a staggeringly difficult medium with which Alberti had no evident experience. Alberti uses the mosaic perhaps because his contemporary visual information began to solidify in Rome. On the other hand, he refers to no modern painter except Giotto for five possible reasons. First, following Quintilian, he may have avoided doing so because he wrapped his instruction within a rhetorical treatise, which demanded the use of classical examples above all – and the minimization of the importance of contemporary artists. In relying upon pre-contemporary antique models, Alberti, like Cicero, is virtually inscribing his work with authentication by ancient relics. As Nagel and Wood point


\(^61\) Ibid.

\(^62\) Ibid.
out, the entirety of scholarship depends upon this process of *inscription*.

The inscription here is the stamp of the ancients that, like an antique monument, gives force of recognition. Secondly, Giotto was considered, by his unique depictions of naturalism governing physical expression, spatial definition, color and light, as the *nec plus ultra* of post-antique artists even in his own day. Thirdly, Alberti, by praising Giotto, is following in the footsteps of his famed predecessors, Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch and Vergerio. Fourthly, Alberti lauds the *Navicella* as a symbol or culmination of all of Giotto’s works. In fact, had Alberti written the entire book in Florence, we might ask why he did not refer to the sophisticated articulation of space and emotional force in Alberti’s prescription for *historia* in the frescoes cycles of *St. Francis* (1325) or of *St. John* in the Bardi and Peruzzi Chapels respectively (1320) in the church of Santa Croce (Fig. 3.10 and 3.11). Nor does he speak of the *Baroncelli Polyptych* (1334) or the *Crucifix* (1330) in Santa Maria Novella, both of which, albeit not in the realm of the prescription of *historia*, are Florentine hallmarks of Giotto (Figs. 3.12 and 3.13). As Alberti was working Rome by the time he was probably finalizing the information in *De pictura*, he would write of that city’s famed mosaic, having the *Navicella* represent his homage *in toto* to Giotto.

Lastly, the reference to the *Navicella* removes any sense of a competitive civic panegyric to any particular urban center, other than the Rome of both the ancient and more modern rule.

Boccaccio had already championed the specifically Florentine context of Giotto:

> The other whose name was Giotto was of such excellent intelligence… the mother operator of all things… wherefore the humans sense of sight was often deceived by his works and took for real what was only painted… and he may deservedly be called one of the lights in the glory of Florence.  

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63 Nagel and Wood, 222.

64 Boccaccio, *Decameron*, VI.5, “[Giotto] ebbe uno ingegno di tanta eccellenzia… madre di tutte le cose et operatrice… che il visivo senso degli uomini vi prese errore, quello credendo esser vero che era dipinto...meritament una della luci della florentina gloria dir si puote.”
Thus, Alberti not only applauds antiquity’s capital, Rome, without suggesting any other specific geographic dimension, he also inserts himself into the famous literary tradition before him.

**Alberti and Cennini**

In piecing together Alberti’s visual experience in Padua, particularly regarding Giotto, it is necessary to revisit the controversy as to the dating and place of authorship of Cennini’s *Il libro dell’arte* and how that book relates to possible Paduan influences upon *De pictura*. For Cennini had also heralded Giotto as having transformed painting in Italy from *maniera greca* into a more expressive and emotive genre.\(^{65}\) Believed to have been written in Padua, *Il libro* probably dates from between 1392 to 1407. Cennini’s handbook serves as an important forerunner to Alberti’s treatise, and it is possible that Alberti knew of Cennini’s book through Barzizza or others in Padua. In fact, it may be hypothesized that *De pictura* is a theoretical tract for humanists written in direct *response* to Cennini’s handbook for craftsman.

Although copies of Cennini’s work were available in the Renaissance, the earliest surviving manuscript of *Il libro* is dated July 31, 1437 with additional words, *Ex stincarum*, or “from the Stinche” – the debtors’ prison in Florence.\(^{66}\) Latifah Troncelliti argues for the book’s post-*De pictura* authorship in Florence.\(^{67}\) Cennini’s wife was Paduan, his brother, Matteo,

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\(^{65}\) See Bolland, “Art and Humanism in Early Renaissance Padua: Cennini, Vergerio and Petrarch on Imitation,” *Renaissance Society of America and the University of Chicago Press* 49, no. 3 (Autumn, 1996): 469-487. See also Troncelliti, note 3. Although born in Tuscany, Cennini perhaps worked for the Carrara and his book is in Paduan dialect; hence the work is assumed written in that city. For example, *argere* replaces *acero*, *figaro* for *albero di fico* (‘fig tree’) and *miguolo* for *bicere* (glass), among others.

\(^{66}\) See Troncelliti, 81-86. The copy, found by Cavalier Tambroni in 1821 is now in the library of San Lorenzo.

\(^{67}\) Ibid. Troncelliti’s cogent argument is founded upon Tambroni’s manuscript supporting Filippo Baldinucci in 1681 for the book having been written in the Florentine prison. Troncelliti argues that Cennini finished *Il libro* two years after Alberti’s *De pictura*. She argues the dialect as a matter of social and educational exposure. This opposes the accepted Paduan place of origin argued by the Milanesi. See also Gaetano and Carlo Milanesi, eds. *Il libro dell’arte o trattato della pittura di Cennino Cennini: di Nuovo Pubblicato, con Molte Correzioni e coll’aggiunta di più Capitoli, Tratti dai codici Fiorentini* (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1859), iv-vi. In reference to painters, however,
befriended the Carrara, and, furthermore, much of Cennini’s written dialect, pointed out by the Milanesi, is Paduan. Cennino’s opening statement, saluting Giotto and the Gaddis, also venerates St. Francis and his most important protégée, St. Anthony of Padua – the city, after Assisi, most strongly committed to Franciscanism and home to the largest Franciscan basilica in the world and the saint’s tomb:

In beginning the Book of Art, written by Cennino of Colle [val d’Else] in reverence to God, and the Virgin Mary and St. Eustace and St. Francis and St. John the Baptist, and of St. Anthony of Padua, and of all the male and female saints of God and in the reverence of Giotto, of Taddeo (Gaddi) and of Agnolo (Gaddi), Cennino’s master, and for the usefulness, good and benefit for all said who strive to attain this art.

Cennini’s homage, like Alberti, is not only to Giotto but also to his medievalist teacher, Agnolo Gaddi, the son of Giotto’s disciple Taddeo Gaddi (1290-1366) and arguably the last late-medieval Florentine proponent of the Giotto-esque style. Had Cennino written in Florence during the late 1430s, as Troncelliti argues, the craftsman might have emulated Alberti’s vernacular later tip-of-the hat to more contemporary Florentine masters; but he does not. Nor does he address, in his short chapter on proportion, the advent of fixed perspective – a breakthrough in painting technique that Alberti addresses in Book I of De pictura. Cennini merely recommends to take a “prime measurement” for a figure of a face which should “serve as the guide for all figures, for buildings and for one figure to another and is the perfect guide

Cennini mentions only those who influenced him, all of whom predate Alberti

68 See Cennini, Il libro dell’arte di Nuovo Pubblicato, iv-vi. See also Francesco Dini, “Cennino di Drea Cennini da Colle Valdelsa,” Miscellanea Storica della Valdelsa, 13, (1905): 76-87. Both the Milanesi and Dini reference documents in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze that state “Cennini de Coli pictor... habitator Padue...familiaris magnifici domini Paduani” and further was married to a woman of the Ricca family from that city.

should you use your intellect to estimate how to apply measurements.”

Surely, as a painter himself, Cennini would have described, possibly more acutely than even Alberti, the procedural technique for perspective, had he written in the late 1430s. Finally, Vasari has Cennini as Gaddi’s assistant in Florence, but the only mention of his own work (lost) is a Virgin with certain saints in the hospital of Bonifacio Lupi, Altichiero’s patron of the St. James Chapel. In fact, Miklós Boskovits argues that as the basis of Cennini’s inspiration and pedagogy comes by way of his master, Agnolo Gaddi (1369-96) who worked for a time in Padua, that inspiration and craft derived also from Giotto and Altichiero’s works in the Cappella Scrovegni, Palazzo della Ragione, and St. James Chapel, respectively.

If we accept the Paduan source of Cennini’s book, we may see Cennini as a progenitor and a direct influence on Alberti, albeit one with distinct and different methodologies. As the single surviving work on painting, written broadly within the period of De pictura, Il libro is a practical manual not a rhetorical treatise. This also pins down a break point between medieval and Renaissance painting discourse. One book delivers late-medieval guide-lines – the other delivers intellectual aesthetics. In simple terms, Cennini writes for the artisan and Alberti writes for the humanist; or, if you will, Cennini writes for the workshop and Alberti for the court. This distinction is most obviously apparent in the languages chosen by the authors. If Alberti read

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70 Ibid., trans. Weller, 19. “... e la prima misura che pigli a disegnare... t’è guida di tutta la figura, de’ casamenti, dall’ una figura all’ altra, ed è la perfetta tuo ’guida; operando il tuo intelleto di sapere guidar le predette misura.”


Cennini, which he most likely did, either in Padua or Bologna, in this respect it may have inspired Alberti to refine his own content for a humanist and princely audience.

**Painting and Imitatio**

According to Andrea Bolland, Cennini’s text was accessible to the late Carrara dynasty under Francesco Novello. If so, Cennini may have had an impact upon or at least a connection to Vergerio’s epistolary influence on Novello’s son, Umbertino, regarding the importance of painting. Cennini warns in chapter 27 that imitating only a few masters is preferable to dissipating one’s talent by emulating too many mentors:

> And if you are in a place where many good masters have been, so much the better for you. But I give you this advice: take care to select the best on every time, and the one who has the greatest reputation… For if you undertake to copy after one master today and after another one tomorrow… you will inevitably, through enthusiasm, become capricious, because each style will distract your mind.

Given that Cennini worked in Padua during the last days of the Carrara and perhaps during the subsequent Venetian occupation of the city, this passage may not just be the simple good sense of a painting teacher, but possibly traces of a line of thinking about imitation, which we have seen adopted from Seneca in Vergerio’s letter to Buzzacarino. Another possible source virtually ubiquitous among humanists in late-Trecento Padua was the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. In 2001 Christie’s auctions in New York sold an edition copied around 1380, possibly belonging to Petrarch’s library. The book contains an illumination of the humanist on the frontispiece. (Fig.)

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74 Bolland, 469-487.

3.14) The *Rhetorica*, as Alberti, endorses the ancient artists in pedagogy. Inspiring possibly both Cennini and Alberti’s advice on a single master, IV.5.8 of the *Rhetorica* also says:

> For if the student believes that all qualities can exist in one man, he himself will strive for a mastery of them all. But if he despairs of this achievement, he will occupy himself in acquiring a few qualities, and with these be content. Nor is this surprising, since the teacher of the art himself has been unable to find all the qualities in one author… He will therefore be content with emulating one author and distrust his own single power to possess the sum total of qualities possessed by all the authors.  

The very next chapter of the *Rhetorica* transfers the argument to the visual arts:

> Not thus did Chares learn from Lysippus how to make statues. Lysippus did not show him a head by Myron, arms by Praxiteles, a chest by Polycleitus. Rather with his own eyes would Chares see the master fashioning all the parts; the works of the other sculptors he could if he wished study on his own initiative.

Chares gleaned from only Lysippus and not Myron and Praxiteles as well. Alberti, although he suggests *imitation* for the painter, claims himself in II.26, to be a theorist following no master:

> We are, however, building a new an art of painting about which nothing, as I see it, has been written in this age. They say that Euphranor of Isthmus wrote something about measure and about colors, that Antigonus and Xenocrates exchanged something in their letters about painting, and that Apelles wrote to Pelleus about painting. Diogenes Laertius recounts that Demetrius made commentaries on painting. Since all the other arts were recommended in letters by our great men, and since painting was not neglected by our Latin writers, I believe that our ancient Tuscan [ancestors] were already most expert masters in painting.

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76 [Cic.] *Rhet. Her.*, IV.5. 7-8, 244-245. “Si enim putabit posse omnia penes unum consistere, ipse quoque ad omnium nitetur facultatem. Si id desperarit, in paucis se exercere; ipsis enim contentus erit, nec mirum, cum ipse praeceptor artis omnia penes unum reperire non poterit... Quare unius alieius esse similem satis habebit, omnia quae omen habuerint solum habere se posse diffidet.”

77 Ibid., IV.6.9, 248-249. “Chares ab Lysippo statuas facere non isto modo didicit, ut Lysippus caput ostenderet Myronium, brachia Praxitelis, pectus Polycletium, sed omnia coram magistrum facientem videbat; ceterorum opera vel sua sponte poterat considerare.”

78 Alberti, *De pictura*, II.26, 62-63. “Sed non multum interest aut primos pictores aut picturae inventores tenuisse, quando quidem non historiam picturae ut Plinius sed artem novissime recenseamus, de qua hac aetate nulla scriptorum veterum monumenta quae ipse viderim extant, tametsi ferunt Euphranorem Isthmiun nonnihil de symmetria et coloribus scripsisse, Antigonum et Xenocratem de picturis aliqua litteris mandasse, tum et Apellem ad Perseum de pictura conscripsisse. Refert Laertius Diogenes Demetrium quoque philosophum picturam commentatum fuisset. Tum etiam existimo, cum caetera omnes bonae artes monumentis litterarum a maioribus nostris commendatae fuerint, picturam quoque a nostris Itals non fuisse scriptoribus neglectam. Nam fuere quidem antiquissimi in Italia Etrusci pingendi arte omnium pertissimi.”
In Book I of *De pictura*, Alberti uses forms of the verb *imitare* five times but only in the context of *representation* or *comparison*. In Book II.31 he introduces *imitatio* in the context of the *aemulatio* arguing the ease of copying painting as opposed to sculpture (“facilius quam sculptas *aemulantur*”). For Alberti the teacher to be imitated is Nature herself, which he stresses in Book III.58. Yet, the chapter begins with his reticence falling away with an exception of *fame* as motive for *imitation*, as with the ancient sculptor Calamis: “There are some who *imitate* (emulentur) the work of other painters and thereby aspire to fame. They say that the sculptor Calamis did this.”

Alberti capitulates that if imitation is needed, a mediocre sculpture is better than an excellent painting due to the sculpture’s *relief* (*prominentiae*) creating light and shadow:

If it is a help to *imitate* the works of others, because they have greater stability of appearance than living things, I prefer you to take as your model a *mediocre sculpture* rather than an excellent painting, for from painted objects we train our hand only to make a likeness, whereas from sculptures we learn to represent both likeness and correct incidence of light… No one will ever be able to paint a thing correctly if he does not know its every *relief*, and *relief* is more easily found by sculpture than by painting.

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79 Ibid., II, 36-27, “… for he strives to *represent* only the things that are seen.” (*Nam ea solum *imitari* studet pictor quae sub luce videantur.* See also ibid., II, 4, 38-39. “A spherical surface *is like* the outside of a sphere… a composite surface… *resembles* a plane…” (*Spaerica superficies dorsum sphaerae *imitatur*… composita vero superficies… *una dimisione planitiem… imitetur*), II.9, 46-47. “… with roses… others *resemble* pale ivory” (*Tum et in rosis aliae candidum ebur imitentur*), and II.24, 58-59. “… instruct the painter how he can *represent* with his hand” (*pictorem instituamus… conceperit ea manu *imitari*).

80 Ibid. II.31, 68-69.

81 Ibid., III.58, 100-101. “*Sunt qui aliorum pictorum opera emulentur, atque in ea re sibi laudem quaerant.*” A mistake with Calamis and Zenodorus, he has the former copying the latter’s work on two cups. “… *quod Calamidem sculptorem fecisse ferunt, qui duo pocula caelavit in quibus Zenodorum it emulatus est ut nulla in operibus differentia agnosceretur.*” See also Pliny, *N.H.*, xxxiv, 18, 47, 162-163. According to Pliny the reverse is true. “… he copied for Dubius Avitus… two drinking-cups, chased by the hand of Calamis… and this with such exactness, that they could scarcely be distinguished from the originals. The greater, then, the superiority of Zenodotus, the more certainly it may be concluded that the secret of fusing [precious] brass is lost.” (“*Dubio Avito… duo pocula Calamidis manu caelata… emulentus est, ut vis ulla differentia esset artis. Quanto maior Zenodoro praestantia fuit, tanto magis deprehenditur aeris obliteratio.*)

82 Alberti, *De pictura*, II, 58, 100-101. “*At pictores maximo in errore versantur, si non intelligunt eos qui pinxerint conatos fuisse tale simulacrum reprezentare, quale nos ab ipsa natura depictum in velo intuemur. Vel si ivat opera aliorum *imitari*, quod ea firmiorem quam viventes patientiam ad se ostendenda praeestent, malo mediocrer sculptam quam egregie pictam rem tibi *imitandam* proponas, nam ex pictis rebus solum ad aliquam similitudinem
Finally in the very next chapter, Alberti completely endorses *imitatio* with the demand of an excellent model and the additional cultivation of *diligence* combined with “speed of execution”:

> Whether you practice painting or sculpture, you should always have before you some fine and remarkable model which you observe and copy; and in copying it I believe that *diligence* should be combined with *speed* of execution...⁸³

Alberti’s advice on the practice of imitation suggests he was well aware of the humanist debate, grounded in the work of Seneca, Cicero, Petrarch, Vergerio and possibly Cennino. In chapter 28 of *Il libro*, Cennino seems to foreshadow Alberti with his reference to *Nature*:

> Mind you, the most perfect steersman that you can have and the best helm, lie in the triumphal gateway of copying from *Nature*. And this outdoes all other models; and always rely on this with a stout heart, especially as you being to gain some judgment in draftsmanship.⁸⁴

Troncelliti points out that Cennini embraced *fantasia* in the painter’s quest “to discover things unseen” (*di trovar cose non vedute*) which may not only imply a reckoning with the non-obvious but, also, an extension of the artist’s facility to imitate. Regarding this, Martin Kemp points out that the emphasis in early Renaissance painting was on *exactitude* in imitative technique and not the production of individual *style*.⁸⁵ The precision of painting is a new operative in discourse with Alberti, thus individual style is yet to be addressed in the early advent of pictorial

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⁸³ Ibid., III.59, 100-103. “Denique vel picturae studeas vel sculpturae, semper tibi proponendum est elegans et singulare aliquod exemplar, quod et spectes et *imitieris*, in eoque *imitando* diligentiam celeritati coniunctam ita adhiberi oportere censeo...”

⁸⁴ Cennini, 15. “*Attendii, che la più perfetta guida che possa avere e migliore timone, si è la trionfai porta del ritrarre di naturale. È questo avanza tutti gli altri esempi; e sotto questo con ardito cuore sempre ti fida, e specialmente come incominci ad avere qualche sentimento nel disegnare.*”

perfectionism that only regards Giotto as a master. The *craftsman* is yet to become *artist*.86

Style is neither Alberti’s nor Cennini’s aim as it flies in the face of exactitude in the imitation of Nature. In this regard, Cennini defends the single master using the word *aria* (spirit):

> But I give you this advice: take care to select the best one every time, and the one who has the greatest reputation. And, as you go on from day to day, it will be against nature if you do not get some grasp of his style and of his *spirit*.87

The reference to *aria* appears to borrow from Petrarch’s 1366 letter to Boccaccio in which the former uses the pictorial arts as metaphor for his scribe, Giovanni Malpaghini (1346-1422).

Here Petrarch turns to think about individual style:

> While often very different in their individual features, they have a certain something our painters call and *air*, especially noticeable about the face and eyes that produces a resemblance.88

On the other hand, Baxandall argued that Vergerio, in his opinions on Giotto as a model was substituting Giotto for the *Rhetorica*’s Lysippus. To invoke *imitation* and Giotto as model forms is pertinent to humanist discussions of *exemplum*. In other words observation about painting provided humanists with an analogy, as Baxandall pointed out.89 Boland, on the other hand, argues that this may be a limited view, and that a viable humanist engagement with – as well as correspondence about – art was taking place in Padua immediately before and during Alberti’s tenure there.90 The recipient of Vergerio’s letter, Buzzacarino, was of the wealthiest familial supporters of the Carrara as well as the nephew of Fina Buzzacarino, consort to Il Vecchio and

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86 Troncelitti, 125.

87 Ibid. “*Ma per consiglio io ti do: guarda di pigliare sempre il migliore e quello che ha maggior fama: e, seguitando di di in di, contra natura sarà che a te non venga preso idì suo ‘maniera e di suo *aria*…”*


89 Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators*, 49.

90 Bolland, 469-487.
mother of Francesco Novello. She was the patron of Giotto-esque frescoes by Giusto de’ Menabuoi (1320-1391) in Padua’s Baptistery and a contemporary of both Petrarch and Altichiero (Fig. 3.15). Furthermore Il Vecchio received, through Petrarch’s will, a picture of a Madonna (lost) by Giotto (tablam meum sive iconam) given him by friend, Michele di Vanni. Vergerio probably saw the Madonna and surely knew of Petrarch’s will as the latter’s library ended up in Pavia. Thus, it is cogent that Vergerio cites Giotto not only because of the painter’s remarkable reputation in all of Europe, but, more specifically, because of his seminal work in the Cappella Scrovegni, the profundity of that excellence heralded from Dante to Cennino.

The notion that painters had little communication with humanism in the Padua of Alberti’s day is controverted on two further counts: First, Petrarch’s text De viribus informed Altichiero’s frescoes in the Sala Grande, to be addressed later; secondly, Alberti himself requires painters to “first of all be a good man well versed in the liberal arts.” Alberti provides the addendum “to be learned in all the visual arts, but I wish him above all to have a good knowledge of geometry.” In this we glean a desire for painters to have a humanist education; yet as we have now seen, the converse had taken place in Padua – the visual arts in the humanist curriculum had been already discussed within humanist circles.

Cappella Scrovegni: Background

We may imagine, plausibly enough, that Barzizza possibly conducted the equivalent of

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92 Alberti, De pictura, III.52, 94-95. “… quo haec possit omnia pulchre tenere, in primis esse virum et bonum et doctum bonarum artium.”

93 Ibid., III.53, 94-95. “Doctum vero pictorem esse opto, quoad eius fieri possit, omnibus in artibus liberalibus, se in eo praesertim geometriae peritiam desidero.”
‘field trips’ – in accordance with the practice of his assistant, student and protégé, Vittorino, or even on Barzizza’s own initiative indicated by his recommendation to Bicharano of “a thorough grasp of the theory of painting.”94 One must then fully expect that the teacher accompanied students to see Giotto’s seminal opus of narrative fresco cycles in the Cappella Scrovegni (See Figs. 0.20-0.25). The fame of the Chapel’s paintings by the early 1400s we surmise by the praise of the aforementioned notable writers. The accessibility of the chapel, on the other hand raises the issue of the status of the building itself and its history.

The Scrovegni name first appears within the list of Paduan bishops in the early 1200s. The Scrovegni chapel was intended as both a public venue for worship and pilgrimage as well as the site of the Scrovegni family’s mausoleum. Modern scholarship considers Enrico’s chapel, S. Maria della Carità de Arena (consecrated March 25, 1305) as well as his endowment of the convent of San Orsola, as penance for his father, Reginaldo’s sin of usury. Moneylenders abound throughout the legal and notary profession as well as the class of knights and aristocracy. The underpinning of ecclesiastical chastisement of moneylending lies, perhaps, within the aristocratic distaste for families of smaller wealth who were censured in a century when social mobility resulting from quick interest could very well destabilized the status quo of wealth. Records of moneylending existed in Padua among notaries, knights, jurists and other entitled families in the city.95 Two of the foremost families according to volume of lending in Padua were the Lemici and Scrovegni. Dante placed both the Lemici and the Scrovegni, the latter by way of Enrico’s father, Reginaldo, in the seventh circle of Hell.96 By the fourteenth century,


95 See Hyde, 183-185, and 185, n. 3-5.

96 Dante, Inferno, XVII.64, trans. Allen Mendelbaum, in The Divine Comedy (New York: Random House, 2013), 93-94. “And one who had an azure, pregnant sow (coat of arms of the Scrovegni) inscribed as emblem on his white
both families had desisted from the practice.

While Reginaldo actually speaks to Dante in the *Inferno*, in actuality ecclesiastic censure for the act of moneylending, although condemned by canon law, was scant in the realm of the rich; most likely the building of the chapel by Enrico had little to do with the sins of his father and more to do with his social station in Padua. In fact, regarding the sin of usury, Da Nono chastises Enrico for his grandiosity and never mentions money lending at all. The Augustinian friars of the Church of the Eremitani, next to the Cappella, indicted that the church was no more than an act of “pomp, vainglory and gain than for the praise, honor and glory of God.”

By August 30, 1336, the day of Enrico’s death in Venice, the Scrovegni were the richest family in Padua. Although Marsiglio da Carrara absconded with Scrovegni property during the family’s exile in Venice, whether through political or financial reparations Enrico’s widow and second wife, Giacopina, and her sons were back in Padua and living on their estate next to the Arena soon thereafter. Having been coerced by Francesco Novello, however, to sell Scrovegni property, the family welcomed the Visconti take-over of the city in 1388, availing the Scrovegni to reclaim property once again; yet this would go asunder with Novello’s re-taking of the city in 1390. At this point, the Scrovegni, once again, sought exile in Venice. Novello proclaimed the entire family enemies of the state and bequeathed the house and chapel to his half-brother, Conte da Carrara in 1391. In 1399, Zabarella appointed a new arch-priest to the Chapel. Upon the Venetian appropriation of the city and the execution of Novello and his heirs, the Scrovegni

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reoccupied their house and chapel under Venetian security. During Alberti’s tenure in Padua, the Scrovegni were in possession of both the house and the chapel. In sum, although the Scrovegni were absent in Padua from 1319 to 1350 and again from 1390 to 1405, they had continued to be conspicuous financial patrons of the church even during their absence, and the building was in their hands, yet probably open to the public (and certainly Barzizza) as it had been at its origin, during the years that Alberti would have seen Giotto’s seminal work of art.  

Cappella Fame: Giotto and Humanism

Among the stunning cornerstones of narrative art that Giotto’s work constituted in the Cappella Scrovegni, the intellectual context in which the choice of materials and their execution took place has been given relatively short shrift. Yet it is difficult to assume that the entire complex scheme of the cycle, arguably the acme of innovation in narrative art in the formative era of the Renaissance, would be conceived, prescribed, and managed by means of a single person. A prominent theory is that Giotto, working with Pietro Cavallini in Rome on the mosaics in Santa Maria Trastevere, was recommended to Scrovegni by Altegrado Cattaneo, the city cathedral’s archpriest and papal proto-notary who also, perhaps, compiled the narrative and iconographical components of the program.

Eva Frojmovic, on the other hand, has argued that Padua, as the early enclave of science and humanism in northern Italy was home to a much richer degree of intellectual cooperation about the Chapel’s narrative scheme and iconography. This included both the Paduan pre-

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98 Riccobaldo’s *Cronologia* refers to Giotto’s work in the Santo, from the church’s renovation from around 1307, but were destroyed in 1350. Alberti would have never seen Giotto’s Santo paintings but would have heard of them.

humanist Barberino as well as doctor-philosopher D’Abano. Frojmovic asserts that the visual concept of the cycle is a coalition of space, optics and rhetoric – a result of discourse among artist, humanist and scientist, and that this coalition placed visual art within an intellectual context hitherto unseen in the medieval pictorial process. The bedrock of Frojmovic’s argument hinges upon the presence of Latin inscriptions accompanying the Virtues and Vices cycle, particularly that of Prudence (Fig. 3.16). The text suggests that if Giotto alone chose the narrative scheme of the chapel the painter would have been adept in the language. Unless we conjecture that an artisan of the late thirteenth century would have been proficient with Latin, such can hardly be the case. Furthermore, the iconography of Prudence looking into a mirror as well as what remains of the inscription points to the act of visualizing:

RES ET TEMPUS SUMMA CURA [. . .]/ [. . .] VIDENTIS MEMORATUR[.  
Fact[s?] and time[s?] with supreme care [...] [...] of the seeing person is mentioned [...] .101

Following this visual-scientific paradigm, an allegorical depiction above the Scrovegni’s personal north door to the patron’s palace (destroyed), points to the collaborative work among a coalition of pre-humanists. To the left above the door a half-figure replicates Barberino’s Circumspection, documented in the lawyer’s book Liber documentorum amoris (Fig. 3.17). Frojmovic suggests that Barberino based his iconography upon a study corresponding to D’Abano’s professorial work in optics. D’Abano taught in Padua during Giotto’s period of work in the opening decade of the Trecento.

That D’Abano’s reference to Giotto in his Problemata physcia was overlooked until the

101 Ibid., 210, n.49.
102 Thomann, 239.

103 Michele Savonarola, *Libellus de Magnificis Ornamentis Regie Civitatis Padue Michelis Savonarole*, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, n.s. xxiv, Part sv, ed. A. Segarizzi (Città di Castello: E. Lapi, 1902), 44 and 47-48. Savonarola praises Giotto and suggests the frescoes in the Palazzo are inspired by d’Abano, but does not specifically attribute that work to Giotto.


Barberino to Giotto’s work in the Palazzo della Ragione.\footnote{Ibid., “Giotto’s Allegories of Justice and the Commune in the Palazzo della Ragione in Padua: A Reconstruction,” \textit{Journal of the Warburg and Courthold Institutes} 59 (1996): 24-47.} Barberino is remarkable in that he was a Paduan pre-humanist exploring the correlation between text and visual art; his connections to both Giotto’s work in both the Arena Chapel and the Palazzo suggests an even earlier foundation of art theory in Padua that would culminate with both Cennini and Alberti.

No extant evidence points directly to Giotto’s access or use of scientific texts regarding optics, although some relevant texts were certainly circulating in the early fourteenth century, and these works would help increase the study of optics. The Aristotelian theory of optics was present in both the schools of medicine and of arts at the University of Padua during D’Abano’s career. Perhaps D’Abano actually introduced the analysis of Aristotelian optics from the \textit{Perspectiva} (1278), of Witelo, believed to be residing in Padua before his arrival in Viterbo. Herein the theory, reiterated by Alberti, of the intromission ray – that is the ray that extends from an object to the viewer’s eye – was endorsed by D’Abano in his \textit{Conciliator differentiarum philosophorum et precipue medicorum}.\footnote{Pietro D’Abano, \textit{The Mediator of Conflicts Between Philosophsers and especially of Medical Scientists}, ed. Ezio Riondato and Luigi Olivieri (Padua: Antenore, 1985).} Furthermore Part V of Bacon’s \textit{Opus maius} (late 1260s), entitled \textit{Perspectiva}, as well as Bacon’s less-lengthier opus, \textit{De multiplicatione specierum} were widespread among students of optical science in Padua during D’Abano’s and Giotto’s time in Padua. All three texts as well as Peckham’s \textit{Perspectiva communis} arrived in one form or another at the papal court of Clement IV (reigned 1265-68) in Viterbo during the papal fight against the Hohenstaufen.\footnote{Paul Hills, “Giotto and the Students of Optics: Bacon, Peckham and Witelo,” in \textit{The Light of Early Italian Painting} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 64.} In this possible exchange of optical science in Viterbo, a key agent was Willaim of Moerbeke (1215-1286), papal confessor and, as a student of science,
translator of Hero of Alexandria’s Catoptrica (1269) to whom Witelo personally dedicated his Perspectiva. Bacon had already sent his work to Cardinal Guy de Foulques, later Clement IV, in an attempt to circumvent a Franciscan ban upon his works. Peckham himself traveled to Viterbo in 1277 and possibly wrote the entirety of the Perspectiva in that city. Hills is one of the first scholars to point out that the confluence of these seminal academics of optics in Viterbo at precisely a time during the patronage by Pope Nicholas III (Giovanni Gaetani Orsini, 1220-1280; active 1277-80) of monumental painting in Rome, from the likes of Cavallini, where Peckham traveled after Viterbo is “striking.” The spatial dynamics of Cavallini, particularly in his mosaic, Nativity of the Virgin in Santa Maria Trastevere reveals a sophistication in optics hitherto unseen (See Fig. 0.51). That Giotto worked with Cavallini in Rome and arrived in Padua while both Witelo and D’Abano were residing there, reveals a remarkable set of connections in the dispersement of information about optics that would have impressed the aficionado of pictorial arts right up to Barzizza and Alberti.

That Giotto conversed with men of intellectual and scientific merit before executing the visual scheme of the Arena Chapel is apparent, at the very least, in his astounding naturalism in the human drama. If he entertained a dialogue with men of letters, then we have grounds for considering a fruitful partnership between painter and humanist that would have begun in Padua and would continue right up to Alberti in Barzizza’s school. While it remains open to debate whether or not Giotto, under the influence of Cavallini, had a comprehesion of Bacon’s optics, it is certainly true that Giotto’s visual evidence suggests Peckham’s demand that color on objects

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109 David. C. Lindberg, “Lines of Influence in Thirteenth Century Optics,” Speculum 46 (1971): 66-83. If, as Lindberg argues, that all three authors were interdependent – that Witelo and Peckham had read Bacon, then we could surmise that all the texts were available to the purveyor or student, whether he be scientist or artist.

110 Ibid. 68.

111 Hills, “Giotto and the Students of Optics,” 64.
be mutable according to “the light shining upon them,” which foreshadows Alberti’s treatise on light. In the Presentation of the Virgin, we see Giotto’s use of shadow to distinguish a solid object from the transparency of luminous air endowed by directional light that terminates upon, for instance, a roof top (Fig. 3.18). Furthermore, Alberti’s visual pyramid has its origin in Peckham, Bacon to some extent, and Witelo—the theorists who made up the intellectual context surrounding Giotto’s work. The apex of the pyramid of rays arrives at the eye and its base is the width of the picture plane. The eye is no less than the source of light. Alberti turns to this theory in Book I. Rather than assume that light is diffused in distance, light, as postulated by Alberti, divides objects into geometric shapes—concave, convex and linear. This geometric consequence was the single answer to the concept of diffusion for Alberti and it is taken directly from Witelo, Peckham and Bacon. In their work, the concept of light upon object seen by the eye—via the pyramid and its central ray—prefigures Alberti. All of the points within the pyramid—from the base (picture plane) to the apex (eye) reveal an intersection of rays. The fallacy of Alberti’s fixed system of perspectival vision lies in the eye’s facility to roam, a consequence that countermands Albertian theory of extrinsic, median and centric rays as fixed.

Finally, Giotto’s lost frescoes in the Palazzo della Ragione were the artist’s first works of secular art. After Ezzelino, the edifice housed the commune’s courts of law. Giotto painted an allegorical cycle around 1306 to 1309 in the rebuilding of the Palazzo during the city’s commune period. Alberti probably saw Giotto’s frescoes in the Palazzo, before the cycle was destroyed by fire in 1420, around the time that Alberti left Padua for higher education in Bologna.

113 Ibid., 159.
Altichiero

Altichiero painted in Padua from around 1376 to 1384. His work was well known to the humanist circles in which Alberti moved in ways that require some elucidation. As we have seen, Vergerio studied with Barzizza’s predecessor, Conversino. Vergerio knew and corresponded with Barzizza; a letter from Vergerio to Barzizza in 1414, penned in Bologna lauds Barzizza and affirms his status on the recommendation of their humanist mutual friend, Zabarella: “Francesco Zabarella ordered me to cherish you.” Vergerio compiled a grammar manual with Zabarella, in 1396, entitled *De arte metrica*. Zabarella became a cardinal in 1411, subsequently playing a major role in the Council of Constance in 1414. He was responsible for reintroducing Vergerio, after he joined Zabarella’s household, to a new wave of humanists in the Veneto – including Barzizza, whom Vergerio admired for the teacher’s codification of Cicero’s rhetoric. Zabarella, who by then was archpriest of the Padua’s cathedral (where he is buried) remained in constant touch with Barzizza during the years of Alberti’s studies, as evidenced by several letters from Barzizza to the cardinal. As cathedral as well as famed humanist of his day, Zabarella had primary access to Padua’s Franciscan basilica, *Il Santo*, that also housed the recently finished fresco cycle of St. James in Bonifacio Lupi’s chapel. Painted by Altichiero, the site was also easily accessed by the public and the cycle contains works that represent some of the earliest public portraiture in the Renaissance, including of depictions of Petrarch, King

114 A. Gloria, *Monumenti dell’ Università di Padova*, II.

115 Vergerio, *Ep. CXXXIII*, 351-352. “Franciscus Zabarella... iussit ut te diligerem, quod ipse magnpere facit, atque ut ad te scriberem... (“Francesco Zabarella... ordered me to cherish you, as he does very much, and to write to you.”) cum tradendae artis rhetoricae curam susceperis, tatum in promovendis adolescentibus et studio tuo et felicitate quadam valueris, ut iam plurimos qui probe ex arte dicere valeant proferre possis. Qui si morum quoque praecepta sequentur et vivendo te imitabuntur, duplicis gloriae fructum ex tua conversatione reportabunt.”

Ludwig of Bavaria and the Lupi clan, which Alberti would have definitely seen.

Zabarella, mentor and friend to both Vergerio and Barzizza, supervised in an official capacity in Padua over two of three seminal works of art in all of Italy to which Alberti would have had facile access by way of Barzizza’s school – Giotto’s frescoes in the Scrovegni chapel and Altichiero’s in the Saint James Chapel. Before we turn to the St. James Chapel, however, of equal importance, in a humanist context, was Altichiero’s critical development of pictorial antique motifs in the frescoes decoration of the Palazzo Carrarese.

**Palazzo Carrarese: Lost Frescoes**

As Robin Simon rightly observes of Altichiero’s work in the Palazzo: “here in Padua, as nowhere else in the fourteenth-century Italy, and certainly not in Florence, we feel the powerful senses of a *continuum* rather than of a ‘renaissance’ of an instinctual, living and enduring relationship between the present and the classical past.”¹¹⁷ The loss (repainted) of the work signifies an empty space in the conjunction of intellectual and art history at this most significant moment of the Renaissance and court patronage. To contextualize the innovative brilliance of Altichiero’s paintings in both the courts of the Carrara and the Della Scala demands preliminary examination of these paintings in the continuum of Padua’s avant-garde in pictorial antiquity. Much twentieth-century scholarship, save the work of a thankful few historians like Plant, Simon, and Richards, has relegated Altichiero to a second-tier position in northern Italian art. This diminution may be due, as Richards suggests, to the works having been repainted as well as, in their own day and in subsequent centuries, of a Renaissance art history geared to ecclesiastic

iconography, suffered the “unconscious critical bias” towards their secular subjects.\textsuperscript{118}

Despite this, the work revealed Altichiero as a rare pictorial harbinger of the return to recovering a visual image of antiquity in the 1400s with secular painting. Without doubt Alberti would have ruminated on these works; the entire building was available to Barzizza and his school when Padua was under Venetian rule – in particular the Palazzo’s largest room, the \textit{Sala Vivorum Illustrium} displaying heroic antique personalities whose iconography was dictated by Petrarch’s \textit{De viris illustribus}. This hall, along with other rooms dedicated to antique themes, survived an overhaul after the Venetian republic’s take-over of Padua in 1405. Before turning to the \textit{Sala}, some overall discussion of the Palazzo works will assist in developing further context.

The center of the building, along with most of the frescoes in the lesser halls, was destroyed during a demolition of the building in 1873. What we know of the scheme comes down to us from Andrea Gloria, then director of the Museo Civico who failed in his attempt to save the decorations.\textsuperscript{119} The Palazzo complex was the administrative center of the city, housing the princely residence and government buildings under the Carrara. Vergerio penned the earliest surviving textual account of the complex in his \textit{Liber de principibus Carriensibus} in the late 1390’s.\textsuperscript{120} The \textit{Liber de principibus} presented cursive portraits of the Carraresi each accompanied by a miniature likeness, possibly executed by Altichiero. Around 1440, Michele Savonarola (1385-1468) produced a description of the rooms as well.\textsuperscript{121}

The complex was begun by order of Alberto della Scala around 1329 during the time of Padua’s Veronese domination – immediately north of the Duomo, just south of Padua’s main

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 9.

\textsuperscript{119} Gloria, \textit{Documenti Inediti Intorno al Petrarca}. See also ibid., \textit{Monumenti}. 35.

\textsuperscript{120} Vergerio, \textit{Liber de Principibus Carrariensibus}, 115-184.

\textsuperscript{121} Savonarola, 44-45.
gate at the Ponte Molino and west of the Palazzo della Ragione (housing Giotto’s lost frescoes). The Reggia including the Palazzo Ponente and Palazzo di Levante with a peristyle courtyard connecting the two, was most likely finished by 1347. Four frescoed chambers were executed under Giacomo II from 1345 to 1350. The Sala Thebana depicted lost frescoes of the late first-century epic Latin poem Thebald by Statius, which dealt with the legendary seven heroes of Argos who stood against the city of Thebes. Considering access to classical texts via Lovato, Mussato and Petrarch’s connection to the papal court library in Avignon, a version of the poem in Latin probably informed the iconography of the room. The frescoes may have been executed by Guariento di Arpo (active 1340’s and 1350’s), one of the first noted Paduan painters. In addition fragments of Guariento’s biblical frescoes on the ceiling – as well as panels of Angelic orders from the west and east walls – survive from the Carrara private chapel (Figs. 3.19 and 3.20). Giacomo II’s assassination took place in the so-called Camera Neronis, a chamber whose argued iconography has provoked much argument in recent scholarship. As to why the Carrara, if informed by Seneca and Petrarch would dedicate a chamber to an emperor condemned by Seneca, Dante as well as Petrarch is unclear. One plausible argument is that the Neronis is not named after the emperor but after the famed Gaius Claudius Nero, hero of the Second Punic War who defeated Hannibal’s brother, Hasdrubal. According to Padua’s own native son Livy, he also made peace with his joint victor and competitor, Marcus Livius Salinator, with whom he rode in triumph into Rome. Petrarch, informed by Livy, included the two victors in a chapter of De

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123 Guariento’s only recorded work of note was The Battle of Spoleto of 1355 in the Sala del Gran consiglio at the Doge’s Palace in Venice. This painting was replaced by Titian’s 16th-century replication of the same subject.

The dating of the room to the late 1340’s would also suggest that Petrarch’s *Africa*, finished in 1343 may have at least inspired the cycle’s iconography.

Il Vecchio’s take-over from his uncle, Giacomino began a period of absolutism in Padua. From this point in time onward there followed a plethora of rooms dedicated to antique personalities. The room of the *Lucretie* was finished in 1356 and was most likely a residence. None of the paintings survived into the 1870 destruction of the building. We know little of the *Sala Herculis*, completed in 1363, other than its possible role as room of finance or chancery. The room of the *Camilli*, mentioned in 1366 – probably dedicated to Marcus Furius Camillus and his victory in 396 BCE at the Battle of the Veii – depicts only traces of notable talent and drafting precision of what Gasparotto considered to be “un buon pittore postgiottesco,” perhaps Altichiero although that painter is first recorded in Padua in 1370.

**Sala Vivorum Illustrium and the De viris illustribus**

The *Sala Vivorum Illustrium* was the largest in the Carrara Reggia, located on directly over the peristyle courtyard of the complex, and the iconography of Altichiero’s frescoes was precisely dictated by Petrarch’s *De viris* compendium of ancient heroes. Richards argues that the *Sala Vivorum Illustrium* was not simply a room among many but the apogee. By the 1360s Petrarch had established a friendship with *Il Vecchio*; thus the remaining rooms, painted during

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127 Ibid., no. 1673.


this period were perhaps executed under the humanist’s guidance. Venetian nobleman and art enthusiast, Marcantonio Michiel (1484–1552), describing the re-named Sala Vivorum Illustrium recorded in his Notizia d’ opere di disegno (1521-1543): “in the Sala dei Giganti… by Altichiero, there are portraits of Petrarch and Lombardo [della Seta] who provided the subject matter for these pictures.”130 Almost half a century before Alberti arrived, a further crucial endorsement of visual art in Padua came from Petrarch. Petrarch’s first sojourn in Rome in 1337 revealed to him the surviving antiquities of Rome’s legacy, which acted as a source of inspiration for his Africa and De viris illustribus.131 De viris is Petrarch’s sole work of history. Kohl argued that the work had little to do with history and much more to do with tripartite construction of moral, aesthetic and critical components comprising a didactic exemplar modeled on Livy.132 Writing the book for several decades from the 1340s onwards, Petrarch also entertained the idea of a compendium of biblical heroes as well. By the time of his famous saying, “For what is all history but the praise of Rome?” penned around 1369, the book had excluded all but heroes of antiquity.133 Livy postulated that history should display the rise or decline of moral character:

Here are the questions to which I would have every reader give his close attention – what life and morals were like; through what men and by what policies, in peace and in war, empire was established and


131 Petrarch, Rerum familiarium libri, VI.2. Petrarch recorded this first journey in a letter to Dominican friar Giovanni Colonna. See also, ibid., V.1, and Michiel, 69-70. Despite Petrarch’s mistakes in identification in a letter to Boccaccio, he correctly identified the ubiquitous “Regisol” as originating in Pavia. One of the first to register works of art, city by city, Michiel labeled the ‘Regisol’ as Odoacer, but believed by others to be Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, or Lucius Verus. Ostensibly Charlemagne moved the bronze from Ravenna to Pavia.


enlarged; then let him note how, with the gradual relaxation of discipline, morals first gave way, as it ere, then sank lower and lower, and finally began the downward plunge which has brought us to the present time, when we can endure neither our vices nor their cure.\textsuperscript{134}

Based upon this model, there are parallels between the second introduction of \textit{De viris} to \textit{Il Vecchio}, penned between 1371 and 1374, and the dedication of \textit{De pictura} Gian Francesco Gonzaga. Petrarch’s introduction is almost exactly replicated in its first sentence by Alberti, which addresses, first of all, the lord himself with attending praise. While Petrarch calls \textit{Il Vecchio} “noble Carrara lord who wields the scepter solely and with very moderate force over the great city of Padua,” Alberti addresses Gian Francesco with “… illustrious prince… As you rule over a city so peaceful and well governed by your virtue…”\textsuperscript{135} The moral salute, presented in rhetorical form by Petrarch, lay within critical criteria of the past and present such that the reader would take what is valuable from history and make decisions for himself:

What chiefly makes the study of history wholesome and profitable is this: that you behold the lessons of every kind of experience set forth as on a conspicuous monument; from these you may choose for yourself and for you own state what to imitate, from these mark for avoidance what is shameful in the conception and shameful in the result.\textsuperscript{136}

Petrarch follows Livy in the moral ordering of historical material:

I have decided to collect… certain illustrious men who flourished in outstanding glory and whose memory has been handed down to us in diverse and widely scattered volumes through the skill of many learned

\textsuperscript{134} Titus Livy, “\textit{Praefatio},” \textit{Ab urba condita libri}, I.9, trans. B.O. Foster (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 4-7. “… ad illa mihi pro se quisque acriter intendat animum, quae vita, qui mores fuerint, per quos uiros quibusque artibus domi militiaeque et partum et auctum imperium sit; labente deinde paulatim disciplina velut desidentes primo mores sequatur animo, deinde ut magis magisque lapsi sint, tum ire coeperint praecipites, donec ad haec tempora quibus nec uita nostra nec remedia pati possimus perventum est.

\textsuperscript{135} Kohl, “Petrarch’s Prefaces,” 142. See also Alberti, “Ad Johannem Franciscum Illustriissimum Principem Mantuanum,” \textit{De pictura}, 35. “…princeps illustriissime… Etenim cum ita pacatum et bene tua virtute constitutam civitatem habeas ut otium tibi quod a republica…”

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, 6-7. “Hoc illud est praecipue in cognitione rerum salubre ac frugiferum, omnis te exempli documenta in industri ositao monumento intueri; inde tibi tuaeque rei publicae quod imitare capias, inde foedum inceptu foedom exitu quod vites.”
Alberti accounts for his own material: “I wished to present you with these books on painting… when you have leisure to read them, how much light and learning I have brought with my natural talents and industry.”

Both Petrarch and Alberti qualify their intention: Petrarch states:

In my book, nothing is found except what leads to virtues or to the contraries of virtues. For, unless I am mistaken, this is the profitable goal for the historian: to point up to the readers those things that are to be followed and those to be avoided.

Alberti remarks: “you will see they are such that their contents may prove worthy by their art of the ears of learned men, and may also easily please scholars by the novelty of their subject.”

Finally, the closing disclaimer of rambling attends, nonetheless, to the talent of the writer and the asking of the lord to give the writer a just acknowledgment. Petrarch writes: “I ask from you no other kind of reward than that I be loved by you… But I realize… I shall not drag on longer.”

Alberti, with the same apology, however, seeks employment, looking to emulate Petrarch’s fortune with the Carrara: “But I will say no more of them here. You could know my character and learning, and all my qualities best, if you arranged for me to join you, as I indeed desire.”

When Petrarch died, his protégé, Lombardo della Seta completed De viris. The book’s

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137 Kohl, “Petrarch’s Prefaces,” 143.


139 Kohl, “Petrarch’s Prefaces,” 143.


141 Kohl, “Petrarch’s Prefaces,” 144.

lessons would be vibrant to Alberti, both in rhetorical legacy – from Petrarch via Livy as well as painted legacy by Altichiero – by means of cursive illustrations of the moral excellence in ancient heroes replicated in fresco on the walls of the Sala Vivorum. Prior to De pictura, the room offered the most important evidence of the impact of the revival of antiquity upon visual art. The rehearsal, more or less, for this remarkable cycle occurred in Verona, Altichiero’s birthplace. There, the artist furthermore furnished the earliest surviving examples of the antique coinage revival with monochrome “portraits” – most likely lifted from Della Scala coinage – for the Loggia di Cansignorio della Scala in the Palazzo Scaligero in Verona around 1364 (See Fig. 0.33). Il Vecchio was the uncle of Cansignorio, and his desire for antique heroes to adorn the largest room of Padua’s Reggia was perhaps inspired by competition with the culture of Verona. The Carrara held public functions in the Sala; thus, the very same painters, Altichiero and Jacopo Avanzo (1350s-1416), subsequently in Padua, recreated antique personages from both coins and Petrarch’s account of thirty-six famous men of antiquity (See Figs. 0.34 and 0.35). The frescoes were famous in their day, touted by Piero Buoninsegni’s Florentine History. Della Seta, completing the De viris five years after Petrarch’s death in 1374, honored his mentor’s correlation of text to art within his dedication to Il Vecchio with:

As an ardent lover of the virtues, you have extended hospitality to these viri illustres, not only in your heart and mind… to the inward conception of your keen mind you have given outward expression in the form of

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143 For the reconstruction of the figures and antique iconography of Altichiero’s cycle see Mommsen, “Petrarch and the Decoration of the Sala Virorum Illustrium in Padua,” Art Bulletin 34, no. 2 (June, 1952): 95-116. Mommsen dates the frescoes based upon the dedication to Francesco II Vecchio and the portrait of Petrarch which is the only original painting that survives. The earliest complete description of the cycle is by Michele Savonarola in 1446.

144 Ibid., 98, n. 13 and 101, n. 56. Mommsen sources P. Buoninsengi, Historia Firoentina, Florence, 1580, 548 (ad. A. 1370) “… hauuta la vittoira ne venne a Padoua e dopo pochi giorni passò di questa vita e fu sepelitto in Padoua con grandissimi honori, e fecelo il signore dipignere in una sala fra gli altri huomini famosi in fatti d’arme.” As De viris was unfinished an abridged version, the Compendium, was given as a reference book to Il Vecchio while Petrarch was still at work on the original Epitome. The Compendium is listed as Paris B.N. MS Lat 6069G. The Epitome is Paris B.N. MS Lat 6069F. A century later Michiel asserted that “Petrarch and Lombardo… supplied the subject matter of these pictures. Mommsen sources Michiel, 34.
most excellent pictures, so that you may always keep in sight these men whom you are eager to love because of the greatness of their deeds.\textsuperscript{145}

Pliny recorded the motif of the ancestral brave upon the threshold of public and private houses:

\ldots in the days of our ancestors, it was these that were to be seen in their halls… portraits modeled in wax were arranged, each in its separate niche… which ever member of the family that had ever existed was always present. The pedigree, too, of the individual was traced in lines upon each of these colored portraits… A powerful stimulus to emulation...

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The \textit{Sala} stands as testimony both to the intellectual and personal association of Petrarch with the Carrara courts and Il Vecchio in particularly. Most importantly the \textit{Sala} not only constitutes a seminal Renaissance moment in which we clearly see the intersection of art and humanist text, we also see that antiquity informed both contexts.\textsuperscript{147}

The single painting in original state in the \textit{Sala} is the portrait of \textit{Petrarch in His Study} (1370’s), remarkably conserved in Altichiero’s style even after the frescoes’ mid-Cinquecento repaint (See Fig. 0.36). Altichiero’s portrait of the artist is replicated in both codices of \textit{De viris} in Paris as well as the illuminations from Donato degli Albanzani’s Italian translation of \textit{De viris} from Padua, penned around 1400 now in Darmstadt (Fig. 3.21).\textsuperscript{148} Therein is another copy of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{145} Mommsen, 98, n. 27. Mommsen sources Cod. Lat 6069 F, ff. 144r, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale. \textit{“Hos non modo mente et animo ut virtutum amantissimus hospes digne suscepist… que cum similes sui ut supra dictum est reddat effectus, nec tui nec innate virtutis quod intus ab arduo erat conceptum ingenio, ut assidue in conspectu haberes, quos diligere ob magnitudinem rerum studueras.”}
\bibitem{146} Pliny, \textit{N.H. XXXV}, 6-7. \textit{“… aliter apud maiores in atriis haec erant, quae spectarentur… cera vultus singulis disponebantur armariis, ut essent imagines… stemmata vero lineis discurrebant ad imagines pictas… erat haec stimulatio ingens, exprobrantibus tectis cotidie inbellem dominum intrare in alienum triumphum.”}
\bibitem{148} Mommsen, “Petrarch and the Decoration, 107. The codex, Darmstadt, Universitäts-und-Landesbibliothek, Cod.
Altichiero’s *Petrarch in His Study* as well as probable drawings of the frescoes that suggest monochrome *predella* works by Altichiero and his associate Avanzo. Richards suggests an intentional parallel on the part of Altichiero and Petrarch between the inclusion of Petrarch’s portrait in the *Sala* and that of Ennius on the tomb of Scipio Africanus – possibly in homage to the humanist’s *Africa*. Cicero’s commentary on Ennius, “dear to the elder Scipio” in the *Pro archia* would not have been lost on Petrarch, nor upon Barzizza or Alberti:

> Our countryman, Ennius, was dear to the elder Africanus, and even on the tomb of the Scipios his effigy is believed to be visible, carved in the marble.”  

The frescoes in the *Sala* would have presented a major event in Renaissance intellectual and art history and an inspirational example of what could be achieved in art in collaboration with humanist scholarship. Savonarola stated in the 1440s that:

> In this room [*Sala Virorum Illustrium*] are depicted Roman commanders, [Romani imperatores] in wonderful figures and with their triumphs, painted in gold and with the best colors… the work of the famous painters Ottaviano and Altichiero. This is indeed an imperial palace and worthy of an emperor."  

Mommsen, working with the illuminations in the Darmstadt codex of the *Compendium*, the abridged version of the *Epitome*, constructed a most compelling argument regarding panels.  

While most of the costumes are contemporary to Altichiero, they are less medieval in deportment

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149 Cic. *Arch.* ix.22, 30. “Carus fuit Africano superiori noster Ennius, itaque etiam in sepulcro Scipionum putatur is esse constitutus ex marmore.”

150 Savonarola, 49. “... in qua Romani imperatores miris cum figuris cumque triumphis, auro optimoque cum colore depicti sunt. Quos gloriosae manus illustrium pictorum Octaviani et Alticherii configurarunt. Hec vero domus imperatoria est et imperator digna: cui camere, amena viridaria, ecclesia, officialium loca et advenarum hospitia quam magnifica minime desunt.”

151 Mommsen, “Petrarch and the Decoration of the *Sala Vivorum Illustrium*,” 102 and 103.
than most contemporary examples. More importantly, the architecture of Rome is apparent in the folio depicting the *Building of the Walls of Rome*, which includes the Coliseum, the Vatican Obelisk, the Column of Trajan (or Marcus Aurelius) and the pediment of the Pantheon (Fig. 3.22). In the left hand corner of the panel of *Siege of Rome*, the Church of S. Nicola in Carcer, replicated, shows the incorporated classical columns – the antique elements of the pagan temples on which the church was built (Figs. 3.23 and 3.24).

Altichiero strived to recreate a Rome in architecture that conveyed Antiquity as carefully as possible. The illuminations reveal two panels of pagan gods venerated (Figs. 3.25 and 3.26). Although Mommsen attributes the impetus behind this classicism to Petrarch’s commitment to the antique, it is more likely that Altichiero was the driving force. The iconography was certainly not the first attempt at something of the kind. Giotto is recorded to have depicted famous men in Castelnuovo for King Robert of Naples. In addition, Altichiero himself had by this time also decorated the great hall of the Della Scala in Verona with images of the Jewish Wars, taken from Josephus. According to Vasari, there was yet another portrait of Petrarch in this work. Yet this hall also included contemporary men of significance. Paintings of ancient nude gods were also depicted – a distinction of classicizing fifty years before Donatello. Then again, despite the existence of other works, in Siena, Rome and Milan, which offer early Renaissance depictions of famous men of historical stature, the *Sala* remains the one visual example that is entirely antique. Just as Petrarch only deemed worthy to include the great men of virtù from Antiquity, as they represented the pinnacle of moral achievement worthy imitation, so Alberti replicated this approach in *De pictura*, by omitting any contemporary of both intellectual

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152 Ibid., 113.

and artistic history, save that of Giotto, the single painter lionized in Padua by the Italian
godfathers of historical humanism, Dante and Petrarch.

In his discussion of the principle of disjunction, Panofsky highlighted the medieval
tradition to depict antiquity in contemporary garb, literally or metaphorically.154 A detailed
grasp of the classical period gradually eroded this tendency.155 As an era cemented within its
own synthetic parameters, the Middle Ages could not see the distance of Antiquity as distinct
from their own. Chastising those painters who clung to contemporary dress, Filarete was
perhaps the first Renaissance theorist to demand the depictions of ancients in classical dress.156
As Nagel and Wood point out, this idealization of the historical past would elevate and alleviate
the viewer and afforded a measure of escape from the mundane in contemporary existence.157

Renaissance art history usually emphasizes Mantegna, especially in his work in the
Church of the Eremitani in Padua, as the key figure in early detailed representation of the
classical settings of subject matter. For example, with Mantegna’s St. James Led to His
Execution influenced by antiquarianism, visual art set into relief a period of the past such that the
viewer now had historical context (Fig. 3.27). However Mantegna may have been bringing to
fruition an approach pioneered by Altichiero whose work on the very same subject, St. James,
including antique motifs, were in evidence right before Mantegna’s eyes a few blocks south at
the Santo. Altichiero delivers the first example in early modern art that runs against the principle
of disjunction. Altichiero’s profile bust of Hadrian depicts the garland of a Roman emperor, not


155 Ibid., Renaissance and Renascences, 87. The proclivity for contemporary dress came from medieval
Christianity. Even the images of pagan gods in Petrarch’s Africa came from the medieval compendium
Mythographus III.

156 Filarete, 306.

the helmet of a medieval knight (See Fig. 0.28). Petrarch’s Rome had been recreated as part of
the attempt by Altichiero to visually contextualize the heroes of classical nostalgia that would
stand in the midst of Alberti’s Padua.158 Petrarch and Altichiero delivered, as Mommsen said,
the “conscious effort to unite classical content and its form and expression.” This marriage
between the visual and the humanist literary spheres in the presentation of antique heroes in
ancient apparel is unique in Renaissance art.

**Padua as Portent of Rome**

Pliny’s idea of displaying noted men of heroism was an echo of Cicero’s Pro archia:

How many images of the bravest me, carefully elaborated, have both the Greek and Latin writers
bequeathed to us, not merely for us look at and gaze upon, but also for our imitation! And I, always keeping
them before my eyes as examples for my own pubic conduct, have endeavored to model my mind and
views by continually thinking of those excellent men.159

If Petrarch derived his pedagogical approval of the use in moral instruction of images of the past,
both literary and visual, from Cicero’s Pro archia – perhaps Rome’s first written endorsement of
the visual arts – his own text, De viris, which embodied that approach, came to informed the
iconography of a major political chamber in Europe. His work provided the written analogue of
the visual representation of virtù in Roman heroes – Scipio, Julius Caesar and Camillus – to be
embraced by the Carrara lords. Representing the epitome of Il Vecchio’s metaphorical self-
image in the room, the Carrara lord could now, as Petrarch advised him, “polish the countenance

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159 Cic. Arc. vi.26, 22. “Quam multas nobis imagines - non solum ad intuendum, verum etiam ad imitandum -
fortissimorum virorum expressas scriptores et Graeci et Latini reliquerunt? Quas ego mihi semper in
administranda re publica proponens animum et mentem meam ipsa cognitione hominum excellentium
conformabam.”

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of his great reputation so that he would become more attractive.” Petrarch had effectively supplied the textual prototype for the pictorial archetypes in Altichiero’s monolithic murals of antique heroes. This was, as Richards says, “the most public and ambitious reflection of such patronage in Petrarch’s life since his coronation in Rome in 1341.” In addition, the event was a thoroughly neo-classical Renaissance cultural collaboration, which would remain unsurpassed in the Quattrocento, possibly until Raffaello’s *School of Athens* (Fig. 3.28).

**St. James Chapel**

The distinction of this achievement emerges more clearly when we compare the ethereal hierarchy of Menaboui’s fresco of *Paradise* in Padua’s baptistery with the plasticity and realism of his contemporary, Altichiero, in the St. James Chapel of the Basilica of San Anthony of Padua (Figs. 3.39 and 3.30). A document confirms Altichiero’s finishing the paintings in the sacristy and (ostensibly) the St. James chapel in 1379; another document in the archives of the University of Padua confirms completion of the his fresco cycle of *St. Lucy and St. George* in the Oratory of St. George in 1384 (Figs. 3.31 and 3.32; see also Fig. 0.32). The two most distinguished families of support for Il Vecchio were the Scrovegni and the newer family, the Lupi, originally from Parma. Exiled from that city, by the Visconti, Bonifacio, the head of the Lupi clan, in addition, had close ties to King Charles of Bohemia who had Bonifacio ensconced as the Marchesi of his home in Soragna. Bonifacio’s wealth and influence tied him to the Carrara affinity. Furthermore Il Vecchio appointed him as ambassador to King Louis of Hungary. His last work for the Carrara was as envoy to Duke Leopold of Austria. Subsequently, Bonifacio

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161 See Bronstein, 6, n.8. The document, Basilica of San Antonio of Padua, t.III, doc. cII, notes payment from Lupo for the chapel. “*Ancora dado al maestro Altichiero per ogni raxon chaveva a fare con mess. Bonifatio Cussi (Lupo) ne dipingere la capella di San Jaconco como per la sacrestia nel libro d’ ducati settecento novanta dui.*”
turned his attention to securing his immortality in the St. James Chapel in the Santo. Altichiero and, possibly Avanzo, also painted for Bonifacio’s cousin Rolandino in the Chapel of San Giorgio next door to the Santo. Andriolo de’ Santi (1320-1375) and his son, Giovanni, as architects for the St. James chapel, specified the dimensions individual design elements like columns, tombs, and appointment sculptures.

Léo Bronstein described Altichiero’s composition and his use of color and narrative, perfectly placed among a complexity of classical elements in the St. James Chapel, particularly in the Crucifixion as “an enveloped complex drama is in its simplicity, modesty, plasticity and understanding.”162 The tripartite Crucifixion (Fig. 3.33) incorporates classical columns under gothic arches separating knights and soldiers in motion – playing dice and policing the reaction of on-lookers with children on the right panel, villagers on the left, while the crucifixion itself takes place in the middle. The scene is spread across the three niches in a dramatic motion that verges on the musical, fulfilling all of Alberti’s demands for good historia. In spherical orders of peopled space the entire center is a spectacular interlacing action and coherent, dramatic whole presented in a precise and grand testimony to innovative color, composition, spatial horizon and depth. If the evolution from Giotto to Leonardo proceeded, as Panofsky argued, from a rediscovery of line, color and naturalism, to the singularity of classical elements of architecture and fixed perspective resulting in a confluence of both in the sixteenth century, then we can see with Altichiero in the St. James Chapel a fresco cycle that is, perhaps, the connective tissue for all of the above – the incorporation of an entire architectural scheme, borrowing from the antique, into a painting realism of sophisticated color and line evolved directly from Giotto.163

162 Ibid., 24.
163 Panofsky, Renaissance and Renascences, 39.
Portraits

Alberti’s last request in III.63 of De pictura is to have his portrait painted:

If it is such to be of some use to painters, I would especially ask them as a reward for my labors to paint my portrait in their historiae, and thereby proclaim to posterity that I was a student of this art and that they are mindful of and grateful for this favor.”

We might inquire as to where Alberti had seen portraits in his young life. King Ludwig of Hungary is probably represented as King Romiro in Altichiero’s Council of King Ramiro (See Fig. 0.29). Vasari tells us that Giotto initiated Florentine portraiture in the Palace of the Podestà with his three depictions of Dante as well as the Florentine capo of the Black Guelphs, Corso Donati (1260-1308). In addition Giotto painted Dante’s teacher, Latini, author of Li livres dou trésor and translator of Cicero into the volgare. John Pope-Hennessey, in his classic work, The Portrait in the Renaissance, argued that the “Florence of the 1420s” was the birthplace of early-modern frescoed portraiture with Masaccio’s 1426 paintings (lost) in Church of Santa Maria del Carmine, and the Brancacci Chapel depictions. The Carmine paintings, according to Vasari, included Brunelleschi, Donatello, as well as, among other Florentine political notables, founder of the Medici ascendancy, Giovanni di Bicci de’ Medici (1360-1429) and Antonio Brancacci (d. 1391), the benefactor of the chapel that houses Masaccio’s frescoes within the

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164 Alberti, De pictura, III.63, 104-107. “Ea si eiusmodi sunt ut pictoribus commodum atque utilitatem afferant, hoc potissimum laborum meorum premium exposco ut faciem meam in suis historiis pingant, quo illos memores benefici et gratos esse ac me artis studiosum fuisse posteris praedicent.”


166 Giuseppe Billanovich, Petrarch e Padova, 14. Florence of the Trecento only offered rhetoric in the vulgate, thus Guido Cavalcanti would recommend his friend, Dante, write Vita Nuova in the local Italian as well.

church. The latter two men Masaccio painted post-mortem. In the chapel itself, within the *Raising of the Son of Theophilus* (Fig. 3.34) Masaccio depicted portraits of Salutati and, possibly, himself as well as Donatello (Figures 3.35 and 3.36). Nonetheless, Pope-Hennessey’s argument is imprecise.

St. James the Moor, patron saint of Spain, among soldiers, attendants, Charlemagne and Ramiro of Oviedo, were the subjects the chapel, which Altichiero was hired to decorate. Here, the portraits for the Carraresi affinity contain the earliest Renaissance gallery of well-known and realistically rendered faces. The west wall displays Altichiero’s *Council of King Ramiro* where King Louis of Hungary serves as Ramiro watching his clients, Il Vecchio and son, Francesco Novello (See Fig. 0.24). Seated in front of the lords are portraits of both Petrarch and Lombardo della Seta (Fig. 3.37). To Ramiro’s left is the Lupi clan, including Bonifacio’s bearded younger brother, Giovanni, canon at the Duomo. Lower down stand Bonifacio with beard and the word *amor* on his cap along with his wife, Caterina Fransesi in a hood (Fig. 3.38).

The Oratory of San Giorgio, moreover, in the cycle of *Saints Catherine of Alexandria and Lucy* Altichiero’s portraits continue with members of Paduan aristocracy in the *Death of St. Lucy* (See Fig. 0.32). In replication are Petrarch, Lombardo, and more Lupi relatives. In the *Adoration of the Magi*, depicted on the north wall of the oratory are Raimondino and family as votaries, as well as his own patron saint George supplicant before the Virgin and Child, with followers behind (Fig. 3.39). In terms of specificity of physique, composition and draftsmanship here, it is not extraordinary to assume Altichiero’s influence on Pisanello, whose work Alberti would see in Rome. Altichiero, like Pisanello, was a unique purveyor of a compositional

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168 Vasari, *Vite*, vol. 2, 295-296. “… che vanno dietro alla processione; fra i quali fece Filipo di ser Brunellesco in zoccoli, Donatello... Antonio Brancacci che gli fece far la cappela... Giovanni di Bicci de’ Medici.”
combination of Giotto and the antique.\textsuperscript{169} Pisanello probably absorbed Altichiero’s spatial monumentalism.\textsuperscript{170} George Francis Hill observed, in fact, that the “brilliance and originality” of Altichiero “culminated in Pisanello.”\textsuperscript{171} Immediately after Michiel’s entry on the \textit{Sala Vivorum Illustrium} comes his entry on the \textit{Pozuolo} (podium); “there are portraits of \textit{signori} of Padua.”\textsuperscript{172} Here, along with Cappella Maggiore, according to Michiel, were portraits of the Carrara dynasty, most likely executed in the last decade of the 1300’s under Francesco Novello.\textsuperscript{173} The portrait of Petrarch in the \textit{Sala} is repeated in both Altichiero’s \textit{Council of King Ramiro} in the Oratory of St. George and the St. James Chapel (See Figs. 0.36, 3.31 and 3.37). The portraits, described by Vergerio in \textit{Liber de principibus Carrariensibus}, resemble the plates attending a manuscript now in the Biblioteca Civica in Padua.\textsuperscript{174} Based on stylistic resemblance to Lombardo in Altichiero’s \textit{St. George Baptizing King Servio} (or Servius) as well as the \textit{Death of St. Lucy}, Richards dates the works to the 1370s-80s and attributes the paintings to Altichiero.\textsuperscript{175} Richards rightfully says that Vergerio’s endorsement of painting and portraits (“place before you the

\textsuperscript{169} Evelyn Sandberg Vavalà, \textit{La Pittura Veronese del Trecento e del Primo Quattrocento}, (Verona: La Tipografica Veronese, 1926), 142.


\textsuperscript{171} George Francis Hill, \textit{Pisanello} (London: Duckworth, 1905), 8-9.

\textsuperscript{172} Michiel, 30. (“Il pozoulo da driedo, ove sono li Signori de Padoa retratti al naturale de verde, fu dipinto da...”) See also Richards, \textit{Petrarch’s Influence}, 63, n.176. See also Plant, “Carrara Patronage in Padua,” in \textit{Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 177-199. Mommsen, “Petrarch and the Decoration of the \textit{Sala Vivorum Illustrium},” 101, n. 56. A century later Michiel said that “Petrarch and Lombardo... supplied the subject matter of these pictures.” (\textit{Nella sala di Giganti... vi dipinsero Altichiero et Octaviano Bressano. Ivi sono ritratti el Petrarcha e Lombardo, i quali credo dessero l’argomento di quella pittura.})

\textsuperscript{173} Michiel, 31. \textit{La Capella maggior fu dipinta da Guariento Padoano, secondo el Campagnuola, ove sono gli monumenti degli Signori da Carrara.}

\textsuperscript{174} Vergerio, \textit{Vite Principum Carrariensium}, ed. Muratori in \textit{Rerum Italicarum Scriptores} (Milan: Societatis Palatinae 1889), 117. The manuscript is MS B.P. 158. The Papafava family was a younger branch Paris, of the Carrara family.

\textsuperscript{175} Richards, \textit{Petrarch’s Influence}, 65.
images of your ancestors”) is not simply a casual reference to the pictorial arts but a much more carefully crafted pedagogical instruction of history by visual means.\textsuperscript{176}

**Conclusion to Chapter 3**

Having begun his classical occupation under noted humanist-educator Barzizza on the hallowed ground of Petrarch’s Padua, Alberti’s studies must have placed him in front of Giotto’s work in the Cappella Scrovegni. Here Alberti would have witnessed Giotto’s extremely famous fresco cycle depicted in the Trecento’s apotheosis of a continuous-narrative. Alberti would have only had to cross the town to the Basilica of San Antonio to feast upon the frescoes in the Chapel of St. James as well as the Oratory of St. George by Altichiero, works that were considered to be critical paintings of northern Italy’s late Trecento due to portraiture, unique draftsmanship, classicizing motifs and remarkably specific spatial definition of volume. Regarding Altichiero, however, we may speculate further that Alberti’s exposure to his paintings might initially have occurred in the context of a visual history of antiquity, addressed by Petrarch and Barzizza, in the fresco cycle of the *Sala Virorum Illustrium*. This unique work was a room of massive retrospective depictions Roman emperors, the works having been inspired by Petrarch’s *De viris illustribus*. Also within this room Alberti would have seen Petrarch’s portrait, possibly the first actual portrait of the early modern era. The painting would have ignited Alberti’s passion for fame, exemplified by his own homage that he requests at the end of *De pictura*. Padua served as the formative context for Alberti’s humanism and exposure to visual art. Alberti’s awareness and susceptibility to pictorial arts were fostered by way of the Trecento intellectual legacy in Padua that birthed his humanist discourse. That the Paduan intellectual environment, a legacy of

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 80.
humanism coalescing with visible antique works or works that borrowed directly from the antique inseminated a vocabulary that was to become the lexicon of *De pictura*. 
Chapter 4

Alberti in Bologna
Structure

This chapter addresses Alberti’s years in Bologna. Alberti attended city’s university in the 1420s. After briefly examining the political and intellectual context of the city and school. Subsequently, the chapter will show that certain specific educational opportunities would have been available to Alberti there: first in humanistic studies; and secondly, in mathematics and optics. The latter would further shape De pictura’s prescriptions on fixed perspective.

The chapter will then examine how these two realms influenced Alberti’s written works penned in Bologna. These works reveal his emerging humanist and artistic proclivities as well as his dissatisfaction with the city and his legal training, which led to his leaving the city in the employment of Cardinal Albergati. Lastly, the chapter will assess possible visual sources in Bologna that influenced De pictura and then consider how Alberti’s travel with Albergati exposed the humanist to innovations in pictorial space and portraiture in the works of Jan van Eyck and northern Renaissance painting.

Intellectual Context

Alberti and the University of Bologna

In some regard, the primary influence of Bologna and its university upon Alberti and De pictura lies primarily in the city and school’s negative affect on the humanist. That is to say, attending the university for whatever estimated time beginning around 1420 for possibly as long as seven years and possibly less, drove Alberti into disdain for law and produced an ambivalence about a life of letters altogether; as a result of which he had two nervous breakdowns.\(^1\) This would push Alberti further from academia into an independent, non-institutional existence as an

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intellectual and artist. When viewed against the backdrop of his avant-garde education in humanism and exposure to the fairly spectacular visual arts of Padua, Bologna and its university seem to have been only able to offer Alberti a rather restrained and constricting intellectual life. The argument is borne out by the young humanist’s lament in his *De commodis.*

Bologna’s university was the earliest and most important center for the study of Roman law in medieval Europe. By 1119 the university was heralded by Irnerius with the moniker *Bononia docta*, as a center for law. The *Decretum* was a textbook by one Gratian, who may have been a Camodolese monk (the only lawyer whom Dante places in Paradise) and who also may have taught near Bologna at the abbey of St Felix. With the *Decretum* canon law, as civil law, developed as a pursuit unique from the school of theology. Although the sources regarding the unification of Bologna’s several schools into one constant university are thin, by November of 1158, the university received the grant of privilege by Frederick Barbarossa. In April of 1215, the university’s two main bodies – teachers of civil Roman law and the nation of students – convened to hear Buoncompagni’s *Rhetorica antiqua* and the first use of the word *universitas* was incorporated as a descriptive for an amalgamated academic entity. Bologna therein became the model of universities concentrated in civil law. Aside from Gratian’s *Decretum*, Pope Gregory IX had bequeathed a substantial tome of works to universities by 1234. These works

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7 Pedersen, 11-13.
subsequently demanded glosses (condemned by Dante) executed by canonists. By the 1300s the commune of Bologna controlled the salaries of professors, and the university had the largest number of faculty throughout Renaissance Europe. At the time of Albertí’s arrival in the early 1420s, Bologna’s university employed seventy-nine professors – forty-six teaching law and thirty-three teaching medicine. Bologna could boast of being the only university in Europe to offer stipends for independent and communal teachers of students before college age, which it sustained in order to meet with local demand and ensure enrolment.

Alberti attended Bologna’s studium during a political crisis in the city between the Bentivoglio family and its chief competitor, the Canetoli – while Milan and the papacy both contended for exterior control. By 1420 the Bentivoglio had been driven out, returning in 1445. Periodically the city would ask Rome to intercede and impose direct rule by means of a papal legate. During these political crises the university remained relatively undisturbed in terms of employment, attendance and curricula, as was the case when Alberti joined – during which time the young humanist would meet and work for Cardinal Albergati.

The university was no system of public buildings as it is today; classes were spread out over the city, taking place, for the most part, in the rooms of professors in their habitats.

Education at Bologna’s studium consisted in an initial course in the seven liberal arts (an amalgam of disciplines, including the trivium of grammar, dialectic and rhetoric, which provided


9 Grendler., *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, 8-10.


11 Ibid., 1-4.

training for lawyers and politicians, as well as the quadrivium of arithmetic and geometry, music and astronomy). However in Alberti’s day, the liberal arts were still under the thumb of the jurists and their non-classical, parlance of jargon in the legal idiom. In the Trecento, the study of rhetoric in general and Cicero specifically had not prospered with students and teachers of canon and civil law.\textsuperscript{13} In sum, Padua had already bequeathed to Alberti an exuberance and excitement for the antique lexicon and language that further endowed him with a freedom of invention in classical literature that was unequalled in upper-level academia. The radical changes regarding the historical appreciation of antiquity did not figure highly in Alberti’s university education simply because Bologna’s \textit{studium} in the 1420s did not offer or maintain a humanist course of study; on the contrary it continued to hold the language and culture of antiquity captive within traditional jurisprudential discourse. Consequently, we may deduce that the crucial period of exposure to humanist learning that Alberti had begun in Padua slowed considerably in Bologna.

\textbf{Humanism and the University}

In Bologna, as elsewhere, intellectuals and professionals, \textit{not} the university generated humanist culture. The endeavor gathered momentum as the pastime or obsession of professional people who had access to classics: notaries, teachers, papal officials and some aristocrats or mercantile oligarchs. By 1424 Bologna’s \textit{studium} had leased public buildings; while Alberti was enrolled there, the \textit{studium} records the first surviving reference to the \textit{studia humanitatis} by a pupil of Guarino, Giovanni Toscanella (d. 1448), who taught poetry, rhetoric, moral philosophy:

\begin{quote}
... utilize your minds and God-given and celestial reason, and with zeal, effort and diligence, strive to comprehend these \textit{studia humanitatis} and \textit{bonae artes}, keeping lively vigil both by day and by night.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} Pedersen, 296.

\textsuperscript{14} Karl Müllner, \textit{Reden und Briefe Italienischer Humanisten: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichite der Pädagogik Humanisimus} (Vienna: Hölder,1899), 196-197.
However, Bologna’s studium founded a chair in litterae humanitatis only in 1512. Although the emblematic return to antiquity on the university level might be that of Padua in 1315 awarding Albertino the first laurel wreath for poetry since antiquity, Walter Rüegg equates the University of Bologna with that of Padua only as an early incubator of humanism, possibly beginning with the appointment of Giovanni del Virgilio, in 1321, as auctorista.15 The position included lecturing on the legacy of antique prose and poetry; Virgilio produced a humanistic commentary on Ovid’s Metamorphoses.16 Of the theories as to why Italian studia absorbed humanism (albeit slowly) before those in northern Europe, the most resonant reasoning lies in the within the comparatively diminutive theological presence at the universities of Padua and Bologna, suggesting a lesser control over the teaching of liberal arts. However, we must note that, although the fulcrum of rhetoric was Cicero’s De inventione and the pseudo Ad Herennium, rhetoric as a discipline only became a separate faculty at Bologna’s studium in the early 1400s around the time of Alberti’s arrival – providing not a crux of humanism in the curriculum but rather a fostering of the discipline in its graduates after having left the school. For example, Petrarch and Salutati, among the first to interpret the philology of classical texts by means of epistolary efforts – by which Guido Billanovich holds that: “Gothic Italy very soon became humanist Italy” – only began this process after having been graduated.17 In short the early age of humanism only reached the university level by 1450 fostered by the renewed interest in Rome.

On the other hand, the names of the more noted humanists of the early 1400s are not present in the annals of the university system. Subsequently we look to the graduates and not the


16 Ibid.

course work of Bologna’s *studium* for the city’s humanism. As a protégé of Salutati, Loschi was professor to Barzizza, teacher, rhetorician and philologist, and purveyor of humanism in the early Quattrocento.\(^{18}\) Salutati never taught at the university level. Petrarch’s scribe, Giovanni Malpaghini taught periodically at the *studium* in Florence between 1394 and 1412.\(^{19}\) As little survives either written of or by him, we are uncertain as to his output on an academic level. In addition, the university in Florence was late to the game of Renaissance humanism.

A second earmark of humanist development would be the study of Greek by means of Chrysoloras and Guarino. The single precedent of teaching Greek in the Trecento before Chrysoloras is Leoncino Pilato (active mid-1300s), from Calabria who taught Greek at the University of Florence between 1360 and 1362; nothing of his teaching survives.\(^{20}\) Chrysoloras, brought to Florence by Salutati in 1397 for three years, left a legacy of Greek among the likes of Bruni. Yet, it was Chrysoloras’ protégé, Guarino, who disseminated the language into school environs in Padua. Even Chrysoloras was never employed by the *studium* in Florence, and Guarino only began teaching at a *studium* in 1442.\(^{21}\) This begins to form part of a wider pattern in the relationship between humanists and universities during this period. Vergerio, although teaching at the *studium* in Padua from around 1391 to 1397, taught logic at Bologna’s *studium* for only one year in 1388. As we have seen, Vittorino held the chair of rhetoric in Padua, but for only one year after Barzizza retired in 1421. Barzizza was more known for independent lectures than for any methodology taught at Padua’s university.

\(^{18}\) Rüegg, 455.

\(^{19}\) Sabbadini, *Giovanni da Ravenna*, 246.

\(^{20}\) Guido Billanovich, “Giovanni del Virgilio, 322.

\(^{21}\) See Alessandro Gherardi, *Statuti dell’Università e Studio Fiorentino dell’anno 1387* (Florence: Forni, 2012), 365-370.
Aurispa, perhaps the first humanist of note to teach at Bologna around 1425, only taught for one year and was more of a trader in Greek texts than a teacher of Greek.\textsuperscript{22} Aurispa left to teach at the \textit{studium} of Florence, where, again after a single year, that school with no record of ever having paid a salary, dismissed him.\textsuperscript{23} Beccadelli served only one year at the University of Pavia in 1430, leaving to become court poet for the Visconti in Milan where he would stay also for a year before leaving for the Aragonese humanist court in Naples.\textsuperscript{24} Notably, even Lorenzo Valla disdained his university teaching experience at the \textit{studium} in Pavia. Having been employed from 1431 to 1433, he publicly criticized the scholarship and Latin of a law student and was, perhaps literally, run out of the establishment.\textsuperscript{25} In 1427 the \textit{studium} of Bologna also hired Filelfo, a graduate of Barzizza who was also in Bologna teaching rhetoric at that time. Filelfo and Barzizza lasted little more than a year at Bologna’s university, whereupon Filelfo would be teaching in Florence when Alberti arrived in 1434. Banished the very year after the return of Cosimo de’ Medici from exile in Venice; he would teach in Siena and, later, at the Milanese court.\textsuperscript{26} Both Filelfo and Barzizza encountered Alberti in Bologna where Barzizza probably introduced him to Cardinal Albergati, with whom the young humanist would leave Bologna for gainful employment in the visual arts.

\textbf{Alberti and the University}

\textsuperscript{22} Grendler, \textit{The Universities of the Renaissance}, 209.

\textsuperscript{23} Dallari, 4.

\textsuperscript{24} Maiocchi, \textit{Codice Diplomatico dell' Università di Pavia}, vol. 2, 267-269.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. 309-310.

\textsuperscript{26} Gherardi, 415-419. We can surmise that Filelfo’s connections with Venice prompted this move by the Medici.
The essential point here is that all of the of humanists who came into contact with or influenced Alberti had no lasting presence in a university. Bologna’s *studium* offered Alberti little in the way of the *studia humanitatis*. As only in the 1420s would Vittorino in Mantua and Guarino in Ferrara become figures at an elite court, those pedagogues to whom Alberti was exposed in Padua – Vittorino and Guarino as well as Barzizza – were teachers who delivered personal attention to a student in an independently financed, small boarding school. In Bologna, Alberti was enrolled in a comparatively large facility in which he had to fend for himself in the struggle with civil and canon law studies – until leaving, possibly as early as 1426, in the employ of Albergati. No documents attest to Alberti having been graduated from the *studium*. 

His dissatisfaction would have stemmed from the university’s methodology, the antiquated and unconstructed *ars dictaminis* that lasted in Bologna’s university until 1457, thirty years after Alberti’s time there. Even thought the complete manuscripts of Quintilian saw increased circulation among universities, in the 1420s the *ars dictaminis* laid down a curriculum of teaching medieval precepts of Latin by rote without historical or intellectual context.

Thus, in regards to what Alberti may have gleaned from the *studium* in Bologna we must consider that humanism supported the interpretive appliance of antique philosophy to contemporary value, while the *ars dictaminis* methodology of Bologna was only rudimentary. In this lies the source of Alberti’s malaise expressed in his *Vita anonyma* and *De commodis*. As the *dictatores* in the university system taught through stringent rules of linear logic regarding grammar and text, there was no process of personal interactive imitation of the classics. In the

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27 For the transition from *ars dictaminis* to *studia humanitatis* at Bologna, see Carlo Calcaterra, *Alma Mater Studiorum; l'Università di Bologna nella Storia della Cultura e della Civiltà*, (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1948), 167.


29 See Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, 115-116.
corpus of Guarino’s letters, the strident message is for youth to experience an interpretive humanist education, even in evidence in a 1419 epistle to Gian Nicola Salerno (1379-1426), the podestà of Bologna, stressing the necessity of humanism regarding the governing of the city:

How much then must we prize this learning and praise those arts with which one educates the future ruler of the state; and if he possesses justice, benevolence, prudence, and modesty, all will be abler to enjoy the fruit, and the benefit, as usual, will be spread among us all. But if these philosophic studies train a private citizen, it is not the same thing, for they dry up and help only him alone.30

Both Alberti’s Philodoxeos and De commodis reveal a mordant rhetorical opinion regarding law as well as, on the other hand, a penetrating desire for personal glory – unfulfilled by scholastic travails. This disillusionment would turn Alberti toward fame and fortune in aesthetic pursuits. As a result the question remains, as to what exactly Alberti extracted from Bologna, its university, as well as the city’s life and visual art.

Quadrivium and Mathematics

Historiography on Alberti suggests that he learned mathematical principles, particularly those concerning how to decipher fixed-point perspective, in Bologna. This dissertation has argued that he was probably initially exposed to various works on mathematics in Padua. Thus, we may inquire as to how Alberti became further versed in geometry through the study of canon law. Mathematics in the Middle Ages was aimed at commercialism and marketing, first noted at the university around 1265.31 The thirteenth century saw a surge in Bologna’s mathematics

30 Sabbadini, Epistolario, no. 159, 263-264. (“Quanti igitur facienda, quam laudanda ea doctrina, illae artes quibus instituitur is qui futurus est in re publica princeps. Nam ille iustitia bonitate prudentia modestia praeditus communem universis affero fructum potest in omnesque disseminari utilitas solet. Ceterum si philosophiae studia privatum intrent hominem, non itidem; in eo siquidem solo ferme contabescunt et sibi soli prosunt.)

31 Guido Zaccagnini, L’ insegnamento Privato a Bologna e Altrove nei Secoli XIII e XIV (Bologna: Stabilimenti Poligrafici Riuniti, 1924), 32-33. See also Grendler, Schooling in Renaissance Italy, 5.
curriculum due to translations available of Arabic and Greek texts adapted into Latin or vernacular. 32 By 1405, the university curriculum included algebra, geometry, astronomy and astrology. The initial year offered basic Euclidian arithmetic and Ptolomaic astronomy; the second year included astrology, and the third mathematics, astronomy and astrology combined. As mathematics serviced medicine – studying Euclid demanded enrolling in that school. The single teacher most noted in the early Renaissance for his courses in both mathematics, was Pelacani. By the early 1400s Pelacani added mathematics to moral philosophy at Padua and Pavia, such that the course name was changed from astronomy to mathematics. Alberti possibly first came into contact with his work in Padua via Vittorino and Barzizza. While in Bologna, through courses on moral philosophy as an adjunct to canon law, Alberti may have also encountered treatises on perspective.

**Fixed Perspective**

Fixed or single-point perspective, in simple terms, is the visual experience on a two-dimensional plane of space decreasing in size proportionate to the distance of that picture plane from the eye. Alberti’s theory of perspective, whether mathematically correct or not, is the first humanist tract on the subject in visual arts and has come to be claimed, according to Edgerton, “worthy of the same intellectual study as the great classics of antique Greek and Roman literature.” 33 Alberti wrote a shorter tract after *De pictura* entitled *Elementi di pittura* (*Elements of Painting* c. 1434-1446) concerning points and rays. 34 While Alberti’s tenets on fixed

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perspective are certainly not laid out following Brunelleschi’s breakthrough in Florence, his sources are a certain amalgamation of all he saw, knew and learned – both visually and textually – before his arrival in Florence. In addition, his is a treatment born of intellectual education and not the trial and error of a craftsman in a studio. Jean Dhombres puts it succinctly that there are “drawings and paintings,” and then there are discourses on drawings and paintings, “whose implications have not been fully grasped.”

In the historiography of Alberti, we have at one end, Joan Gadol, who heralds Alberti as the founder of Renaissance perspective; and at the other end, Donald Richardson who condemns the art history community for giving Alberti any credit whatsoever for perspective.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that, despite these controversies and questions over the precision of Alberti’s mathematical system in *De pictura*, the book represents the first work since antiquity to present a systematic theory of how to recreate a three-dimensional visual experience of space and object upon a two-dimensional plane. Essentially the process begins with a point of vision (A) and a flat picture plane (B). Depth or distance (C) of an object, ostensibly receding in space, is determined by defining each point at which the object cuts the plane between the eye and depth line (A-C). The intellectual preoccupation with optics, teaching that sight occurred in linear lines or rays, stipulated that parallel lines appeared to converge at some distant point. Transversals, on the other hand – lines drawn across the picture plane horizontal to the ground were to be drawn from the ground upward at a ratio of 3:2.

Although there is no historiography that outlines the precise development of perspective, the technique was not *invented* but *evolved* through an ancient and medieval appraisal of spatial...

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35 Dhombres, 177.

continuity on a picture plane. Two related coordinates explain the impetus in the development of
the technique in painting: *realism* or the desire to reproduce realistically objects as seen by the
eye as opposed to reproducing hierarchical *types* and the desire for scientific precision.\(^{37}\)

Alberti’s aim is to reconstitute a geometric method for *painting* in order to bring painting
precepts within the scope of humanist education. Alberti’s allegiance to the investigators of
optical science who came before him begins in I.5 of *De pictura*. Here he begins to explain the
change of a shape’s appearance in relation to the change of place and subsequent measure of
visual rays according to *sight* as explained by the “rules of philosophers.”\(^{38}\) In I.9 Alberti then
refers to these “philosophers” four times in his discussion of light and color. First, he refers to
them when insisting on the distinction between light and color to make each visible to the other
by the very reason of contrast. Secondly, he proceeds to “leave aside disputes of philosophers
regarding the origins of color.” He then adds that he does not “despire those philosophers” who
maintain that the kinds of colors are *seven* in number with the spectrum using white and black as
the two extremities. Finally he argues that, notwithstanding the experts who “follow the
philosophers,” it is sufficient for a painter to be aware of gradations of color. He states that there
are those more expert than he himself who assert that black and white are the only “two colors in
nature;” but this is not important to the painter, as from a mixture of colors, “almost infinite
others are created.” He closes the chapter with his second iteration of his profession: “I speak
here as a painter.”\(^{39}\) Thus, Alberti alludes to experts whom he does not name. The experts,

\(^{37}\) See Kirsti Andersen, *The Geometry of an Art: The History of the Mathematical Theory of Perspective from Alberti
to Monge* (London: Springer, 2007). See also Edgerton, *Renaissance Rediscovery and White, Birth and Rebirth of
Pictorial Space*.

\(^{38}\) Alberti, *De pictura*, I.5, 38-41. “Id quidem qua ratione fiat perscrutemur, exordiamurque a *philosophorum*
sententia, qui metiri superficies affirmant radiis quibusdam quasi visendi ministris...”

\(^{39}\) Ibid., I.9, 44-45. “*Dicunt philosophi* posse videri nil quod ipsum non sit lumine coloreque vestitum... *Missam*
faciamus illum *philosophorum* disceptationem qua primi ortus colorum investigantur... *Neque tamen eos*
however, are the investigative minds of the thirteenth century who pioneered new approaches in geometry and light that Pelacani, in Padua’s early 1400s, distilled into precepts that were famous and popular when Vittorino taught and Alberti studied in that city.

Alberti’s Historiography of Perspective

The oldest treatment of geometric laws in the context of human sight is Euclid’s *Optica*, the major ancient text of geometry studied from the thirteenth century onwards. Euclid’s work was the single most replicated manuscript – copied or printed – until the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{40} From Euclid, Alberti takes the topos of *ray* as well as visual *pyramid* as regards observed geometry.\textsuperscript{41} The *De architectura* by Vitruvius was also available to Alberti in Padua. This work translated classical designs of theatre and stage, as near as possible, to a fixed point of perspective most likely incorporated in ancient frescoes such as that at the first-century Villa Oplontis on the Bay of Naples (Figs. 4.1 and 4.2).\textsuperscript{42} Ptolemy of Alexandria wrote of geometric perspective in his *Optics*, translated into Latin in the 1150s by Eugenio da Palermo (1130-1202). This text, probably by way of Pelacani, provided Alberti with his centric ray or the central visual point from eye to center of the picture plane. Galen attempted to define a lens within the eye as the physiological receptor of image. In medieval pedagogy, the staple of the quadrivium was *De instituione arithmetica* by Boethius. Using this work, as well as Euclid’s *Elements*, Robert

\textit{philosophantes asperandos putem qui de coloribus ita disputant ut species colorum esse numero septem statuant… Nolim a peritioribus redargui, qui dum philosophos sectantur, duos tantum esse in rerum natura integros…”}

\textsuperscript{40} Jean Dhombres, “Shadows of a Circle, or What is There to be Seen: Some Figurative Discourses in the Mathematical Sciences during the Seventeenth Century,” in *The Treatise on Perspective: Published and Unpublished*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 177 and 208, n. 2. For editions before the 17\textsuperscript{th} century see Charles Thomas-Sanford, *Early Editions of Euclid’s Elements* (San Francisco: Alan Wofsy Fine Arts, 1979).

\textsuperscript{41} Edgerton, *The Rediscovery of Linear Perspective*, xv - xvii.

Grosseteste (1175-1253), a father of scientific reasoning, argued that mathematics was an exponent of the perfect nature of God (a view echoed by Piero della Francesca). Grosseteste wrote treatises on a variety of subjects: refraction of light in *De luce*; color in in *De colore*; Euclid’s *Optica* and *Catoptrica*; Ptolemy’s *Optica*; Aristotle’s *Meteorologica*; as well as *De aspectibus* by Alhazen (Abū `Alī al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Haytham, 965-1040 CE).

Alhazen combined Euclid, Ptolemy and Galen in the *Kitab al-Manazir* (*Book of Optics*, 1121), possibly the most essential book on optics of the thirteenth century asserting that rays traveled in straight lines. Grosseteste, writing on direction of light in lines and angles in *De lineis, angulis et figuris*, prefigured the two Franciscans whose widely circulated works transformed the study of optics: Bacon’s *Opus maius*, lauding Italian painters in his account of optics as God’s work; and Peckham’s *Perspectiva communis*, the most noted book on optics in the fourteenth century.

**Bacon and Painting**

Other authorities on optics need mentioning. Witelo was studying at Padua by 1260 where he probably began the *Perspectiva*, his treatise on light and vision. Based largely on the precepts of Alhazen, Witelo’s book would reach far into the Quattrocento with Lorenzo Ghiberti’s *Commentario Terzo*. In 1328, Thomas Bradwardine (d.1349) published his *Tractus de Proportionibus*. By the end of the 1300s, Bologna’s *studium* syllabus would include Peckham’s *Perspectiva* as well as Euclid’s first book on optics.

Alberti’s *pyramid* is Euclid’s visual cone with the eye as an apex, and vision itself as the rays from apex to the picture plane. Bacon, however, connected the science to painting. The evolution of linear perspective was not the inevitable process of an increasingly secularized

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44 Pedersen, 294.
world moving toward humanism and the Renaissance. On the contrary, philosophers like Bacon discussed the perfection of mathematics within a wider metaphysical picture of God and the universe, a methodology, which would continue well into the fifteenth century. Bacon, prefiguring Alberti’s endorsement of the painter’s discipline in geometry, praised the instruction in painting practice, arguing that allegory became clearer in the pictorial religious message by means of mathematics’ precision. Dangerous territory in Bacon’s time, Aristotle’s works were banned by the Bishop of Paris in 1277 on the grounds that mathematics stood for a finite universe. Bacon lauds perspective for the depiction of the divine in his *Opus Majus*:

> Therefore, I count nothing more fitting for a man diligent in the study of God’s wisdom that the *exhibition of geometrical forms* of this kind before his eyes. Oh, that the Lord may command that these things be done! There are *three or four* men who would be equal to that task, but they are most expert among the Latins, and rightly must they be expert, since unspeakable difficulty lurks here, owing to the obscurity of the sacred text and contradiction of the sacred writers and difference of the other expounders.

These three or four men “among the Latins” capable of turning the magic of optic illusionism into painting must be either Cimabue or Cavallini, both of whom would be working on the frescoes in the upper Franciscan Basilica of Francis of Assisi not long after the Bacon’s endorsement. Cavallini would subsequently go to Rome to work on the mosaic cycle of *The Virgin* in the church of Santa Maria Trastevere. In fact, Pope John XXI (Pedro Julião, 1215-1277; active 1276-77), a graduate of medicine, held his quarters in Viterbo, a city, which, according to Klaus Bergdolt became a thirteenth-century haven for Franciscan philosophy where

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Bacon’s treatise proved popular with Pope John. This Franciscan enclave of natural science study, for which Bacon’s work was a set piece, continued to flourish under Nicholas III and may have been the wellspring from which Giotto drew upon Bacon’s principles of relative perspective. The sophistication in spatial delineation of hands, drapery, and shadow in certain panels in the Upper Church of Assisi, such as *Isaac Rejecting Esau* (Isaac Master/Cavallini?) prefigure Giotto’s work in the Cappella Scrovegni (Fig.4.3; See also Figs. 0.20-0.25).

Bacon like his fellow mendicant, Peckham, stressed the plasticity and volume that are evident in these works. Although medieval treatises on optics never resolved the vanishing point that would translate three-dimensional vision to exact scale these works certainly laid the foundations for such work. In fact Alberti and his peers knew nothing, *per se* of a vanishing point. Alberti himself only refers to the point at end of a horizon as his *centric ray*, in I.5 and again in I.8; “we call the centric ray the one which alone strikes the quantity in such a way that the adjacent angles on all sides are equal.”49 In I.20 he changes the “centric ray” to “centric point” describing the eye of the viewer and “successive transverse quantities” – an idea of a vanishing point – by placing another horizontal line outside the picture plane and a “point directly above and perpendicular to the end of it” on the same plane as his centric point.50

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50 Ibid. I.20, 56-57.
Thereafter, drawing lines from that point back to the base line points on a picture plane, he creates the eye’s view by the spectator of what modern readers think of as a “vanishing point.”

Edgerton maintains that Alberti is not as much concerned with the dilemma of composition on the picture plane as creating an absolute three-dimensional illusion. However, Alberti, in fact, never mentions the word perspective – in any form of the Latin noun perspectiva or the Italian prospettiva – in any treatise in his entire corpus of extant works. The first noted use of the term in the context of visual art is found in the book of the Commentarii of Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455): “Apelles took his paint brush and composed a result in perspective belonging to the art of painting.” Finished around 1452, this text contains the first application of the term taken from Pliny, where it is used to describe the competition between Apelles and Protogenes to paint from the life in best replication. However, Pliny’s immediate preceding paragraph, 36.80, is more precise in describing “measurement… in proper space,” as perspective in the compliment paid Asclepiodorus by Apelles:

… he [Apelles] used to acknowledge his inferiority to Melanthius in grouping, and to Asclepiodorus in nicety of measurement, that is in the proper space to be left between one object and another.

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51 Edgerton, *The Rediscovery of Linear Perspective*, 44-45. The connection of spectator and the centric ray is only in the Latin edition of *De pictura*.


55 Ibid., 35, 36.80, 320-321. “… fuit autem non minoris simplicatatis quam artis. Melanthio dispositione cedebat, Asclepiodoro de menuris, hoc est quanto quid a quoque distare deberet.”
Here Pliny explicitly states the “proper space... between one object and another.” Alberti however refers to the competition without any mention of perspective:

I believe one should take care that circumscription is done with the finest possible, almost invisible lines, like those they say the painter Apelles used to practice and vie with Protogenes at drawing.  

The second extant reference to the idea appears in Filarete’s Treatise on Architecture (c.1460s) in homage to Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) and his two famed paintings (lost) of the Baptistry of Florence demonstrating fixed perspective; “Truly I think it was by this method that Pippo di Ser Brunelleo discovered this perspective.”  

Herein, as Edgerton points out, the distinction of “this” (questa) pertains to the difference between the mathematical precepts of Euclidian optics (perspectiva naturalis) and the linear of fixed method used in painting, drawing and architecture (perspectiva artificialis). Edgerton argues that while Alberti only devotes a portion of chapter to the concept of perspective, art history has, nevertheless, linked “Albertian” with “perspective” with the same zeal that “damn” is linked with “yankee.”

Thus the historiography on perspectiva artificialis – perspective in pictorial space – raises the question of whether the development was a result of access to and distillation of Euclid over the centuries, or whether it was the result of trial and error by the artisan drawing these visual distinctions. For instance, the mathematical historian Field argues that Alberti’s directive on executing orthogonals has all but been relegated to “the Holy Writ” of art historians when in fact

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56 Alberti, De pictura, II.31, 66-67.
58 Edgerton, The Mirror, the Window and the Telescope, 41.
it is simplistic and does not actually work. Alberti insists on natural optics but never dissects the process in toto. By contrast, the *De prospectiva pingendi* of Piero, a mathematician and painter, begins from the ground line of the picture plane instead of a superimposed pyramid, delivering a precision of perspective in a scheme that Alberti never achieved. In fact, Piero’s book mirrors his practice as a painter; the Italian treatise was a technical explanation for the craftsman. Alberti’s Latin text was a humanist theory for the elite.

**Pelacani, Alberti and Mathematics**

Alberti’s study of perspective is therefore derived, to some extent, from the work of medieval authorities and the more recent theories of Pelacani. Certainly the influence of Pelacani and his compendium of Euclid, Alhazen, Bacon, Peckham and Witelo extend beyond the boundaries of the university and probably served as Alberti’s introduction to optics in Padua. Pelacani taught at Padua’s *studium* from 1382 to 1388 before going to the University of Pavia and completing his *Quaestiones perspectiva* in 1390, thence returning to Padua from 1407 to 1411. Near the year that Alberti entered Barzizza’s school, Pelacani taught the *Quaestiones* in the *studium*. Pelacani perhaps knew Brunelleschi and taught Vittorio at Padua shortly before

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60 Field, *The Invention of Infinity*, 25.

61 Ibid., “Piero della Francesca’s Perspective Treatise,” in *The Treatise on Perspective: Published and Unpublished*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 76 and n. 42. The earliest version is in the Biblioteca Palatina, Parma; MS 1576, 6v. BL Add MSS 10366.

62 Ibid., 63. Although plagiarized until the sixteenth century, Piero’s book never saw print during the author’s lifetime.

Alberti studied with Barzizza. A passage in I.8 of *De pictura* may well point to his own tutelage under Pelacani. Alberti says:

There is also a third condition in which surfaces present themselves to the observer of diverse form. This is the reception of light. One can observe in a spherical or concave body, if there is only one source of light present, that the surface is rather dark in one part and lighter in another, while at the same distance and with no change of the original centric position, if the same surface lies in a difference light from before, you will see as dark the parts which were bright before under the other light, and as light those parts that earlier were in the shadow. If there are several lights around, various patches of brightness and darkness will alternate her and there according to the number and strength of the lights. This can be verified by experiment.

We may inquire as to what “experiment.” Pelacani penned his papers on Aristotle, *De generatione et corruptione, Meteorologica, Questiones de anima* and *Physics* around 1385 in Padua as well as his work on astrology (which he taught) *Summa super libro de celo et mundo* in Bologna in 1388, the *Perspectiva* in 1390 in Pavia and *Questiones super de tractatu proportionibus* (*Questions on the Proportions of Velocities in Motions*) in 1393. By then he was declared the most revered mathematician living by Giovanni Gherardo da Prato (1360?-1446) in his *Paradiso degli Alberti* (1389). The *Paradiso*, a Boccaccio-like opus recounting conversations among friend in the village of Bandino, was home to the Florentine jurist, Antonio

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64 See Thorndike, 70. Thorndike dismisses this, arguing that Vittorino would have been in this thirties and too old. This observation is twentieth-century myopia, based upon scholastic endeavours according to our contemporary age standards. Vergerio received his doctorate in 1405 in his later years, just as Vittorino attempted the unique pedagogy of Pelacani regarding light rays and spherical images.

65 Alberti, *De pictura*, I.8, 42-45. “Est quoque tertium aliquid ex quo superficies diffíormes et variae intuentibus exíbeantur. Id quidem est lumium receptio. Nam videre licet in sphaericà atque concava superfície, si unícum tantum adsit lumen, una parte subobscuram alia clarioriem esse superfíciem, ac eodem intervallo centricaque positione prístina manente, modo ea ípsa superfícies diverso quam prius lumine subiaceat, videbí ípsas íllíque esse partes eas quae sub diverso eantea lumine sitae clarebant, atque esse eádem claras quae prius obumbraeae erant. Tum etiam si plura circumstentí lumina, pro luminum numero et viribus variae suis locís maculae candoris et obscuritatis micabunt. Haec res experimento ipso comprobatur.”


Alberti, relative of Leon Battista who was exiled with the humanist’s father, Lorenzo. By the time he returned to Padua, Pelacani’s works, particularly the Questions – copied on many occasion – were better known in northern Italy than any other series of manuscripts on mathematics whatsoever. As Edgerton contends that Alberti was possibly first exposed to perspective sciences in Padua; in that case, the “experiment” in question could be the obsession among students of optics since Peckham with pin-hole images, a context elucidated by David Lindberg. Pelacani argued that rays emanating from spheres like the sun would not appear as spheres, but become diffuse because the ray does not hit an object equally everywhere. An intersection of rays creates the geometry of a sphere seen as such. Pelacani claimed that the pyramid of rays should converge at an apex at the aperture or eye or beyond. The idea of a pinhole as an aperture that would create a diversely lit image of a sphere is certainly in line with Alberti’s notion of the sphere being lit according to the diffusion or strength of the rays. That Pelacani, Vittorino and Barzizza initially exposed Alberti to a lasting fascination with light’s radiation and its result upon a (painted) surface cannot be exaggerated here. Bologna may have honed Alberti’s taste for optics, but the period of incubation of these interests began in Padua.

Between 1615 and 1619 Jesuit astronomer, Giuseppe Biancani (1566-1624) published two separate books on mathematical history, *Aristotelis Loca Mathematica ex Universes Ipsius Operibus Collecta et Explicata*, and *Sphaera Mundi Seu Cosmographia Demonstrativa, ac Facili Methodo Tradita*. Alberti’s role as consul had so permeated the historiography of mathematics

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68 Ibid.


that Biancani’s *Sphaera* has Alberti inventing the process of the measurement of sea-depth by
sinking an object and releasing an inflatable tube at the moment it touches the object –
subsequently timing the float’s return to the surface.\(^\text{72}\) However, a contemporary of Alberti’s at
Padua – Giovanni da Fontana (1395-1455) – developed this process *during* Alberti’s stay in the
city and, in 1420, while Alberti was in Bologna, published his *Metrologum de pisce, cane et
volucre*.\(^\text{73}\) Biancani probably miss-identified Alberti as Fontana from scientific precepts of
invention in *De pictura*.

**Alberti’s Early Writings Before *De pictura***

Because Alberti’s talents as both humanist and scientist were clearly visible at an early
age, the development of his visual art theory must also be assessed in the context of his early
writing in Bologna. Contextualizing *De pictura* against this backdrop helps us to overcome the
hermeneutical problems inherited from early twentieth-century scholarship that have tended to
isolate Alberti’s intellectual corpus from his three books of art history (four if counting the
vernacular *Della pittura*). In the early twentieth-century, beginning with Schlosser, there was an
intent by scholarship to separate the early humanists of the late Trecento and early Quattrocento
from the scholasticism of preceding centuries.\(^\text{74}\) At the same time, the so-called *literary* works
of Alberti were considered to have little bearing upon the aesthetics of his art history, although in

\(^{72}\) Ibid., 108. *Sphaera mundi, seu cosmographia demonstrativa, ac facili methodo tradita*.

\(^{73}\) See Thorndike, 58. He references Giovanni da Fontana, *Metrologum de Pisce Cane et Volucre* (c. 1420),
Bologna, *Biblioteca universitaria*, MS 2705, ff. 95-104 and 172.

\(^{74}\) See Schlosser, *Ein Künstlerproblem der Renaissance*. 

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1972 Eugenio Garin strove to overcome this oversight.\textsuperscript{75} Garin reworked the notion of art-historical works as standing distinct from the ethics reinterpreted from antiquity.

Thus, it is within Alberti’s writings before \textit{De pictura} where we may glean evidence of early proclivities germane to understanding his evolution in visual art as well as his motivation to leave Bologna. Alberti’s play, \textit{Philodoxeos fabula} as well as his treatise, \textit{De commodis litterarum atque incommodis} were both finished in Bologna. The works reveal Alberti’s disdain for traditional legal training and a penetrating desire for personal glory not to be fulfilled by scholastic travails. The first mention by Alberti of his corpus of early works is found in his \textit{Vita anonyma}. Here, Alberti’s single reference to Bologna is to describe it as “wide open to its neighbors for it was a fat but stupid city.”\textsuperscript{76} Disillusionment with the city, together with a sense of the rewards of fame and fortune would lead to Rome and a full-time obsession with art and architecture. To comprehend Alberti’s proclivity to embrace the pictorial arts within the textual realm of neoclassical ideals, structure, language and syntax, we must turn to these early works before \textit{De pictura} in the period from 1420 to 1431.

\textit{Philodoxeos fabula (early 1420s)}

The classical ideals of virtue, fame and glory, now revived by humanists since Petrarch, are the most recurrent themes in the early works of Alberti. Alberti’s ‘glory’ is not the ephemeral quality of contemporary reputation, but the acquisition of immortality. Alberti’s early works have a strong autobiographical voice. They often speak in the first person or disguised as

a replicated character from Antiquity. Alberti’s first surviving opus, *Philodoxeos fabula*, was a humanist imitation of an antique play, probably begun in Padua.\(^{77}\)

*Philodoxeos* is allegory depicting classical gods as characters. The work reveals much of Alberti existential dilemmas as a young man and his search and demand for glory and fame. *Fame* (Phimia) and her sister *Glory* (Doxia) are the two objects of desire in *Philodoxeos*. Taken from Plautus and Terence, the lover of glory represents Alberti as a writer of ambition. The visual source for Alberti’s Fame may have been Altichiero’s ancient heroes in the *Sala vivorum*. The connection here with Alberti to both Altichiero and Petrarch may further include the latter’s unfinished poem, *Trionfi*, which informed Altichiero’s *Triumph of Glory*, the frontispiece of the copy of *De viris* now in Paris as well as that originally shown in the *Sala* (Fig. 4.4).\(^{78}\)

The importance of the work in regards to his formation in both Padua and Bologna is Alberti’s foraging into what Nagel and Wood term “art-historical consciousness.”\(^{79}\) That Alberti, for decades, passed the play off as an antique original represents the first attempt at literary forgery that we know of in the entirety of humanist or art historiography. The inception of this sort of imitative replication of ancient forms harkens back to the Carrara medals of Padua. (see Chapter 3) An infamous medal portraiture of Constantine and Heraclius had been passed off by Italian sellers to the Duc du Berry as early as 1401 (Figs. 4.5 and 4.6).\(^{80}\) The Duke’s collection held also held one of the medals depicting Francesco Novello Carrara and his son, Umbertino (See Figs. 0.17 and 0.18). The Carrara medals were examples of the finery of casting

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\(^{78}\) Dorothy C. Shorr, “Some Notes on the Iconography of Petrarch’s *Triumph of Fame*,” *The Art Bulletin* 20, no. 1 (1938): 100-107. “Fame” was also illuminated in Padua around 1400 in Lombardo’s manuscript of *De Viris*.

\(^{79}\) Nagel and Wood, 291.

\(^{80}\) Hill, *Medals of the Renaissance*, 16.
and, continuing this artistry, the Paduan medals of Giovanna dal Cavino (1500-1570) were of such precision that his works show up in antique inventories for a century afterward.81

To follow in the footsteps of this antiquarian hoax, Alberti needed to recreate the voice, intention, and morality of the antique play and commit it to parchment in an antique style. The accomplishment of the Philodoxeos in Bologna would associate Alberti inextricably with the world of ancient Rome, upon which he would build a reputation as an aficionado of antiquarian art, beginning with De pictura. Like Philodoxeos, De pictura would use the past to justify and enlighten while speaking to a future generation of art and artists.

*De commodus litterarum atque incommodis* (middle-late 1420s?)

Alberti’s *De commodus* offers a further personal statement of his fascination contemporaneous with both classical literature and visual art, fostered in Padua and further developed in Bologna. In her translation Watkins suggests that Alberti had visited Florence in 1428 while writing *De commodis*, and that he was “familiar with Brunelleschi and his circle.”82 To reiterate, there is no documentation to substantiate this, nor does any evidence or suggestion lead one to suppose that, even had Alberti visited Florence, that he would have had the wherewithal to befriend any artists by 1428.

Alberti began *De commodis* in Bologna, referring to the city of his past, lamenting:

I am thinking of something I heard in Bologna, where I was as student, from a certain honourable citizen, the father of a legal scholar, who told me more than once that there was nothing he regretted as much in his life as having let his son embark on these studies.83

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Alberti’s use of *quod apud Bononiam* (“regarding before, in Bologna”) suggests a time past there. Thus the book might have been completed shortly after Alberti’s departure, in company of Cardinal Albergati, for the Netherlands. In any case, statements in the work, which touch upon inclusion of painting, architecture, astronomy and the visual arts indicate the long fomentation of these interests in the humanist well before his return to Florence in 1434. Then again, as the book’s recipient is his brother Carlo, who indeed returned to Florence around 1428, perhaps the tract serves as a warning before his brother’s departure from Padua to begin business in Florence. For within the invective in *De commodis*, Alberti is none too complimentary toward the *urbs* of his family’s exile in a damning tone about the lack of principles among the wealthy of Florence:

To the one whose wealth engages their greed, the crowd offers applause as soon as they see his face and figure. As he comes nearer, they rise up instantly for they suppose and expect that a man of such outstanding fortune should be made much of. Understandably enough, they put a man from whom they hope to get favors and money *before any and all men of learning*. Fuelled by greed, *especially in our city*, the idea has flourished that highest honors should go only to the wealthy and fortunate, while accomplished scholars are considered objects of little future utility.  

After honoring his father Lorenzo’s commitment to their education, Alberti describes Carlo’s tenacity both in “business and in continued reading” and declares his own commitment to letters:

… while I, who dedicated myself to scholarship and put it above everything else, would give up any activity *rather than let a day pass without reading or writing.*

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84 Alberti, *De commodis*, VI.22-23, 105. “*Huic cuius divitias cupiditate amplectitur plebs vultu fronteque applaudit, ergo advenienti confestim assurgit; hunc quanti fortuna preset, tanti esse faciendum et censet et predicat; hunc ergo a quo iuvari favoribus et pecunia queritant cives, non stulte omnibus litteratis anteponunt. (23) Ita demum iis omnibus rebus incebruit, presertim in nostre urbis homnibus, opinio flagranti cupiditate incensa ut solis divitibus, de litteratis vero non amplius cogitent quam de rebus his que usui future minime sint;*”. See also ibid., *On the Use and Abuse of Books*, ed. Watkins, 47.

85 Alberti, *De commodis*, I.1, 37.“*... omnia posse libenti us debeo quam diem aliquam nihil aut lectitando aut commentando preterire.*” See also ibid., *Use and Abuse*, 15.
The insistence on daily discipline is a clear appropriation of the view expressed in Cicero’s *Brutus*, extolling the oratorical talent of Quintus Hortensius Hortalus:

He was likewise inflamed with such a passionate fondness for the profession, that I never saw any one, who took more pains to improve himself *for he would not suffer a day to elapse* without either speaking in the forum or composing something at home; and very often he did both in the same day.⁸⁶

In fact Alberti takes directly from the *Brutus* regarding the select few endowed with ability:

For if fate endowed Hortensius with memory and Cicero with intelligence it hardly granted any special glory of this kind to the many other rhetoricians of their time.“⁸⁷

Cicero declares the same dedication, yet bemoans his fate with letters:

… though I wrote and read and declaimed daily with unflagging interest, yet I was not satisfied to confine myself only to rhetorical exercises.⁸⁸

Subsequently warning that wealth comes late, if it comes at all to the rhetorician, Alberti invokes Cato the Elder’s reprimand:

And, these, it is quite obvious, even if they perform remarkable intellectual work, will be old before they are able by their earnings to render their family glorious and wealthy. Of these perhaps we may say with Cato: they have worked hard to be wealthy among the shades.⁸⁹

Thereafter, Alberti summons Plutarch:

He made fun of the school of Isocrates, declaring that his pupils kept on studying with him till they were old men, as if they were to practice their arts and plead their cases before Minos in Hades.⁹⁰

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⁸⁶ *Cic. Brut. lxxxviii.302, 262-263.* “*nullum enim patiebatur esse diem quin aut in foro diceret aut meditaretur extra forum.*”

⁸⁷ Alberti, *De commodis*, IV.43, 81-82. “*Nam si Hortensio memoriam, Ciceroni ingenium fata enlarrita sunt, aliis quidem ex tanto rhetorium numero in his rebus singularem laudemvix ulla concedere.*” See also ibid., *The Use and Abuse of Books*, 35.

⁸⁸ *Cic. Brut. lxxix.305, 264-265.* “… *cotidieque et scribens et legens et commentans oratorios tantum exerztionibus conentis non eram.*”

⁹⁰ Alberti, *De commodis*, IV.46, 83. “*Et neque latet tametsi litteris claruerint tanmen eosdem an futuros senses quam questitius literarum possint ornamat et locupletam familiam reder. De istic fortassis illud Catonis persimile dicetur; studuisse istos ut apud inferos divitas pararent.*”
Then, in homage to his father, he refers to the “great writers” whom he has encountered:

Thanks to our upbringing, I am happy to say that, guided by the great writers, we bore with unperturbed spirit certain evils that long afflicted us and prudently avoided others.  

Here Alberti pays testimony to his humanist education in both Padua and Bologna. He then laments that his classical heroes have already dealt expertly with all the great subjects:

Nothing came to mind that had not been beautifully dealt with by the divinely inspired classical authors, so that no one of our time, however learned, could deal with it better than they, nor did there seem to be some topic... that I could handle well and with grace. The ancients had encompassed all serious and comic material, leaving to us only the opportunity to read them and the obligation to admire.

On the other hand there follows a clear reference to the humanists from Petrarch onwards – when Alberti turns to speak of “older contemporaries of ours” who “have seized on a few subjects that lay hidden, perhaps overlooked by the ancients, and have thus gained honor and fame.”

Regarding his ambivalence “what are we to do?” (Quid igitur nos?) in trying to pen something less than perfect, he borrows from Quintilian:

Would it be good enough to imitate Isocrates, the rhetorician said to have produced splendid orations praising Busiris, a horrible tyrant, and condemning Socrates, the best and most venerable philosopher?

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91 Alberti, De commodis, I.2, 38. “Qua ex re illud quidem nos assecutos gaudeo, ut adversas quibus diutius premimur erumnas partim ferre moderate, partim viare prudenter licuerit documentis litterarum. Ac mihi quidem studiis nostris non modo ut nobis tantum prosint, sed magis etiam ut amicorum expectationi satisfaciant enitendum videtur.” See also ibid., Use and Abuse of Books, 15.

92 Ibid., I.3, 39. “Nihil mihi unquam pervestiganti in mentem subiit, quod ipsum a priscis illis divinis scriptoribus non pulchre esset occupatum... mihi similia illis apte et condigne agere relictum sit; ita et seria omnia et iocosa veters ipsi complexi sunt, nobis tantum legendi atque admirandi sui facultatem et necessitatem dimiserunt.” See also ibid., Use and Abuse of Books, 15.

93 Ibid., I.4, 39. “tum hac etate qui mairoes adsunt natu nonnula que fortassis a superioribus scriptoribus neglecta latitabant laudis et nominis gratia deprehenderunt.” See also ibid., Use and Abuse of Books, 15.
This use of Quintilian perhaps goes back to Alberti’s years with Barzizza in Padua more than his
time in Bologna. Alberti misquotes Quintilian here. When defending rhetoric as an art,
Quintilian refers to the rhetorician, Polycrates – not Isocrates – as the antagonist of Socrates:

For my part, I think that those who have argued against this view did not mean what they said, but wanted
rather to exercise their intellect on a difficult theme, like Polycrates praising Busiris and Clytemnestra –
though he is said to have composed in a similar vein a speech which was delivered against Socrates.  

Had Alberti been reading his Quintilian in Bologna, it is possible he would have not mistaken the
Attic orator who stood against Busiris, Isocrates (436-338 BCE), with the sophist Polycrates
(440-370 BCE) who defended Busiris and his “Accusation Against Socrates.”

*De commodis* and Visual Art

The question addressed in *De commodis* is whether through study one can hope for
rewards one in this life or whether the literate must forgo pleasure altogether. In III.3 of *De
commodis* Alberti, insists that:

From childhood on through every age, as we have seen, they are pressured and loaded with work, and
scholars’ nights as well as days are never free of anxiety and striving, so that it is implausible that they will
find much there that smacks of even a little pleasure.  

According to the *Vita anonyma*, Alberti would opt for music, visual art and physical rudiments.

*De commodis* asserts that the greatest of pleasure is observing man’s artistic design:

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94 Quint., *Inst.*, 2.17.4, 378-379. “Equidem illos qui contra disputaverunt non tam id senisse quod dicerent quam
exercere ingenia materiae difficultate credo voluisse, sicut Polycraten, cum Busirim laudaret et Clytaemnstram;
quamquam is, quod his dissimile non esset, coposuisse orationem quae est habita contra Socraten dictur.”

95 See Isocrates II, *Busiris*. Polycrates *Accusation*, an accounting of Anytus’ prosecution of Socrates, does not
survive; however we know of it from Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, 1.2.

96 Alberti, *De commodis*, III.3, 50. “… ab ipsa quidem pueritia omnem per etatem premi ac perstringi laboribus,
tum vigiliis, diuturnaque cura et sollicitudine nungquam eosdem esse vacuos literatos videmus, ut eos nemo facile
credat tam laboriosa in vita nulta comperire que vel mediocrem sapiant voluptatem.” See also Watkns, *The Use and
Abuse of Books*, 20.
One of the greatest pleasures… is to wander through cities and regions: to gaze upon temples, theaters, fortifications and all sorts of buildings, to walk in places which, by nature and by human labor and design, have been made beautiful, welcoming and secure.\(^{97}\)

One may assume from “temples” and “theaters” that Alberti refers to the arenas of Padua or Verona as Alberti had yet to travel to Rome. In referring to the habit of taking his own field trips, possibly learned from Barzizza and Vittorino in Padua, Alberti goes on to say:

It is hard to take along a lot of books while traveling, nor does one find much time to read when sightseeing. Of course nothing will hold you back from roaming with great enjoyment through the provinces if you think you can be a learned man without reading much or often. Beware, however, for it may be that travel is not only inconvenient to the pursuit of learning but ought to be viewed by scholars as more dangerous for other reasons: in particular, because such scholars, even if they stay in their own country, incur much disapproval for taking part in small pleasures that do not even amount to major distractions.\(^{98}\)

After a warning that scholars who indulge in singing or dancing will be condemned as foolish, Alberti gets to the heart of the irony with:

… young men are not unreasonable… if they foresee that they may not travel in other regions for pleasure, since even in their own country they are not allowed to take part without shame in agreeable and joyful gatherings. Thus if they have thought of gaining any sort of fame or noble reputation, they will stay nicely shut up at home, renouncing elegant, pleasant, and admirable things and forbidding themselves all access to these in order, as their work requires to dig most diligently through their books; they will not permit pleasure in exploring external things that might distract their minds and disturb their concentration.\(^{99}\)

\(^{97}\) Ibid., III.4, 50. *Etenim voluptatum prestantissima et libero homine digna una illa est per urbes provinciasque vagari, multa et templa et theatra, menia atque omnium generum edificia spectare, locaque ambire que tum natura amenissima, grata, munitissima, tum manu et ingenio hominum erint ad conspectum pulchras, adque impetum hostium continendum redita tutoria.* See also ibid., *Use and Abuse*, 20.

\(^{98}\) Ibid., III.5 and 6, 51. “*Non quidem proficiscentes per itinera trahere libros, neque novis regionibus contemplandis occupati multa posunt lectitare, quod si parum multa parumve sepius lectitantem fieri te litteratum putabis, nihil erit quod ab hac discurrendi per provincias voluptate retraham. Cave tamen ne omnes profectiones non solum incommode studis, sed etiam studiosis longe vituperande sint; id quidem cum ceteras ob res tum vel maxime quod in ipsa patria litterati paulum proclivius amena prosequentes vituperantur.*” See also ibid., *Use and Abuse*, 21

\(^{99}\) Ibid. III.10 and 11, 52. “… ut non stulte deditis litteris adolescentibus meo judicio precipiatur ne per alienas provincias solatii causa discursitent, cum ne propria quidem in patria rebus amenis et iucundis sine ignominia inservire liceat. Quare si quid fame et laudi consulendum putabunt pulchre domi sese occlusos detinetbunt, resque
Traveling is clearly an important method of pursuing one’s pleasure through viewing of monuments and art – the method of gaining respite from the toil of writing – perhaps a practice had learned in Padua. Alberti also seems to tap into his own growing theoretical interests in art:

If you inquire into technical knowledge or painting or three dimensional design, the philosophical disciplines will react strongly: ‘this is the way you defraud us of you energies. From you we will withhold knowledge of the highest thing!’ 100

Finally Alberti laments the lack of time available to scholars to enjoy themselves with the type of observation of culture that he has earlier mentioned:

If the scholar is never allowed to take time away from his studies to explore and observe to enjoy himself… who can possibly dare to say that he is a man of books and learning for pleasure’s sake 101

That Alberti will give up the studium and follow the visual arts is inferred at the end of Book IV:

… the scribe, physician, and tawyer, believe and teach that learning is superior, useful, bringing practical advantage. Knowledge of the mind, nature of things, ways of mankind, important and beautiful matters, is despised and rejected as ignorant and ugly by the people of the city. Only venal learning is prized. 102

Alberti lauds that “noble disciplines and most abstruse arts were always worth more than all the gifts of fortune,” and closes his invective with a salute to the ancients and rhetorical morality:

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omnes foris elegantes, amenas, admiratio neque dignas abdicabunt a se atque proscribent, quo maiori, ut opus est, assiduitate ad litterarum cognitionem sese affirment, ac denique nullam patientur apud se visendi voluptatem tantum valere ut animo alias ad res distracti non queant multam litteris atque necessariam quam debent operam contribuere. See also ibid., Use and Abuse, 21.

100 Ibid. III, 27, 27. “Si ingenia, picturam, formas, exquiras, inquient discipline: Hac tu nos occupatione defraudas, te nos maximarum rerum cognitione privabimus?” See also ibid., Use and Abuse, 24.

101 Ibid. III.30, 62-63. “Si studii temporibus nunquam debet studiosus a rerum investigatione ac perceptione neque vuluptatibus avocari… quis igitur erit qui se voluptatis causa litteris operam dare audeat dicere?” See also ibid., Use and Abuse, 25.

102 Ibid., IV.58, 87. “… scriba, medicus ad iurisperitus, tres hi tantum prestantes atque utiles didicisse litteras putentur, quoniam easdem bene fecerint mundinarias; relique autem doctrine de ingenio, de natura rerum, de moribus deque ceteris maximis prestantissimis atque elegantissimis rebus inculte et sordide a civibus contemnuntur atque reiciuntur soleque venales littere in pretio sint.” See also ibid., Use and Abuse, 38.
Consider the full remembrance of forgotten antiquity and its wisdom that you find in us, which can help you rise above and endure any attack or accident of fortune.  

**Alberti, Painting and the *Vita anonyma***

In the fourth sentence of his *Vita anonyma* Alberti exalts painting as worthy of esteem:

He embraced with diligence every art that brings glory. He strove for fame in *sculpture and painting*, not to mention other arts, for he refused to neglect anything that might earn him the esteem of good men.

Here Alberti speaks of a preoccupation with art even before his arrival in Rome in 1431. In the next paragraph he tells us how are helped him overcome the weariness of studies in Bologna:

… his eyes, looking like scorpions, so that the last thing he could do would be looking at books. When books thus temporarily lost their appeal, he would shift his attention to music and painting.

Given to the fine arts, Alberti furthermore lauds his own talent at music:

He learned music without instructors, and his compositions were commended by learning musicians… Not a few musicians became more learned through his criticism.

In Bologna, though Alberti found the law distinctly lacking as a vocation. In the *Vita* the dissatisfaction with law emerges, along with a breakdown possibly around 1423 due to studies. Making no mention of a degree, he says of himself that:

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103 Ibid., VI.7, 113 “... fortunam non metuere, solamque animi quietem, mores, virtutem, sapientiamque apprendere, siquidem bone hoc ferme artes contendunt.” See also ibid., V.12, 115. “Memento rerum preteritarum vetustissimam apud nos memoriam integramque prudentiam considere, que te res omni fortune impetu et casu possit sublevare ac sustinere,” and *Use and Abuse*, 51 and 53.


He devoted some years to canon and to civil law with such industry and zeal that, from overworking at these studies, he became physically ill. 107

Then, as self-consolation a sentence later, he writes that, not yet twenty years old, he finished *Philodoxeos fabula*. The telling suggestion that Alberti never completed a degree is further evident in the next reference to his becoming ill again:

upon physician’s orders… he did give up his legal studies… just as they were about to bear fruit. When he heard that some learned person had arrived, he at once tried to get to know him and to learn from whoever it might be anything that he did not know.108

Because he was bereft of stimulation, he then, at the age of twenty-four, “turned to physics and mathematics,” which he “could cultivate freely” due to their demand for “intelligence rather than memory.”109 Here we have a clear reference to his scientific studies, which would bear the tenets of perspective that Alberti elucidates in Book I of *De pictura*. The translation of the *Vita* by Watkins fails to include Alberti’s age (*annis natus quatuor et viginti*), a remarkable omission.110 The age reveals that, at nineteen years old, Alberti was equipped to write the *Philodoxeos*, and only twenty-four when he forsook the study law for the stuff of the scientific backbone of *De pictura*. Alberti’s formative time at both Padua and Bologna had him excelling beyond his years as a scholar, while demonstrably receptive to questions of visual art precepts. Leaving law in the mid-1420s would place him in the company of Cardinal Albergati. Regarding the arguments of

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107 Alberti, *Vita anonyma*, xcii. “... didit enim operam juri pontificio, jurique covili, annos aliquot; idque tantis vigiliis tantaque assiduitate, ut ex labore studii in gravem corporis valetudinem incideret... Idcirco consolandi sui gratia, intermissis jurium studiis inter curandum et convalescendum, scripsit Philodoxeos fabulam, annos natus non plus viginti...” See also ibid., trans. Watkins, 8.


109 Ibid., xciv. “Verum quod sine literis esse non posset, annos natus quatro et viginti ad phisicam se, atque mathematicae artes contulit; eas enim satis se posse colere non diffidebat; siquidem in his ingenium magis, quam memoriaem exercondam intelligeret.” See also ibid., trans. Watkins, 8.

Francesco Borsi, Watkins and others of Alberti visiting Florence in 1428, the end of his family’s exile, there is also no mention in the autobiographical *Vita* or *De commodis*.

Furthermore in Alberti’s *Della famiglia*, which Holmes calls a “masterpiece of humanist prose,” Alberti never makes Florence his home.\(^{111}\) Brilliant in its humanist invective and vernacular satire, the book reveals his sense of alienation from Tuscan culture:

... for his relatives… before he was thirty… in paternal Tuscan to help those who were ignorant of Latin. He finished this work in Rome in ninety days, but the language was rough and unpolished and could hardly be called Tuscan. For the long exile of the Alberti’s meant that he had not been raised in the language and it was hard for him to write it elegantly and properly when he was unaccustomed to writing it at all.\(^{112}\)

We might assume, if such a return occurred in 1428 that it would be mentioned, yet it is not. In addition, regarding first contact with kinsmen in Florence, Alberti further laments that upon presentation of the first three books of *Della famiglia*:

among all the Alberti, scarcely one deigned even to peruse the titles… he could not help being angry when he discovered some among his relatives openly scoffed at the work and the author as inept.”\(^{113}\)

Thus Alberti makes no mention of his presence in Florence before 1434 and no mention of Florence or her artists. Arguments contending that Alberti was privy to the art of Donatello and contemporaries in Florence some *seven years* before *De pictura*’s completion are unsustainable.

\(^{111}\) Holmes, 138.

\(^{112}\) Alberti, *Vita anonyma*, xciv. “*Scripsit praeterea et affinium suorum gratia, ut lingae latinæ ignaris prodesset, patrio sermone annum ant trigésimum aetatis suas e tungos libros, primum, secundum, ac tertium de Família, quos Romae die nonagesimo, quam inchoarat, absolvit; sed inclimatnos, et asperos, neque usquequaque e tungos. Patriam enim linguam apud externas nationes per diutinum familiæ Albertarum exilium educatus non tenebat, et durum erat hoc in lingua scribere elegantier, atque nitide, in qua tum primum scribere non assueverat.*” See also ibid., trans. Watkins, 8

\(^{113}\) Alberti, *Vita anonyma*, c. *“Cum libros de Família primum, secundum atque teriam suis legendos tradidisset, aegre tulit, eos inter omnes Albertos, aloquem aciosisimos, vix unum repertum fore, qui titulos librorum perlegere dignatus sit... neque potuit non stomachari, cum ex suis aliquos intueretur, qui totum illud opus palam, et una auctoris ineptissimum institutum irriderent.”* See also ibid., trans. Watkins, 10.
Alberti’s first view of the art of Donatello or Masaccio would have been in conjunction with Pisanello, Gentile da Fabriano, Cavallini and a reprise of Giotto in Rome.

Regarding artistic influence, he gleaned skills from “craftsmen, architects, shipbuilders, and even from cobblers and tailors … wishing to acquire any rare and secret knowledge contained in their arts.”\(^{114}\) Thereafter Alberti segues to painting and talks of being under the auspices of “endless discussions of literature and philosophy” while dictating, “to these friends… little works (opuscula) while he painted portraits or made a wax model of one of them,” suggesting a studio in Venice after his first sojourn to Florence in 1434:

In Venice he modeled the faces of his friends in Florence whom he had not seen for a year and whole months. He used to ask some young boy whether he recognized the image he was painting, and if it was not recognizable to a child, he denied that the painting was a work of true art. He strove to render his own features and characteristic appearance, so that, by the painted or modeled image, he might be already known to strangers who summoned him.\(^{115}\)

Here is the prelude to his claim, that “He wrote little books on painting.” Alberti does not give the names of the books. Bonucci, the first to translate the Vita into Italian, capitalizes “De pictura” as if it serves as the veritable title of the book.\(^{116}\) We do not know if the capitalization is a later redaction or Bonucci’s or Alberti’s own name of his books. Watkins offers a date of 1437 or 1438 for the Vita.\(^{117}\) The telling point regarding the year is Alberti’s mention of

\(^{114}\) Alberti, Vita anonyma, xciv. “A fabris, ab architectis, a naviculariis, ab ipsis sutoribus siscitabatur si quid nam forte rarum sua in arte et reconditum quasi peculiare servarent.” See also ibid., trans. Watkins, 10.

\(^{115}\) Alberti, Vita anonyma, cii. “Familiares arcessbat, quibus cum de literis, et doctrina suos habebat perpetuos sermones, illisque excribentibus dictabat opuscula, et un eorum effigies pingebat aut fingebat cera. Apud Venetias vultus amicorum, qui Florentiae adessent, expressit annum, mensesque integros postquam eos viderat. Solitus erat rogare pueros, eam ne imaginem, quam pingeret, nosserent, et negabat ex arte pictum dici, quod non illico a puris usque nosceretur. Suos vultus, propriumque simulacrum emulatus, ut ex picta fitage effigie ignotis ad se appellentibus fieret notior.”

\(^{116}\) See Bonucci, lxxxviii. Bonucci translated from a 16th-century mss in Florence, owned by the archbishop of Cortona.

modeling the faces of Florentine friends that he “had not seen for a year and whole months,” while he was in Venice. Yet the logical reason as to why Alberti has not mentioned the name of his “little books” on painting is possibly because those books had not yet been assimilated into one opus. Because neither *De pictura*, nor *Della pittura* is mentioned by name, the date of the *Vita* is thrown into question. Then again, the Latin words may be the veritable title. If this so, then the *Vita*’s reference may support the argument of *De pictura*’s being written before *Della pittura* as no addendum is offered of the book in the vernacular. In addition, the *Vita anonyma* suggests that Alberti did not master mathematics and optics in Bologna; after quitting law he could, “cultivate freely” the disciplines from “exercised intelligence rather than memory.”

**Intercoenales (Dinner Pieces)**

The *Vita anonyma* also states that he wrote “before the age of thirty, many *Intercoenales.*” Alberti possibly began these “dinner pieces” in the late 1420’s in Bologna, yet they were never published in his lifetime. The dedication speaks to the influence of his friends, one of whom was scientist and astronomer, Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli (1397-1482):

> I have begun to collect my Dinner Pieces into short books so that they may be more easily read over dinners and drinks. You treat diseased bodies as other physicians do, sweetest Paolo, with bitter medicines which even provoke nausea. But I, through writings, provide a way of relieving the mind’s maladies...  

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118 Ibid., cxiv. “Verum quod sine literis esse non posset, annos natus quaturo et viginti ad physicam se, atque mathematicae artes contulit; eas enim satis se posse colere non diffidebat; siquidem in his ingenium magis, quam memoriam exercondam intelligeret.” See also Watkins, *Vita*, p. 8.


120 Alberti, *Intercoenales*, “Ho cominciato a raccogliere le nostre ‘Intercenali’ in una serie di agili volumetti, perché
Toscanelli studied medicine at Padua’s university receiving his degree around 1418, while Alberti was studying with Barzizza. He also excelled at geography, cartography, mathematics and astronomy. As optics were contingencies of science at the studium, Toscanelli, by way of Vittorino, may have been another opening for Alberti’s first contact with the discipline.\textsuperscript{121} Ugolino Verino, in the latter fifteenth century, penned a poem to Toscanelli’s merits with optics.\textsuperscript{122} According to Antonio Manetti (1423-1497), Toscanelli was also friend to Brunelleschi.\textsuperscript{123} Allessandro Parronchi argues that Brunelleschi learned optics from Toscanelli, partnering in the advance of fixed perspective and that Toscanelli penned \textit{De perspectiva}, sometimes attributed to Alberti.\textsuperscript{124}

\textbf{Virtue: Polyclitus, Praxiteles and Phidias}

The classical ideal of virtue, fame and glory, now revived by the humanists since Petrarch, are the most recurrent themes in these early works of Alberti. Alberti’s ‘glory’ and the acquisition of immortality manifests once more with his resurrecting ‘Lepidus,’ his old pseudonym from \textit{Philodoxeos}. The running theme of Book 1 of \textit{Intercoenales} includes the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{121} Siraisi, 67-77.

\textsuperscript{122} Ugolino Verino, \textit{De illustratione urbis Florentiae}. “Quid Paulum memorem? Terramqui norat et astra, qui prospective libros descriptis, et artem, egregius medicus, multos a morte reduxit.”

\textsuperscript{123} Antonio di Tuccio Manetti, \textit{The Life of Brunelleschi}, trans. Catherine Enggass (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), 54-55. “Master Paolo del Pozzo Toscanelli… who was, he said, on familiar terms with him [Brunelleschi] for more than forty years.” (… quantunque maestro Pagholo… dal pozo Toscanelli che lo pratico piu di quaranta anni secondo chi diceva.)

\end{footnotesize}
Alberti’s continuing address of moral questions and the conflict between virtue and fortune are an echo of Seneca and Petrarch. Religion is an invective that follows the model of Horace, satirizing the habit of asking gods to answer prayers; it is symptomatic of the dearth of orthodox religious content in all of Alberti’s writings. In Virtue, the goddess is assumed, tellingly, to be the champion of the creative soul. In a dialogue between Virtue and Mercury, the goddess (Virtue) includes, among the great philosophers as her protégés and leagues, Polyclitus, Praxiteles and Phidias, the most noted of Greek purveyors of perfect classical sculpture. As Virtus is driven from the heavens by Fortune (while Marc Antony attacks Cicero), the only personages mentioned trying to defend themselves – with their artistic instruments – are “Polyclitus with his brush or Phidias with his chisel… who could hardly defend themselves against fierce armed men.”

Herein the visual arts are virtually synonymous with virtue.

The idea of Mercury conversing with Virtue comes from a fifth-century work by Martianus Capella, The Marriage of Philology and Mercury. In Book I, Mercury, looking for a wife, councils with Virtue. In Book II, Mercury weds Philology with ancient persons present, fictional and real, including Orpheus, Plato, Archimedes, Pythagorus and Epicurus. The next chapters each personify the seven liberal arts. Sculptors are exalted in the chapter on Geometry as the perpetrators of keeping Pallas “in a habit and attitude of learning.”

Capella’s work was

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126 See Jarzombek, On Leon Battista Alberti, 26. See also Mancini, Opera Inedita et Pauca Separatim Impressa di Leon Battista Alberti (Florence: Sansoni, 1890), 122-224. “Neque enim Polycletus peniculo, aut Phidias scalpro...”


often used as an introductory text for learning Latin, Capella clearly informed Alberti’s preliminary education in visual art. For learning Latin, Capella clearly informed Alberti’s preliminary education in visual art.

**Intercoenales and Lucian**

Alberti takes on the satire of Lucian, whose influence is evident in the *Intercoenales* with Alberti’s use of irony and acerbity. In addition, Lucian’s use of *ékphrasis*, in his essay *Imagines*, elucidating the art of words to bring pictures to mind in the retort of Lycinus to Polistratus:

> Are you aware what you have demanded? It is not in the power of words, not mine, certainly, to call into being a portrait so marvellous, to which hardly Apelles or Zeuxis or Parrhasius would have seemed equal, or even perhaps a Phidias or an Alcamenes. As for me, I shall but dim the lustre of the original by the feebleness of my skill.

Exactly when Italian humanists took hold of Lucian is still a matter of conjecture. As addressed in Chapter 2, Chrysoloras may have first introduced the ancient writer to the Renaissance when that humanist began his three-year stint lecturing in Florence. Perhaps more notably Alberti became enamored of the satirist under Barzizza. Barzizza had no copies of Lucian listed in his inventory. However, to reprise, Chrysoloras’s amanuensis, Guarino, translate Lucian into Latin, and Guarino was a guest at Barzizza’s school during Alberti’s tenure as a student there.

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129 Mercer, 13, 114.

130 See Marsh, *Dinner Pieces*.


133 Mercer, 13, 114.

134 Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, 13. There is no proof of Guarino’s returning with any Lucian works to Italy. However Guarino did ask the prelate Isodore of Kiev to send him copies of Lucian’s works and this Isodore did, born out by the inventory of the Herzog-August library in Wolfenbüttel.
Consequently Alberti may have first accessed Lucian through Barzizza, particularly considering the brevity of the material.

Lucian delivered some eighty surviving essays on philosophy, rhetorical exercises and fictional parodies. David Marsh cites a codex from Padua dating from 1400 that includes, among copies of Bruni and Vergerio, Aurispa’s translation of *Dialogues of the Dead*, a fictional discourse among dead and famous generals of antiquity on military issues and integrity. Lucian’s sobering satirical comments on philosophy and history offered Alberti a way of commenting opinions and common sense. Alberti mentions Lucian by name in *De pictura* as well as the iconography of the painting of *Calumny* by Apelles. As a popular antique source by the time Alberti was living in Bologna, one could argue that the entire inspiration and inception of *Intercoenales* comes from Lucian.

*Pictura*

In the piece entitled *Pictura*, Alberti invents a cycle of frescoes on a temple wall dedicated to *Fortune*, including the characters of *Ambition, Contention, Injury, Vengeance*, and *Calamity*. On a separate wall are contrary vices and virtues in opposition: *Envy vs Modesty, Calumny vs Peace of Mind, Indignation vs Protection of Virtue, Enmity vs Praise* and *Misery vs Immorality*. Alberti holds these pictures to present rewards of morality in a happy life. Alberti mentions no particular painting but only this fiction of depicted morality. The piece shows Alberti’s fascination with antique archetypes and his marked preference for classical, non-


136 Alberti, *De pictura*, III.53, 94-95. “… illa Calumniae descriptio quam ab Apelle pictam refert Lucianus.”

137 Alberti, “Paintings,” in *Intercoenales*, ed. Marsh, 54-56. “… aliquid voluptatis et ad bene beateque vivendum admonimenti.”
Christian and profane topics in iconography during a period of pictorial religiosity that predates Botticelli by a half century. Whether Giotto in the *Cappella Scrovegni* inspired these personifications of moral qualities is a matter of conjecture – as there were certainly no images of the sort in Bologna. In any case, the fanciful archetypes reveal a precocity that pre-dated even his years in Rome, although the piece may have been written in Rome in the early 1430s before Alberti arrived in Florence. The works were probably begun in Bologna and continued on into Alberti’s years in Rome as well as Florence and his reprised time in the two former cities.

**Visual Context: Antique, Medieval and Early Modern Sources**

**Nicola Pisano**

We must now hold Alberti’s period of development in Bologna to consist not only of an increasing immersion in science and letters but in visual aesthetics as well. Antique images aside, there was art in Bologna that Alberti would have scrutinized. Nicola Pisano left evidence of his study of antique realism taken from the sarcophagi in the Campo Santo in Pisa. Perhaps a depiction of *Meleager* from a sarcophagus informed his 1260s *Massacre of the Innocents* on the Duomo Pulpit in Siena, a masterpiece of neo-antique molding and possibly the first of western art since the fall of Rome to depict Romans in the dress of antiquity (Fig. 4.7; See Figs. 0.13, 0.48, 0.49). He would also bequeath to Bologna a major opus in antique replication.

More than any artist before Donatello, Pisano infused both compositional and substantive elements of classicism into sculpture. The corpus of his works is the foreshadowing of a Renaissance to come. Perhaps born in Apulia, Pisano grew up around sarcophagi in southern Italy preserved in the age of Frederick II, inceptor of Padua’s political arm by means of Ezzelino.

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Frederick’s period of influence coincides with the beginnings of the Franciscan and Dominican mendicant orders, the former order being the first substantial engine in art realism, absorbed from antiquity and manifested through painting and sculpture. This initial break with Byzantine abstraction, marking the return to an emotional humanism in pictorial and sculptural arts, based upon the preaching of the human and suffering nature of Christ, manifests itself in the Franciscan iconography of the *Cristo doloroso* (*Cristus patiens*) genre of Giunta Pisano (active 1229-1254) and Copo di Marcovaldo (1225-1274) (FigS. 4.8 and 4.9). Depictions of the dead and dying on Roman sarcophagi and other antique remains, evident in most of Italy but particularly in the Campo Santo of Pisa inspired a vivacious reality of physical torsion in the depiction of pain.139

With Pisano, the images of sarcophagi come to life again on the pulpit of Pisa (1260) a copy of *Phaedra* becomes Mary in the *Adoration of the Shepherds*, (Figs. 4.10 and 4.11), a Dionysus perhaps informs Simeon on the pulpit’s *Presentation at the Temple* (Figure 4.12) and a Hercules is *Fortitude*, replete with lion, below the pulpit (FiG. 4.13). Neither Alberti, nor any other youthful disciple of visual art and ancient iconography, could have lived in Bologna without marveling at the compositional presence in Pisano’s reliefs on the *Tomb of St. Domenico* in the church of the latter’s namesake (Fig. 4.14). Along with the aforementioned pulpit in the Duomo of Siena, Pisano replicated his practice of imbuing Christian iconography with classical motifs. On the San Domenico tomb, Romans are attired in cuirass and toga just as Altichiero would do later in Padua (Fig. 4.15). There are, in addition, no haloes over the heads of saints. Pisano recaptures the specificity and power of classical art, and Alberti, with his obsession for

antique replication could not have missed the importance of it. As Weiss declares about Pisano’s apogee of physical realism; “to find a parallel we must wait for Donatello.”

**Professor’s Tomb and Manuscript Illumination**

In considering the medieval works in Bologna, which may have had an impact on Alberti’s is the unique genre, the so-called *professor’s tomb*, funerary reliefs also styled in imitation of Roman sarcophagi (See Fig. 0.39). Early Quattrocento Bologna was also distinguished as a center for both religious and secular manuscript illumination due to the University’s demand for books (See Fig. 0.41). Dante’s *Purgatorio* in the voice of illuminator Oderisi of Gubbio heralds the skill of manuscript illuminator Franco Bolognese:

> O, asked I him, art thou not Oderisi; Agobbio’s honor, and honor of that art, which is in Paris called illuminating? “Brother,” said he, “more laughing are the leaves; touched by the brush of Franco Bolognese; all his the honor now, and mine in part.”

Oderisi invokes the famed metaphor of Giotto and Cimabue:

> O vain renown of human enterprise; Not lasting longer than the green on trees; Unless succeeded by an uncouth age! In painting Cimabue thought to hold; The field; now Giotto is acclaimed by all; So that he has obscured the former’s fame.

Late-Trecento Bolognese illuminators, such as Vitale da Bologna and the unknown *Il Illustratore* (active 1340’s) were noted for precocious spatial definition and physical torsion (Fig. 4.16).

Manuscript illumination moved into an early naturalism by way of works from artists like

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142 *Ibid.*, 91-99. “O vana gloria delle umane posse: Com’ poco verde in sulla cima dura, ; Se non è giunta dall’etati grosse! Credette Cimabue nella pintura; Tener lo campo, ed ora ha Giotto il grido; Si che la fama di colui oscura.”
Niccolò di Giacomo da Bologna (d. 1403) and by Maestro dell Iniziali di Bruxelles (active circa 1415), whose sophistication in light and physical action is revealed in illuminations for classical texts including that of Seneca’s *Tragedie*.\(^{143}\)

**Progression Through the Fourteenth Century**

The late Gothic, like Giovanni Pisano’s prophets on the Duomo of Siena, allowed the statue to bend and peer down, releasing it from its Romanesque pedestal. Aquinas revived Aristotle’s declination of space. Just as the Romanesque melded object and space, as the object was liberated by plasticity, so the artistic sphere was liberated.\(^{144}\) If this plasticity of object with space gives way to Giotto and Duccio, both of whom, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, created proportional interior space, then their inheritor, Ambrosio Lorenzetti turned the floor of his 1344 *Annunciation* into an exponential signifier of a potential vanishing point and subsequent unity (Fig. 4.17). In another Lorenzetti picture, *Presentation in the Temple*, even though corner and middle orthogonals create attempts at two vanishing points, the picture progresses toward a sophisticated unity of space through both ceiling and floor differential (Figure 4.18).

The process was adopted in Northern Europe from Trecento Italy by painters such as Jan Van Eyck, Dirk Bouts and Pietrus Cristus. Panofsky argued, however, that the breakthrough never really occurred in the north, as can be seen in Roger Van der Weyden, (1400-1464)) who, despite a sophistication in draftsmanship, lacked a spatial unifying vanishing point. Van Eyck came to closest to realizing integration of both horizontal and vertical plane.\(^{145}\) Particularly with Van Eyck the volume of an entire picture would be freed from the front plane of the picture as

\(^{143}\) Drogin, 250, 301, and n.36. This work is now in the Cleveland Museum of Art.

\(^{144}\) Ibid., 53.

\(^{145}\) Ibid. 142-143.
exemplified by the *Madonna of Canon van der Paele*, a picture that Alberti may possibly have seen in its inception during his sojourn in the company of Cardinal Albergati, which will be dealt with presently (Fig. 4.19). As the picture seems to include the viewer by seeming extension of perpendicular space – the picture space seems to *cut off* where the viewer stands – imagined space is now included in two-dimensional continuity. One would expect that absolute fixed perspective would have sprung forth in northern Europe but it did not. In any case, volume and infused pictorial space were by means of Pisano and in even more so with Van Eyck in the Netherlands when Alberti arrives.

**Jacopo della Quercia and San Petronia**

Despite disillusionment, Alberti, as Mancini said, “held tight to new humanist friends and all that they could give him.”\(^{146}\) These friends may have been physically real, or antique authors or artists themselves. In that regard, there is an example of Renaissance art in Bologna that must be addressed as a most probable visual source for Alberti. One of the landmark originators who did most to advance the depiction of naturalistic and neo-classical physiognomy – probably influenced by Pisano – is Jacopo della Quercia, whose work began in Bologna during Alberti’s final years there. If, as we said, a certain understanding by Alberti, of the concept of *historia* came from Quintilian, his introduction to the neo-classical *nude* as a component of excellent *historia* was first sourced in that city.\(^{147}\) Bologna possibly offered Alberti the formative sense of visual aesthetics regarding the nude by way of the very same work that, by its classical realism, would so impress Michelangelo – the panels of *Creation* and *Temptation* (See Figs. 0.37 and 0.38) as well as *Expulsion* for the doors of San Petronio by Jacopo della Quercia for the *Porta*

\(^{146}\) Mancini, *Vita*, 61. “*A Bologna Battista strinse numerose amicizie*…”

\(^{147}\) Quint, *Inst*. 2.4.2., 280-281.
Magnifica (Figs. 4.20 and 4.21). Along with New Testament figures on the architrave and the Virgin and Child in the lunette above the portal, the Genesis cycle on the pilasters that frame the door reveal classicizing elements and detail of physiognomy that mark out the reliefs as a cornerstone in Renaissance sculpture significant to Alberti’s visual standard in De pictura. Della Quercia’s nudes, moreover, resemble two from antiquity, a gem of Diomedes and Paladium or a relief of Hercules in the Garden of the Hesperides, both of which were visible in Rome while Alberti was in service for Pope Eugenius IV (Figs. 4.22 and 4.23). 148

Alberti and Northern Europe: Niccolò Albergati

Franco Borsi is among scholars who hold that Alberti’s employment with Cardinal Niccolò Albergati included travels to northern Europe with the cardinal. Appointed Bishop of Bologna in 1417, Cardinal Albergati, first visited Flanders as early as 1422 as emissary to Pope Martin V in the attempt to settle the arguments of succession in Burgundy between France and England. 149 He returned to Bologna in 1423, and, in 1426, was further ordained as Bishop of Santa Croce of Gerusalemme in Rome. 150 By 1427 Albergati was in Milan brokering peace on behalf of Pope Martin V between Duke Filippo and the contingency of Venice and Florence. In 1431, almost immediately after the election of Eugenius IV, the pope sent Albergati to attend the peace negotiations between Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy and Charles VII, king of

148 Bober and Rubinstein, 123. The Diomedes, found by Niccoli on a child and purchased from the father (Vespasiano da Bisticci), was bought in 1437 by patriarch of Aquileia and, later, Pope Paul IV as well as Lorenzo di Medici.

149 Ercole Maria Zanotti, Vita del B. Niccolò Albergati (Bologna: Girolamo Corciolani, 1757), XI, 129-140.

150 Riccardo Parmeggiani, Il Vescovo e il Capitolo il Cardinale Niccolò Albergati e i Canonici di S. Pietro di Bologna (1417-1443). Un’inedita Visita Pastorale alla Cattedrale (1437) (Bologna: Deputazione di Storia Patria 2009), 14 n.28, 16 and 17. See also Zanotti, 69. The exact day of his appointment as cardinal is debated. Zanotti has a memorial for Albergati arguing July 4, 1417; Anno D: 1417 die dominica, 4 Julio Frater Niccolaus de Albergatis de Bononia de Ordine Fratum de Certosâ fuit consecratus factus Episcopus Bonoia,qui est valdè contentus.
Eschewing the provincial life of Burgundy, Philip the Good (1396-1467), Duke of Burgundy held his court, for the most part, in Bruges. His lineage from the House of Valois had inherited Low Country territories upon the death of Count Louis II of Flanders in 1384 and the subsequent marriage of Louis’ heiress, Margaret III (1350-1405) to the first Valois Duke, Philip the Bold (1342-1404), grandfather of Philip the Good.

By April of 1432, Albergati was subsequently serving the Council of Basel in the Hussite dilemma and papal supremacy. Franco Borsi argues that because there are no documents as to Alberti’s whereabouts from 1428 to 1431, the humanist accompanied Albergati on the latter’s diplomatic missions in France and the Netherlands during those years. Alberti may have also attended him in Basel for a time. One may surmise that Alberti’s introduction to Albergati was a result of Barzizza’s friendship with the cardinal. Albergati visited Barzizza in Milan in the early 1420s. Subsequently both were in Bologna, and Barzizza thereby possibly generated Alberti’s employment by the bishop. Listed in Bologna in 1426, Barzizza was on the list of lecturers as “M. Guasperinus de Pergamo deputatus ad lecturam Rethorice et Poesie” (“Gasparino Barzizza from Bergamo is appointed lecturer in rhetoric and poetry”). Mercer argues that Barzizza first met Albergati in Milan in the early 1420s and again in Bologna, around 1427. This meeting, possibly with Alberti in Albergati’s company, during the very period that former student and Alberti classmate, Filelfo was teaching Greek at the university. In 1430, Panormita wrote of his concern for Barzizza; “Gasparino is now in old age and moved into ill health.”

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151 Zanotti, XIX, 205.
152 Franco Borsi, 316.
153 Dallari, 53-56. “M. Guasperinus de Pergamo deputatus ad lecturam Rethorice et Poesie.”
154 Mercer, 135.
155 Domenico Magni, Gasparino Barzizza: Una Figura del Primo Umanesimo (Bergamo: Magni, 1937), 221.
Both meetings may have set the foundation for Alberti’s papal employment as even the latter with Filelfo occurred while Alberti resided in Bologna. Hence, a convincing reason for withdrawing from the university was the pursuit of a career with Albergati. Not only with the Veneto lords during his stint in Padua at both the *studium* and his private school, as well as the Visconti in Pavia, Barzizza was welcomed in association with Cardinal Albergati, first as apostolic secretary to the Council of Constance in 1417 and later in both Milan and Bologna.\(^{156}\) This work must have occurred during a hiatus of commitments at the *studium* in Padua and at his private school where Alberti was possibly still in attendance. As Alberti would work with Albergati in Bologna, indeed Barzizza may have very well been the agent of introduction between Albergati and Alberti in Bologna in the later 1420s. Though Albergati returned to Flanders in 1435 to assist with the Treaty of Arras between Burgundy and France, the cardinal had employed Alberti from probably around 1428 and possibly earlier.

Borsi points out that Alberti’s drawings in *De re aedificatoria* reveal the humanist’s comprehension of northern Gothic architecture possibly from first-hand experience across the Alps.\(^{157}\) In the introduction of the book, Alberti mentions no painting but only references an overview of building; yet in Book 6, chapter 8, Alberti refers to a first-hand account of people ice-skating in Germany.\(^{158}\) In several other accounts, he speaks of building materials in Belgium

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"*Gasparinus hic senio iam et invalitudine confectus.*"


\(^{157}\) Ibid.

and France that read like first-hand experience. The books’ drawings support Alberti’s comprehension of northern Gothic architecture from experience across the Alps.159

**Portraiture and Van Eyck**

In *De pictura* Alberti remands that the painter who relies solely upon his own imagination will develop bad habits as opposed to the painter who distills from all of Nature, in order to “echo Nature” (*conetur naturam*).160 This passage includes Alberti’s first reference to “well-known men” in a *historia* or *portraits*, to be addressed later.161 In his last chapter of Book III, and final mention of *portraiture*, Alberti implores the student, if satisfied with his treatise to depict the face [*faciem meam*] of Alberti himself; “If they are useful and helpful to painters, I ask only that as a reward for my pains they *paint my face* in their istoria in such a way that it seems pleasant and I may be seen a student of the art.”162

Giotto pioneered the donor portrait in early modern painting with his depiction of Enrico in the *Last Judgment* on the exit wall of that family’s Capella Scrovegni (FigS. 4.24 and 4.25). We have already argued against the assertions that portraiture, as a genre, began in Italy with Masaccio’s work in the Brancacci chapel (See Fig. 3.36).163 Single figurative portraiture, on the other hand, although maturing with the likes of Antonello da Messina (1430-1479) evolved in

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159 Franco Borsi, 375.

160 Alberti, *De pictura*, III.56, 100-101. “… ut quod in quaque esset formae muliebris laudatissimum, id in pictura referret. Prudenter is quidem, nam pictoribus nullo proposito exemplari quod imitentur… Qui vero ab ipsa natura omnia suscipere consueverit, is manum ita exercitatum reddet ut semper quicquid conetur naturam ipsam sapiat.”

161 Ibid.

162 Ibid., III.63, 104-106. “Ea si eiusmodi sunt ut pictoribus commodum atque utilitatem aliquam afferant, hoc potissimum laborum meorum premium exposco ut faciem meam in suis historiis pingant, quo illos memores beneficii et gratos esse ac me artis studiosum fuisse posteris praedicent.”

163 Pope-Hennessy, 4-7, 304-307, and n. 13, 38, and 51. Pope-Hennessy refutes Vasari that the heads were painted from the life, but makes no mention of Altichiero, Petrarch’s contemporary, who painted that humanist from life.
the Netherlands, possibly due in part to the dilated possibilities in plasticity with oil painting in depicting flesh contours of a human face (Fig. 4.26). The entire genre of the bust-single-figure portrait was blessed by the plasticity and realism of Van Eyck, who was appointed, in 1422, valet du chambre and court painter to Philip the Good, perhaps the grandest art patron in Europe of his day. We know that Van Eyck was painting portraits as earlier as 1428, as in that year he is documented to have been in Portugal executing a portrait of King John I’s daughter, the Infanta Isabella, (lost) for Philip’s approval, pending the latter’s marriage to the king’s daughter.164

During this period, Albergati presumably sat for the portrait by Van Eyck (See Fig. 0.42). Van Eyck also executed a silverpoint study of Albergati before 1432 when the cardinal was in Brugge (Fig. 4.27).165 From the provenance, a 1659 inventory of art collector Archduke Leopold William of Austria, W.H. J. Weale ascertained in 1904 that a portrait of a cardinal by Van Eyck, now in Vienna and noted as Ein Contrafalt van Oehlfarb auf Holcz des Cardinals von Sancta Cruce, Original von Johan van Eyckh was that of Albergati.166 A seventeenth-century art collector in Antwerp, Peter Stevens, first recorded the work, “representing the Cardinal of the Holy Cross,” in the possession of the Duke.167 The problem with the latter account is that Stevens actually dates the painting to 1438, and the work itself has no date.168 As the solitary bishop of the Holy Cross in Van Eyck’s lifetime, the painting probably depicts Albergati, well-

164 Richard Vaughn, Philip the Good, Apogee of Burgundy (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), 154-155, and n 2. Vaughn cites the Inventaire de la Librarie de Philip le Bon, 1420.

165 Meiss, “Jan van Eyck’s Nicholas Albergati Portrait,” Burlington Magazine 97, no. 626 (1955): 45-147, 207-218. This dissertation follows Meiss; the study came before the painting.

166 William Henry James Weale, The Van Eycks and Their Art (London: John Lane, 1912), 103-104.

167 Elizabeth Dhanens, Hubert and Jan van Eyck (New York: Alpine Fine Arts Collection, 1980), 286.

known in his own time for reorganizing clerical discipline within the bishopric in Bologna as well as astute diplomacy in northern Europe. Indeed, shortly after his demise the cardinal was beatified. A further panel by Van Eyck and Petrus Cristus, *Saint Jerome in His Study*, is also considered homage to Albergati (Fig. 4.28).

If indeed Alberti accompanied Albergati, he would have probably witnessed at least the beginnings of Albergati’s portrait as well Van Eyck’s portraiture for Philip the Good (Fig. 4.29). Van Eyck’s access as a court painter to Philip the Good and his aristocratic desire for court accessories rooted the genre of portrait painting in northern Europe.\(^\text{169}\) Despite Van Eyck’s remarkable sophistication, Renaissance portraiture was already present in Padua, as we have shown, in depictions by Altichiero of Petrarch, Della Seta, the Lupi family, Roman emperors possibly taken from coins as well as portrait medals of the Carrara.\(^\text{170}\) Alberti’s ideas about the portrait, in sum, were almost certainly first informed by Giotto, Altichiero and then by Van Eyck where Alberti may have first seen remarkable attempts of fixed perspective at work. In Van Eyck’s *Madonna with Canon van der Paele* the workings of spatial proportions conjoin with donor portraiture – an idiom Alberti would have not witnessed since Giotto in Padua.

Works in progress or works finished while Alberti was there may have also included the famous *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini*, wherein Arnofini is standing with his wife (Fig. 4.30). Karl Doeblemann (1864-1926) in 1906, first remarked that Van Eyck had not yet figured out the specificity of orthogonals, thus the convergence of physical space resulted in *vanishing areas*

\(^{169}\) See Millard Meiss, “*Nicholas Albergati and the Chronology of Jan van Eyck’s Portraits,*” *Burlington Magazine* 4, no. 590 (1952), 137-146.

\(^{170}\) Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, New York, 59-60. Panofsky asserts that Van Eyck was probably the first to liberate “three dimensional space from its ties” to a two-dimensional picture plane.
In 1991 James Elkins argued that the *Arnolfini* incorporates four separate vanishing areas. Panofsky regarded the *Arnolfini* as skewed, because the work incorporated the same number of points. Nonetheless, Elkins rightfully points out that this only reflects the obsession in early twentieth-century scholarship with an entire work centralized by one single vanishing point, thus defining a picture as a solitary space. Whereas Van Eyck, realizing that a single vanishing point might force the floor, windows and ceiling into a problematic diminution of interior elements relegated separate perspectives in four domains – ceiling, floor and two walls. This system was replicated in his *Lucca Madonna* (Fig. 4.31). Separate surfaces disseminated in perspective are conjoined others. Elkins calls this a “Chinese box seeing” event, that enlarges or brings closer elements like windows that would diminish drastically into a tunnel effect if absolute linear perspective was employed. Thus, although Van Eyck may not have finessed the exact precepts of fixed perspective, he had a precise approach to depth and volume that speaks of a remarkable eye for proportion, and his stunning incorporation of several vanishing points must be considered as formidable, if not directly influential upon Alberti’s redaction of the technique from paintings he observed. If we consider that Alberti accompanied Albergati to Bruges then he would have marveled at these principles at work with official painter of the Burgundy court.

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174 Elkins, 62.

Conclusion to Chapter 4

Of the recurring motifs in Philodoxeos, De commodis, and pieces in the Intercoenales, Fame and Glory are most ubiquitous. Alberti’s glory is not the ephemeral entity of contemporary leverage, but immortality. After Philodoxeos, a copy of Lucian satire, then De commodis, an invective modeled on Cicero and Petrarch, and, possibly, the Intercoenales – brisk satiric conversations taken from sources like Capella’s Marriage of Mercury and Philology, Alberti experience with visual art would evolve observing the gifts of Pisano and della Quercia whose motifs were obviously inspired by antique sculpture. On the one hand, the deepening study in mathematics that Alberti had begun in Padua and further gleaned in Bologna from both textual and visual study would support his address of single point perspective. However the city and the studium ultimately bequeathed a resolute dissatisfaction in a program that had yet to embrace antiquity in the context to which Alberti had become accustomed in Padua. Hence, his experience with both city and school would have a negative effect on his psyche and aesthetics, these results evident in his works written there. While his experience in Padua had given the language freedom in the extrinsic intent of antique discourse, at Bologna the liberal arts were still remanded to jurists. Antiquity in historical time was not present within the paradigm of Alberti’s university education. Consequently, Alberti left possibly as early as 1426, in the company and employ of Cardinal Albergati to witness further breakthroughs in pictorial realism from the likes of Van Eyck in northern Europe. Alberti’s cache of humanism and geometry – along with his accelerated comprehension of pictorial elements and antique visual ideals – absorbed in Padua and then in Bologna would conclude with his intellectual and visual experience Rome.
Chapter 5
Alberti in Rome
There is no documentation as to Alberti’s whereabouts from the mid 1420s to 1431. The most thorough source is still Mancini. Alberti came to Rome around 1431 and perhaps as early as 1428. In considering both the intellectual and visual environment in which Alberti worked in Rome before his arrival in Florence, three central themes become apparent. First, regarding Alberti’s personal humanist development, one needs to consider that, even though he was employed in Rome by the Pope – unlike the humanist work of Petrarch and others before Alberti – there is no direct reference whatsoever to Christianity in De pictura. Consequently, this chapter will first contextualize Alberti within the ecclesiastic domain by attending to the paradox of a religiosity that he appeared to publicly embrace as an employee of the Catholic Church, yet personally reject as humanist. Secondly, early-1400s Rome was only in the embryo of its own Renaissance. Humanism was initially obsessed with recreating the city’s visual past, that is to say the location and function of its buildings. Hence, the chapter will briefly outline the textual development of the topography of the city. Lastly, Rome, possibly more than any locale, furnished Alberti with, perhaps, his largest assemblage of visual works for De pictura. Therefore, this final chapter will address the antique intellectual sources for several motifs that appear in De pictura – the most ubiquitous and crucial of which is that of historia. By addressing the sequential deployment of the term within De pictura, the chapter will conclude with a corpus of medieval and early Renaissance works that point to the historia which Alberti deemed deserving of “laudare et admirari,” as well as those works underpinning his counsel and admonition against inferior historia.  

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1 Alberti, De pictura, II.40, 78-79.
Intellectual Context

Alberti and the Church

The chancery (curia) of Pope Eugenius IV employed scriptores or abbreviators who wrote, edited, and glossed papal bulls; Alberti was hired as such, possibly thanks to the assistance of his friend, Lapo da Castiglionchio, but more likely, as Mancini believes, through the intervention of Albergati who had met Alberti via Barzizza.¹ Alberti’s attempt to elevate painting to the dominion of art – by quoting the ancients, using the form, language and moral tenets of the ancients, including science and mathematics accepted as art by the ancients – was the humanist attempt to recover a way of thinking that pre-dated Constantine and the conversion of Rome to Christianity. In fact, to uphold the values of Cicero, Quintilian, Seneca and Terence, as worthy goals for the modern man, Alberti, like others, risked criticism for flirting too openly with paganism. Alberti never mentions “God” and only alludes to Christ as the Apostles’ “friend.”³ When the divine appears in his writing, he only refers, in classicizing style, to “the gods.”⁴ Referring to a hero-painter of antiquity, Zeuxis, who parted with his works without recompense because they were beyond monetary value (pretio emi non possent), Alberti delivers classically rhetorical hyperbole, insisting that Zeuxis “behaved like a god among mortals.”⁵

Venetian humanist Pietro Dolfin (1444-1525), in a letter to his friend, Cardinal Pietro Barozzi (1441-1507), Bishop of Padua, defended his desire for transcripts (cum pro transcribendis Leonis

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¹ Mancini, Vita, 85. “Si può supporre che intorno al 1428, anno in cui Battista probabilmente si laureò, il questore lo impiegasse presso il cardinale Aleman legato di Bologna, seppure non lo collocò subito presso l’Albergati, nella cui famiglia forse il giovane dottore si infervorò sempre più del culto.” See also Grafton, Leon Battista Alberti, 48-59.

³ Alberti, De pictura, II.42, 82-83. “Giottus undecim metu et stupore percussos ob socium...”

⁴ Ibid., II.25, 60-61. “Quod vero pictura deos expresserit quos gentes venerentur, maximum id quidem mortalibus donum fuisset censendum est... See also ibid., II.27, 62-63.

⁵ Ibid., II, 25, 58-59. “... quasi alterum sese inter mortals deum praestaret.”
Baptistae opusculis) of Alberti’s work. Barozzi found Alberti irreligious, yet Dolfin argued the lack of piety on the page as not necessarily a stance against Christ.

Alberti, however, despite papal employment and spurred on in part by his excellent humanist training, was divesting classical learning from its medieval and religious characteristics. Jarzombek suggests that in Alberti’s works, before and including De pictura, an underlying Deist ethic suggests that the Church in its institutional form emerges as an entity that is spiritually defunct. Alberti knew to tread lightly over this ground, as his critical subtext resembled that of Marsiglio of Padua, condemned as a heretic in 1327, in part for his advocacy of separation of church from state. Nevertheless, Alberti, in ecclesiastic employment as early as the mid 1420s and for many years to come, became a canon with hardly a sentence of pious discourse to his name. While his contemporaries at least referred to a notion of Christian dogma, there is more of Stoicism than Christianity in Alberti’s corpus – and no Christian piety at all in De pictura. The book is remarkable in its total refusal of ecclesiastics or ecclesiastical concerns.

On the other hand, as an abbreviatore apostolico, a scribe of papal letters in Latin, Alberti would have access to any monuments, both textual and visual, that remained of Rome’s antiquity. The ruins of Rome, considered a quaint and somewhat irrelevant historical backdrop, even in the day of Petrarch, was beginning to reawaken a reverence and enthusiasm among early Quattrocento humanists during Alberti’s early days in the city. That humanist reverence would continue to grow to almost obsessive proportions in some humanist circles both within and

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6 Pietro Dolfin, Ep. 208 in Veterum Scriptorum et Monumentorum Historicorum, Dogmaticorum, Moralium, Amplissima Collectio, vol. 3, eds. Edmund Martène and Ursin Durand (Paris: Montelant, 1726), 1160-1161. “... non videri te forsitan mihi debere adeo occupatum, cum pro transscribendis Leonis Baptistae opusculis; valde fueris follicitus, non ego sane hoc versor animo, neque talis mihi succurrat cogitatio.” See also King, 9

7 Jarzombek, On Leon Battista Alberti, 59-63...

8 Ibid., 60-63.
beyond the city itself, throughout Alberti’s life until his death in 1472. The passion for Rome’s antiquity would have the city completely reborn by the beginning of the following century.

The Topography of Rome

Both Valla’s *Elegantiae* (1440s) and Biondo’s *Roma instaurata* (1435) would transform Latin philology and archaeology within the wider body of humanist learning. These landmarks, written after Alberti’s arrival, were, nonetheless, to some extent the product of an intellectual movement in Rome of the early fifteenth century, which manifested largely in the humanist attempt to recreate the city’s topography in Antiquity. The prelate Alberto Alberti (d. 1445 related distantly to Leon Battista) lamented the fact that in the city of his day “modern buildings… are many but rotten. The beautiful Rome is a ruin.”

As we saw in chapter 1, Da Fiano, as Chancellor, had escorted Vergerio through the ruins similarly complaining about the entropy and neglect he had found. Da Fiano’s protégé, Cencio de’ Rustici (1380/90-1445), present with Poggio at St. Gall during the rediscovery of Quintilian’s *Institutio*, wrote to the chancellor in 1416 at the Council of Constance, pleading with him to help the salvaging of antiquity, marked by the disrepair of the antique texts. The letter further attests to the current thinking about Rome’s beauty and abandonment shortly before Alberti’s arrival:

But when we [Poggios and Bartholomeus Montepolitianus and I] carefully inspected the nearby tower of the church of St. Gall in which countless books were kept like captives and the library neglected and infested with dust, worms, soot, and all the things associated with the destruction of books, we all burst into tears, thinking that this was the way in which the Latin language had lost its greatest glory and distinction. Truly, if this library could speak for itself, it would cry loudly: “You men who love the Latin tongue, let me not be destroyed by this woeful neglect. Snatch me from this prison in whose gloom even the bright light of the books within cannot be seen.” There were in that monastery an abbot and monks totally devoid of any knowledge of literature. What barbarous hostility to the Latin tongue! What damned dregs of humanity!

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10 Cincius Romanus, “Letter to Franciscus de Fiana (summer 1416),” in *Two Renaissance Book Hunters: The Letters of Poggius Bracciolini to Nicolaus de Niccolis*, trans. and ed. Phyllis Gordan and Walter Goodhart (New York:
Begun perhaps around 1433 before his arrival in Florence, Alberti would return to Rome and finish *Descriptio urbis Romae* by 1450. Alberti’s brief topographical essay offers no delineation – drawing or description – of any particular monument, but only serves as a mathematical field calculus for the geographical boundaries of the city. The utensils used – found in the existing manuscripts – are a “horizon” and a “spoke.” In Alberti’s table XVI, however, he lists among the churches a miss-named “Colonna Adriana” (Trajan’s column), the Arch or Basilica of Constantine, the Pantheon, the Baths of Diocletian, the pyramid (meta) of Sestius and the pyramid of Romulus (destroyed in the sixteenth century). The book was long thought to include a map once housed in the Marciana Library in Venice. However recent work by Mario Carpo and Furlan has proved that Alberti intended his book to stand alone as a method of mathematical survey to be adapted, in scale, by whoever wished to use it.

There were obviously medieval precedents for Alberti’s *Descriptio* – texts that attempted to visualize and describe the city as it was in antiquity. As early as 1158, Frederick Barbarossa’s uncle, Otto of Freising, wrote the *Gesta Frederici imperatoris* as a homage to his nephew, which included a description of extant monuments. Passages and itineraries such as these were

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12 Ibid., 30-38 and 78-79.

13 Ibid., 87.

14 Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Antiquity*, 5, n.1. Weiss sources the *Ottonis e Rabewini Gesta Friderici I*
found in the ubiquitous and anonymous *Mirabilia Romae urbis* (mid 1100s) and the *De miraculis urbis Romae* (late 1200s), assembled by one Magister Gregorius. Accompanied by circular diagrams of noted edifices like the Coliseum and Pantheon, *De miraculis* presented more of pagan than of Christian Rome; we may thus assume that Gregorius wrote for antique enthusiasts as well. For example he corrected the *Spinario*, an early first-century BCE copy of a third-to-fifth century original sculpture, as a classical piece and not the *priapus* it had been long thought to be ("*De ridiculoso simulachro Priapi...*") (Fig. 5.1).

Antiquated by the early 1400s, both books, along the anonymous *Tractatus de rebus antiquis et situ urbis Romae*, would nevertheless continue as the city’s reference guides. Poggio, Biondo and Alberti, however, were the first to attend to questions of size and measurements of Rome during the city’s fledgling early humanism. Poggio began to study Rome in depth around 1423 after a return from England. Following the vigor of Dondi and Ciriaco d’Ancona, he is the first humanist of the fifteenth century to devote a life’s work to the location, edification, epigraphy, history and mathematical proportions of the architecture in the ruins of Rome. Whereas Dondi listed the edifices, Poggio inquired more deeply into process as well. The specificity and details of gates, walls, and building methods marked Poggio’s work as a transformation of all that had been written before. He may have gleaned his obsession with the

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16 Ibid., 49. The end of Rushforth’s article contains a small inventory of Master Gregorius. “*Est etiam aliud eneum simulacrum valde ridiculosum quod Priai (pum) dicunt.*”

17 Valentini and Zucchetti eds., *Codici*, vol. 4, 110-150.
visual history of ancient Rome from Chrysoloras who, during his stay in the city in 1411, became fascinated with the reliefs on ancient monuments and their ability to reveal the events of history.

Poggio’s renowned tract on Rome, *De varietate fortunae*, begun in Rome in 1431, was not completed until 1440 and was only published in 1448 in honour of Nicholas V. Although the impact of Poggio’s work on Alberti is certainly noticeable, despite Grayson’s conjecture that it was the Rome of Poggio that was central to Alberti’s vision, the *De varietate* came late in the day, thus Alberti’s expertise in antique elemental edifice may not have derived from Poggio.

On the other hand, Biondo’s distinctive contribution to the emerging genre of topography was his precise description of particular remains. He described the remnants of the Palatine, Capitoline and Aventine as either “ruins or vineyard… more or less untouched.” The organization of his book followed the logistical plan of a copy of a text in the library of Monte Casino by one “Sextus Ruffus vir consularis.” Biondo quotes this Sextus several times, turning to his authority for instance, in order to state on one occasion that, “Sextus Ruffus in his description of Rome said that there were indeed two columns in the region of the altar Flaminianus, allowed by Antoninus Pius, to Horatius (Coclites) the hero against the Etruscans.” Biondo may have confused his source with Sextus Rufus Festus, a fourth-century historian-general under Valens, who penned an anecdotal military and political history of Rome, *Breviarium rerum gestarum populi Romani* around 379 CE.

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19 Biondo, *De Roma instaurata*, I.76, 1527, Turin, 10. “Reliquus mos aut ruinis aut vineis… multo aut pauciora integra Pallatinus mons atque Capitolinus aut aventinus…”

20 Ibid., II.76. “Sexti etia Ruffi urbis descriptio quom duas immo in urbe Roma suisse coclides colonas dicit hac in ara flaminii regione sita Antonini Pii appellat.”

Nonetheless, Biondo’s book attempted to reconstruct Republican and Imperial Rome. The escalation of archaeological activity in the city under Popes Eugenius IV, Nicholas V and Pius II would be the result of sustained humanist writing on Rome’s ancient treasures in the city’s original language – Latin. One effect of this kind of antiquarian humanist scholarship can be seen in the decision by Alberti and his patron, Giovanni Rucellai (1403-1481), to have Ruchelai’s name across Santa Maria Novella in Florence like that of Marcus Agrippa across the architrave of the Pantheon, in blatant emulation of the classical epigraphy of ancient Rome.

**Historia in Intellectual Context**

As Jarzombek maintains, in Alberti’s books we see the “setting into practice of Alberti’s cultural theory” as much as we see the art itself. Yet, if we are to understand this cultural theory in full, we must not only inquire into the core of his intellectual labors but also into the visual context shaping his theory. De pictura’s visual theory certainly represents a critical coalescence and distillation of what Alberti saw, particularly in Rome. If there is a single term within his theory that serves as the book’s core intent, it is historia. Virtually the entirety of Alberti’s vocabulary, which he employs in his precepts on composition, perspective, light, color and relief, is linked to his theory regarding historia.

We must consider for a moment Grafton’s view, adopted here, that historia is best translated as narrative. Janitschek considered, in his translation of the Italian Della pittura,

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that istoria (Italian) signified a history painting.\textsuperscript{25} Grafton rightly maintains that Janitschek was reading through the “veil… of a connoisseur of painting of the 1870s.”\textsuperscript{26} Janitschek’s use and translation of the term however was not far off the mark. He simply took it one step farther by suggesting that Alberti construed historia to mean a narrative of a time or epoch.\textsuperscript{27} Spencer, endowing the term with an intellectualism derived from the sum of Alberti’s humanist training, perhaps overwhelmed the term as a historical account of mythology.\textsuperscript{28} Indeed, just as the cursive model he used was antique Latin, so the visual inspiration of Alberti’s term may have been mythic narratives on sarcophagi. Grafton, on the other hand, demands us to use “Homer to study Homer” and look to Alberti’s complete corpus for his use of the word.\textsuperscript{29}

In conveying that what he means by historia as narrative, Alberti first uses the term in its sense of ‘historical narrative’ in Philodoxeos fabula, in which the protagonist, declares that, “all histories testify to Rome as the home of glory.”\textsuperscript{30} The source of this must by Livy, as Grafton observes.\textsuperscript{31} Alberti first encountered the works of Livy in Padua where he may have consolidated his entire understanding of history with Barzizza in Padua. The term appears in its literal sense in Alberti’s second extant work where, in De Commodis, he disclaimed having the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Janitschek, trans. Weller, xxviii. “Von der ‘Historie’ werden zuerst Mannigfaltigkeit und Reichhaltigkeit gefordert… Die ‘Historie’ soll uns erfassen, in’s Herz greifen, ja in Mitileidenschaft ziehen… dass die Träger der Historie voll starken inneren Lebens und innerer Bewegtheit seien, damit sie auch den Beschauer bewegen und rüren.”
\item \textsuperscript{26} Grafton, “Historia and Istoria, 39 and 40, n.7. As the German translation of istoria, Grafton notes that Janitschek used the term geschichsbild followed by “die höchste Leistung des Malers ist.”
\item \textsuperscript{27} Janistschek., xix-xx.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Spencer, On Painting, 1-8.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Grafton, Historia and Istoria, 44.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Alberti, Philodoxeos, 145. “quod Romam omnes historie fuisse glorie domicilium testentur…”
\item \textsuperscript{31} Grafton, Historia and Istoria, 39-46.
\end{itemize}
maturity and wisdom to write real *history*; “only those (of maturity and intelligence) could trace the ways of princes and major political events and wars.” In addition, the term appears in the *Vita anonyma*, in which Alberti says of his subject that “he liked *histories* of any sort to the degree that he thought even bad writers worth admiration.” In all three works the word holds significance distinct from the term’s usage in *De pictura*. A second use of the term in this context is found in *De re aedificatoria*, in which Alberti says that he would “look at a good painting… with as much pleasure as in reading a good *historia*.“ Hope has argued that *historia*, as a term, was not new to Alberti, but, on the contrary, was “familiar and the only one available” to him within the extant art criticism, and, furthermore that it is best translated as simply ‘story.’ While this is certainly a usage with Alberti, it is not the only one; the other elements of its meaning are drawn from his humanist background in classical historiography and rhetoric. One needs, furthermore, to think of what non-textual and purely visual sources, particularly, in Rome, that embodied the *historia* or *narrative* that Alberti envisaged in his text.

In *De pictura* Alberti introduces the term *historia* in I.21 with his criticism of “former ages,” wherein he censures his predecessors for their lack of *historia* in “painting or modeling or even sculpture.” *Historia* is then fully addressed, beginning in II.33 where the term is

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32 Alberti, *De commodis*, 41. “Condant illi quidem historiam, tractent mores principum ac gesta rerum publicarum eventusque bellorum…”

33 Alberti, *Vita anonyma*, 77. “… et in quavis re expostitam *historiam* faciebat, ut etiam malos scriptores dignos laude asseveraret.”

34 Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, ed. G. Orlandi, 1966, 609. “Et picturam ego bonam… non minore voluptate animi contemplabor, quam legero bonam *historiam*.”

35 Hope, “The Structure and Purpose of *De pictura*,” 254.

36 Alberti, *De pictura*, II.21 and 23, 57-59. All notes and references to *De pictura* are from Grayson’s Latin-English work, based upon six separate MSS. See also Grayson, “The text of Alberti’s *De pictura*,” *Italian Studies* 23 (1968): 71-92.
characterized as “the great work of the painter.” This dictum is repeated in chapter III.60, reemphasizing historia as the “most important part of the painter’s work.” To reiterate, although his prescriptions of historia acknowledge inspiration drawn from painters of antiquity such as Euphranor, Apelles and Timanthes of Cyprus, Alberti makes no mention whatsoever of any medieval or early modern artist, save the single reference to Giotto and the Navicella. Yet it is part of the book’s rhetorical strategy, one imitated from Cicero and Quintilian who had only referred to those deceased ancients of perfect example, that this should be so. From Barzizza Alberti would have understood the power of the rhetorical exemplum, which he only draws from antiquity. Quintilian demands imitatio – and the imitation of virtuous writers – as a primary exercise in learning rhetorical art; and, by analogy, it is, says Alberti, only by learning from supreme examples, drawn from the ancients, that young painters should learn. For Quintilian, there are “outstanding authors,” (summi auctores) the “best authors,” (optimi auctores), and “great authors” (magni auctores); yet even good writers may not display enough virtus as they may make mistakes. Quintilian delivers his own list of good authors. Contemporary authors are not included in Quintilian’s list. They have not stood the test of time, thus are vulnerable to misinterpretation and criticism. In similar fashion, Alberti excludes post-antique painters, save

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37 Alberti, De pictura, II.33, 70.

38 Ibid., III.60, 102.

39 Alberti, De pictura, II.42, 82-83.

40 Quint. Inst. 10.2.1, 322-323. “It cannot be doubted that the large part of art is imitation.” (Neque enim dubitari potest quin artis pars magna contineatur imitazione.)

41 Ibid., 10.1.37-131, 271-322. Quintilian gives a reading list of classics; “In view of the fact that I consider reading to be so useful, I expect most of my readers will want me to add a statement of what authors are to be read…” (Credo exacturos plerosque, cum tantum esse utilitatis in legendo iudicemus, ut id quoque adiungamus operi, qui sint legendi quae in auctore quoque praecipua virtus.)
Giotto – idealized by Dante, thus equitable to the ancients.\textsuperscript{42}

Alberti’s entire written corpus, consequently, reveals a systematic embracing of the cultural values of antiquity. Writing \textit{De pictura}, not as a primer for the painter but as a humanist manifesto, he was practically flaunting his unique humanist credentials. Ames-Lewis contends that a facility in Latin was evident in no painter of the Quattrocento, including Piero who, despite attending an abacus school and penning the Latin title of the \textit{De prospectiva pingendi} in Latin, wrote his book in the vernacular.\textsuperscript{43} Antiquity not only informed Alberti’s rhetoric but also his evaluation of visual excellence. Having encountered early masters of visual excellence in Padua, Bologna, and perhaps northern Europe, he would have found the remnants of antiquity in Rome as not only the inspiration for his architecture, but the \textit{conditio sine qua non} of \textit{historia} in painting. Although the word is not unique to \textit{De pictura}, Alberti was, as Grafton reminds, a precocious savant who chose his words carefully.\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{Visual Context}

\textbf{Antique Sources}

Grayson argued that works of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries are “undoubtedly to be considered among his [Alberti’s] sources and \textit{sculpture} perhaps more than painting.”\textsuperscript{45} Sculpture would include that of antiquity. We must note, in regards to Alberti’s exposure to antiquity, that he is among the few figures to have seen the classical legacy on both

\textsuperscript{42} Dante, \textit{Purgatorio}, XI.8.94-96. “\textit{Credette Cimabue ne la pittura tener lo campo, e ora ha Giotto il grido, sì che la fama di colui è scura}.”

\textsuperscript{43} Ames-Lewis, 19-20.

\textsuperscript{44} Grafton, \textit{Historia} and \textit{Istoria}, 46-48 and 55.

\textsuperscript{45} Alberti, II.26, 62. “\textit{Sed non multum interest aut primos pictores aut picturae inventores tenuisse, quando quidem on historiam picturae ut linius se artem novissime recenseamus}...” See also Grayson, \textit{On Painting}, 9.
sides of the Apennines and Alps – in Padua, Bologna and possibly Venice, Ravenna and northern European – before he ever reached Rome and Florence. Thus, Alberti witnessed an evolution of antiquity in much of Europe – more so than any other humanist of his day.

By the fifteenth century, Byzantine icons sat side-by-side with antique sculpture and artifacts in Italy.\(^{46}\) The homogenization of antique and icon should not be dismissed as an aspect of the visual context in which Alberti moved. For example, Brunelleschi’s Old Sacristy for the Church of San Lorenzo in Florence resembles, in interior elevation and plan, the fourth-century Baptistery of Padua, believed antique and rebuilt in the early twelfth century (Figs. 5.2 and 5.3). If nothing else proves the complex intertwining of antique with medieval, Florence considered its sixth-century baptistery, refurbished in the following centuries, to have been built during the reign of Augustus. Even Vasari refers to the building as a “most ancient temple.”\(^{47}\) With no updated information, Florentines simply absorbed architectural redactions between their time and imperial Rome.\(^{48}\) Alberti himself would model both the attic and second story of Santa Maria Novella on the Florence Baptistery and San Miniato al Monte respectively. Consequently, although antique artists like Euphranor or Apelles take center stage in De pictura, Alberti locates only one extant classical sculpture, a dead Meleager (See Figs. 0.48 and 0.49).\(^{49}\) Because he promises his humanist audience that he intends to “treat art in an entirely new way” (\textit{sed artem novissime recenseamus}), Alberti’s dearth of reference to specific classical works may not only reflect his need to dismiss Pliny and antique historiography in order to stress his own originality,


\(^{47}\) Vasari, \textit{Vite}, “Andrea Tafi,” vol. 2, 25. “quel tempio antico.” See also the introduction to Book 1 describing the modeling of the church of San Miniato on the Baptistery, “‘antichissimo tempio di San Giovanni nella città loro.”


\(^{49}\) Albert, \textit{De pictura}, II.37, 74-75.
but also reflect his need to parse out what and what was not legitimately ancient.50

Barry Katz contends that the prescriptions of historia do not attempt to form “canons of correct pose and composition, but (only) to set examples.” 51 Alberti’s regimentation and rhetoric certainly goes beyond the merely suggestive, however. His prescriptions are absolutely canonical. Basing his critical judgments very firmly on the ancient visual material that he saw in Rome, Alberti would marvel at what Donatello and Pisanello were accomplishing in that city according to neo-classical standards. The antique statuary that served as the bench-mark against which art was assessed would inform Alberti’s tract in II.40 on historia. As Panofsky wrote:

But it is noteworthy that these alluring motifs – ubiquitously present in classical monuments, lovingly described in classical literature, explicitly recommended to painters by Leon Battista Alberti as early as 1435, and producing a kind of obsession in the mind… did not in fact become a real vogue in painting until the sixth and seventh decades of the fifteenth century.52

For the most part sculpture in-the-round lay unearthed in Rome. In 1430 Poggio noted works including the Spinario (see Fig. 5.1), Lupa and the acolyte Camillus in the Lateran palace (Figs. 5.4 and 5.5).53 The pendant antique river gods, Capitoline Tiber and Nile accompanied the Dioscuri on the Quirinale, while the Marforio lay at the base of the Capitoline under the fourth-century colossal Head of Constantine and the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius atop the hill (Figs. 5.6 – 5.11).54 Relief sculpture on the triumphal arches of Titus, Constantine, and

50 Alberti, De pictura, II.26, 60-61.
51 Katz, 19.
52 Panofsky, Renaissance and Renascences, 176-177.
54 Bracciolini, 241. “Hoc videbitur levius fortasse sed me maxime movet quod subjiciam ex innumeris ferme
Septimius Severus, as well as on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius would have served as entire repositories for prescriptions of historia in II.40 of De pictura (Figs. 5.12 – 5.16).

Yet, despite the dearth of single figurative antique sculptures, sarcophagi were plentiful. Although the major restorations of Rome had yet to begin under Nicholas V in the 1440s, the city was laden with reliefs. Helmut Wohl stated that, “of the 203 subjects listed by copied or known to Renaissance artists, 136 examples are Roman reliefs, mainly of the second and third centuries A.D., and 62 of these are fronts, sides, lids, or fragments of sarcophagi.”55 Alberti’s canon regarding excellent historia directs us to the surfeit of reliefs on sarcophagi as the point of reference for his protracted prescription for historia in II.40. For example, when he asks for a variety of males of all ages, sheep and dogs, he is possibly referring to the likes of the sarcophagus of Meleager and the Calydonian Hunt (See Fig. 0.13).56 “Buildings and provinces” are subsequently added to the plethora of people as seen in a sarcophagus, now entitled Biography of Roman General with Marriage Ceremony (Fig. 5.17).57 While antique sculpture in Rome also inspired those miracula picturae of perspective, clearly the demand in historia for horses, dogs, columns, nudes and drapery were informed by sarcophagi. Luigi Mallè suggested certain specific sarcophagi in Rome as the source of Alberti’s reference to the Dead Meleager (See Fig. 0.49).58 Alberti possibly refers to sarcophagi reliefs from the Necropolis in Ostia, not

Colossis, statuisque tum marmoreis... duas stantes pone equos, Phidia et Praxitelis... quintam in foro Martis statuam quae hodie Martis fori nomen tenet...”


56 Bober and Rubinstein, 144. First documented by Aldrovandi over the house of Julio Porcari in Rome in mid 15th century. The Porcari were antiquarians and the relief was believed to have been extant then.

57 Ibid., 230. Known in the early 15th century, documented in the late 1400s, it was believed to have been in the Della Valle collection.

58 Mallè, 89, n. 2.
in a whimsical gesture towards a work long vanished, but towards an extant example in Rome:

They praise a *historia* in Rome in which the dead Meleager is carried away, because those who are bearing the burden appear to be distressed and to strain with every limb, while in the dead man there is no member that does not seem completely lifeless…

When Alberti insists that bodies should differ in physical deportment, some visible full-face and with hands turned upwards, fingers raised and resting on one foot, and others with faces turned away, the description may derive from action depicted upon the sarcophagi of *Orestes*, *Judgment of Paris* or the *Indian Triumph of Bacchus* which strikingly incorporates every single one of his prescriptions for *historia* (Figs. 5.18 – 5.20). The *Orpheus* meets Alberti’s request for “everything which changes positions has seven directions of movement” (*res omnis quae loco movetur, septem habet movendi itinera*). Some figures, furthermore, fulfill his admonition about only partial nudity as “obscene parts of the body and all those that are not very pleasing to look at should be covered with clothing or the hand.” The figures run the spectrum of feelings:

We see how the melancholy, preoccupied with cares and beset by grief, lack all vitality and action… yet, when we are happy and gay our movements are free and pleasing in their inflections.

While it is difficult to find visual information regarding young women and their requisite drapery

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59 Alberti, *De pictura*, II.37, 74-75. “*Laudatur apud Romam historia in qua Meleager defunctus asportatur, quod qui oneri subsunt angii et omnibus membris laborare videantur; in eo vero qui mortus sit, nolum adsit membrum quod non dimortuum appareat…”

60 Bober and Rubinstein, 137. *Orestes* was believed visible throughout the Quattrocento, although first documented as standing in front of Santo Stefano in Cacco in Rome, according to Fabricus in 1530. See also 112, and 150. By the end of the 15th century *Judgment* was documented at Santa Maria Monteone in Rome. The *Indian Triumph* was in the Church of San Lorenzo, believed to be San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura, as six churches were dedicated to Lorenzo in the Papal City.

61 Alberti, *De pictura*, II.43, 82-83.

62 Ibid., II.40, 78-79. “*Obscoenae quidem corporis et hae omnis partes quae parum gratiae habent, panno, aut frondibus, aut manu, operiantur.”

63 Ibid, II.41, 80-81. “*Nam videmus ut tristes, quod curis stricti et aegritudine obsessi sint, totus sensibus ac viribus torpeant... Laeti autem et hilares cum sumus tum solutos et quibusdam flexionibus gratos motus habemus.”
in the Florentine Renaissance works of Alberti’s early Quattrocento, he nevertheless insists that deportment and movement “in young maidens movements… should be pleasing and adorned with delightful simplicity, more indicative of gentleness and repose than of agitation.” This descriptive rhetoric may well have been visually inspired by antique models. There are indeed these women in the *Orestes* and *Judgment*, but he could just as well have been observing the *Maidens Decorating Candelabrum*, a known Roman neo-Attic relief of the first century (Fig. 5.21). A sarcophagus depicting *Mercury Psychopompos Emerging from the Gates of Hades*, in the Florence Baptistery since the Middle Ages displayed classical elements, such as columns and pediments that might have furthermore informed Brunelleschi (Figure 5.22). The relief is commensurate with Alberti’s dicta demanding that “a painting should have pleasing and graceful movements” and care in the “folds of garments” in II. 44 and 45. Considering the wealth of visual information available in antique works in Rome, we conclude, in the first place, that not only did this body of material inform *De pictura*, but also that Alberti was the first art historian to directly correlate sculpture to painting, thus engendering the *paragone* of the two disciplines to “a generation engrossed in the problem of making painting look like sculpture.”

**Post-Antique Visual Sources**

64 Ibid., II.44, 84-85. “Sint in virginibus motus et habitudo venusta simplicitate compta atque amena, quae statum magis sapiat dulcem et quietem quam agitationem...”

65 Bober and Rubinstein, 95. The slab, one of two, was known to occupy the Atrium of Old St. Peters in the 1400s.

66 Ibid., 58. As one of a group of Roman relics in the Baptistery of Florence from the Middle ages, Boccaccio presumably mentions this work as extant on the site, thus the visual source of a host of antique designs in Florence.

67 Alberti, *De pictura*, II.44, 84-85. “Suaves enim et gratus atque ad rem de qua agiur condecentes habere pictura motus debet.” See also ibid., II.45, 86-87. “Idque ipsum in plicis pannorum observetur...”

Speculation about the post-classical visual sources informing De pictura have pointed to Florence and Donatello’s predella for St. George, his Feast of Herod, Ghiberti’s panels on the east doors of the Florence baptistery, or Masaccio’s Trinity (See Figs. 0.03 – 0.06). Yet Alberti’s tenure in Rome for the papal curia three years prior to his arrival in Florence would have offered the humanist access to an amalgam of visual art that would include works by Donatello, Ghiberti, and Masaccio. As painting innovation in Italy had its Trecento and Quattrocento roots in the Veneto, Tuscany, Emiglia Romania, Tuscany and other areas of the north, those innovations would be brought to Rome in the early Quattrocento. Just as Alberti passed off the Philodoxeos fabula as an antique comedy, so antique copying and forgery would become a novel practice and idiom when the center of Italian art moved to Rome. The Roman Renaissance would flourish in the early-Cinquecento of Raffaello and Michelangelo; but in 1428, there was no indigenous school or style of art in Rome. According to Manetti, it was Brunelleschi and Donatello who began visual art’s preoccupation with Rome’s antique beauty. Perhaps apocryphal, Manetti’s account may explain the replication of antique motifs by artists whom Alberti would encounter in Rome. Alberti’s visual sources in the city, however, would encompass a much wider range of works than simply those of Renaissance Florentines:

They also praise in Rome the boat in which our Tuscan painter Giotto represented the eleven disciples struck with fear and wonder at the sight of their colleague walking on the water... 

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69 Alberti, De pictura, I.19, 54-55.

70 Manetti, 52-53 and 132, n.32. “The sculptor Donatello was with him [Brunelleschi] almost all the time during the stay in Rome.” (Ebbe in questa stanza di Roma quasi continuamente Donatello scultore.”) Manetti has Brunelleschi in Rome in the opening decade of the 1400s. Donatello, born 1386, would barely have been old enough to accompany Brunelleschi there.

71 Alberti, De pictura, II.42, 82. “Laudatur et navis apud Romam ea, in qua noster Etruscus pictor Giotto undecim metu et supere percusso ob socium, quem supra undas meantiem videbant, expressit, ita pro se quemque suum turbati animi inditium vultu et toto corpore preaferentem, ut in singulis singuli affectionum motus appearant.”
We repeat Alberti’s quote regarding Giotto – as the mosaic still existed in Rome, when Alberti probably began writing his hypothesis or editing *De picture* (See Fig. 0.19). Although Alberti’s tribute to Giotto may have been inspired by Cennini’s assertion that Giotto had transformed painting in Italy from Greek to Latin – from the obsolete to the modern – Alberti’s very mention of Giotto argues for other non-antique visual sources endemic to *De pictura*. In *Della pittura*, within the dedication to Brunelleschi, Alberti, as well, honors the sculptors, Ghiberti, Donatello and Della Robbia. If the ‘Masaccio’ mentioned is indeed Masaccio the painter, then, consequently, the only two post-antiquity painters mentioned by Alberti within his entire corpus are Giotto and Masaccio, the same artists praised by Leonardo over half a century later. Yet, while Leonardo looked back over a vast range of Quattrocento art, Alberti wrote during the vanguard of the renovation of pictorial theory, a time when few painters existed who actually practiced what Alberti preached. In fact, as Panofsky asserts, the entire medieval era between ancient Rome and the advent of the Quattrocento is “coolly ignored” by Alberti. Consequently, his rhetoric refuses to cede any credit to later artists or their works.

The mistaken assumption of the great Frederick Hartt that perpetuates Alberti as an influential advisor to seminal Renaissance artists was expressed thusly: “in the 1430’s and 1440s

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the two surviving giants of early Quattrocento Florentine sculpture, Ghiberti and Donatello, underwent changes of style *that are in keeping with Alberti’s new doctrine... for the tone of the dedication in his Della pittura* of 1436 suggests long friendship.\(^77\) In truth the converse was true. The pictorial revelation by Masaccio became the mainstays of spatial influence for both sculptors. Masaccio and Donatello would have influenced Alberti, rather than vice versa. Both artists were already well on their way to special transformations in sculptural relief before Alberti and he would have first seen their works in Rome. However, both artists were also intertwined with their historical past; we can no more set Masaccio and Donatello apart from an antique influence or the Trecento tradition that preceded them than we can Alberti and *De pictura*.\(^78\) On the other hand, just as Van Eyck’s spatial territory represents a sophisticated shift in figurative painting, so the medieval and Renaissance art that Alberti saw in Rome represented a break from both Greek and French influence. Within this context, Alberti’s prescriptions for *historia* beg speculation as to what specific post-antique works he saw in Rome.

**Pre-Thirteenth Century Influence**

The papal edifices of St. John Lateran, San Paolo fuori le Mura and Santa Maria Maggiore became the foundation of the city’s religious art in the late-thirteenth century. The tomb of a French pope, Clement IV (1265-68), was the first surviving in central Italy to present an effigy of the deceased. Under Nicholas III Orsini (1277-1280), the earliest surviving medieval frescoes to adorn a papal church were those in San Paolo Fuori le Mura. Nicholas turned to the papal seat of St. John Lateran and the *Sancta Sanctorum*, wherein the so-called

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\(^78\) See Nagel and Woods, 45-50.
Master Cosmatus melded classical pillars into tripartite fictive niches in which saints are depicted in a barrage of color. Corresponding acts of the saints appear in frescoes in the lunettes above. Thereafter Nicholas IV Colonna (1288–92), the first Franciscan pope, revitalized Santa Maria Maggiore with Jacopo Torriti’s *Coronation of the Virgin* (c. 1294) an archaic miasma of mosaic that, although revered by modern scholarship, stands in stark comparison to the realism of Giotto that Alberti so admired (Fig. 5.23).

**Pietro Cavallini**

The impact in Rome of Cavallini and Giotto upon subsequent early Renaissance painting cannot be overstressed. The dearth of scholarship on Cavallini and his remarkable treatment of volume, particularly in a medium as difficult as mosaic, can only be ascribed to the lag of historiography in adequately considering Rome’s early influence on figurative art. The literal appropriation of the antique would be apparent in the Cappella Scrovegni with Giotto’s monochromatic miniatures in the scales of *Justice*, Jupiter with thunderbolt and Victory with the scholar (Fig. 5.24). On the other hand, the apse and transept of the eldest Marian edifice in Rome, Santa Maria in Trastevere, delivered the prototype of Giotto’s specificity in physical volume in Padua with the brilliance of Cavallini’s *Annunciation* and *Adoration of the Magi* in the mosaic cycle of the *Life of the Virgin* (Figs. 5.25 and 5.26). Before Cavallini, volume in mosaic was only depicted as unified color in background to suggest a general recession of space, as in the fifth-century works in Santa Maria Maggiore. Panofsky credited Cavallini with being the

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first to perceive, re-conceive and resolve the visual modern space.\textsuperscript{81} Perhaps Cavallini was looking at remnants of second or third (Pompeian) style frescoes; more likely he learned the wonder spatial layers from antique sculpture. Ironically, as Panofsky pointed out, there was a decline of spatial depth in medieval sculpture after Nicola and Giovanni Pisano, just when Cavallini was developing the system in wall art.\textsuperscript{82}

Frequently this spatial definition interceded between figures delineated by color differentiation. Cavallini would change this at the end of the thirteenth century, prefiguring the genius of Giotto in light and space in Padua. In Santa Maria Trastevere, Cavallini distinguishes pictorial space by creating a horizontal picture plane in establishing a linear platform or the ground upon which characters interact. For example the \textit{Annunciation} depicts a stone precipice on which both the angel Gabriel kneels and Mary’s throne rests. Similar linear justification is utilized in the \textit{Adoration of the Magi} wherein the trim of a blue curtain continues across the picture plane to endow the composition with the ground upon which the Magi kneel or stand as well as the throne where Mary sits. Thus each sequence is framed, giving the individual episode unique volume by means of its own visual pronunciation – in fictive relief from the church wall.

Furthermore, natural light comes from the windows on the left. In both the \textit{Adoration} and \textit{Annunciation}, Cavallini positions the face and torso of Mary toward the light, as well as creating fictive shadow with darker tesserae in both Mary’s receding drapery of her back as well as the receding architecture behind her. Gradations of color, while possible with paint, are impossible with mosaic; Cavallini’s distinctions in shadow are dramatically executed with light against dark tesserae thus creating an illusion of diminishing light. The height of Cavallini’s brilliance, however, lies in the definition of six separate receding volumes of space in the

\textsuperscript{81} Panofsky, \textit{Renaissance and Renascences},137.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
Nativity of the Virgin (See Fig. 0.51). As Hills points out, with Cavallini pictorial space moved from a simplistic background – upon which a hierarchy of subjects were defined in linear sequence – to a narrative analogue of realism like that of a scene from a stage play. Distinctions in color would allow Cavallini to register spatial volume, which would, in turn, create space for diverse narrative actions. In the Nativity, Mary lies on a bed raised by minipilasters that form the stage ground. A table of bread stands behind her bed and attendants, one holding a carafe and a second presenting a bowl, stand behind the table. At the foot of the bed sits a handmaiden with baby Jesus in her lap. While one foreshortened arm, wraps around the Infant, the other arm tests the water, which another attendant pours into a bowl. Behind the standing attendants the architectural plane begins to recede along the foreshortened stringcourse, revealing a drawn curtain appended to the receding element. Behind the drawn curtain is a volume of interminable negative space.

Cavallini employed three seminal techniques for his creation of depth. First architecture is presented obliquely thus defining volume of the backdrop. Secondly faces and torsos are at justified angles according to their physical life as well, endowing the event with action as well as overall depth. Lastly Cavallini uses darker tesserae for receding architecture and drapery thus creating fictive relief. Influencing Giotto and every other wall artist and theoretician to come, including Alberti, this remarkable achievement in depth executed solely by color variation – antithetical to antecedent works that presented full-frontal and staid buildings and people – marked a transformation in pictorial technique. As Cavallini’s composition entertained the interdependence of pictorial space and exact viewpoint of the observer of the picture, both volume and perspectival perception were now geared directly to narrative.

Alberti surely observed the revolutionary replications of color, surface and negative space.

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in Cavallini’s fresco cycle of the *Last Judgment* in Santa Cecilia (Fig. 5.27; See also Fig. 0.50). Here the gradations of color are so subtle that there is hardly a primary distinction in hue to be observed. The contrasts between red and purple for example, endow a subsequent tangible naturalism evident in the apprehension of movement from apostles as well as the wings of angels above the visage of Christ and his *mandorla*. Light coming from the right, receding shadows and individualized postures of the saints create an oblique composition of distinctive volume by modeling the drapery and faces through multiple gradations of color. The brilliant fresco would have been seen by a laity observing the cycle from the nave of the small church.

Cavallini’s achievements in pictorial relief were an inspiration both to Ghiberti and Michelangelo. He was perhaps the first Italian to create volume and negative space in mosaic by using smaller tesserae for specific detailing, the result of which cleanly defined movement and gesture according to Alberti’s demand of a painting emulate sculptural relief. As the patron of Cavallini’s work in Santa Maria Trastevere, Cardinal Bertoldo Stefaneschi ensured that his tomb lay beneath the work. His brother, Cardinal Giacomo (1270-1363) became the patron of Giotto’s *Stefaneschi Triptych* altarpiece for the church of Old St. Peter’s (Fig. 5.28). Marci Hall and others have suggested that, rather than Giotto having been *caput magister* in Assisi, he may have followed Cavallini there, thence to Rome and Santa Maria Trastevere for Stefaneschi. Struck by the prestige of the medium in a symbolic city of Christ, Giotto returned to the medium he learned under Cavallini in his *Navicella* mosaic. As Enrico Scrovegni in Padua was first cousin to the Stefaneschi brothers, the *Navicella* may have been the Giotto’s calling card, along with the Cavallini association, that had him recommended for Scrovegni’s chapel in Padua. Assuming that young Alberti saw the frescoes in Padua, one can only conjecture whether or not he knew of the associations among the Stefaneschi family, Cavallini and Padua when he was studying with
Barzizza. However we may assume that he would have been aware of this association when marveling at Giotto and, assuredly Cavallini in Rome.

**Gentile and Pisanello**

Rome of 1417 was broke and broken, the city of Petrarch and Dante no more than a symbol. Numbering fewer citizenry (around thirty thousand) than even Venice, most dwelled in Trastevere, near the Pantheon or what is now the Piazza Navona (1st century CE *Stadium of Domitian*). The artists who would paint there before Alberti’s arrival in the city would be a small group and even those would never spend their lives in artistic endeavor in the city. Under Martin V (1417-1431) Colonna, St. John Lateran took precedence in rivalry amongst papal basilicas, as Martin declared the church as “most worthy of devotion and faith.”

Alberti may have observed both Gentile and Pisanello painting their illusionistic porticoes in fixed-point perspective in a seminal chapter of Renaissance painting in Rome, with the fresco cycle of the *Life of St. John the Baptist* for St. John Lateran as seen in the surviving 1647 drawing by Francesco Borromini (1599-1667) of the north wall of the nave in the church of St. John Lateran (See 0.52). Meredith J. Gill has heralded the work as “first real artistic enterprise of the Roman Renaissance.” Possibly because of the excellence of the frescoes in the Palazzo Ducale in Venice (lost) Gentile was commissioned for the work in St. John Lateran. Evidenced in sketch, the north wall of the cycle begun by Gentile in 1427 displays fictive antique columns and round arched portico. Although Gentile’s niches betray his roots in International Gothic, neoclassical additions to the church had included antique columns in the nave. Dying in

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84 Meredith G. Gill, “Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” in *Rome*, ed. Hall, 2005, 46, n.53

85 Ibid., 46.
1428, shortly after beginning work in the clerestory, Gentile completed five fictive tabernacles before Pisanello assumed the work, completing it in 1431. Pisanello was already moving in humanist circles at the Este court in Ferrara while Alberti was in Bologna.\(^{86}\) He was working for the Este in 1429 when Guarino arrived as Lionello’s tutor. By 1431 he was part of the household of Eugenius IV whose curia employed Alberti in that year.\(^{87}\) Pisanello’s work, probably at least advised upon by Martin’s senior papal secretary, Poggio, is certainly indicative of what Alberti would seize upon as *worthy* in *De pictura*. Possibly responsible for Alberti’s getting work in the curia, Poggio would describe him as “*viri singularis ingenio Monique amicissimus.*”\(^{88}\)

Although Borromini provides the only reference to the joint effort of Gentile and Pisanello, the archaeological impression in the painted recreation of Roman elements is the first of its kind in Renaissance Rome. As Pisanello shows a mastery of fixed perspective in a 1444 drawing of an interior portico, it is argued by Edgerton that Alberti’s treatise may have influenced the painter; but the converse is more likely true. (Fig. 5.29) Pisanello was drawing perspectival foreshortening in his drawings of horses well before Alberti finished either his Latin or Italian versions in 1435 and 1436 (Fig. 5.30).

**Ghiberti**

Based upon his development of antique sophistication, Krautheimer holds that Ghiberti perhaps first visited Rome around 1416 and then again from 1425 to 1430.\(^{89}\) Alberti may have

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\(^{87}\) Ibid.

\(^{88}\) Clark, “The Literature of Art,” 178.

\(^{89}\) Krautheimer, 283-288.
met Ghiberti in Rome. Clark, stressing Alberti’s originality, also opined in his review of Krautheimer’s monograph, *Ghiberti*, that Alberti may have been Poggio’s antiquarian apprentice for the instruction of Ghiberti, Donatello and Masaccio. Clark speculated an amazing scenario of Poggio placing Ghiberti, Donatello and Masaccio in the hands of Alberti who would then escort this trio of geniuses to his “favorite sites” in the antique city, referring to Pliny and Lucian and “elaborating on antique painting.” The hypothesis is relevant; although it may appear fanciful, it has the merit of seeing that Alberti may well have played a major role in the shaping of Renaissance talent long before he reached Florence and Clark agrees. His letter to Brunelleschi as the introduction to *Della pittura* suggests to most scholars a personal knowledge of Masaccio who died in 1428. Thus, if Alberti was in Rome in 1428, Clark, possibly rightly surmises that Alberti knew the painter while he worked on the San Clemente or Santa Maria Maggiore pieces. However Clark goes one step further in supposing that Ghiberti would have prevailed upon Alberti for advice:

Now, is it not fair to assume that Florentines with an interest in antiquity who visited Rome in the years 1428-33 would have been recommended to the care of the young papal employee, their compatriot and friend of the most illustrious Florentine in Rome, Poggio? I cannot resist the picture of this brilliant cicerone taking Donatello, Masaccio and Ghiberti to his favorite sites, deducing from them the character of classic architecture and, from his reading of Pliny and Lucian, elaborating his conception of antique painting. In this way Alberti could have achieved a considerable ascendency over the Florentine artists some time before his return to Florence in 1434, so that when he arrived even Ghiberti could have turned to him for advice.

As it was Alberti who gleaned from the artists and not the contrary, we might also allow the converse of Clark’s conclusion; that Alberti followed the artists, or at least observed them

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91 Ibid.

92 Ibid.
looking at the great works in Rome. Evident in Ghiberti’s last work, Gates of Paradise for the east doors of the Florence Baptistery are antique architectural elements and compositional groupings of people derived from sarcophagi (See Fig. 0.50). One need only see the relief detail replicating antiquity in Solomon and Sheba to realize Ghiberti copied from extant Roman monuments themselves (Fig. 5.31). This relationship with antiquity is most evident in his Joseph panel, inclusive of the Renaissance’ first centralized monopteros, a Peripteral edifice from Classical Rome, copied perhaps from the Temple of Hercules Victor in the Forum Boarium (Fig. 5.32). Evidently this period of the reliefs’ execution marked the shift in Ghiberti’s oeuvre towards classicism. Krautheimer, in the 1970 revision of his monograph acknowledges E.H. Gombrich’s 1955 assertion that Ghiberti was possibly influenced textually by Pliny’s description of the naturalism in physical form reproduction as seen in Lysippus; although Krautheimer mistakes the chapter of Book XXXIV of the Natural History. Ghiberti would write the first Renaissance analysis of Roman artistic legacy, the Commentarii, in which the sculptor paraphrases Pliny in I.16. Krautheimer also has Ghiberti’s execution of perspective in the panels “reflecting” Alberti’s principles of perspective, but only in the Isaac and Joseph panels. Human figures proportionate to an architectural casamento stand upon a perspectival floor or pavimento, exactly as Alberti delineates in Book I of De pictura. In line with Krautheimer, it is moot to consider whether or not Alberti codified what Brunelleschi, Ghiberti or others already applied; the writing of the concept of single-point perspective was novel in and of itself.

93 Krautheimer, Ghiberti, xix.

94 Ibid., xx, n.89. See also Pliny N.H., XXXIV.x, 63-65. Pliny’s recounting of Lyssipus creation of naturalistic physiques by smaller heads etc. is found in Chapter xix, 65, not x.64. “statuariae arti plurimum traditor, contuisse capillum exprimendo, capita minora faciendo quam antiqui, corpora, graciliora siccioraque, per quae proceritas signorum maior videretur.”

95 Krautheimer, Ghiberti, xix.

96 Ibid., xxi.
Possibly due to their significant position on the Baptistery, the Gates of Paradise were the most celebrated all art in the city even before their completion. Alberti was not only present in Florence when the reliefs were being sculpted, he also most likely had access to Ghiberti’s workshop by means of his connections to Eugenius IV, residing at Santa Maria Novella. Remarkably, Krautheimer suggests that perspective in Ghiberti’s final panels is abandoned because Alberti left Florence for Bologna in 1436, suggesting that Ghiberti relied upon Alberti for these precepts instead of Alberti distilling techniques from the sculptor. Ghiberti, however, derived this craft from Donatello and the composition from the same source in Rome that Alberti, as well as Pisano and others had consulted elsewhere – sarcophagi.

**Masolino and Masaccio in Rome**

While employed by Albergati and, subsequently, Eugenius, Alberti possibly encountered both Masaccio and Donatello in Rome – Masaccio, as early as 1427 while painting his St. Jerome and St. John the Baptist for the polyptych at Santa Maria Maggiore 1427, and Donatello, in 1432 while he was sculpting the Ciborium for St. Peters or the Tomb of Giovanni Crivelli in the church of Santa Maria in Aracoli (Figs. 5.33 – 5.35). Both Donatello works were en route to completion in Rome while Alberti was there. As we have seen, Alberti probably first witnessed the practice of fixed perspective, if not in the initial work exploring replication of antique physiognomy with Della Quercia in Bologna, or with Van Eyck in northern Europe, then certainly with Pisanello and Gentile in St. John Lateran. In any event, an understanding of perspective was certainly in play in visual art even before Alberti arrived in Rome; and if Alberti’s claim to be a painter has any weight at all, he almost certainly began the study of that aptitude long before Florence. On the other hand, his self-portrait medal (1435) in the Kress Collection remains the sole suggestion of Alberti as a visual artist (Fig. 5.36). No surviving

\textbf{Polemic on Masaccio the Painter vs Sculptor}

Whether or not Alberti encountered Masaccio before the latter’s death in 1428, one argument that plays an important role in this dissertation is Mary Pardo’s extension of Janitschek’s 1877 assessment, regarding “Maso di Bartolomeo, Genannt Masaccio,” in the supplement of his German translation of \textit{Della pittura}.\footnote{Janitschek, 257-261. See also Mary Pardo, “L.B. Alberti’s Dedication of \textit{Della pittura},” in \textit{Perspectives on Early Modern and Modern Intellectual History}, 223-258.} Janitschek argued that the “Masaccio” in the dedication letter of the Italian version does not refer at all to the painter of note, who would have been long dead by 1436 (the year of \textit{Della pittura}’s dedication), but instead refers to Maso di Bartolomeo (1406-1456) the sculptor and integrated artisan employed by Donatello and Michelozzo. Janitschek maintained that, “in this respect Masaccio the painter cannot be claimed as the \textit{Masaccio} of Alberti’s reference but the builder, caster and architect Maso di Bartolomeo is to be seen as \textit{Masaccio}.\footnote{Janitschek, 260. \textit{‘Aus diesem Grunde kann der von Alberti genannte Masaccio nicht der Maler Masaccio sein, sondern man wird darunter den Bildhauer, Erzgiesser und Architekten Maso di Bartolomeo genannt Masaccio, zu verstehen haben.’}” Maso assisted both Donatello and Michelozzo (di Bartolomeo Michelozzi, 1396–1472) who were at work in the completion of Brunelleschi’s dome of that same year of 1436 and was simultaneously assisting Donatello at the Cathedral of San Stefano in Prato with his external pulpit (Figs. 5.37 and 5.38).

That Della Robbia, Ghiberti and Donatello, all sculptors were all gainfully employed under Brunelleschi’s direction in the Duomo in 1436 and that the Italian dedication is written in that year, serves Janitschek’s argument – precisely fleshed out by Pardo – that ‘Masaccio,’
documented as the nickname of the *sculptor* Maso, thus refers to only those working in the Duomo. Maso’s name is not to be found in 1436 during the completion of dome under Brunelleschi, as he worked under Donatello and Michelozzo; yet later, when working independently under his own stature, he is referenced in the documents of the *Archivio dell’ opera del Duomo di Firenze* of 1444 and again in 1445 to 1446 for work on the bronze Sacristy Door (Fig. 5.39). Maso is noted in Karl Friedrich von Rumohr’s third volume of *Italienische Forschungen* of 1827 and again in Giovanni Poggi’s second volume of extensive documents on the Duomo – only in regards to his work on the sacristy door. Maso is labeled, just like Michelozzo, as an “engraver” (*intagliatore*) and called *Masaccio* (*Maso di Bartolomeo, detto* Masaccio); and he is contracted along with Michelozzo and Della Robbia for a door of two pieces and ornaments (*una porta di due pezzi e con piu ornamenti*) to be paid eleven hundred gold florins. However he is indeed called *Masaccio*. Yet, art history may be anachronistically imposing a canon here, by assuming that Alberti was lauding him in the same breath as Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, Donatello and Luca della Robbia. Not only had Masaccio been dead around six years before Alberti arrived in Florence, and eight years before his *Della pittura* dedication; it is also the case that the painter is first called *Masaccio* only in the 1450s by Filarete who also includes Maso di Bartolomeo as *Masaccio*. Furthermore, art history lauds the painter, *Masaccio*, as the painter of mathematical and emotional realism as we think of him.

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100 Pardo, 255, n. 25.
101 See Karl Friedrich Rumohr, *Italienische Forschungen*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Nicolai’schen Buch Handlung, 1827), 244, n.1 on ff. 75 and 370 on ff. 73, both folios from the *Archivio dell’Opera del Duomo* (“avere inteso che l’anno 1444 fu alloghato per loro Anticessori a Michelozzo di Bartholomeo Intagliatore et a Lucha di Simone della Robbia et a Maso di Bartholomeo Intagliatore detto Masaccio una porta di due pezzi e con piu ornamenti et pacti et modi come nella alloghatione si contien per pregio et nome di pregio di fiorini 1100 doro... ”). See also Giovanni Poggi, *Il Duomo di Firenze; Documenti sulla Decorazione della Chiesa e del Campanile tratti dall’ Archivio dell’ Opera, Italienische Forschungen* 1-18 (Florence: Courier, 1988), 23 and 29.
102 Pardo, 232.
today only as early as 1473 by Alamanno Rinuccini (1426-1499) and, eight years later, by Cristoforo Landino (1424-1498) in 1481, Giovanni Santi (1435-1494) in 1482 and Manetti in the 1480s as well.\textsuperscript{103} Then again, it is Manetti who supplied the date of the birth of Masaccio.\textsuperscript{104}

Secondly, the fact that Alberti includes a salutation to Della Robbia at all – who in 1436 was barely established in his career, had only begun his \textit{Cantoria} for the Duomo, and was certainly not in the same league of prestige or fame as Brunelleschi, Ghiberti or Donatello – perhaps strengthens the argument that Alberti’s intention was to list only those artisans who were specifically working on the Duomo, as the \textit{Della pittura}’s introduction is a celebration of the completion of the dome. Thirdly, \textit{Masaccio} is the last name mentioned, relegated to that position \textit{after} the almost unknown Della Robbia, thus suggesting that it refers to the artisan employed in the Duomo – not the painter, who would probably be mentioned first in a \textit{book on painting}.

Fourthly, if Alberti is referring to Masaccio the painter, one may well ask why, then, he does not mention the painter's demise, or refer to any other painters or paintings of mathematical note – like Fra Angelico \textit{Annunciation} with spatial compartmentalization defined by floor layouts or the perspectival studies of Uccello (Figs. 5.40 and 5.41). Both of these painters were working in composition and fixed perspective contemporaneous to Alberti and \textit{De pictura} and long after Masaccio the painter was dead.

These complexities of language and purpose suggest the dedication of \textit{Della pittura} is an homage, at the consecration of the Duomo, to the collective work on that edifice by the artisans –

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{104} Manetti, “XIV Uumoni Singhularii in Firenze,” trans. Peter Murray in “Art Historians and Art Critics-IV,” \textit{Burlington} 99, no. 655 (1957): 330-336. Murray sources MS 151, g. 2 fol. 141, in the Biblioteca Nazionale, Firenze. “Masaccio the painter, a wonderful man, painted in Florence and elsewhere. He was about 27 when he died (Marginal note: 15th September 1472. His brother Lo Scheggia told me that he was born in 1401 on the day of St Thomas the Apostle, which is the 21st December.)” (\textit{Masaccio Pittore huomom aravigliso dipinse in Firenze e altrove or d'eta d'anni 27 incircha... adi 15 di setembre 1472 mi disse l'oscheggia suo fratello che naque e 140l di di santo tomaso apostolo che (e) adi 21 dicembri.)
all of whom were working on the cupola during Alberti’s arrival in Florence in 1434. That Alberti only writes of the guarantors of work, all subservient to that of Brunelleschi, on the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore, dedicated and completed in 1436, resonates with the arguments of this dissertation which also supports the claim that the name of Masaccio the painter cannot be firmly associated with the Della pittura dedication. Krautheimer, like many scholars today, could not accept that a Renaissance icon like Alberti might simply acknowledge uomini di lavoro of the Duomo instead of the desired list of Florentine artistic elite. However that itself is an elitist assumption, which should not hamper a new consideration of Alberti’s debts.

Masolino

We can only assume then that if Alberti would have met or known Masaccio it would have been in Rome. Herein lies the crux of the argument, posed by earlier twentieth century scholars that, other than Giotto, if it is Masaccio the painter to whom Alberti refers he is the only other modern painter ever lauded by the humanist in print; consequently Alberti must have returned to his native Florence upon the ban on his family lifted. However, in the same decade as the completion of Masaccio’s Trinity, the artist’s pioneering in fixed perspective at Santa Maria Novella, as well as of the frescoes of the Brancacci Chapel with Masolino, those monuments to emotional realism – both artists also worked in Rome. Alberti would have been introduced to Masaccio’s breakthroughs in perspective in Rome by way of the latter’s double-sided triptych Colonna Altarpiece (with Masolino) for Santa Maria Maggiore, commissioned by Martin V for that church which stood as a bastion to his family’s patronage. Echoing the late-thirteenth century facade mosaics of the Virgin, commissioned by Cardinals Jacopo and Pietro Colonna under Nicholas IV, as well as Jacopo Torriti’s apse masterpiece, the recto displayed
Masolino’s *Founding of Santa Maria Maggiore* (Fig. 5.42). Masaccio’s final two surviving pieces are the *St. Jerome and St. John the Baptist* (Fig. 5.43). Where else would Alberti have encountered Masaccio, except in Rome where we have a painting, albeit remnants, that depicts the striking originality in realism and volume gifted to the Renaissance? As Clarke pointed out, the distinctions of Masaccio’s realism as opposed to the lyricism of his partner Masolino and the Quattrocento residue of International Gothic sensibilities is apparent in the “strenuous” physiology of the two saints.  

Alberti, perhaps through his associations with Poggio, would have also seen an important successor to Altichiero’s *Sala* in Padua in Masolino’s frescoes (lost) of *Uomini Famosi*, executed for antiquarian Cardinal Latino Orsini (1411-1477) at the latter’s palace on Monte Giordano. Another cornerstone in Renaissance painting in Rome, the cycle, as in Padua, portrayed a visual history of ancient men of merit and mischief probably informed by Poggio’s *De vera nobilitate*. In Poggio’s treatise the idea of virtue as the only qualification for true nobility was advanced; “therefore nobility does not justly derive from external things but descends from virtue.” By 1432 the cycle boasted over three hundred personae extracted from Tacitus, Livy and Plutarch. Possibly the first humanist circle in Rome, Orsini frequented the likes of Poggio, Leonardo Dati (d. 1408-1472) as well as Valla and, possibly Alberti.

No documents support Masaccio in Rome. Vasari writes that Masaccio was in the city, but was summoned back to Florence upon Masolino quitting the St. Peter cycle in the Brancacci Chapel. Clark postulated that Masaccio painted the Santa Maria Maggiore altarpiece in Rome in 1425 to 1426, finishing Saints Jerome and John the Baptist and starting John the Evangelist

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106 Bracciolini, *De vera nobilitate*, ed. Davide Canfora (Rome: Edizione di Storia e Letteratura 2002), xxiv. “... poiché la nobiltà non deriva bene da esterni, bensi descended all virtù...”

Based upon stylistic comparisons, the St. Martin was not finished by Masaccio by the time he was called back to Florence and the Brancacci Chapel. He most likely intended to finish the piece upon returning to Rome, yet passed away.

One can understand, given the Gothic quietness and ease of the physiology why Masolino’s *Founding of Santa Maria Maggiore* was first attributed to Gentile; yet Masaccio’s face of St. John the Baptist seems the prototype of Alberti’s idea of sculpture as the metaphor for painterly definition; “In painting I would praise… those faces which seem to stand out from the pictures as if they were sculpted.” Masolino, possibly with Masaccio, painted his ultimate opus at the Basilica of San Clemente, the *Annunciation*, which displays a voluminous myriad of classicizing arches in a double portico as well as Alberti’s prescription for floor and wall scheme. (Fig. 5.44) The central panel *Crucifixion* reveals Masolino’s internalization of Masaccio’s perspectival and volumetric work in the *Tribute Money* (Figs. 5.45 and 5.46). In addition to the neoclassical elements befitting Alberti’s vocabulary for architectural articulation, one might also add the humanist scholarly elements apparent in the iconography. Also executed at San Clemente during those years, Masolino’s *Saint Catherine Debates the Scholars of Alexandria*, reveals fictive Roman columns that epitomize the borders of Alberti’s *window* as well as spatial clarity enhanced in perspective by wall pavers (Fig. 5.47). Of equal importance however, is the iconography of Catherine lecturing to scholars with books opened on their laps. The *Miracle of the Wheel* continues with orthogonals in the rosettes on the balcony-ceiling and fixed-point space defined by receding arches (Fig. 5.48). Herein, with Masolino and Masaccio, Renaissance art leaves the Gothic splendor of Gentile behind and, along with Donatello in St. Peter’s, embraces

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109 Alberti, *De pictura*, II.46, 88-89. “Pictos ego vultus… laudabo eos qui veluit *exculp*it extare a tabulis videantur; eosque contra vituperabo quibus nihil artis nisi fortassis in lineamentis eluceat.”
the realism of Alberti’s demand for relief in painting. The volumes, architectural elements and visage realism of Masaccio and Masolino in Rome at St. John Lateran and San Clemente accordingly are singular and powerfully prescient masterpieces that would even point to the Renaissance Roman walls of Raffaello’s *School of Athens* (See Fig. 3.28).

The Venetian, Gabriele Condulmer, became Pope Eugenius IV on March 3, 1431. Indicative of the Pope’s Venetian heritage, he was conversant in Greek as well as Roman antiquity. Indeed Eugenius had served as a priest at both Santa Maria Maggiore and San Clemente under Martin V, during the latter’s notable artistic embellishments by Masaccio, and Masolino. Eugenius was also behind Pisanello’s replacing Gentile in the St. John Lateran frescoes.\(^\text{110}\) Alberti would travel with the Pope to Florence in 1434 and may have returned with the papal retinue in 1443. The humanist circles in which Alberti moved were linked to a core of Renaissance painters whose pioneering work embodied much of what *De Pictura* prescribes.

**Donatello**

One need only see Donatello’s *Feast of Herod* in Siena to confirm that the sculptor was the first Quattrocento artist to deliver a computed antique assimilation of element, event, and place (See Fig. 0.4). Whether this facility was the product of his innovative genius or the outcome of a true study in classicism is moot, as argued by Ulrich Pfisterer.\(^\text{111}\) Donatello’s synthesis of preeminent forms – antique, medieval and modern – created a high developed individualized approach, which we now tend to call style. In fact, between ancient Rome and Donatello’s replication thereof, there is little difference other than style.

\(^{110}\) See Hill, *Pisanello*, 48-52. We may assume Eugenius commanded Pisanello replacing the deceased Gentile. Hill dates Pisanello’s first payment to 1431. Hill points out Vasari has confused Pisanello with Gentile in his claim that Martin V invited Pisanello to work on St. John Lateran. Both Martin and Gentile were dead by the time Pisanello began work in the church.

Although no documentation attests to Donatello’s presence in Rome contemporaneous to Alberti in the 1430s, he executed works there during Alberti’s time in the city; thus Rome may also be the location of Alberti’s initial encounter with the sculptor. Alberti would have seen the work and installation of two ground-breaking Renaissance works in the city. The first is the tomb of Martin V in St. John Lateran (early 1430s) by Simone Ghini (1406-1491), which is the only funerary monument in bronze found in Rome during the entire Quattrocento save the funerary monument of Sixtus IV by Antonio Pollaiulo (1485-93) (Fig. 5.49). The second and more important work is the only signed opus of Donatello’s in Rome, the 1432 Tomb of Giovanni Crivelli (See Fig. 5.35). Ghini’s classicism derives from that of Donatello. Ghini also uses the flat, low relievo schiacciato work virtually invented in Donatello’s predella of St. George for Orsanmichele in Florence (See Figs. 0.2 and 0.3). This technique, a prerequisite for good painting for Alberti, is also worked into the iconography of personified tomb slabs in Donatello’s 1426 Pecci Tomb in Siena’s Duomo (Fig. 5.50) as well as the 1427 Tomb of Cardinal Rainaldo Brancaccio at St. Angelo in Nilo in Naples (Fig. 5.51). Both works predate Ghini in Rome, but both Donatello and Ghini are visual progenitors for sources for De pictura, as both sculptors were working in the city when Alberti arrived.

In Old St. Peter’s, however, Alberti would encounter possibly the very first true Renaissance edifice in Rome with Donatello’s 1431 Ciborium (See Fig. 5.33). In the upper relievo frieze, Christ is revealed by two putti drawing back drapes for the viewing of a horizontal deposition reminiscent of Alberti’s Dead Meleager. Beside the tabernacle niche holding Lippo Memmi’s Madonna della Febbre, antique pilasters bestride the orifice, high reliefs of observant folk standing on the pilaster bases. Atop the capitals are the winged putti opening the view of the Deposition. The capitals themselves attend a pediment over the tabernacle. The entire
edifice with its composition in *relievo schiacciato* in the frieze, pseudo-classical motifs in the architrave, pediments and pilasters enveloping its rounded niche is inspired by a single-fornix Roman triumphal arch, most likely that of Titus. The composite is, *in toto*, a completely unique Renaissance complex of neo-antique style that sets a precedent in Quattrocento Rome.

**Other Early Modern Examples**

In Florence by 1434, in the company of the curia, Alberti’s proximity to the pope would have probably given him access to any workshop in the city. In addition, Eugenius helped facilitate Cosimo de’ Medici’s return from exile, and Cosimo was a legendary and astute patron of the arts in Florence. Alberti’s praise and criticism hits a rhetorical high note in his discussion of *historia* in II.38 and again in II.41 and II.43, in which movements are described. Borrowing from Cicero’s *De natura deorum*, chapter 38 heralds ancient artists for endowing Vulcan with dignity by revealing the god’s limbs beneath drapery:

> They also made Vulcan’s limp show beneath his clothing, so great was their attention to representing what was necessary according to function, kind and dignity. ¹¹²

Cicero’s text had stated:

> … and at Athens there is a much-praised statue of Vulcan made by Alcamenes, as standing figure draped which displays a slight lameness, thought not enough to be unsightly. We shall therefore deem the god to be lame since tradition represents Vulcan so. ¹¹³

In *De pictura*, II.41, dealing with the revealed emotion by means of movement, Alberti insists upon depicting an epitome of beauty and grace that is “free and pleasing” (*tum solutos et*

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¹¹² Alberti, *De pictura*, 11.38, 76-77. “*Tum et Vulcan claudicandi vitium apparere sub vestibus volebant, tantum illis erat studium pro officio, specie et dignitate quod oportet exprimere.*”

¹¹³ Cic. *Nat. deor.*, i.2.83, 80-81. “*Et quidem laudamus Athenis Volennnum eum quem fecit Alcamenes, in quo stante atque vestito leviter apparat claudicatio non deformis. Claudam igitur habebimus deum quoniam de Volcano sic acceprimus.*”
quibusdam flexionibus gratos motus habemus). Combined with this graceful movement, the historia, in II.43, should demonstrate emotions such as happiness by displaying seven specific movements: coming, going, either up or down or in a circle. Alberti wants all movements to be in a painting. (Hos igitur omnes motus cupio esse in pictura). They should have arms directed “upwards into the air,” with bodies moving in harmony and in accordance with action with passions aflame and wrathful – a choreography so perfectly evidenced in the dramatic response at the precise moment of Salome producing the head of John the Baptist in Donatello’s Feast of Herod (see Fig. 0.49) or the gaiety of Donatello’s putti on his Cantoria (Fig. 5.52 and 5.53).

Furthermore, historia should demonstrate these “feelings as clearly as possible,” in bodies that are ill or old or recovering; the movements outwardly demonstrate feelings, as if the bodies are unsteady or lack all vitality or are inconstant or merciful. Alberti requires ten people, the optimum number for any single historia, as given in II.40, a quantity dictated by “Varo’s dictum” for guests at a dinner. In this, the most protracted segment, II.40 Alberti is self-contradictory in his enthusiasm for a historia worthy of praise and admiration. He demands variety of “old men, young boys, matrons, maidens, children, domestic animals, dogs, birds, horses, sheep, buildings and provinces,” but then he disapproves of painters who “leave no empty space” while insisting on the quotient of nine or ten bodies sufficing. The positions of bodies must be varied, sitting, standing, lying down, faces turned away and some full-face, with

114 Alberti, De pictura, II.41, 80-81.

115 Ibid., II. 43, 83-84. “…Res omnis quae loco movetur, septem habet movendi itinera, nam aut sursum versus aut deorsum aut in dextera aut in sinistra aut illuc longe recedendo aut contra nos redeundo. Septimus vero movendi modus est is qui in girum ambiendo vehitur. Hos igitur omnes motus cupio esse in pictura.”

116 Ibid., II.37, 76. “Membrorum motus vivaces et gratissimi sunt qui aera in altum petunt.”

117 Ibid., II.41, 80. “Nam videmus ut tristes, quod curis astricti et aegritudine obsessi sint, totis sensibus ac viribus torpeant, interque pallentia et admodum labantia membra sese lenti detineant.”

118 Ibid., II.40, 78-79. “… quam novem aut decem homines non possint condigne agere, ut illud Varronis huc pertinentem arbitror, qui in convivio tumultum evitans non plus quam novem accubantes admittebat.”
no repetition of gesture. There should be nudes, but the “obscene parts” should be covered with clothing or the hand. Colors must be arranged in variety such that white contrasts with black, dark colors giving light colors dignity such that beauty is achieved by this variation.

We may conjecture that a knowledge of Masaccio’s *Tribute Money* is informing Alberti’s rhetoric in chapter 40 (See Fig. 5.46) since no single opus seems to encapsulate to the same degree, even a large portion of his prescriptions, other than Pisano’s pulpits or ancient sarcophagi. Then again we must remember that Alberti is here describing the perfect painting. Like the authors who imagined the “Ideal City,” he is engendering a fantasy – an abstract of all the elements of historia that are endemic to great narrative – as if from Giotto, Altichiero, Pisano, Della Quercia, Pisanello, Bellini, Masaccio, Donatello and Ghiberti – all compressed into a single picture. Had he lived in the next century, he might have marvelled at Paolo Veronese’s 1573, *Feast in House of Levi* displaying a textbook composite constraining virtually every demand in II.40 – particularly his last, that the same gesture never appears twice (Fig. 5.54).

Alberti’s work on relief points more to Masaccio in the Brancacci Chapel than do his tenets on mathematics. The sculptural space and volume in the St. Peter cycle were evidence of a tendency as Field describes:

> Like other artists of the fifteenth century, Masaccio and Donatello were interested in a form of truth that was essentially visual rather than mathematical.\(^\text{119}\)

Within Alberti’s vocabulary, historia cannot be divorced from compositio and circumscriptio. The insistence on drawing in II.31 is reiterated in II.33 and II.35. Alberti insists that the heart of historia is composition of “the bodies,” and the heart of composition is circumscriptio wherein those bodies are drawn upon surfaces. Alberti concludes his entire book by emphasizing

\(^{119}\) Field, *The Invention of Infinity*, 61.
preparation and creation of the “whole historia” by sketching. Some of these drawings are “very large, as in buildings and giant statues” and some are small drawings of “living creatures.”

Regarding drawings of large buildings, very few preparatory works survive dating before De pictura. Although David Rosand reminds us that Alberti’s insistence on preparatory drawings predates the earliest surviving Quattrocento examples, we know they existed from Taddeo Gaddi’s silverpoint preparation for his Presentation of the Virgin in the Baroncelli Chapel of Santa Croce (Fig. 5.55). While conceivable that Alberti had access to preparatory drawings in Florence, he would have certainly seen Gaddi’s fresco upon his arrival in that city in 1434. Likely critical of its historia, as “a maximum of obliquity and complication,” as Panofsky points out, Alberti may nevertheless have admired its attempt to “exploit non-frontal, often very complex, architectural settings as a means of taking depth by storm.”

In regards to large statues, Uccello was also in Venice in 1425 working on mosaics on San Marco while Alberti was in Bologna. Vasari maintains Uccello went to Rome in 1431, the year that both Pisanello and Alberti are documented as arriving in that city. Moreover, around 1434, the year Alberti arrived in Florence accompanying the exiled pope, Uccello was working in the Duomo. Thus Alberti’s distinction of “large statues” might refer to Uccello finishing the Funerary Monument to John Harkwood (Fig. 5.56). More likely, antique equestrian works in Rome such as the Triumph of Marcus Aurelius, a second-century relief from a lost triumphal

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120 Alberti, De pictura, II.33, 70-71. “Etenim cum sit circumscriptio ea ratio pingendi qua fimbriae superficierum designantur, cunque superficierum aliae parvae ut animantium, aliae ut aedificiorum et colossorum amplissimae sint, de superficiebus circumscrribendiis ea praecepta sufficiant…”


122 Panofsky, Renaissance and Renascences, 139.

arch of the emperor, impressed both Uccello, as well as Alberti (Fig. 5.57).\(^{124}\)

Some of the small living creatures may be as he states in chapter 60 of Book III, “the horse and the dog.”\(^{125}\) If Alberti was looking at Altichiero, he might have also sourced Pisanello’s drawings of various “living creatures,” such as monkeys and horses, as Pisanello is believed to have studied with Altichiero in Verona (Fig. 5.58). Pisanello is documented, however, to have worked in Venice on the Sala del Maggior Consiglio in the Ducal Palace in the late teens of the early Quattrocento while Alberti was in Padua.\(^{126}\) Gentile, who was also training Jacopo Bellini during this period, had painted in the same room from 1409-1414.

Although Alberti left Padua for Bologna, we might assume that during his time in either Padua or Bologna that Alberti may have seen drawings in Venice by Pisanello or Bellini. Bellini began his sketchbooks, according to both Froehlich and Simon, possibly as early as 1425. In what are believed to be earlier studies, such as St. George and the Baptism of Christ, he also included animals; although Bellini is assumed to have crossed paths with Alberti in Florence in the 1440s, Colin Eisler, arguing that the two met in Venice before Alberti’s arrival in Florence, contends that Bellini assisted Alberti in a recorded but lost aerial View of San Marco.\(^{127}\)

In addition, Pisanello was in Mantua for the first half of the 1420s, employed by young Lodovico Gonzaga, son of the very Gian Francesco to whom Albert dedicated De pictura.\(^{128}\) On the slim chance that Alberti did not encounter the historia drawings of either Pisanello or Bellini

\(^{124}\) See Bober and Rubinstein, 167. One of three reliefs from a destroyed arch, it was visible in the 15\(^{th}\) century in the Church of San Martina (previously Secretarium senatus) in the Roman Forum.

\(^{125}\) Alberti, III.60, 102. “... verum et equum et canem et alia animalia...”

\(^{126}\) See Woods-Marsden, 33-46.

\(^{127}\) For the Froelich and Simon notes see Eisler, 197.

\(^{128}\) Woods-Marsden, 32-33.
in Venice, nor even Pisanello’s work in Mantua in the 1420s, he observed Pisanello’s
draftsmanship in Rome. Although there is no documentation to prove that Alberti sojourned to
Verona in the early-to-mid 1430s, he might have also seen drawings for Pisanello’s fresco of St.
George and Princess of Trebezond at the Church of Sant’Anatasia in Verona, if not witnessed
work on the fresco itself (Fig. 5.59). The St. George, in fact, fulfills all the previous criteria
listed in Alberti’s prescription for historia, including dogs, horses and architecture. Despite the
debated date, Pisanello’s St. Eustace is yet another opus of brimming with all the aforementioned
requisites for Albertian historia (Fig. 5.60). This painting, if seen by Alberti, would further
illustrate his prescriptions of historia as conversant with both Pisanello’s and Bellini’s work as
contemporary masters of buildings and small creatures disegnatur.

Once drawn, the “composition of surfaces” should constitute a historia of “pleasing lights
and agreeable shadows,” wherein “grace and beauty must above all be sought.” 129 Alberti uses
this rhetoric, so well adapted from Cicero and Quintilian, then segues from shadows and light to
perfect depiction of the “parts” within the historia, prescribing that the “nude” be painted so that
flesh facilitates the proportion of muscles. 130 He heralds a historia in Rome of the dead
Meleager, and surviving sarcophagi reliefs, probably that from the Necropolis in Ostia (See Fig. 0.49). 131 When Alberti refers to this antique iconography, he is thinking of extant examples viewed during his time in Rome; and indeed he must to keep the role of the ancient exemplum
firmly impressed upon his pedagogy and aesthetics.

129 Alberti, De pictura, II.35, 72-73. “... ut amenalumina in umbras suaves defluant... maxime gratia et pulchritudo perquirenda est...”
130 Ibid., II.36, 74-75. “…sic in nudo pingendo prius ossa et musculi diponendi sunt.” See Chapter 4, this dissertation, on Bologna and Jacopo della Quercia.
131 Ibid., II.37, 74-75. Laudatur apud Romam historia... videantur.”
Alberti’s Criticism and Counsel in Painting

If Alberti’s chapters on historia serve more as rhetorical description more than pragmatic instruction, then the entirety of prescriptions could be considered a protracted ekphrasis. To follow Baxandall’s argument, that there are no “neutral” ekphrases – that is to say that there is either “praise or blame” involved. Alberti, therefore, gives us a stringent guideline that painting’s historia must not cross. Moving bodies, first of all, must be appropriate to form and function; any false ratio of internal space to the human form, as if people were shut up in a box in which they can hardly fit, is anathema – errors which are apparent in the aforementioned Mercury relief, for example, wherein, as Alberti cautions they seem to be closed “up in a ball” (See Fig. 5.22). This claustrophobic dichotomy of human and architectural proximity in relation to action abounds in Trecento narrative and is Alberti’s first criticism of unacceptable historia. Alberti probably disparaged proto-Renaissance art in Florence, exemplified by Lorenzo Monaco’s Coronation of the Virgin and the Saints (Fig. 5.61). Violating Alberti’s aesthetics as well would be Andrea da Firenze’s Christ Bearing the Cross to Calvary in the Spanish Chapel of Santa Maria Novella – a fresco the humanist would have seen with Eugenius, as the papal entourage resided at that Dominican church (Fig. 5.62).

In II.35 Alberti reiterates that the “great work” of a painter is historia quam colosso – a narrative and not a colossus. Warning against forms of exaggeration, as in Menabuoi’s fourteenth-century frescoes of Marriage at Cana and Paradise, which Alberti would have seen in Padua, he likens a large hodgepodge of contradictory images, large and small, prominent and

132 Baxandall, Giotto and the Orators, 87. For the relationship of ekphrasis and Alberti, see ibid., 51-120.
133 Alberti, II.39, 76-77.
134 Ibid. … “officio et magnitudini corpora…”
135 Ibid., II.35, 72.
receding, to *vetularum vulibus* – the face of an old woman (Fig. 5.63; See Fig. 3.29). The same visual verbosity would have irked him, again in Santa Maria Novella with the populous *Paradis* fresco cycle of Nardo di Cione (d. 1366) in the Strozzi Chapel (Fig. 5.64). If human-architectural extremes were not sufficiently violated by Andrea da Firenze (d. 1415), the painter would have been incriminated for his sins of ‘colossus’ in *The Way of Salvation*, wherein he filled every possible millimeter of space on the south wall of the Spanish Chapel of Santa Maria Novella – complete with the Duomo jammed in among Dominican *frati* saving the world (Fig. 5.65). Lew Andrews, in his compelling treatise on narrative, outlines the demands of perspective to isolate the eye on a fixed event or *historia*, such that the sequential movement of many forms of complex narrative became obsolete by the mid Quattrocento. The works by Da Firenze, Monaco and Nardo deliver the late-Gothic painting topos of a crowded amalgam in a small frame as opposed to a compelling composition of *varietà*. Fixed perspective would excise this verbosity from Quattrocento *historia* by demanding the eye’s focal precision on a single event.

Like the claustrophobia of the *Mercury* relief, Alberti avoids criticism of classical works in his admonitions; however he follows the rhetorical practice of inserting antitheses and attacking contrary points of view within his arguments. At times the antithesis backs up against his prescription, as in the definitions of how to paint faces. He notes “serious mistakes” of movements that are “too violent, and make visible simultaneously in one and the same figure both chest and buttocks, which is physically impossible and indecent to look at.”

Certainly Alberti saw the antique relief of *Amor and Psyche* owned by Ghiberti wherein the depiction of

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136 Ibid.


138 Alberti, *De pictura*, II.43, 84. “Motus enim nimium acres eprimunt, efficiuntque ut in eodem simulacro et pectus et nates uno sub prospectu conspiciantur, quod quidem cum impossibile factu, tum indecentissimum visu est.”
both the back and front of Psyche delineate obvious contortion and obscenity in a confusing and indulging \textit{historia} that would have been abhorrent (Figure 5.66).

Alberti permits architectural ornaments, columns and pediments, if finished in real gold. Donatello’s \textit{Cavalcante Annunciation} in Santa Croce must have inspired this exception, because otherwise Alberti spurns “excessive use of gold” (Fig. 5.67).\textsuperscript{139} Fra Angelico perhaps represents all that Alberti rejects in the way of unacceptable \textit{historia}. Although Fra Angelico was instrumental in perfecting pictorial perspective, he defies the sobriety in Alberti’s dicta against ostentation, pictorial verbosity and visual diminution in \textit{historia}. Following Quintilian’s counsel that beauty “is the finest thing… but only when it comes naturally, not when it is deliberately sought,” Alberti leaves Book II with his disparagement of gold “that almost blinds the eye.”\textsuperscript{140} He does not approve of gild or halos, ubiquitous in Venice and in Fra Angelico’s \textit{Lamentation} (Fig. 5.68). Moreover, the \textit{Strozzi Altarpiece} by Orcagna (Andrea di Cione, 1308-1368), Lorenzo Monaco’s \textit{Coronation of the Virgin} and Gentile’s \textit{Adoration of the Magi}, would have epitomized the gilded anathema (Figs. 5.69 – 5.71). In fact this condemnation of gold possibly indicates a summary rejection of altarpieces, further indicated by a final invective, against “very small panels,” which would infer predella paintings such as Lorenzo Monaco’s \textit{Flight into Egypt} or Gentile’s \textit{Nativity} (Figs. 5.72 and 5.73).\textsuperscript{141} Lorenzo and Gentile also vilify Alberti’s remand on avoiding the claustrophobia of “rolling people into balls.”\textsuperscript{142}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[139] Alberti, \textit{De pictura}, II.49, 92-93. “… quod aurum putent quandam historiae afferre maiestatem.”
\item[140] Quint. \textit{Inst.} 8.18, “Proemium”, 316-317. “… qui est in dicendo mea quidem opinione pulcherrimus, sed cum sequitur, non cum adfectatur.” See also Alberti, \textit{De pictura}, II.49. …eam tamen aureorum radiorum copiam, quae undique oculos visentium perstringat…
\item[142] Ibid., II.39-40, 77-78.
\end{footnotes}
Conclusion to Chapter 5

There is no account for Alberti’s whereabouts in the late 1420s until his arrival in Rome around 1431 in papal employ. The Rome he encountered by 1431 was a city only in its embryo state regarding humanism. The mainstay of textual development in the city was an obsession among humanists to recreate the topography of Rome. They committed to writing a visual recreation of antiquity for intellectuals who were interested or had been steeped classicism, like Alberti beginning in Padua. Within this neo-classical reconstructive context, art that would propel the city into its own unique Renaissance by the end of the century. Iconography on sarcophagi depicted finite composition and movement in reliefs, along with the greatest artists of the middle ages, Giotto and Pietro Cavallini and their works of seminal spatial experiments in mosaic no less, would have inspired Alberti’s visual aesthetics. If Alberti was at least only an accomplished draftsman, which by evidence of his architectural design he was, then his vocabulary had been fomenting for years from visual sources in Padua, Bologna and northern Europe. Finally, however Rome’s narrative wonders in antique replication would have certainly amazed the humanist. The curia, in its beginning stages of rebuilding Rome, not only sought out the early humanists like Poggio and, eventually Alberti, but they began to patronize the avant-garde visual talent in the recreation volume and detail from painters like Pisano and Masaccio as well as sculptors like Donatello and Ghiberti. As a consequence of this new passion in the city for the antique and its replication in new painters an sculptors, the criteria that would inform virtually all of De pictura’s prescriptions, particularly that of historia, would be in evidence and then validated for Alberti in Rome.
Conclusion to Dissertation

In conclusion, Alberti did not arrive in Florence with Pope Eugenius IV to feast upon the cornerstone techniques of Brunelleschi, Masaccio, Donatello and Ghiberti. No documents show nor does any discourse in his personal work suggest that Alberti entered Florene earlier than 1434 in the company of Pope Eugenius IV. Alberti’s own sources only reveal his alienation from Florence altogether. *De Iciarchi* (1468), his last surviving work, says that he was a stranger to the city and rarely went there. In his *Vita anonyma* he claims to have tried to write *Della famiglia* in Tuscan but even the Florentine language appeared alien to him. Considering that the first manuscript of *De pictura* is dated to 1435, it is inconceivable that all of his ideas coalesced into one book within one single year. Furthermore, if Alberti was indeed a painter of any talent, he would have been practicing his craft for years. If, on the other hand, he was at least only an accomplished draftsman, which, by evidence of his architectural design and his dense attempt at the recreation of perspective, he certainly was, then his vocabulary inclusive of his tenets had been fomenting by means of textual and visual sources in Padua, Bologna, possibly Flanders and Rome – the places of his residency, education and employment before his entry into Florence.

Alberti’s aim in *De pictura* was not to impress in a painter’s classroom, workshop or studio but to educate a cultural elite who had studied ancient literature, admired visual art and would view his Latin work as a refined neo-classical argument to lift the status of painting to be equal to that of the intellectual arts. Alberti’s sources before Florence primed him for those pioneers and their ‘new art,’ thus validating all the criteria that had been forming and informing his prescriptions that he would set down in *De pictura*.

*De pictura*’s pedagogic model is Quintilian, absorbed by Barzizza in Padua. As Barzizza was of the first humanists to benefit from Poggio’s discovery of the complete *Institutio oratoria*,
certainly Alberti absorbed much from Quintilian in his education at Barzizza’s hands before he left that school around 1420. During the accumulation of knowledge purported by Alberti, the science of geometry as applied to painting practice was only just becoming revolutionized. Consequently, Alberti presents not a prescriptive handbook like Ceninni, but the initial modern pedagogic manual on painting theory, following the ordo naturae. At Bologna’s studium, Alberti honed the rudiments of mathematics and geometry as they apply to painting, he also probably learned from the long heritage of Paduan science taught by Vittorino in Padua.

The Renaissance surfaces with a confluence of text and art resulting in the latter’s visible evidence of classicism of architecture and naturalism of painting. Alberti’s prescriptions reveal little in the way of practical application and more as a consortium of results that were in play from Giotto, Altichiero, Pisano, Della Quercia, Bellini and Pisanello as well as antique sculpture. Possibly the apparent cornerstone in both of these areas of text and art is evidenced in the classical elements and portraiture of Altichiero in the St. James Chapel in Padua. More than painter, sculptor or even architect, Alberti, as Beck succinctly put it, “should be approached as a humanist – an intellectual, whose principal vehicle was written language.” Alberti subsequently came to studio arts, whether painted, sculptural and architectural, not through a bottega nor a maestro, but as an intellectual, gleaning process and technique through his own precocious abilities by means of that intellect. This, consequently, may be why we have no contracts of patronage for Alberti, as these works, even painting if it exists, may have been commissioned on nothing more than erudite promise.

Masaccio and Donatello enacted more the precepts of Cennini’s studio tenets than Alberti’s scholarly mathematics. Thus Alberti may present nothing more than a longue durée of

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artist principles that were in practice in the painting studio a century before he laid pen to paper.

Alberti’s despising of gilding stems from a contrasting religious and humanist polemic of the age, as gold represented the religious artifice so antithetical to his humanist training in Padua and Bologna, his personal experience of ancient discourse and experience’s influence in early modern art. On the other hand, Cennino endorsed gold for its moral endorsement of religious depiction. Alberti delivered oratorical and intellectual conjecture, while Cennino delivered methodology of craft. The popularity of Alberti lies in his humanist attraction, not in the artisan execution. Art theory has never perpetuated artistic process. Theory is only the de facto analysis; practice is breakthrough and perfection is only realized through repetition in the work place and not by means of theoretical discourse. The practice of visual art is an organic continuum preceding the intellectual reflection. So Leon Battista Alberti compiled and edited De pictura, his tract on painting precepts, from his personal experience in the humanist classroom and visceral physical attendance of his eye upon the majesty of the visual product of genius that he witnessed in Padua, Bologna, Rome and only then, finally, in Florence.
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