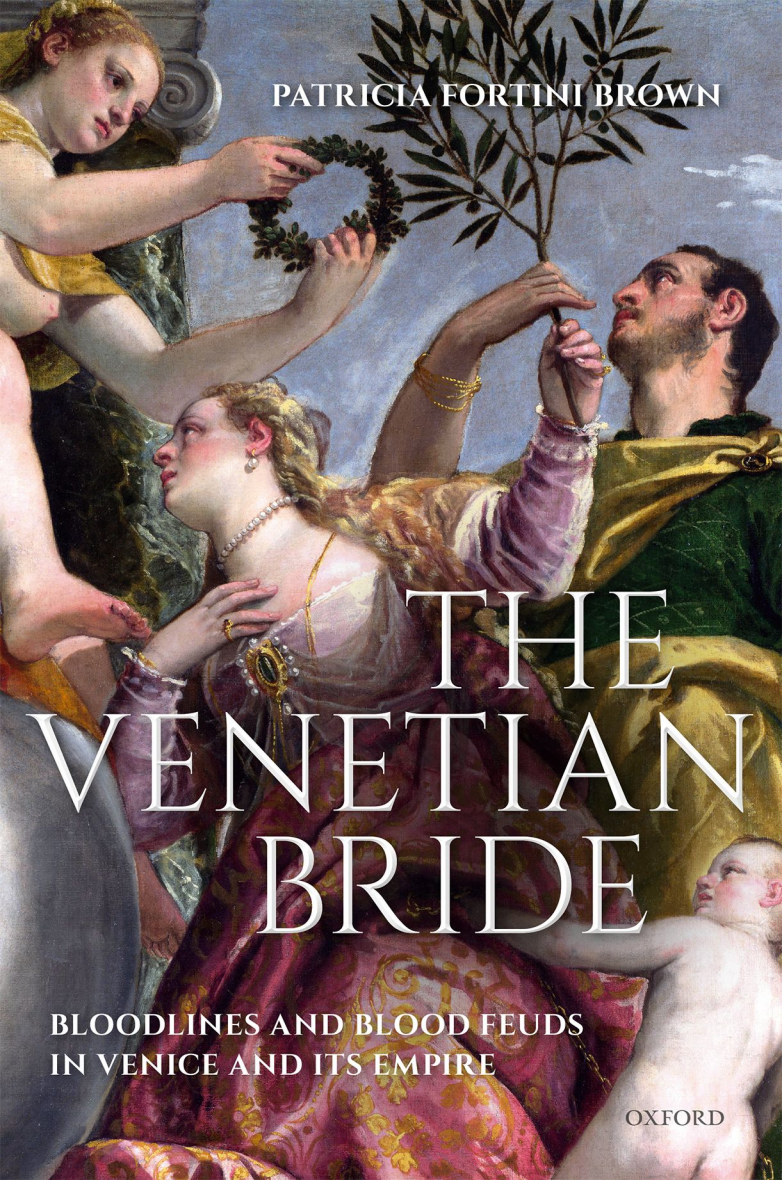
PATRICIA FORTINI BROWN
THE VENETIAN BRIDE
BLOODLINES AND BLOOD FEUDS IN VENICE AND ITS EMPIRE
OXFORD

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This book is dedicated to Paul, John, and Anton—my own bloodline

Contents

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List of Illustrations

Note on Citations and Abbreviations

Printed sources are referred to in the notes by author and year of publication (anonymous works by short title and year). The bibliography at the end of the book, divided into primary and secondary texts, gives full references. The following abbreviations are used in the notes.

Archives and Libraries

ASDUd	Archivio Storico Diocesano, Udine
ASTr	Archivio di Stato, Trento
ASTS	Archivio di Stato, Trieste
ASUd	Archivio di Stato, Udine
AT	*Archivio Torriani-Della Torre*
ADT	*Archivio Della Torre*
ADP	*Archivio Della Porta*
ASVe	Archivio di Stato, Venice
AC	*Avogaria di Comun*
	Barbaro, *Genealogie Miscellanea codici, Storia Veneta*, bb. 17–23 (I–VII), Marco Barbaro, *Genealogie patrizie*
CCX	*Capi del Consiglio di Dieci*
Coll.	*Collegio*
CX	*Consiglio di Dieci*
X Savi	*Dieci Savi alle Decime in Rialto*
LPF	*Luogotenente alla Patria del Friuli*
MC	*Maggior Consiglio*
NA	*Notarile, Atti*
NT	*Notarile, Testamenti*
SAV-MC	*Segretario alle Voci, Elezioni in Maggior Consiglio*
SAV-Sen.	*Segretario alle Voci, Elezioni in Senato*
Sen.	*Senato*
ASVic	Archivio di Stato, Vicenza
BCUd	Biblioteca Communale 'V. Joppi', Udine
MCVe	Biblioteca del Museo Civico Correr, Venice
	Barbaro, *Genealogie* MS Cicogna 2498–2504 (I–VII). Marco Barbaro, *Genealogie e origine di famiglie venete patrizie*

Publications

Bembo/TraviPietro Bembo, *Cardinals*	*Lettere*, ed. Ernesto Travi, 4 vols., Bologna, 1987–93. *The Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church*: http://cardinals.fiu.edu/cardinals.htm
CSP/5	*Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Volume 5, 1534–1554*. Edited by Rawdon Brown. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1873. *British History Online*, accessed 4 June 2020, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol5.
CSP/8	*Calendar of State Papers Foreign: Elizabeth, Volume 8, 1566–1568*. Edited by Allan James Crosby. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1871. *British History Online*, accessed 4 June 2020, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/foreign/vol8.
Cicogna, *Ins. Ven.*	Cicogna, Emmanuele A. *Delle inscrizioni veneziane*, 6 vols in 7. Venice, 1824–53.
DBI	*Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. 92 vols. Rome: Istituto dell' Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–[online: http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/]
DU	Leonardo and Gregorio Amaseo, with Giovanni Antonio Azio, *Diarii udinesi dell'1508 al 1541*, ed. Antonio Ceruti, Monumenti storici, 3rd ser., vol. 2, Cron*AC*he e diarii, vol. I, Venice: R. Deputazione Veneta di Storia Patria, 1884.
DU, GA	Portion of diary by Gregorio Amaseo (225–492: 1511–41)
DU, GAH	Appendix to diary by Gregorio Amaseo, *Historia della crudel zobia grassa et altri nefarii excessi et horrende calamità intervenute in la città di Udine et patria del Friuli del 1511* (497–544)
DA, LA	Portion of diary by Leonardo Amaseo (1–191: Feb. 1508–10)
Moroni, *Dizionario*	Moroni, Gaetano. *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica da S. Pietro sino ai nostri giorni*. 103 vols. Venice, 1840–61.
Pastor	Pastor, Ludwig Freiherr von. *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages,* 40 vols. London, 1891–1953.
Relazioni/Legnago	*Relazioni dei Rettori Veneti in Terraferma. VIII. Provveditorato di Legnago*, Milan, 1977.
Relazioni/Friuli	*Relazioni dei Rettori Veneti in Terraferma. I. Patria del Friuli, Milan,* 1973.
Sanudo, *Diarii*	Sanudo, Marin. *I diarii*. Edited by Rinaldo Fulin et al, 58 vols in 59. Venice, 1879–1903.
Vasari,	*Lives*Vasari, Giorgio. *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*. Translated by Gaston du C. De Vere. 10 vols. London, 1912–15.
Vasari, *Vite*	Vasari, Giorgio, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori* (1568). Edited by Gaetano Milanesi. 9 vols. Florence, 1878–85.

Other abbreviations

b./bb.	Busta/Buste
c./cc.	Carta/carte (leaf/leaves)
fasc.	Fascicolo
fu	son or daughter of
MS/MSS	Manuscripts/s
n.	Note
q.	quondam (son or daughter of)
r./rr.	Registro/Registri
s. v.	*Sub voce*
v./vols.	Volumes/volumes

Names

The names of Girolamo and Hieronimo were used interchangeably in this period. Gian Matteo Bembo might be called Zuan Matteo, Zan Matteo, Giammatteo, or Giovanni Matteo. The first version is used in this book for consistency. Likewise, Luigi might be referred to in the primary sources as Alvise, or Ludovico or Lodovico; or Jacopo as Giacomo; or Marco Antonio as Marcantonio; and so on. In general, a specific individual will be referred to with the same spelling throughout the book when possible. When the same name is repeated through the generations, the first so-named and his/her successors will be designated as Carlo I, Carlo II, Carlo III, and so on.

The Della Torre surname, generally used throughout the book, also appears in documents of the period with several spellings, including Dalla Torre, a Turre, a Torre, a Turri, Turriani, Torriani, and even delatore.

Patronymics: In primary documents, a living father is typically (but not always) designated by fu; a deceased father by q. (i.e., Gian Matteo Bembo fu Alvise; or Gian Matteo Bembo q. Alvise). The original spelling is retained in the book.

Dates

The Venetian year began on 1 March. Thus, dates in original documents that were cited as *more Veneto* have been changed to normal usage. The Venetian dating system was not used in the Friuli, where the year began on 1 January.

Translations

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

Previous publications

In addition to material that was presented in a different context in my book, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice* (Brown 2004), I have published articles on specific topics that are incorporated into the present book: Brown 2008, Brown 2013a, Brown 2013b, Brown 2013c.

Preface

In exploring Venice's engagement with the ancient past for my book *Venice & Antiquity* (1996), I came across the curious statue of a wild man holding a solar disc inserted in a classical niche on the façade of a palace in Campiello Santa Maria Nova. I learned that the owner and patron, Gian Matteo Bembo (also called Zuan Matteo, Giovanni Matteo, and Giammatteo in the primary documents), had led a consequential life, not only in Venice, but also in its territories in the Terraferma and the stato da mar. Gian Matteo's sculptural pastiche made a cameo appearance in the conclusion to *Venice & Antiquity* as an example of uniquely Venetian self-fashioning that engaged the republic's classical past and imperial present.

Gian Matteo would play a far more important role in my *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice* (2004). I became intrigued by his daughter Giulia's marriage to Count Girolamo Della Torre, a mainland noble with a castle and other properties in the Friuli. A new book, the microhistory of a marriage, was in the making. My working title was *The Venetian Bride.*

Brides were central to the Venetian experience. Bejewelled brides played a major role in Venetian pageantry, put on display for foreign dignitaries as emblems of the city's wealth and, as future bearers of sons, of its continual renewal. Indeed, Venice was itself a bride, its identity grounded in a bridal paradox. On the one hand, the city, its mythical foundation on the day of the Annunciation, was identified early on with the Virgin Mary, the mother and bride of Christ, as *Venetia-Vergine*. On the other hand, in the *Festa della Sensa*, the annual Marriage to the Sea, the city conveniently switched genders. Here, Venice, as represented by the doge, became a husband, espousing the sea as its bride in a metaphor of its dominion over its maritime empire. Over time, the trope of Venice as Virgin (chaste and undefiled) eventually incorporated a notion of Venice as Venus (sensual and fertile). In sum, the ideal bride.

But then what about Giulia Bembo's husband, the feudal lord from Venice's mainland empire? He was the other half of the bridal equation. The Friuli was new terrain for me, and the project entailed a number of trips to Udine to research the Della Torre family archive in the Archivio di Stato and related material in the Biblioteca Comunale. Three books—Edward Muir's *Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta in Renaissance Italy*; Antonio Conzato's *Dai castelli ai corti*; and Laura Casella's *I Savorgnan*—and a wealth of articles were essential for my understanding of the complex dynamic between the Venetian patriciate, the feudal nobility of the Friuli, and the Holy Roman Empire. But as I carried out my research, the playing

field was expanding both chronologically and spatially. For Gian Matteo's career as a 'man of empire', and Girolamo's exile to Crete, were other parts of the story.

Following this line of research brought me into contact with Venice's maritime territories. The publications of Chryssa Maltezou, Maria Georgopoulou, Benjamin Arbel, Monique O'Connell, Lorenzo Calvelli, and Helena Szépe were particularly important for my journey into what was, for me, previously unexplored territory. In the course of two decades of research, I went on to publish several articles on various aspects of the topic, parts of which have been incorporated into this book. More recently, I had the opportunity to review Erin Maglaque's book, *Venice's Intimate Empire: Family Life and Scholarship in the Renaissance Mediterranean*. And I finally accepted the fact that my own book in progress was about more than a bride. It was about the mingling of the bloodlines of two families with contrasting notions of honour and justice in three spatial theaters over three centuries. A study of their lives opened a precious window into a past in which Venetian republican values clashed with the deeply rooted feudal traditions of the mainland. And thanks to an anonymous reader for Oxford University Press, I retitled the book to *The Venetian Bride: Bloodlines and Blood Feuds in Venice and Its Empire*—a far more accurate description of its contents.

And what happened to the notion of a microhistory? I would refer readers to Thomas Cohen's masterful definition of the genre in his essay entitled 'The Macrohistory of Microhistory'. He calls attention to a weariness with 'the Linguistic turn and the rise of theory' and the emergence of a desire for what he calls 'suchness', defined as 'palpable reality, as experienced directly and as understood by its inhabitants'. How do we get at it? Through examinations of individual agency, material things, spaces, places, and time. In sum, a deep dive into the archives. Given the fragmentary nature of surviving evidence, we can only hope to piece together a patchwork of experiences that these inhabitants of the historical past—Girolamo Della Torre and Giulia Bembo and their extended families: past, present, and future—might recognize as their own, and to stitch this patchwork into a matrix that comprises the larger world in which they lived. One can never get it exactly right, but one can try to come close.

What is the significance of the marriage of Girolamo Della Torre and Giulia Bembo? I see it as emblematic of the Venetian experience, with the metropole at the center of a fragmented empire: the union of a Terraferma nobleman and the daughter of a Venetian senator, who raised their family in the stato da mar, in the stato da terra, and in Venice itself. And who, beyond that, established a bloodline that would survive the end of the Venetian republic. In sum, a microhistory embedded in a macrohistory.

PART ONE

BIRTHRIGHTS

1
A Future Bride

Antonia Bembo was not blessed by marital good fortune. Daughter of the humanist diplomat Bernardo Bembo, and sister of Pietro, man of letters and later a renowned cardinal, she had married the noble Sebastiano Marcello in June 1493. On the face of things, his prospects were good. An experienced *sopracomito* (galley captain), he had already served as podestà of Montona (Istria) and castellano and camerlengo of Lepanto. Indeed, he seemed destined to become a prototypical Venetian man of empire. After the marriage, Sebastiano settled down with Antonia for a time, with government positions inside Venice, and Marcella, the first of three daughters, was born in February 1496.[1]

A New Malady

But soon, disquieting news emerges from Pietro Bembo's correspondence. In a letter dated 3 December 1498, he consoles a close friend who had recently contracted the *morbo francese*. He knows how hard this is, because 'the husband of my sister has been suffering from this malady already for many months, now healthy, now sick, and mostly bad'. He counsels his friend to continue with his treatment until it is complete, even though he may think himself healed.[2]

Antonia's husband Sebastiano had fallen victim to a disease of disputed origins that had already been described by the Venetian diarist Marin Sanudo in July 1496, shortly after Marcella's birth:

> Note that due to celestial influences, two years ago, that is, since the coming of the French in Italy, a new malady was discovered in the human body called the *mal franzoso*, which disease has spread throughout Italy, as well as Greece, Spain, and almost the entire world. And it is of such a nature that it overwhelms the limbs, the hands and feet with a type of gout, and makes pustules and inflamed blisters over the entire body and on the face, with fever and arthritic pains…with such misery that the patient calls for death. And this sickness begins first in the area of the genitals; and in coitus it is contagious, otherwise not. It is said that even children have it. Its duration will vary widely, and it is conclusively a filthy disease, but few die of it. Which malady, although many say it came from the French, they also have had it for two years, and they call it the *mal italiano*.[3]

The Venetian Bride: Bloodlines and Blood Feuds in Venice and Its Empire. Patricia Fortini Brown, Oxford University Press (2021). DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780192894571.003.0001

Striking the highborn as well as the low, the mysterious disease, later called syphilis, swept through the papal court in Rome, infecting Cardinal Cesare Borgia, son of Pope Alexander VI, and at least seven other cardinals. It also seems to have plagued the Este family of Ferrara.[4]

As Sanudo had observed, the disease was not usually fatal, at least in the early stages. After a year or so, it typically entered a latent phase without symptoms, but was still transmittable to others. And herein lay a silent but deadly threat to chaste wives, and, indeed, any future sexual liaison. A tertiary stage, with paralysis, blindness, dementia, and death, might appear only decades after the initial infection.[5]

Perplexed doctors tried a variety of treatments on desperate patients. Those endured by Sebastiano might have included bloodletting, ointments and baths of wine and herbs, toxic applications of mercury, the cauterizing of sores, and sweats in dry heat. None would have been truly effective, but as his disease entered the latent phase, Sebastiano may well have thought himself cured.[6] While he would undoubtedly have contracted the disease from a prostitute or courtesan, his infidelity was thus not the biggest problem facing Antonia. The conjugal debt was enshrined in canon law, and during the periods in which Sebastiano felt himself 'now healthy', it had to be paid.

By June 1499, Sebastiano is serving as podestà of Cologna Veneta, a small commune in Veronese territory, accompanied by Antonia and their second-born daughter, Maria, known as Marietta. Pietro has joined his parents in Ferrara, where his father Bernardo is serving a two-year term as *visdomino* (Venetian consul in residence) at the court of Isabella d'Este. Little Marcella is staying there as well with her grandparents and already learning her letters. Pietro writes Sebastiano an affectionate note, assuring him that 'your sorrows and annoyances are my annoyances and sorrows. I expect that the others of our house are also of this mind.' Unsettling words, suggesting that Sebastiano's maladies continue. Maria could have been born as early as 1497 or as late as early 1499, and thus conceived after Sebastiano became infected. But there is no evidence that he passed on the disease to Antonia or the child, and thus to the Marcello bloodline—a danger to which Pietro seems oblivious. After reporting on rumours of war in Naples and Tuscany, he adds that he is sending Sebastiano a female puppy and signs off cheerfully: 'Be well and kiss the *podestaressa* for me, and kiss Marietta for me. La Marcellina has become a great sonneteer.'[7]

Bernardo has returned to Venice from Ferrara by 1500 and is living with his wife Elena in a rented palace at San Trovaso. The household now includes Pietro, and probably his brother Carlo and half-brother Bartolommeo, along with Sebastiano and Antonia and their children. But then world events intervene. At war with the Ottomans for the past year, Venice loses its fortress at Modon on the tip of the Peloponnese in August, and Sebastiano is dispatched as *sopracomito*

(captain) of a war galley to Zara, a Venetian port city on the Adriatic, with money and munitions. He dies in Corfù the following April, leaving Antonia a widow, now with three daughters.[8] The third, Giulia, must have been born in this period and would definitely have been conceived after Sebastiano had been infected with the *morbo francese*.

What was expected of a good wife? Juan Luis Vives, in his treatise *De Institutione Feminae Christianae* [*The Education of a Christian Woman*], published in 1523, praised an innocent young girl whose husband, more than twenty years her senior, was infected with the French pox:

> The doctors advised her not to touch him or go close to him. Her friends gave the same advice . . . She was not deterred by these words, but cared for both soul and body . . . So, through his wife's care, his life dragged on for ten years after his first illness in his cadaverous body, or more truly, a living tomb. During this time she bore him two children in addition to the six to whom she had already given birth since her marriage at the age of twenty, never becoming infected with her husband's contagious disease . . . and her children also were endowed with healthy and clean bodies. From this example it becomes clear how great is the virtue and holiness of those women who love their husbands with their whole heart, as is fitting, and how God rewards them in this life.[9]

Again, we have to ask whether Antonia was equally fortunate or whether she or any of her daughters had contracted Sebastiano's disease. Pietro makes no mention of such a dire consequence in his correspondence, and we can only hope that such was not the case.

Unbeknownst to the family, Pietro was involved in a torrid clandestine love affair at the time with Maria Savorgnan, a young aristocratic widow from the Friuli who was living nearby. Maria was a woman of resolve. Sanudo had recorded the extraordinary appearance before the Collegio on 22 December 1498 of

> the widow of Giacomo Savorgnan, our *condottiere* of one hundred horsemen, dead at Pisa . . . with two little boys and two little girls, most beautiful creatures, and her brother, Domino Anzolo Francesco da Santo Anzolo, also our *condottiere* and the brother-in-law of Sir Girolamo Savorgnan, in mourning clothes. And throwing themselves at the feet of the Signoria, that lady begged for maintenance and for dowries for her daughters because of her husband's fidelity. The Collegio was moved to compassion and the doge said that he would consider her plea, but she received nothing.[10]

Maria left her four children with relatives back in the Friuli and remained in the palace of friends near San Trovaso, where she met Pietro. Even after she went to

Figure 1.1. Valerio Belli, Pietro Bembo (obverse), bronze medal, ca. 1532 (Washington, National Gallery of Art)
The medal is probably a fair likeness of Bembo in his early 60s. Most surviving painted portraits depict him as a bearded patriarch after his election as cardinal in 1539. The verso of the medal depicts him *all'antica*, as a partially nude figure, reclining beside a stream.

Ferrara for carnival celebrations in December 1500 and stayed on, they continued to carry on a passionate correspondence, complete with exchanges of sonnets. He wrote to her on 1 March 1501: 'Love me, love me, love me and a thousand times love me.' They met for the last time in September, when he wrote: 'I pray the gods that they bring to you, a thousand times doubled, that sweetness which you are now removing from my life. It will always be most sweet to me, above all other sweet things, hearing that heaven advances your every desire.'[11]

Pietro did not remain heartbroken for long. Within a year he was residing in a villa near Ferrara and already in love with the golden-haired Lucrezia Borgia, the bride of Alfonso d'Este (himself reputed to be suffering from the *mal francese*). Their dalliance lasted until 1503, and even beyond, when she took on a new lover, her own brother-in-law, the condottiere Francesco II Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, husband of Isabella d'Este.[12] Pietro—cultivated, charming, and cash-strapped—went on to lead the life of the courtier, making the rounds of the courts, Mantua, Ferrara, Urbino, and particularly Rome, in search of benefices (Figure 1.1).[13]

Foeminae innocentissimae

Antonia remarried in 1508, further evidence that she had escaped a disfiguring, and shameful, infection with the *mal francese*. Again, the prospects were bright. Giacomo Marcello fu Giovanni, a distant cousin of Sebastiano's and also a galley captain, was a widower without sons.[14] But the marriage did not go well. Commissioned as capitano of the galleys of Beirut, Giacomo sailed away in September.[15] Unlike most men of the sea, when he returned to Venice the following February it was not to his family, but to a courtesan with whom he had been enamoured all along. Antonia, whose mother would die later that year, was miserable. She tried to regain Giacomo's affections 'with humanity, decency, restraint,

and patience, making the greatest efforts without saying anything to anyone, to no avail'. When her father became aware of the situation, he too was unsuccessful in persuading the wayward Giacomo to mend his ways. Pietro, referring to his sister as *foeminae innocentissimae* [the most innocent of women], a description that he had used to refer to his own mother, was appalled to hear of Giacomo's 'unprecedented arrogance' and wrote from Urbino to the Patriarch Antonio Contarini in July 1510. He asked him to intervene with his brother-in-law as 'their last hope, the sacred anchor which can save the family from shipwreck'.[16]

Pietro was himself most susceptible to feminine charms, and his moral calculus was clearly different when the shoe was on the other foot. In 1513, the year that he was appointed secretary to Pope Leo X, he met the beautiful Ambrogina Faustina Morosina della Torre, the love of his life (although not the first), in the Borgo outside the Vatican walls. Although only sixteen and already married, Morosina became Pietro's lover and companion, secretly in Rome, but openly when she accompanied him back to the Veneto as his *de facto* wife. From a little-known family of Genoese origins with aristocratic pretensions, she was said to be charming and cultivated, perhaps like her sister Mariola, a Vatican courtesan who owned at least two houses in the Borgo. If Morosina had not been married off with a dowry at such a tender age, she might well have shared a similar fate. Little is known of her husband, not even his name.[17]

Antonia's three daughters—Marcella, Maria, and Giulia—were probably already safely sequestered in the convent of Santa Caterina as boarding students in those years. The precocious Marcella would remain Pietro's favourite niece throughout his life. Back in 1502, he had written to his brother Carlo: 'I am sending to Antonia a couple of Greek rules [grammars] of messer Costantino [Lascaris] for Marcella.'[18] Heavy reading indeed for a six-year-old. Allowing that she was better educated than most of her teachers in the convent, Marcella would have been instructed along with her sisters in the womanly arts of weaving, sewing, and embroidery, in addition to basic reading and writing.

The convent complex, consisting of a church, a large cloister, and dormitories surrounded by high walls, housed widows, battered women, and *converse* (servant nuns), in addition to professed nuns and *foeminae innocentissimae* like the Bembo girls. A *ruota*, a revolving door like a subway turnstile, 'that only one person can enter', was intended to restrict access. It led to the *parlatorio* in which visitors gathered to chat with cloistered nuns—brides of Christ—who were safely secured behind a double grate in an adjacent room. But a letter written by the Patriarch Antonio Surian in 1505 had told a different story. He complained that many of the nuns were 'accustomed to leaving the convent and wandering about the city at leisure *cum scandolo* of many'. He threatened all such transgressors with excommunication. Without much success, it would seem. The same admonition, now applying to all the convents in the city, was

repeated in 1509 by the Patriarch Antonio Contarini, to whom Piero had written the following year.[19]

The gap between religious ideals and actual practice, as well as the special status accorded talented courtesans as well as court ladies, was further highlighted by Marin Sanudo in his diary entry of 16 October 1514:

> This morning Lucia Trivixan, who was an excellent singer, was buried at Santa Catarina. She was the consummate courtesan of her day and was held in much esteem by musicians; all of the virtuosi met at her house. She died last night, and eight days from today, at Santa Catarina, the musicians will have a solemn funeral mass and other offices said for her soul.[20]

Whether or not Antonia's husband had changed his ways and abandoned his own courtesan, a mellowed Pietro was addressing him later that year as his *carissimo cognato*—'dearest brother-in-law'.[21] The next we hear of Giacomo is in 1518, when he sailed off as capitano of the galleys of Beirut for two consecutive terms.[22] During his absence, Antonia may have been living in the convent or, more likely, with her father Bernardo. He died on 27 May of the following year at the age of eighty-seven and was buried in San Salvador three days later. Sanudo writes: 'He was an excellent and most learned patrician and senator, especially in the humanities. He served in many ambassadorial missions and governorships…He dedicated himself to his life, continually writing, until the final hour of his illness, fine and well-composed letters filled with every sort of erudition.'[23]

A Very Good and Virtuous Gentleman

The year 1519 had been difficult for Pietro. In addition to his father's death, a trusted employee had robbed him of 600 florins. And now he was responsible for his three nieces. Writing in October to Cardinal Bernardo Bibbiena, he lamented that a long illness had left him

> not only impoverished, but also in debt. Furthermore, as an additional burden on top of so many problems, I had to marry off my niece with a dowry of 3000 florins, not however of cash, that I could not have found, but with an equivalent sum of my annuities assigned to the husband, with several hundred florins in addition. And two other [nieces] already grown, remain on my shoulders, each to be married…I can tell you that I have never found myself at any time of my life more travailed than I find myself now.

But then he reconsiders: 'Leaving melancholy matters aside, I have given my oldest niece, called Marcella, to a very good and virtuous gentleman not only of my

Figure 1.2. Venice, Ca' Bembo on Campiello Santa Maria Nova, built late fourteenth century.

patria, but also of my family, Messer Giovan Mateo Bembo, not rich, but well off enough, esteemed in this city and much honoured for his age, that is, of 28 years. Of this I am well satisfied.'[24] Patrician dowries were limited to 3000 ducats by law, which meant, of course, that this amount was expected by a prospective spouse.[25] After the wedding, Marcella moved from the convent of Santa Caterina into Ca' Bembo, a modest fourteenth-century Gothic palace on Campiello Santa Maria Nova inherited by Gian Matteo (Figure 1.2).[26]

Ever the courtier, Pietro wrote to Pope Leo X about the newlyweds shortly after the marriage: 'Both of them kiss the blessed feet of your *Beatitudine* and humbly bow and kneel before you in supplication, asking that you deign to give them your blessing.'[27] The pope was quick to comply with a letter directly to Gian Matteo, who thereupon forwarded it to Pietro for perusal. Pietro then wrote another letter thanking the pope, sent it back to Gian Matteo, and instructed him to read it and forward it to Rome along with his own response. He also advised his new nephew to have Marcella visit her two sisters at Santa Caterina and ask the abbess and the nuns to 'devote a prayer to God for the health and happiness of Pope Leo'. In his letter to the pope, Pietro had indicated that his mother Antonia

was also staying in the convent and that he wished his sisters to remain there, like Marcella, until they were married.[28] Marcella, then twenty-three years old, had received a classical education, unusual for a young woman of her time. With her family connections, she was an ideal wife for a man aspiring to a career in public life. Indeed, with the marriage—and Pietro's support—Gian Matteo's career took off on an upward trajectory.[29]

Giacomo Marcello, Marcella's misbehaving stepfather, returned from his last galley trip on 11 January 1520. Sanudo observes that he 'came to the Collegio dressed in black velvet for the death of ser Bernardo Bembo, doctor and cavalier, his father-in-law'. Giacomo himself died on 14 March before he could present a full report of his voyage to the Senate.[30]

A Valiant Woman

Leaving Morosina behind in the Veneto, Pietro returned to Rome that spring to shore up his financial situation. He writes to Gian Matteo on 26 June, addressing him as *figliuol caro* [dear son].

> It is precious to me that my sister [Antonia] is with you. You should all live happily and lovingly as much as you can. It pleases me that you are often in my house with Madonna Morosina and that she comes sometimes to be with you. It is true that I am a bit envious of you. The more love you show her the more you will please me, and I will be indebted to you… Marcella, dear little girl, I kiss you from here; you will kiss your sisters for me.

He signs himself *Bembus pater*.[31] Marcella is pregnant, and Pietro writes to Gian Matteo again a month later: 'I am pleased that your Marcella has entered the ninth month because she will be over that burdensome labor so much sooner. The child who is born, if male, I would like to be called Quintilio, if female, Lucina.'[32]

The baby was born right on schedule on 10 August, the feast day of San Lorenzo. Pietro writes again on 28 August:

> I rejoice with you for the son who has made you a father, with good health and little annoyance to Marcella, his mother and my daughter. Nor do I demur in celebrating with you that she is a valiant woman, [and] that our lord God would make both you and all your house and ours (that is one alone, both in love and in name) happy with this baby boy. Take care of him well and kiss him in my name many times, and also his mother.[33]

A new bloodline, Bembo twice over, was begun.

Pietro's preference in names is worth noting. Quintilio referred to the Roman rhetorician Quintilian, whose *Institutio Oratoria* was on the bookshelf of any Renaissance humanist worthy of the name. Lucina, the Roman goddess of childbirth, might seem a suitable name for a first daughter, but, perhaps by coincidence, it was also the name of the eldest daughter of Maria Savorgnan, Pietro's lover of two decades earlier.[34]

The new parents honoured Pietro's wishes, at least technically, and named their first son Quintilio Lorenzo (although thereafter they called him Lorenzo). In doing so, they departed from the traditional Venetian practice that privileged the renewal of the ancestors through repetitive names. The firstborn son was typically, but not always, named after his paternal grandfather. If not that, after another relative. But with no Quintilio evident on either side of the baby's family tree, this would be a new beginning, sanctioned by the addition of Lorenzo, the name of his patron saint.[35]

It would not be long before Pietro would write again to Gian Matteo, in January 1521: 'I am pleased that Marcella is expecting [again] in that children will not be lacking. [But] for her, I am worried that she will grow old too quickly. Take care of yourself, and refrain from those bad practices that take away or shorten or weaken and ruin old age.' We can only speculate as to what practices he referred to.[36] When a daughter was born in July, she would be named Augusta—also a name with a Roman pedigree—not Lucina. Her grandmother Antonia probably died soon thereafter, but her presence at the births of both babies must have been a godsend to Marcella, an inexperienced, if erudite, mother of two infants under the age of two.[37] By the end of the decade, Augusta would be followed by four more brothers: Alvise (named after his paternal grandfather), Marco Antonio, Sebastiano, and Davide.[38]

When Pietro returned from the Vatican in the spring of 1521, he held twenty-seven benefices, including the *commenda* of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem in Bologna. Granted by Julius II in 1508, it had required him to join the Order in six months' time, but he had managed to obtain deferrals from Leo X, who even granted him an additional *commenda* of Benevento and appointed him Prior of Hungary. Pietro settled down contentedly with Morosina in Villa Noniano (or Villa Bozza) at S. Maria di Non, a village north of Padua where the Piovego river flows into the Brenta. They would be joined at some point by Maria and Giulia, his unmarried nieces.[39] But then on 1 December, Leo X died unexpectedly. When he was succeeded in January by the hardliner Adrian VI, Pietro knew that he would finally have to take vows. He had been receiving benefices from the Order of St John for fourteen years. No more deferrals could be expected. Undaunted, although he was living openly with Morosina, he finally joined the Order in December 1522. Supplying the requisite proof of four noble grandparents and taking vows of 'true obedience towards every superior given me by God and this Order', he promised 'to live henceforth without any private property and to

observe chastity'. He put on the distinctive black habit with the white eight-pointed cross and returned to the villa and Morosina. Although the rules of the Order strictly forbade a member from keeping a concubine—and Morosina, Pietro's *de facto* wife, definitely fell into that category—Pietro blithely ignored the injunction and seems to have suffered no negative consequences. His first child, Lucilio, was born eleven months later, to be followed by Torquato in 1525.[40]

A Modest Affair

Pietro still had to find husbands for his two unmarried nieces, presumably untouched by the *mal francese*. The matter was of some urgency, since both girls were well past the typical age for a first marriage. Maria, born in 1497/8, was his first concern. She was betrothed, finally, in early 1526, to Bernardino Belegno, 'a Venetian gentleman, very well-mannered, and, for his age, much honoured and loved in the city'. Pietro's letters make clear that Maria was a passive player in a game played out by her male relatives. The major protagonists in the negotiation of the marriage contract were Bernardino himself and the Magnifico Pietro Marcello, a distant but very wealthy and influential relative of the bride's birth father. The two men made the agreement official with a handshake. The witnesses included Bernardino's brother Vincenzo and Maria's brother-in-law, Gian Matteo, the latter standing proxy for our Pietro, who had been involved in the negotiations but seems to have remained in Padua.

Pietro Bembo affirms the engagement in a letter to Gian Matteo on 1 March: 'I pray that the lord god would give his blessing. Since you are so content, I remain very satisfied… I am resolved to obey the Magnifico Pietro [Marcello] in all things.' The wedding itself, as orchestrated by the Magnifico, was to take place as soon as possible. It should also be modest, far from the extravagant multi-week affairs for which Venice was famous. Our Pietro continues:

> So, tomorrow morning, God willing, I will mount the barge with Maria and her sister, and we will be with you tomorrow evening. So that Saturday after dinner, at whatever hour his Magnifico determines, she will be married. It would be good if this affair would take place as secretly as possible. Tell Marcella that she should find some clothes for her… and anything else that is needed, even something like a beautiful string of pearls, or whatever is customary. But do it soon, so that it is not late for Saturday. I don't know what else to tell you. You who are there will know the whole thing better than I know.[41]

Why did the Magnifico Pietro, a very distant relative of the bride, take such an interest in the wedding and essentially manage the entire affair? The answer might

lie in his ambitions, his wealth, and the political climate. Having entered the Senate back in 1515 with a payment of 500 ducats, he was accustomed to deploying his assets for political advantage. It is unclear whether he subsidized part of Maria's dowry (perhaps with a loan to her uncle Pietro), but one might conjecture that he had been eager to conclude her marriage as swiftly and privately as possible to avoid drawing attention to untidy aspects of the family tree.

Long concerned with maintaining the purity of the patrician bloodline, the nobility were particularly outraged that spring by a marriage between a patrician and a wealthy and sumptuous courtesan, an event that, according to Sanudo, 'has cast great shame on the Venetian patriciate'. The Council of Ten immediately passed legislation making it difficult for any sons born of such unions, not to mention those born to *de facto* wives, to gain admission to the Great Council when they reached maturity. At stake was 'the honour, peace and preservation' of the state, which rested on the 'immaculacy and purity' of the 'status and order of nobility'.[42] Such attitudes might explain Morosina's absence from the wedding party in Ca' Bembo. Admittedly she had two small children to care for, but she was often a visitor in the house and must have been close to the bride. Indeed, it was perhaps no coincidence that the Magnifico would be elected Procurator of San Marco with a contribution of 16,000 ducats on 13 June, a few months after Maria's wedding. The most prestigious office in the Venetian government next to the doge, this lifetime position came with the right to wear a splendid red velvet toga and involved duties such as the administration of estates.[43] Pietro's son Lucilio would die at the age of eight; Torquato would eventually be legitimized by the pope and become a cleric, but he would never be a Venetian patrician.[44]

It was a time for weddings. Gian Matteo must also have been involved, along with his brothers Davide and Bernardo, in the marriage negotiations for his sister Marina to Francesco Tiepolo in 1526. The wedding took place on 5 July 1527. Already cited in her father's will of 7 December 1492, Marina must have been in her mid-thirties—a most mature bride.[45] And, unlike her brothers, completely absent from Pietro's correspondence.

What Fortune Will Bring

Pietro has a respite of three years before Gian Matteo writes him in April 1529 that a suitor has been found for Giulia, the youngest niece, now living with his family in Ca' Bembo. Pietro, by then the father of a daughter, Elena, responds with little enthusiasm:

> Concerning Giulia, I tell you that these are bestial and dangerous times, such that for now I do not want to make that expense. I would like for you to write me

> a line about who he is. I did have a thought which I did not want to write you, that is, that a rich and very kind and wise man had some desire to be related to me. We will see what fortune will bring.

It is worth noting that Pietro views the thirty-year-old Giulia's desirability in terms that relate to himself and not to her own personal charms.[46]

Pietro ponders the situation further and writes to Gian Matteo again three days later: 'God knows that I would like to do every good thing for all my family; you know from past experience that I am of this mind.' But the world is in tumult, and Pietro has lost much of his income and has taxes and loans to pay. For all that, he comes up with a proposition: 'If that young man will be content with 30 *campi* of land that will count for 600 ducats, and take the rest at so much a year, along with that of her mother [Giulia's share of Antonia's dowry], I will gladly consider it. But I cannot give them money, since I do not have a *soldo*.' He cites a tale of a father who would be content to remain in a Spanish prison if it excused him from marrying off his daughter. Pietro concludes: 'I tell you this, and I say it most truly: that if Giulia were my daughter, I would not have had nor will I have now the burden of marrying her, that I would have her become a nun, and she would have to do it, since I being her father, she would have to obey me.'[47]

Giulia's suitor, Marc'Antonio Longo, hopefully 'a rich, and very kind, and wise man', agreed to the terms. The wedding took place in the convent church of Santa Caterina on 18 November 1529, with Bernardino Belegno and Gian Matteo acting as witnesses for the bride.[48] Pietro sent his regards to the couple three weeks later and wrote to Giulia herself the following March, inviting her and Marc'Antonio to visit him and Morosina in Padua.[49] Alas, Giulia died soon thereafter, perhaps in childbirth.[50] But her name would live on, for Marcella was pregnant yet again.

Pietro writes to Gian Matteo in July 1531 during a heat wave. He is concerned about Marcella, 'who with her great body would be faring badly in her prison'. A month later, he writes: 'I am content that Marcella is relieved [from her burden], and also that she has given birth to a baby girl, since you have already have too many boys. I rejoice with her and with you. Take care to stay healthy, and nourish the *bambina* well.'[51] Marcella's second daughter, her seventh child in eleven years, would be named Giulia, thus renewing her sister's name in the family bloodline.

As we have seen from our brief tour through the marital history of the Bembo and Marcello families, brides were the creations of male agency and mediation. It is telling that in documents and genealogies of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries women were typically cited without a first name, and only as wives, mothers, or daughters of named male figures. The latter, by contrast, were invariably referred to by a first name along with a patronymic, attesting to the transcendent importance of male lineage.

At the time of her wedding a girl was truly the central figure in a drama, but one that was fully orchestrated by her father, her new husband, and male relatives on both sides. In theory, a girl had the right of refusal; but, in reality, such refusals seldom happened. A generation later, Lodovico Dolce could still write:

> Since a virgin neither knows nor desires the union with man, our young girl will leave all deliberations in her father's hands, accepting gladly as a husband the one [he] will choose. Apart from the fact that this responsibility does not befit a virgin, she would not be able to make a good choice since she has no experience of the world.[52]

The alternative to marriage was the convent, and again it may not have been a matter of choice or vocation. As Pietro Bembo had put it, if Marcella's sister Giulia had been his own daughter, he would have insisted that she become a nun, and 'she would have to do it, since I being her father, she would have to obey me'. Ironically, it turned out that his own daughter Elena resisted life in a convent, and he would give in, marrying her off to a Venetian patrician at the age of fifteen. She was, like her aunt Marcella, a skilled Latinist whose marriage would restrict her literary activities to personal correspondence. And she would be, like her aunt Antonia, the forgiving wife of an unfaithful husband.[53]

That would not, happily, be the case for Pietro's grandniece, the renewed Giulia, a future bride. She was destined for an eventful marriage that played out in three spatial theatres: Venice, the Terraferma, and the Stato da Mar. But before we encounter her as a bride, we must travel back in time to the early sixteenth century and explore the early life of her eventual husband, Count Girolamo Della Torre, a feudal lord from the Friuli, part of Venice's mainland empire. For our Giulia's destiny was determined not only by her Venetian roots, but also by the feudal and ecclesiastical heritage of the extended family of which she would become a part. A decades-long vendetta between the Della Torre and the Savorgnan families was central to that heritage. And, indeed, two generations later, Tristan, grandson of Maria Savorgnan, Pietro Bembo's former lover, would carry out the very act of vengeance that led to the merging of two noble bloodlines with the marriage between Girolamo Della Torre and Giulia Bembo, his Venetian bride.

Notes

1. Giannetto 1985, 52, 204–7. Antonia must have lost her first child. Pietro writes in September 1494 that he had returned to Venice from Sicily to find his sister pregnant. Bembo/Travi, I: 7 (11 or 22 September 1494). Sebastiano served on the Quarantia

Civil Nuova in 1494 and on the Quarantia Civil e Criminale, and as one of the Signori di Notte in 1495. ASVe, *SAV-MC*, r. 5, 16v, 32v; r. 6, 66r, 79r. 129r, r. 9, 9r.

2. Kidwell 2004, 22; Bembo/Travi, I: 34 (3 December 1498). For the spectacular career of Pietro Bembo, see now Beltramini, Gasparotto, and Tura 2013; Nalezyty 2017.
3. Sanudo, *Diarii*, I, 233–4.
4. Arrizabalaga, Henderson, and French 1997, 47–50, 113; Alfani 2013, 109–10.
5. Arrizabalaga, Henderson, and French 1997, 25; Eatough 1984, 11–13.
6. Arrizabalaga, Henderson, and French 1997, 29, 131–42; Frith 2012, 49–58; Tognotti 2006, 29–59; Cohen and Cohen 2001, 244–6.
7. Kidwell 2004, 21–2; Bembo/Travi I, 37, no. 43 (12 June 1499). Modern studies indicate that untreated syphilis is transmitted to around 60 per cent of sexual partners. A child could receive it from an infected mother in the womb or during the birth. See Garnett 1997, 185–200.
8. Sanudo, *Diarii*, 3: 769, 907; 4: 49. Cf. Kidwell 2004, 192, who confuses Sebastiano di Benedetto (Antonia's husband) with Sebastiano di Antonio.
9. Vives 2000, 200–2.
10. Sanudo, *Diarii*, 2: 245; Kidwell 2004, 28–30. Maria was the daughter of the condottiere Matteo Griffoni de Sant' Angelo of Urbino. For Giacomo's will, written in 1495 before he went off to battle, see Casella 2003, 142. The Signoria, the supreme body of Venetian government, typically consisted of the doge, his six councilors, and the three heads of the Quarantia Criminale (criminal courts). The Collegio, the main executive council, comprised the Signoria, plus the five savi agli ordeni, five savi di Terraferma, and six savi di Consiglio. See Labalme and Sanguineti White 2008, 546, 549.
11. Kidwell 2004, 25–8, 62–8; Bembo/Travi, I, no. 126 (1 March 1501); no. 132 (4 September 1501); Nalezyty 2017, 74–87, 97–8. Pietro kept eighty of her letters until his death in 1547; they were discovered in the Vatican archives only in 1950.
12. Kidwell 2004, 71–98; Quatrocchi 2005, 1–5, 10. Gonzaga also exhibited symptoms of the *mal francese*. See Arrizabalaga, Henderson, and French 1997, 47–9.
13. Kidwell 2004, 113–50. For Bembo's possible portrait by Giovanni Bellini in this period, see Shearman, *Early Italian Pictures*, 41–3.
14. For the two marriages, see ASVe, Barbaro, *Genealogie*, IV, cc. 469, 477; MCVe, Barbaro, Genealogie, IV, cc. 305, 308. See also Giannetto 1985, 256 n296. For the probable death of Marcello's wife and daughter in 1503, see Sanudo, *Diarii*, 5: 65.
15. Sanudo, *Diarii*, 7: 440–1, 461, 628, 741; ibid. 8: 11–12.
16. Quotations from Kidwell 2004, 192, 411n31. For the letter, see Bembo/Travi, II, 299 (7 July 1510), incorrectly naming the patriarch as Domenico Contarini. For Elena's death, see Kidwell 2004, 146; Bembo/Travi, II, 293. Sanudo, *Diarii*, 10: 18, incorrectly refers to the death of a *figlia* of Bernardo Bembo on 4 March 1510. He may be referring to the death of Bernardo's wife Elena in 1509. Gianetto, 253, accepts the date, but cf. Kidwell 2004, 192, noting that Antonia is cited in Pietro's letters up to 1521. BMVe, MS, it. Cl., VII, 8307(=18), Cappellari Vivaro, *Il Campidoglio veneto,* 3:31, cites incorrect names for Antonia's daughters, again disproven by Pietro's letters. See Gianetto, 205n297.

17. Kidwell 2004, 174–5, 199–200. Although he seems to have still been alive in the 1530s, he simply disappeared from the pages of history without any record of an annulment or divorce. For concubinage, see Byars 2019, 22–59, esp. 33–42.
18. Bembo 1564a, 11r–11v (8 October 1502). Cf. Bembo/Travi, I, no. 138, with a misreading of 'Antonia' as 'Antonio'. Pietro had studied Greek with Lascaris, one the greatest Byzantine scholars of the day, in Messina. See Kidwell 2004, 11; Wyatt 2014, 13.
19. Canosa 1996, 47–8; Toffolo, *Art and the Conventual Life*, 1–37; Laven 2003.
20. Labalme and Sanguineti White 2008, 322.
21. Kidwell 2004, 148, 192; Bembo/Travi, II, 345 (4 December 1514). Unaware of Antonia's marriage to Giacomo in 1510, both Kidwell and Travi incorrectly assume that this refers to Sebastiano (who died in 1501).
22. Sanudo, *Diarii*, 26: 386, 437; ibid. 27: 156, 536, 574.
23. Ibid. 27: 324–5. English translation from Labalme and Sanguineti White 2008, 430.
24. Bembo/Travi, II, no. 392 (1 October 1519). See also Brown 2013a, 232–3. Gian Matteo was born on 21 August 1490. His father Alvise q. Zaccaria had died in 1501, and was presented for membership in the Great Council by his mother Pentesilea Michiel. See ASVe, AC, r. 165, 24v (1 December 1511). She also presented his brothers Davide (ibid. 25r; August 1514) and Bernardo (ibid. 26v; 9 October 1516).
25. Chojnacki 2000, 67–72. The limit was raised from 1600 ducats to 3000 in 1505. The wealthiest families frequently violated the limits with dowries of 10,000 ducats or more.
26. ASV, NT, b. 1259, n. 507. For the layout, see Brown 2004, 188–9, 190–6; Maretto 1978, 74–7; Maretto 1986, 115–20.
27. Bembo/Travi, II, no. 393 (4 November 1519).
28. Ibid. No. 394 (15 November 1519).
29. Brown 2013a, 231–49.
30. Sanudo, *Diarii*, 28: 166, 168–9, 352.
31. Kidwell 2004, 194; Bembo/Travi, II, no. 400 (26 June 1520).
32. Bembo/Travi, II, no. 402 (28 July 1520).
33. Ibid. II, no. 404 (28 August 1520).
34. Lucina was born well before her mother Maria's romance with Pietro.
35. ASVe, AC, r. 51, 15r. For naming strategies see Brown 2004, 16–18, 255; Grubb 1996, 42–7. Cf. Klapisch-Zuber 1985, 283–309.
36. Bembo/Travi, II, no. 412. See Bell 1999, 27–33.
37. With the birth of Augusta imminent, Antonia is still living on 5 July 1521. Bembo/Travi, II, no. 417 (5 July 1521). He does not mention Antonia in subsequent letters. She probably died before 10 December 1522, when Pietro sends his love to Marcella and others, but not to his sister.
38. Brown 2004, 94–5.
39. Kidwell 2004, 201–2, Bembo/Travi, II, 417; 670.
40. Kidwell 2004, 198–9, 202. Lucio was born in November 1523, Torquato on 10 May 1525.
41. Kidwell 2004, 265–6; Bembo/Travi, II, 647 (27 February 1526), 648 (1 March 1526), 652 (16 March 1526), 670 (21 April 1526). The Magnifico Pietro shared a common ancestor with Sebastiano Marcello back in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Andrea di Giovanni (d. 1318) was the fourth great grandfather of the former and the third great grandfather of the latter. ASVe, Barbaro, *Genealogie*, IV, cc. 469, 479; MCVe, Barbaro, *Genealogie*, IV, cc. 305, 309.

42. Sanudo, *Diarii*, 41: 201, 203; Chojnacki 2000, 53–75, esp. 64.
43. Brown 2004, 166–7; Sanudo, *Diarii*, 41: 539–40, 616; ASVe, Barbaro, *Genealogie*, IV, c. 479; MCVe, Barbaro, *Genealogie*, IV, 309. He was a Procuratore di Citra, with jurisdiction over the three sestieri north of the Grand Canal. See Hart and Hicks 2017, 91–2, 192.
44. Kidwell 2004, 257–8.
45. ASVe, *Ospedali e Luoghi Pii Diversi*, b. 236, Processo A, c. 2; ASVe, *AC*, r. 87, 299; MCVe, Barbaro, *Genealogie*, VII, c. 20; ASVe, Barbaro, *Genealogie,* VII, f. 89.
46. Ibid. 266; Bembo Travi, III, 951 (23 April 1529). Pietro's daughter Elena was born on 30 May 1528.
47. Kidwell 2004, 266; Bembo/Travi, III, 952 (26 April 1529). For the burdens that dowries imposed on fathers, uncles, and brothers, see Chojnacki 2000, 132–52, and *passim*.
48. ASVe,AC, r. 87, 22v (10 December 1529).
49. Bembo/Travi, III, no. 1034 (7 December 1529); no. 1047 (2 March 1530); Brown 2004, 95.
50. Marc'Antonio married a second wife in 1532. ASVe, Barbaro, *Genealogie*, IV, c. 300; MCVe, Barbaro, *Genealogie*, IV, c. 190. It is likely that Giulia died before February 1531, when Pietro refers in a letter to Gian Matteo about Marc'Antonio's wish to embark on a ship bound for Candia. Bembo/Travi, III, no. 1197 (11 February 1531).
51. Bembo/Travi, III, nos. 1264 (31 July 1531); 1292 (26 September 1531).
52. Dolce 1547, 31, quoted in Rogers and Tinagli 2005, 117.
53. After Morosina's death in 1535, Pietro's daughter Elena was placed in a convent in Padua. In October 1543, Pietro, by then a cardinal, entrusted Gian Matteo Bembo to negotiate her marriage to the Venetian patrician Pietro Gradenigo. See Ross 2009, 54–66; Kidwell 2004, 346, 352–4. See also Medioli 2000, 122–37.

2
A Bitter Bequest

Girolamo Della Torre would never forget the Cruel Carnival of 1511, when his world would change forever. In a savage orgy of violence on the evening of Giovedì Grasso (*Zobia Grassa* in Venetian dialect), normally the high point of Carnival in Udine, he lost his father, an uncle, two cousins, and his family's closest friends. The memory of this cataclysmic event lived on in the Friuli for centuries. It was recounted in diaries and chronicles in its own time and in articles and books in ours, most notably Edward Muir's *Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta in Renaissance Italy.* But it is fundamental to our story and must be retold here once again.[1] It was a bitter bequest.

A Gathering Storm

Girolamo, born in 1504 as the second son of the Friulian lord Alvise Della Torre, had led a privileged childhood, divided between a luxurious family palace in the city of Udine and the seignorial castle of Villalta in the countryside seven miles to the west. But what should have been a comfortable life was not a carefree one—for the boy had been born in the eye of a gathering storm. The Patria del Friuli, part of Venice's mainland empire since the 1420s, was in a state of siege (Figure 2.1). It was threatened from without by the Turks, who saw it as the gateway to the west; by other European powers who resented Venice's expansionary policies; and by the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I (1459–1519), who eyed it hungrily from north of the Alps as his rightful inheritance. It was threatened from within by a polarized nobility and an increasingly restive mixture of oppressed peasants and discontented townspeople.[2]

Decades earlier, Marin Sanudo had commented on the fragile balance of power in the Patria, split between two 'vigorous and organized factions', following old alignments of Ghibellines and Guelphs. The Strumieri, a consortium comprising most of the castellans—the feudal nobility based in castles in the countryside—was led by the Della Torre family and included the Colloredo, Strassoldo, Spilimbergo, Collalto, Castello, Valvasone, Brazzaco, and Partistagno, among others. Initially resistant to the Venetian takeover of the Friuli and the whittling away of their legal sway over the lives of their peasants, the Strumieri were seen by many (not without reason) as exploiters of the poor. Like their Ghibelline predecessors, they were accused of supporting the emperor. The Venetians, well

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Figure 2.1. Abraham Ortelius, *Patria del Friuli*, 1573, from. *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum Abrahami Ortelii Antverp. Geographi Regii.* Antwerp, Plantin Press, 1601.
The Venetian Terraferma includes Istria and part of the Veneto (colored green) and the Friuli (bordered in yellow). Imperial lands are bordered in red.

aware that the Hapsburgs offered tempting imperial favours to the castellans—pensions, fiefs, posts, debt management, and status—regarded their loyalty with caution, if not suspicion.[3]

The Zamberlani, Guelph counterparts to the Ghibelline Strumieri, were headed by the Savorgnan family. Elected to the Venetian patriciate—an extraordinary honour—in the fourteenth century, the Savorgnan had supported Venice's move into the Friuli with men and arms. Although the wealthiest clan in the Patria in terms of both land and riches, the Savorgnan fashioned themselves as protectors of peasants and the common people and were supported by 'quasi il populo tutto'. They also had allies in Udine among a newly noble mercantile class which resented the swaggering demeanour and superior attitude of the castellans, including the Della Torre, who maintained residences inside the city. Within a society already stratified along lines of hereditary privilege and economic class, the elites were themselves thus profoundly divided.[4]

Udine itself had a split personality. On the one hand, it was the urban hub of a rural hinterland, with roads radiating out from a dozen or so portals to

Figure 2.2. Joseph Heintz il Giovane, attrib., *View of Udine*, c. 1650–60 (Udine, Civici Musei, Galleria d'Arte Antica).

castles and villages dotted throughout the surrounding plain and foothills of the Alps (Figure 2.2). On the other hand, it was inward looking. The city had grown up around the *colle*, a prominent hill surmounted by the Castello, the thirteenth-century palace of the patriarch of Aquileia, who wielded temporal and spiritual authority in the region. It was protected by five circuits of walls that had been built over time. After the Venetian conquest in 1420, the Castello remained the administrative centre of the Patria and served as residence of the luogotenente, a rotating post held by a Venetian noble for sixteen months, with an attendant cadre of officials. The real centre of political authority remained, however, in Venice.[5]

The Serenissima successfully controlled the fractious nobles for a time by playing one group against the other and securing vows of allegiance from both, and yet the internal situation remained volatile. The contentious relationship between the Della Torre and some of the Savorgnan was particularly complicated. A property dispute dating to 1339 had given rise to a feud that would flare up periodically over the next two centuries and beyond. During the last decades of the fifteenth century, the streets of Udine and Cividale, the most important cities in the territory, were filled with partisans brandishing pennants, one side shouting *Savorgnan, Savorgnan* and the other *Struma, Struma* or *Torre, Torre*, and proclaiming their allegiance to one side or the other with special signs such as flowers, foliage, or other insignia attached to their ears, hats, shoes, or other parts of their dress.[6]