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# Reforming Beauty: The Casa delle Zitelle and Female Asylums in Early Modern Venice

Kelly Renee Cricchio  
*San Jose State University*

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REFORMING BEAUTY: THE CASA DELLE ZITELLE AND FEMALE ASYLUMS  
IN EARLY MODERN VENICE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Art and Art History Department

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Kelly R. Cricchio

August 2019



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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

REFORMING BEAUTY: THE CASA DELLE ZITELLE AND FEMALE ASYLUMS  
IN EARLY MODERN VENICE

by

Kelly R. Cricchio

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF ART AND ART HISTORY

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2019

Dr. Anne Simonson

Department of Art and Art History

Dr. Christy Junkerman

Department of Art and Art History

Dr. Elizabeth Carroll Consavari

Department of Art and Art History

## ABSTRACT

### REFORMING BEAUTY: THE CASA DELLE ZITELLE AND FEMALE ASYLUMS IN EARLY MODERN VENICE

by Kelly R. Cricchio

This thesis examines the Casa delle Zitelle (the House of Unmarried Girls), a female asylum created to care for poor, beautiful young girls who were at risk of becoming prostitutes in early modern Venice. The institution was founded, as well as funded and administered, by a group of pious patrician women in 1559. The Casa delle Zitelle was not only sponsored by and for women, but also the predominant patrons of the institution were Venetian women. The institution's commitment to transform the *zitelle* (unmarried girls) into the sixteenth century ideal of womanhood was best articulated in the design of the architectural complex, which was influenced and patronized by the founding female administrators of the institution. The ability to reform the *zitelle* also persisted in the devotional imagery of the Zitelle's attached church, Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle. This thesis focuses specifically on the altarpiece commissioned by Elisabetta Foppa, *The Agony in the Garden* (c. 1618) by Jacopo Palma il Giovane, which assisted the *zitelle* in matters of religion and piety that were instrumental to the girls' transformations. An examination of Foppa's altarpiece further reveals an understanding of, and contributes to, an interpretation of the iconographic trends in the visual arts located in the churches of early modern female asylums.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

Located on the island of the Giudecca, across the lagoon from the Piazzetta San Marco in Venice, Italy, is the former female asylum known as the Casa delle Zitelle (the House of Unmarried Girls) (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> In 1559, a group of Venetian patrician women founded the Casa delle Zitelle to protect vulnerable girls and to prevent them from becoming prostitutes. Remarkably, patrician women controlled almost every aspect of the institution, from founding and funding to governing the Casa. The female-based administration was exclusively responsible for reforming the *zitelle* (unmarried girls) into the patriarchal ideal of sixteenth-century womanhood. The institutional commitment of the Zitelle was significantly articulated in the design of the architectural complex, influenced and patronized by the female founders and administrators of the institution. The capacity of the architecture to control and influence the wards was further integrated into the devotional imagery in the attached church, notably in the altarpiece commissioned by Elisabetta Foppa. The Casa delle Zitelle was an integral component of the city's revived poor-relief system during the sixteenth century; however, at no other Venetian charitable institution were women the predominant art and architectural patrons

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<sup>1</sup> The Piazzetta San Marco was once the main entrance to the city. The Piazzetta lies between the Palazzo Ducale and the Marciana Library. It is an extension of the Piazza San Marco, the location of the Basilica of San Marco and government buildings reserved for the Procurators of San Marco. Together the two squares formed the social, religious, and political center of Renaissance Venice.

and thereby afforded a substantial opportunity to affect the lives of other women while simultaneously challenging their place in early modern Venice.<sup>2</sup>



**Figure 1.** Casa delle Zitelle, c. 1575–97. Venice, Italy. Photo: author.

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<sup>2</sup> A note on terminology: “early modern” refers to the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Throughout this thesis, the words “charitable institution” and “female asylum” will be used interchangeably. Both refer to residential establishments founded within an institutionalized network of charity aimed at ameliorating problematic groups. Female asylums are, in fact, a type of charitable institution, along with the *ospedali grandi* and the *scuole*. For more on early modern women’s institutions, see Sherrill Cohen, *The Evolution of Women’s Asylums Since 1500: From Refuges for Ex-prostitutes to Shelters for Battered Women* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Historians have examined Italian women's experiences in the early modern period for over a generation.<sup>3</sup> In Renaissance Venice, the gender-specific cityscape seems not only to have informed, but also to have defined norms governing gender roles. Dennis Romano suggested that during the Renaissance "the division of the city into male and female space was one of the marked and powerful dichotomies in the Venetian urban landscape."<sup>4</sup> This sentiment is continuously illustrated in paintings of Renaissance Venice revealing the dichotomous relationship between the city's urban geography and male and female spheres of influence. The many images of beautiful women watching processions and festivals from enclosed residential spaces, such as balconies and windows, demonstrate that public spaces such as the Piazza San Marco and the Rialto, the political, religious, and commercial centers of the city, were understood as masculine spaces.

In Venice and Europe in general, men were synonymous with business, politics, and power. At the end of the thirteenth century, the legislative measure known as the *serrata* or "closing" of the *Maggior Consiglio*, the city's Great Council, and main deliberative

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see Allyson M. Poska, Jane Couchman, and Katherine A. McIver, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2016); Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews-Grieco, eds., *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); and Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, eds. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 19-50.

<sup>4</sup> Dennis Romano, "Gender and the Urban Geography of Renaissance Venice," *Journal of Social History* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1989): 339-40, JSTOR.

body, established a hereditary, aristocratic oligarchy to rule Venice.<sup>5</sup> The closing of the *Maggior Consiglio* codified that all Venetian males, except those whose family members held a position in the council before 1297, were excluded from government offices and committees. The closing effectively divided the population into a tripartite social stratum between patricians, *cittadini*, and *popolani*. Patricians were males atop the social hierarchy and composed about five percent of the Venetian populace. From the patriciate came the noblemen of the *Maggior Consiglio*, or the only men in Venice who could hold public office or be elected as doge, the leader of the Venetian Republic.

Below the nobility was the hereditarily defined class of non-noble *cittadini*, or male citizens. Like patricians, they constituted around five to eight percent of the total population and enjoyed a number of important political and economic privileges.<sup>6</sup> There were two categories of citizens. The first, *cittadini originarii*, men of ancient Venetian ancestry and wealth, and the second, *cittadini de intus* or *de intus et extra*, foreigners who were granted Venetian citizenship. Although citizens were excluded from the councils and assemblies that governed the city, they nevertheless were afforded outlets to fulfill political ambitions. *Cittadini originarii* assisted the government working as secretaries and diplomatic assistants, and exclusively held careers in the *Cancellaria* (Chancellery).

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<sup>5</sup> For the *serrata* and structure of Venetian society during the early Renaissance, see Gerhard Rösch, “The *Serrata* of the Great Council and Venetian Society, 1286-1323,” in *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797*, eds. John Martin and Dennis Romano (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 67-88; and Dennis Romano, *Patricians and Popolani: The Social Foundations of the Venetian Renaissance State* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 27-38.

<sup>6</sup> Romano, *Patricians and Popolani*, 29.

Additionally, prestigious offices at the *scuole grandi* were exclusively reserved for *cittadini originarii*. The *scuole grandi* were the city's devotional and charitable lay confraternities. They played a vital role in the city, in both the religious and social lives of Venetians, and allowed non-noble males the opportunity to participate in public life.<sup>7</sup>

The majority of Venetian residents belonged to the *popolani*, or common people, who comprised roughly ninety percent of the population. They enjoyed, as noted by Romano, no special privileges or legal status, as did members of the patriciate and *cittadini*.<sup>8</sup> Members of the *popolani* were distinguished only by their trade and included not only the lowest ranks of society, but also artisans, craftsmen, prosperous foreigners, mariners, and shipyard workers. Nevertheless, politically, socially, and geographically, Venice appeared to be a city of and for men.

Elite Venetian women negotiated city spaces within the restrictions of patriarchal society and experienced numerous impediments precluding them from public life. Theology, social customs, and the judicial system all conspired to keep women restricted within enclosed and private spaces such as the household, the parish-neighborhood, and

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<sup>7</sup> There were six *scuole grandi* and numerous *scuole piccole*. While some *scuole piccole* had no more than thirty members, others had four hundred or more, rivaling in size with the *scuole grandi*. For more on the development of the *scuole grandi*, see Brian Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1971). See also Richard MacKenney, "Devotional Confraternities in Renaissance Venice," in *Voluntary Religion*, eds. William J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 85-96.

<sup>8</sup> Romano, 29.

the convent.<sup>9</sup> The restrictions placed on noblewomen's mobility throughout the city resulted from the desire of patrician men to preserve their societal honor by protecting the virtue of their wives and daughters.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, women were excluded from politics in Venice. For patrician women the *scuole* became one of the few options available for public life outside of the household. Although prohibited from membership in the *scuole grandi*, they could participate as officers in some of the *scuole piccole*; however, women were excluded from the administration.<sup>11</sup>

In accordance with practices across Europe, patrician women in Venice were destined for either marriage or the convent. In his treatise *On Marital Matters* (1416), the patrician Francesco Barbaro defined the household as a woman's proper realm. He asked, "What is the use of bringing home great wealth unless the wife will work at preserving, maintaining and utilizing it?"<sup>12</sup> According to Barbaro, women should "imitate the leaders of bees, who supervise, receive, and preserve whatever comes into their hives, to the end that, unless necessity dictates otherwise, they remain in their

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<sup>9</sup> This does exclude women of lower status. Women of the *popolani* often profited from options not available to their elite counterparts, such as mobility outside of their household and neighborhood. See Monica Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Romano, 131.

<sup>11</sup> Female officers of the *scuole piccole* included the *gastalda* (female warden) and the *degane* (female office bearers). See Linda Guzzetti and Antje Ziemann, "Women in the Fourteenth-Century Venetian 'Scuole'," *Renaissance Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 1151-195, JSTOR.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt, eds., *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 216.

honeycombs where they develop and mature beautifully.”<sup>13</sup> His treatise further advised men on choosing a suitable wife. Of all things, a wife needed to be modest, quiet, and suppress any independent self-expression.<sup>14</sup> All notions linked with the idea that women belonged in the private sphere. Nevertheless, Stanley Chojnacki has shown how certain women used their dowry to maneuver familial relations to exert dominant roles within the family.<sup>15</sup> Through their economic, social, and legal position, patrician women were also capable of producing large-scale capital investments, indicating the potential to have a sizeable economic impact on the city itself.

While Venetian women’s social power has been traditionally linked to private spaces such as the home and the convent, the philanthropic institutions that emerged in the sixteenth century offered affluent women the opportunity to exercise agency outside of conventional domestic spaces. Charitable institutions became locations ripe with new opportunities for women of all classes in early modern Italy.<sup>16</sup> These institutions developed out of the religious reform that swept throughout Europe in response to the

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<sup>13</sup> Kohl and Witt, *The Earthly Republic*, 217.

<sup>14</sup> King, *Renaissance Women Patrons*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> On noblewomen, see Stanley Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice: Twelve Essays on Patrician Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), especially 115-131 and 169-182. For accounts of dowry wars between spouses, see Joanne M. Ferraro, *Marriage Wars in Late Renaissance Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 135-54.

<sup>16</sup> For how women used charitable institutions to protect their private property against their male kin, especially their husbands, see Laura McGough, “Women, Private Property, and the Limitations of State Authority in Early Modern Venice,” *Journal of Women’s History* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 32-52, Project MUSE.

Protestant Reformation. As a result, Venice witnessed the arrival of new religious orders, such as the Jesuits, whose zealous oratory inspired the assistance of noble laymen and women in founding purposefully designed institutions to care for socially problematic populations, such as the indigent, syphilitics, and prostitutes. Charitable institutions became locations where many upper-class women could participate publicly in administrative positions traditionally unavailable to women. Yet, it was unusual for women to also be the predominant patrons of art and architecture at charitable institutions. Careful study of the Casa delle Zitelle reveals an exceptional situation.

In 1558, the Jesuit preacher Benedetto Palmio arrived in Venice advocating for a new institution to save beautiful young virgins from being sold into prostitution by their families. Palmio's oratory immediately resonated with several patrician women, including Adriana Contarini, Lucrezia da Ponte, Isabella Grimani, and Isabetta Loredan.<sup>17</sup> By 1559, the women had organized and moved fourteen girls into a house in the parish of San Marcilian. At the house, the *zitelle* were provided with shelter and a Christian education in preparation for their return to Venetian society as respectable and virtuous women, either through marriage or entrance into a convent. A *zitella* could be of any social class, although most girls came from middle-class and artisan families. To qualify

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<sup>17</sup> All of the Zitelle's founding female members came from or married into prestigious patrician families, including the Cornaro, Contarini, Grimani, Loredan, Marin, Priuli and Bembo. A commonality among the women was their status as wives and mothers. Many of the women were widowed, and each of their children had reached adulthood, married, or entered a monastic life. Due to their freedom from family obligations, the women had the time and funds to dedicate to charitable endeavors. For more on the female founders of the Zitelle, see Vanessa Scharven Chase, "The Casa delle Zitelle: Gender and Architecture in Renaissance Venice" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2002), 54-71.



as a candidate, a *zitella* had to be of good health, attractive, and at clear risk of compromising her chastity by becoming a prostitute.

The institution's constitution, the *Costituzioni della Casa delle Zitelle*, was written by Palmio in 1587.<sup>18</sup> The constitution not only identified the rigorous admission criteria for prospective candidates but also sanctioned the institutional framework that ultimately reinforced the predominance of female leadership at the Zitelle. Two congregations of trustees and governors were established, comprised of noblemen and women, in addition to a female staff that exclusively looked after the daily proceedings of the institution.<sup>19</sup> The *protettori* and *protettrici* were the male and female boards of trustees; the *protettrici* were responsible for visiting regularly to ensure the young girls were well cared for. The *governatrici*, the board of female governors, were the school's primary administrators and among other duties, responsible for fundraising and obtaining candidates. The *governatrici* more importantly served as a crucial link between the girls in their care and the *governatori*, the board of male governors, who primarily oversaw legal matters. The *madonna* or *madre*, a Venetian noblewoman, was the head of the school and in charge of the daily activities of the house. Her assistants, the *coadjutrice*, also came from noble families and managed the day-to-day operations of the school, including the physical

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<sup>18</sup> The Casa delle Zitelle's constitution and building documents are preserved in the archives of the Istituzioni per Ricovero ed Educazione (IRE) in Venice. For transcriptions of an original manuscript of the constitution acquired by the Archivio di Stato (ASV) in Venice, see Chase, "The Casa delle Zitelle," 452-55.

<sup>19</sup> For a thorough analysis of the Zitelle's administrative organization, see Monica Chojnacka, "Women, Charity and Community in Early Modern Venice: The Casa delle Zitelle," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 68-91, [JSTOR](#).

maintenance of the girls and their quarters. Finally, the *maestre* were former *zitelle* who became teachers. A *maestra* provided guidance, governance, and daily care to the girls.

The establishment of a female-centered and governed community at the Casa delle Zitelle not only challenged women's place in the urban fabric of the city but also created an opportunity to pursue patronage endeavors similar to those presented by their male counterparts. The same group of patrician women who founded and managed the Zitelle utilized their dominant position within the institution's hierarchy to fund and oversee the construction of the new complex on the Giudecca. In 1561, when the original house in the parish of San Marcilian began to meet the needs of the wards insufficiently, as a corporate entity the *governatrici* raised eight thousand ducats to purchase a new property on the Giudecca.<sup>20</sup> From 1575 to 1597, select female administrators supervised a building program that created an environment better suited to the living arrangements and education of the *zitelle*. The women's initiatives resulted in an innovative H-shaped plan with residential quarters flanking the attached church on both sides. Surviving building documents presented by Vanessa Scharven Chase demonstrate women's active roles in the construction process.<sup>21</sup> Through patronizing and overseeing the renovation at the Casa delle Zitelle, patrician women were able to embody the tenets of the school within the spatial organization of the building, creating an architectural space that not only reformed the *zitelle* but also responded to the city's religious and political campaign to refashion itself as a moral Republic.

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<sup>20</sup> Chase, 125-26.

<sup>21</sup> For an extensive account of the Zitelle's construction, see Chase, chapters 2-6.

The initiative to reform the *zitelle* continued in the religious imagery in the church of Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, the church of the Zitelle, named for its patron saint, the Virgin Mary. Construction began on the church in 1581, and it was consecrated in 1588. In a complex that was sponsored by and for women, it is no surprise that women commissioned a majority of the church decorations; two affluent Venetian women patronized sixteen of the eighteen paintings in the church. In 1610, Elisabetta Foppa obtained patronage rights to the right side altar, located on the west wall of the church (Figure 2). Her legacy at the Zitelle includes the altar she commissioned and the numerous properties, devotional objects, and artworks she bequeathed to the institution. Surviving testamentary excerpts and a tomb inscription on the altar evidence her contributions to the Zitelle.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Elisabetta Foppa's will and inventory survive at the IRE in Venice. At the time of researching for this thesis the historical archive of the IRE was closed to scholars and therefore, this thesis relies upon the transcriptions published by Dante Luigi Gardani and Barbara Mazza. See Dante Luigi Gardani, *La Chiesa di S. Maria della Presentazione (delle Zitelle) di Venezia* (Venice: Stamperia di Venezia, 1961), 26-30; and Barbara Mazza, "Committenti e artisti nell'età delle riforme: l'arredo della chiesa di Santa Maria della Presentazione," in *Le Zitelle: Architettura, arte e storia di un'istituzione veneziana*, eds. Lionello Puppi and Giuseppe Ellero (Venezia: Albrizzi, 1992), 129-61. For an English summary of Foppa's will, see Paola Tinagli and Mary Rogers, *Women and the Visual Arts in Italy C. 1400-1650: Luxury and Leisure, Duty and Devotion: a Sourcebook* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 256.



**Figure 2.** Right side altar, c. 1610–18. Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.

Little is published of Foppa's personal life or connection to the Zitelle. It is possible that she served as a *governatrice* of the Zitelle given that the two other altars in the church were patronized by *Governatori* Bartolomeo Marchesi and Federico Contarini, and *Governatrice* Moceniga Mocenigo bequeathed the fifteen panels that adorn the church interior and entry portal. It would appear that patronage rights were given to individuals closely associated with the Zitelle. Although she does not mention the altarpiece painted by Jacopo Palma il Giovane in the published excerpts of her will, Foppa's involvement with the construction and decoration of the altar indicates her participation in the altarpiece commission.

Jacopo Palma il Giovane's (1548/50–1628) *Agony in the Garden* (c. 1618), the painting that occupies Foppa's altar, presents Christ kneeling on top of a mountain ledge. While he appears engrossed in prayer, an angel materializes holding a golden chalice—the symbolic form of the Holy Eucharist. Below Christ, three of his disciple's slumber. Foppa is depicted along with her brother Pasquale in the foreground of the painting. The siblings are presented not only as witnesses to the event but also as participants. Foppa is shown in profile, with her hands raised in a gesture of prayer. Her brother looks toward the viewer and with his right-hand gestures toward both the depicted scene and his praying sister. The inclusion of her donor portrait and the Eucharistic iconography of the altarpiece highlight the importance of chastity and piety, and effectively aid the *zitelle* in their spiritual training. The altarpiece ultimately contributed to reinforcing the Casa delle Zitelle's institutional commitment to reforming the at-risk poor girls who found shelter at the Zitelle. Foppa's financial means provided

her with the opportunity to eternally commemorate herself and her family lineage, as well as the ability to contribute to a female community outside of her kin. Her important, yet understudied, altarpiece further aids understanding iconographic trends in the pictorial lexicon of early modern female asylums.

### **Literature Review**

Scholars have long neglected the endeavors of the women at the Casa delle Zitelle. Since the Zitelle's completion over four centuries ago, most literature about it has focused on the church, specifically on the possible involvement of the famous Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio (1508–80). The trend to attribute the architecture to Palladio can be traced back to 1604, when Giovanni Stringa wrote in his annotated edition of Francesco Sansovino's *Venetia città nobilissima* (Venice, 1581) that Palladio designed the model of the church but Bozzetto carried it out.<sup>23</sup> Stringa's attribution persisted in the following centuries; however, recent scholarship has found no documentary evidence of Palladio's involvement, and thus an interest in the church considerably diminished.<sup>24</sup>

Scant accounts exist before the late twentieth century that offer an analysis of Foppa as a patron or of her altar. Stringa mentions Foppa's altar, but he neither describes the

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<sup>23</sup> “L'architetto il famosissimo Andrea Palladio, terminato poi dal Bozzetto sul modello del medesimo Palladio.” Giovanni Stringa, *Venetia, città nobilissima, et singolare* (Venetia: Appresso Stefano Curti, 1663), 258, [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_ygS10W6X0DgC/page/n279](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_ygS10W6X0DgC/page/n279).

<sup>24</sup> For an overview of scholarship concerned with Palladio's involvement at the Zitelle, see Tracy E. Cooper, *Palladio's Venice: Architecture and Society in a Renaissance Republic* (New Haven: Yale University, 2005), 281-85.

painting nor identifies the patron. In his description of the altar commissioned by Contarini, he states that “some other pious person” will build the right altar.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, at the time of Stringa’s observation, Foppa’s altar had yet to be commissioned or constructed. It is known from Foppa’s testament and an inscription on the tomb that the altar was constructed and completed between 1610 and 1618. The altarpiece also appears to have been completed in 1618. Stefania Mason Rinaldi dates the painting to 1618 based on stylistic characteristics, marking the altarpiece as a late painting in Palma’s career.<sup>26</sup> Carlo Ridolfi further confirmed this when he remarked: “in the last age for the church of the Zitelle [Palma Giovane] worked Christ in prayer in the garden.”<sup>27</sup> Some three hundred years later, Giulio Lorenzetti described Foppa and her brother as joint donors in his iconic guidebook, *Venice and its Lagoon* (Padua, 1926).<sup>28</sup> A joint commission between siblings is plausible. However, her brother seems to have predeceased her, and it was Foppa, and not her brother, who provided the Zitelle with a substantial legacy.

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<sup>25</sup> “Vi è un altro altare all'incontro che sarà anch'egli da qualche pia persona fabricato.” Cited in Gardani, *S. Maria della Presentazione*, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Stefania Mason Rinaldi, *Palma il Giovane. L'opera completa* (Milano: Electa, 1984), 129 n. 444.

<sup>27</sup> “... e nell'ultima età per la chiesa delle Citelle operò il Christo in orazione nell'orto.” Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell'arte: Ovvero le vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato*, Part II (Venetia: Presso Gio. Battista Sgava, 1648), 196, cited in Rinaldi, *Palma il Giovane*, 129.

<sup>28</sup> Giulio Lorenzetti, *Venice and its Lagoon: Historical-Artistic Guide*, trans. John Guthrie (Trieste, Italy: Edizioni Lint, 1994), 782-83.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Dante Luigi Gardani produced the first modern-day study of the Zitelle, focusing solely on the history of the church and its decorations.<sup>29</sup> In addition to providing excerpts from Foppa's will, Gardani provides critical biographical information on the Foppa family and an analysis of the altar, including a transcription of the tomb inscription. In 1989, Bernard Aikema and Dulcia Meijers located an account of the Zitelle's foundation and building construction within the social institutions dedicated to poor relief in sixteenth-century Venice.<sup>30</sup> Significantly, Aikema and Meijers attribute Foppa as the altar's donor based on testamentary evidence. Finally, the restoration of the Zitelle's living quarters in 1992 resulted in a volume of essays edited by Lionello Puppi.<sup>31</sup> Barbara Mazza's chapter within the volume is indispensable for its primary source material. Mazza transcribed not only Foppa's testament and inventory, but also the documents relating to other patrons of the church.<sup>32</sup>

Only two scholars have considered the Zitelle for its importance as an institution devised by and for women. Monica Chojnacka's groundbreaking study in 1998 asserted that a new type of female community was created at the Casa delle Zitelle that connected the female administrators, patrons, staff, and wards, which drew on both familial

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<sup>29</sup> Gardani, 26-30.

<sup>30</sup> Bernard Aikema and Dulcia Meijers, *Nel regno dei poveri: Arte e storia dei grandi ospedali veneziani in età moderna, 1474-1797* (Venezia: Arsenale, 1989), 225-39.

<sup>31</sup> Lionello Puppi and Giuseppe Ellero, eds., *Le Zitelle: Architettura, arte e storia di un'istituzione veneziana* (Venezia: Albrizzi, 1992).

<sup>32</sup> Mazza, "Committenti," 129-61.



structures and traditional female networks that characterized Venetian neighborhoods.<sup>33</sup> Even though the male governors had final authority, Chojnacka demonstrated that the Zitelle offered new opportunities to the women and girls who found shelter, employment, and community there. Her work, however, did not extend to the patronage of the architectural complex or devotional imagery in the church.

In her dissertation of 2002, “The Casa delle Zitelle: Gender and Architecture in Renaissance Venice,” Chase extended the study of women’s patronage into the field of architectural history by considering women as both corporate patrons and as inhabitants. Chase explored how concepts of gender informed the conception of the building, from elevation and plan to urban placement, arguing that the *governatrici* and *Madonna Marina Bernardo* held considerable influence over the design process, creating the optimal spatial organization to educate girls for the life of a respectable woman. While her dissertation was an invaluable source of women’s architectural patronage in Renaissance Venice, Chase only briefly discussed the artworks that adorned the church and their respective donors.

Examining the contributions of the Zitelle’s female patrons allows for an in-depth exploration of laywomen’s production and utilization of architecture and visual imagery in early modern Venice. Female patrons across Italy have received considerable scholarly attention since the late 1990s.<sup>34</sup> However, Venetian laywomen have garnered

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<sup>33</sup> Chojnacka, “The Casa delle Zitelle,” 68-91. See also Chojnacka, *Working Women*, 124-7, 133.

<sup>34</sup> For example, see Tinagli and Rogers, *Women and the Visual Arts in Italy*; Katherine A. McIver, *Wives, Widows, Mistresses, and Nuns in Early Modern Italy*:

little notice and have been subsumed under the activities of their male counterparts.

Romano characterized male patronage in Venice as “city wide, highly institutionalized, and focused on the councils of government,” in contrast to female patronage which “was parochial, private, and highly personal.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the patriarchal nature of Venetian society and the city’s gendered urban geography fueled the conception of the patron as a man and dictated a predominant trend in scholarship to focus on male patrons and their spheres of influence.<sup>36</sup> The government established a precedent of patronage that was

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*Making the Invisible Visible Through Art and Patronage* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012); Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins, eds., *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy* (Kirksville, Mo: Truman State University Press, 2001); Catherine E. King, *Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy, c. 1300-1550* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Cynthia Miller Lawrence, ed., *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); and Jaynie Anderson, “Rewriting the History of Art Patronage,” *Renaissance Studies* 10, no. 2 (June 1996): 129-38, JSTOR.

<sup>35</sup> Romano, 120.

<sup>36</sup> The conception of a patron as a man was not a unique point of view in Renaissance Italy. For example, Florentine architect Antonio di Pietro Averlino, called Filarete (c. 1400-69), remarked in his treatise on architecture, *Libro architetonico*, a patron corresponded to the father of a building, as he was responsible for its conception, and he compared the architect to the mother, who was responsible for its gestation. Not surprisingly Filarete’s model city, Sforzinda, derived its name from his important patron, Francesco Sforza, the fourth Duke of Milan. See John R. Spencer, *Filarete's Treatise on Architecture: Being the Treatise by Antonio Di Piero Averlino, Known as Filarete*, vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), 15-16; and Werner L. Gundersheimer, “Patronage in the Renaissance: An Exploratory Approach,” in *Patronage in the Renaissance*, eds. Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 4. Likewise, the Florentine banker Giovanni Rucellai (1403-81) asserted in his commonplace book the *Zibaldone*, that “men do two important things in life: the first is to procreate: the second is to build.” See F. W. Kent, “The Making of a Renaissance Patron of Arts,” in *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo zibaldone II: A Florentine Patrician and His Palace*, eds. F. W. Kent et al (London: University of London, 1981), 13. In the sixteenth century, artist and biographer Giorgio Vasari (1511–74) fabricated the idea of a

followed by religious orders, *scuole*, and private patrons.<sup>37</sup> Most often Venetian patronage was a corporate initiative, with male committees deciding on the architectural and visual arts programs in civic, religious, and confraternity buildings, such as the Palazzo Ducale and the meetinghouses of the *scuole*.<sup>38</sup>

Despite being excluded from participating or obtaining membership in many of these spaces, Venetian women were important patrons throughout the city. Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, both as private and collective donors, women patronized the city's best artists, and a select few funded important architectural commissions. An account from the workshop of Venetian artist Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556/57) provides useful statistics to postulate the possible percentage of female patrons in Renaissance Venice. Lotto's *Libro di spese*, which contains accounts and expenses kept between 1538 and 1556, records at least ten percent of his patrons as women, most

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great patron by characterizing the patron's role in supporting and cultivating artistic genius when discussing Lorenzo de' Medici in the biography of Michelangelo. See Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 418-21.

<sup>37</sup> This is an exceedingly different system of patronage compared to the princely courts of the Sforza in Milan, the Montefeltro in Urbino, the Gonzaga in Mantua, the Este in Ferrara, or the Aragonese in Naples who controlled religious, civic, and private art patronage, and most notably the Medici in Florence, who ushered a dynasty of pivotal patrons of art and architecture. For the Italian Renaissance courts, see Alison Cole, *Italian Renaissance Courts: Art, Pleasure and Power* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Patricia Fortini Brown, "Where the Money Flows: Art Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Venice," in *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, ed. Frederick Ilchman (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Publications, 2009), 42-52.

of whom were wives, widows, or nuns.<sup>39</sup> Using Lotto's statistics as a measure, it appears that, as art patrons' women were a minority; however, considering the restrictive environment they lived in, this number is quite substantial. As in other cities in Italy, women's finances and social connections allowed for their patronage of Venetian masters and influenced the conditions through which women could attain agency in early modern Venice. When given the opportunity, women, such as the Zitelle's female administrators and Foppa, could use their financial resources to redefine their spheres of influence in Venetian society.

Until recently, art historians have also relatively overlooked the visual arts commissioned for the city's charitable institutions, especially its female asylums. This lack of attention greatly contrasts with other disciplines, which have produced considerable scholarship on these institutions and early modern charity in Italy.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Lorenzo Lotto, *Libro di spese diverse* (1538-1556), ed. P. Zampetti (Venice, 1969). See also, Anderson, "Rewriting the History of Art Patronage," 131. For translated accounts of Lotto's *Libro*, see Tinagli and Rogers, 158-159.

<sup>40</sup> For example, see Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice*; Chojnacka, "The Casa delle Zitelle"; Chojnacka, *Working Women*, chapter 6; Laura J. McGough, "Raised from the Devil's Jaws: A Convent for Repentant Prostitutes in Venice, 1530-1670" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1997); McGough, *Gender, Sexuality, and Syphilis in Early Modern Venice: The Disease That Came to Stay* (England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). For Tuscan female asylums, see Cohen, *Women's Asylums*. For Bologna, see Lucia Ferrante, "Honor Regained: Women in the Casa del Soccorso di San Polo in Sixteenth-Century Bologna," in *Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective*, eds. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 46-72; Nicholas Terpstra, *Cultures of Charity Women, Politics, and the Reform of Poor Relief in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2013), chapter 2; and Liise Lehtsalu, "Changing Perceptions of Women's Religious Institutions in Eighteenth-century Bologna," *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 4 (2012): 939-59, JSTOR. For Rome, see Lance Gabriel Lazar, *Working in the Vineyard of the Lord: Jesuit Confraternities in Early Modern Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005),

According to Diana Bullen Presciutti, two significant factors contribute to the minimal interest on behalf of art historians: first, the limited presence of visual imagery remaining *in situ* (in its original location) in charitable institutions; second, a lack of an understanding of the distinctions and similarities between the different kinds of organizations categorized as charitable institutions, which is necessary to study the visual representations within.<sup>41</sup> In the case of the city's two other female asylums, the Casa delle Convertite and Casa del Soccorso, and charitable hospital, the Ospedale degli Incurabili, Presciutti's analysis is correct.<sup>42</sup> However, in comparison to the visual culture

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chapter 2; Lazar, "Daughters of Prostitutes, the First Jesuits, and the Compagnia delle Vergini Miserabili di Santa Caterina della Rosa," in *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy: Ritual, Spectacle, Image*, eds. Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole Ahl (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 259-79. For Turin, see Sandra Cavallo, *Charity and Power in Early Modern Italy: Benefactors and Their Motives in Turin, 1541-1789* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), especially chapter 4.

The *ospedali* and their all-female choirs have also been the subject of considerable scholarly attention. See Deborah Howard and Laura Moretti, *Sound and Space in Renaissance Venice: Architecture, Music, Acoustics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Hilliard T. Goldfarb, ed., *Art and Music in Venice: From the Renaissance to Baroque* (Paris: Hazan, 2013); Jane Berdes, *Women Musicians of Venice: Musical Foundations 1525-1855* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993); Michael Talbot, "Vivaldi's Venice," *The Musical Times* 119, no. 1622 (April 1978): 314-19, JSTOR; Denis Arnold, "Music at the 'Ospedali,'" *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 113, no. 2 (1988): 156-67, JSTOR; and M. V. Constable, "The Venetian 'Figlie del Coro': Their Environment and Achievement," *Music & Letters* 63, no. 3/4 (July - October 1982): 181-212, JSTOR.

<sup>41</sup> Diana Bullen Presciutti, "The Visual Culture of the Foundling Hospital in Central Italy (1400-1600)" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008), 14.

<sup>42</sup> The Casa delle Convertite was established as an Augustinian convent for repentant prostitutes around 1525; the Casa del Soccorso was founded as a temporary shelter for fallen women between 1577-80; and the the Ospedale degli Incurabili was founded in 1522 to care for those with syphilis. All three institutions were subsequently closed after the suppression of Napoleon in 1806, and their churches stripped of all artworks.

of charitable institutions elsewhere in Italy, many artworks remain *in situ* in Venetian institutions, especially in the church of the Casa delle Zitelle.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, recent individual studies by Rachel L. Geschwind and others have contributed to uncovering the influence religious imagery had on female lay spirituality

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The church of the Convertite (known as Santa Maria Maddalena) was once decorated with six altars, including two *Noli me Tangere*, one by Luigi Benfatto and the other by Alvise del Friso, an *Annunciation with Angels and Saint Nicholas* by Baldissera d'Anna, and numerous artworks by Palma Giovane. The complex currently functions as a women's prison. For more on the artworks in the Convertite's church, see Marco Boschini, "Sestieri di Dorsoduro," in *Le ricche minere della pittura veneziana* (Venezia: Appresso Francesco Nicolini, 1674), 75-6; and Aikema and Meijers, *Nel regno dei poveri*, 193-95. For Benfatto and Palma Giovane, see Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 282-83. For del Friso, see Rodolfo Pallucchini, *La Pittura Veneziana del Seicento* (Venezia: Alfieri, 1981), 22.

The church of the Soccorso (known as Santa Maria Assunta) was once decorated with three altars. The high altar is now at the Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice. For the Soccorso's high altar, see Rachel L. Geschwind, "Magdalene Imagery and Prostitution Reform in Early Modern Venice and Rome, 1500-1700" (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2011); and below, chapter 4. For more on the other artworks in the church, see Boschini, "Sestieri di Dorsoduro," 49; and Aikema and Meijers, 245-48.

The church of the Incurabili (known as the church of San Salvatore) once displayed artworks by Giorgione, Jacopo Tintoretto, and Paolo Veronese. Currently the Ospedale di San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti houses two altarpieces from the Incurabili— one by Veronese and the other by Tintoretto. In 2004 the Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia acquired the property. For more on the artworks once displayed in the Incurabili's church, see Boschini, 19-21; and Aikema and Meijers, 143-46. For Tintoretto, see Sabina Brevaglieri, "Assistenza e patronage femminile a Venezia: La Compagnia di S. Orsola, Tintoretto e l'altare degli Incurabili," *Quaderni Storici* 35, 104 (Agosto 2000): 355-391, JSTOR.

<sup>43</sup> The churches of the Casa delle Zitelle, Santa Maria delle Penitenti, and Santa Maria dei Derelitti (known as the Ospedaletto) are currently closed to the public, however, tours are available by appointment. Reservations can be booked through the Fondazione Venezia Servizi ([www.gioiellinascostidivenezia.it](http://www.gioiellinascostidivenezia.it)). The residential wings of the Casa delle Zitelle have been renovated into two distinct spaces. The western wing and the gardens are now apart of the luxury Bauer hotel, the Palladio Hotel & Spa, and the Zuecca Project Space has managed a portion of eastern wing to exhibit contemporary art since 2011. The churches of the Ospedale della Pietà and the Ospedale di San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti are both open to the public.

in female asylums, not only in Venice but also in Rome and Florence.<sup>44</sup> However, little comparative work has been done between the altarpieces located within these institutions. As a group, the altarpieces possess iconographic similarities, suggesting a larger discourse in the visual arts of women's asylums that explicitly demonstrates the propagandistic messages of the governors and patrons, most of whom were men. It is to this larger corpus of altarpieces intended to control women in female asylums that this thesis seeks to locate Foppa's *Agony in the Garden* at the Casa delle Zitelle.

Analyzing the significant architectural patronage of the Zitelle's administration, in conjunction with the altar commissioned by Elisabetta Foppa, reveals a paramount situation at the Casa delle Zitelle. Art patronage, especially in female asylums, afforded affluent women a platform in which they could participate in a citywide female community while simultaneously engaging and responding to social, political, and religious reforms in a public manner not traditionally available to Venetian women.

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<sup>44</sup> For the visual imagery of female institutions in Venice, see Geschwind, "Magdalene Imagery." The author is aware of an unpublished Master's thesis written by Gilbert Jones, "Young, Pretty, and Poor: The Venetian Charity of Le Zitelle alla Giudecca and Bassano's *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*" (Master's thesis, Syracuse University, 2013). As of the completion of this thesis, Jones' work remains inaccessible to researchers. For the visual imagery of female institutions in Central Italy, see Pamela M. Jones, *Altarpieces and their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 201-59; Barbara J. Sabatine, "The Church of Santa Caterina dei Funari and the Vergini Miserabili of Rome" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1992); Louise Smith Bross, "Livio Agresti, Cardinal Federico Cesi, and the Compagnia delle Vergini Miserabili di Santa Caterina della Rosa," in *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy: Ritual, Spectacle, Image*, eds. Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole Ahl (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 280-97; and Presciutti, "The Visual Culture of the Foundling Hospital," especially chapter 6.

## Chapter Two

### The Casa delle Zitelle

The Casa delle Zitelle was founded as a preventative institution to protect attractive, imperiled maidens from becoming prostitutes. Two complementary institutions were also established in Venice during the sixteenth century, the Casa delle Convertite and the Casa del Soccorso. Together, the network of female asylums explicitly housed at-risk adolescent girls, repentant prostitutes, and adulterous women. The gender-specific institutions were part of the “new philanthropy” of poor relief that relied upon the influence of religious societies and the assistance of noble laymen and women to establish charitable institutions dedicated to assisting groups such as the indigent, syphilitics, and prostitutes. In comparison with other charitable institutions, especially those created for women, the female administrators’ autonomy at the Zitelle surpassed that of women at similar institutions throughout Italy, setting the stage for the unique community of female patrons at the Casa delle Zitelle and their monumental architectural response to poor relief.

From its inception, the mission of the Zitelle’s female founders was simple: create an institution that not only prevented young girls from being forced into prostitution but also prepared for their re-entry into society as wives or nuns. The constitution of the Casa delle Zitelle, the *Costituzioni della Casa delle Zitelle*, specified that the institution’s purpose was to:

Liberate from the danger of eternal damnation a certain sort of young girl, who, although being very beautiful and graceful, is unhappily lost on account of the evil of those who ought to be looking after her well-being and raising her in the fear of God,



and is so miserably thrown into the profound abyss of this abominable life [of prostitution] which is absolutely contrary to Christian health, purity and religion...<sup>1</sup>

Although a *zitella* could be from any social class, a 1597 list of residents reveals that the Zitelle was almost exclusively composed of middle-class and artisan girls.<sup>2</sup> It did not suffice for a candidate to be only impoverished or an orphan since there were already charitable hospitals and orphanages, together called the *ospedali grandi*, designed for those purposes when the Casa was founded. The four *ospedali* were established between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries and designed to care for different demographics of the indigent. The Ospedale della Pietà (1346) functioned as an institution for abandoned infants; the Ospedale degl'Incurabili (1522) cared for those infected with incurable diseases, as well as orphans and prostitutes; the Ospedale di Santa Maria dei Derelitti, known as the Ospedaletto (1528), provided for orphans; and the Ospedale di San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti (1595) cared for Venetian beggars.

As a result of the specialization and function of these institutions, it was required that in addition to being impoverished a candidate for the Zitelle must also be over nine years old and be both healthy and beautiful. On account of her beauty, the “certain type of young girl” needed to be at clear risk of jeopardizing her chastity by becoming a prostitute, either through the coercion of her parents and guardians or the pressures of

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<sup>1</sup> Benedetto Palmio, *Costituzioni della Casa delle Zitelle*, 1r-2v, cited in Vanessa Scharven Chase, “The Casa delle Zitelle: Gender and Architecture in Renaissance Venice” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2002), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Chase, “The Casa delle Zitelle,” 4 n. 4.

poverty.<sup>3</sup> A candidate's beauty was essential for two reasons: beautiful girls were believed to be especially vulnerable to becoming prostitutes, and it was assumed that arranging the marriage of a poor beautiful girl would be easier than an unattractive one.<sup>4</sup>

Once admitted, the *governatrici* organized every aspect of the girl's lives. The *zitelle* were usually educated for a period of five to six years. For the durations they were given a Christian education, taught to read, and trained in either lacemaking or embroidery. The reasons the *zitelle* learned a domestic trade were numerous. Not only would they be able to bring a marketable skill to their future marriage, but also funds from the girl's work supported the school and a portion of their earnings contributed toward their dowry.<sup>5</sup> The Casa offered a dowry of 100 ducats to each *zitella*, fifty in money and fifty in clothing.<sup>6</sup>

Social customs governing marriage and monacation required women to have a dowry. A marriage dowry was both the property and money a bride brought to her marriage, whereas a spiritual or conventual dowry was the sum of money required for a woman to enter into a convent. For the lower classes, the lack of a dowry was a principal obstacle

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<sup>3</sup> Brian Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1971), 388-89.

<sup>4</sup> Monica Chojnacka, "Women, Charity and Community in Early Modern Venice: The Casa delle Zitelle," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 80, JSTOR.

<sup>5</sup> The older girls were expected to produce work worth about ten *soldi* every day, and the younger girls about half that. Older girls were expected to earn about two and a half ducats a month; one ducat went to their keep, one and a half ducats went toward the domestic needs of the house and to pay for a portion of dowries offered by the Casa. See Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice*, 389.

<sup>6</sup> Pullan, 390.

to marrying or entering a convent. Many working-class families could not afford a dowry, and young girls were often forced by parental pressure to procure their dowries as domestic servants or prostitutes.<sup>7</sup> Many foreign men arrived in Venice to buy sexual favors from young virgin girls, and the going price for a girl's virginity was 100 or 200 ducats, a sufficient amount for a marriage dowry.<sup>8</sup> However, entrance fees reached 1000 ducats at Venetian convents.<sup>9</sup> For this reason, convents were primarily filled with the daughters of upper-class families who could afford the steep entrance fee.

Adolescent girls had long been at the forefront of public assistance initiatives in Venice. Tradition dictated that in order to be protected from the dangers and temptations of the world young women needed to marry or enter a convent.<sup>10</sup> It was reported in April of 1584 that collectively the Pietà, Incurabili, Derelitti, and Zitelle supported about 3,000 children and distributed marriage or conventual dowries for about 300 girls each year.<sup>11</sup> Before the sixteenth century, one of the most important social programs provided by a Venetian institution was the program of dowry trusts distributed by the city's lay confraternities. For example, at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco between thirty to thirty-

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<sup>7</sup> Laura J. McGough, *Gender, Sexuality, and Syphilis in Early Modern Venice: The Disease That Came to Stay* (England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 42-3.

<sup>8</sup> Men specifically purchased sexual favors from virgins in order to prevent contracting diseases. See McGough, *Gender, Sexuality, and Syphilis*, 43.

<sup>9</sup> Jutta Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Renaissance Venice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 173.

<sup>10</sup> Pullan, 183.

<sup>11</sup> Pullan, 374.

five percent of the charity dispensed went to providing dowries for poor girls.<sup>12</sup> The dowry trusts established by the *scuole* intended to make marriage economically feasible for honorable young women who could not have otherwise afforded to wed. Into the sixteenth century, providing the means for impoverished girls and orphans to wed became one of the most sensible approaches to poor relief and preserving the social order of the city.<sup>13</sup>

Towards the end of her sojourn, a *zitella* could choose either to marry or to take religious vows. In Renaissance Venice and early modern Europe in general, the socially acceptable categories of womanhood included maiden, wife, widow, and nun. This ideology is reflected in the importance of providing the *zitella* with an adequate dowry for the marital choices available to her. According to a collection of 119 dowry contracts from the 1620s collected by Monica Chojnacka, a majority of the girls chose marriage over monacation.<sup>14</sup> Out of 119 dowry contracts, only fifteen, or 12.6 percent, entered a convent. For those who married, it was usually a marriage in their early twenties to a respectable artisan or worker. Prospective husbands often worked as weavers, masons, boatmen, servants, tailors, and spice vendors. Chojnacka's research further reveals that a

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<sup>12</sup> Pullan, 183-84. For more on dowry distribution at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, see Jutta Sperling, "Allegories of Charity and the Practice of Poor Relief at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* LXX (2009): 119-46, JSTOR.

<sup>13</sup> Sperling, "Allegories of Charity," 132.

<sup>14</sup> Chojnacka, "Women, Charity and Community," 79-82.

few *zitelle* never married, remaining at the house as a *maestra* or as a permanent resident.<sup>15</sup>

### **Female Asylums in Early Modern Venice**

The Casa delle Zitelle was part of a network of female asylums in Venice established between 1525 and 1580. The Casa delle Convertite and the Casa del Soccorso differed in their purpose and constituencies; however, all shared the common goal of eliminating prostitution and the spread of disease in the city. The Casa delle Convertite was an Augustinian convent founded as early as 1525 and dedicated to Mary Magdalene. The Convertite was an untraditional convent and offered a life of seclusion and contemplation to a community of *convertite* (converted prostitutes).<sup>16</sup> Initially, the Convertite had been apart of the Incurabili, but the difficulty of segregating the hospital's occupants resulted in the relocation of the prostitutes to their own community in the parish of Sant'Eufemia on the Giudecca between 1530 and 1534.<sup>17</sup> Prior to 1551, when the convent adopted Augustinian rule, the penitents underwent a period of probation in a house located in the

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<sup>15</sup> Chojnacka, 82.

<sup>16</sup> The Convertite was the most common type of post-Reformation institution for women. The first Convertite was established in Rome; Pope Leo X granted permission for its establishment in 1520. See Sherrill Cohen, *The Evolution of Women's Asylums Since 1500: From Refuges for Ex-Prostitutes to Shelters for Battered Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 18.

<sup>17</sup> Bernard Aikema and Dulcia Meijers, *Nel regno dei poveri: arte e storia dei grandi ospedali veneziani in età moderna, 1474-1797* (Venezia: Arsenale, 1989), 191. The Incurabili petitioned the Holy See for permission to start a convent modeled after S. Maria Maddalena delle Convertite in Rome. In 1551, Pope Julius III authorized the convent to follow Augustinian rule. See Laura J. McGough, "Raised from the Devil's Jaws: A Convent for Repentant Prostitute in Venice, 1530-1670" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1997), 2-3.

parish of San Marcilian. At the end of the probationary period, the women were taken to the parish church of Sant'Eufemia to ritually cut off their hair; they then processed to the nunnery itself.<sup>18</sup> Through cutting off their hair, the sisters of the Convertite physically symbolized their devotion to a new life of rigid austerity.

In order to prevent the convent from becoming a place for aging prostitutes to retire, seventy-nine percent of the nuns admitted to the Convertite were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine.<sup>19</sup> A desire to repent, not to retire, was one of the convent's most important admission requirements. Candidates were also required to be physically attractive. The governors of the Convertite believed beautiful women were more vulnerable to sin than their ugly counterparts, and were therefore, in more need of institutional care. It did not take long for the nuns to gain a reputation for their youth and beauty. For example, in his guidebook to the city, Francesco Sansovino referred to the nuns as *tutte bellissime* (very beautiful).<sup>20</sup>

In the seventeenth century the institution found itself in the middle of a virginity scandal when the Senate discovered some of the nuns were not, in fact, former

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<sup>18</sup> Pullan, 377.

<sup>19</sup> Laura J. McGough, "Raised from the Devil's Jaws," 70.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in McGough, 135 n. 70. The nuns' reputation for their youth and beauty also caused numerous scandals involving priests at the Convertite. The first rector in charge of the convent, Pietro Leon da Valcamonica, was found guilty of having sex with more than twenty nuns and drowning the babies they bore. In 1561 he was publicly executed in Piazzetta San Marco. His confession played to contemporary prejudices about the power of female beauty when he stated: "we are all subject to fragility." In November 1624, the priest Francesco Montenegro was forbidden from saying mass at the Convertite after being caught sending nude male portraits to a nun, and in 1620, the priest Giacomo Zenoni was denounced for sending love letters to nuns at the Convertite. See McGough, *Gender, Sexuality, and Syphilis*, 110.

concubines or adulteresses, but virgins.<sup>21</sup> The Convertite had lacked consistent admission of “fallen” women with enough money to pay the 200 ducat spiritual dowry required for entry. To make up for the lack of incoming capital the institution began admitting the daughters of lower-class merchant and artisan families. These families previously lacked an affordable monastic outlet for their daughters because they could not afford the high-priced spiritual dowry required at traditional convents. Laura J. McGough estimates between 1656 and 1675 that less than half the nuns, around forty-eight percent, met the Convertite’s admission requirements of being “raised from the Devil’s jaws.”<sup>22</sup> It is possible that the Convertite’s change in admission criteria also led to girls from the Zitelle entering the institution. The convent’s attainable spiritual dowry might have been appealing to those who chose monacation over marriage.

The third asylum, the Casa del Soccorso, was established between 1577-80 and designed to shelter prostitutes and adulterous wives who were already living separated from their spouses.<sup>23</sup> A Venetian tradition credits the foundation of the Soccorso to Veronica Franco (1546-91), the famed *cortigiana onesta* (honest courtesan).<sup>24</sup> While

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<sup>21</sup> McGough, “Raised from the Devil’s Jaws,” chapter 2.

<sup>22</sup> McGough, 68.

<sup>23</sup> Ignatius Loyola founded a similar institution in Rome in 1543, the Casa di Santa Marta. See Lance Gabriel Lazar, *Working in the Vineyard of the Lord: Jesuit Confraternities in Early Modern Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), chapter 2. For the Bolognese Soccorso, see Lucia Ferrante, “Honor Regained: Women in the Casa del Soccorso di San Polo in Sixteenth-Century Bologna,” in *Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective*, eds. Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 46-72.

<sup>24</sup> A *cortigiana onesta* was a well-educated and worldly prostitute, who was often revered for her social and literary acumen. In exchange for social advancement or

there are no documents to clarify Franco's involvement in the institution's foundation or administration, a *supplica* (petition) drafted to the Venetian Senate in 1580 indicates she was influential in the Soccorso's establishment. Franco's *supplica* focused on the problems with the strict admission requirements of the Convertite and the Zitelle. She advocated for an institution to help fallen women who did not want to resign their freedom to a convent or were not young virgins.<sup>25</sup> Like the Zitelle, the Soccorso was also run by a group of noblewomen that included a board of *governatrici* and a *madonna*, who had the help of an assistant and a mistress.<sup>26</sup>

The Soccorso provided women a temporary place to live while restoring their honor. Naturally, in addition to showing repentance, the women who entered the Soccorso were

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luxuries, a *cortigiana* offered companionship to members of aristocratic society, such as princes, courtiers, and clerics. For more on Veronica Franco, see Margaret F. Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan. Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>25</sup> "There are many women who, out of poverty or sensuality or for some other reason, lead a dishonorable life, but who are sometimes moved by the Holy Spirit to think of the miserable end, both in body and soul, to which for the most part they come by this means. They could easily withdraw from ill doing if they had some reputable place to repair to, where they might maintain themselves and their children. For they are not allowed to enter among the Zitelle or Convertite if they have mothers, children, husbands, or other necessary responsibilities. It is, moreover, difficult for them to persuade themselves to pass, in a moment, from such a licentious existence to so strict and austere a way of life as that of the Convertite. Because there is no provision for such cases, they persist in wrongdoing, and in this abominable crime among others: that women in need sell the virginity of their own innocent daughters, and launch them on the same sinful path that they themselves have walked, to the loss of so many souls, the scandal of the world, and the grave offence of the Majesty of God." Cited in Pullan, 392.

<sup>26</sup> The *madonna* of the Soccorso had identical duties as at the Zitelle. See Chojnacka, 74 n. 23; and also Pullan, 393.



required to be beautiful, healthy, and not old or pregnant.<sup>27</sup> Those entering the Soccorso were required to take a vow never to leave until reconciled with their husbands, equipped with a marriage contract, or prepared to enter the Convertite.<sup>28</sup> In fact, many of the women admitted to the Convertite came straight from the Soccorso. From 1656–75, twenty-six percent of the Convertite’s nuns came from the Soccorso.<sup>29</sup> Jointly, the three female asylums founded in the sixteenth century formed a branch of poor relief that sheltered, educated, and rehabilitated perilous women, ranging from at-risk adolescent girls, to repentant prostitutes and adulterous women.

The establishment of gender-specific institutions resulted from a turning point in the organization of, and attitudes toward, prostitution in Venice. Up until the mid-sixteenth century, the Venetian government had long tolerated and often encouraged the commercial sex trade.<sup>30</sup> Prostitution had been a legalized profession in Venice since

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<sup>27</sup> Aikema and Meijers, *Nel regno dei poveri*, 241.

<sup>28</sup> Aikema and Meijers, 241.

<sup>29</sup> McGough, “Raised from the Devil’s Jaws,” 68-9.

<sup>30</sup> Economic considerations substantially motivated the legalization of prostitution in Venice. After the significant population decrease caused by the Black Death in 1348, the city witnessed two devastating wars, the first with Genoa (1350-55) and the second with the King of Hungary (1356-58). As a result, Venice became so financially exhausted that in 1358 the Venetians resigned from the war with Hungary, and renounced its territories on the Dalmatian coast and the Doge’s long-standing title as the Duke of Dalmatia through the Treaty of Zadar. It was no coincidence that the legalization of prostitution followed the peace with Hungary by only a few months. As explained by Paula C. Clarke, legalization of the sex trade formed part of the program to revitalize the city after a decade of economic and political turmoil. Legislature from 1358 argued the necessity of prostitution “because of the multitude of people entering and leaving our city to find a suitable location in Venice as a dwelling place for prostitutes,” demonstrating the government’s conception that prostitutes would serve as an incentive to encourage

1358 and in 1360 the city opened its first public brothel, called the Castelletto. By the sixteenth century, Venice thrived as one of the leading port cities in Europe. The city was strategically located near the intersection of Mediterranean seas routes and Alpine passes, linking the West and the East through both maritime and land routes, and the Venetians became intermediaries for northern Europeans who wanted to purchase silks and spices from the East, securing their monopoly on international trade and commerce.<sup>31</sup> The Castelletto was conveniently located at the Rialto, the predominant commercial area of the city, to serve this constant influx of visiting foreign merchants, immigrants, and male travelers. The women who inhabited the Castelletto were known as *meretrici* (prostitutes), a broad term that referred to women working in brothels as well as adulteresses and concubines.<sup>32</sup> Venetian diarist Marin Sanudo claimed in 1509 that 11,654 *meretrici* were living throughout the city, out of a total population of 100,000.<sup>33</sup> By late in the sixteenth century, the city had become illustrious for its carnal attractions, most notably for its *cortigiane*. For example, visitors to the city could consult printed

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foreign merchants and male travelers to continue frequenting the city. See Paula C. Clarke, "The Business of Prostitution in Early Renaissance Venice," *Renaissance Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 423, JSTOR.

<sup>31</sup> Dennis Romano, *Patricians and Popolani: The Social Foundations of the Venetian Renaissance State* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), 7.

<sup>32</sup> McGough, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Scholars generally dismiss Sanudo's claim as an exaggeration. See Patricia H. Labalme and Laura Sanguineti White, eds., *Venice, città eccellentissima: Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo*, trans. Linda L. Carroll (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 321 n. 101.

indexes that listed prostitutes locations and prices.<sup>34</sup> Not surprisingly, Venice became one of the pleasure capitals of the world and prostitutes its principal tourist attraction.

Yet prostitutes served more than just visitors to the city. In an effort to conserve family wealth, it was customary for patrician families to allow only one son per generation to marry and produce legitimate offspring. Likewise, instead of dissipating familial wealth into marriage dowries, a majority of Venice's patrician women were placed in convents throughout the city. Jutta Sperling estimates that close to fifty-four percent of Venice's patrician women lived in convents in 1581, and suggests that between 1550 and 1650 noblewomen were more likely to become nuns than brides.<sup>35</sup> The impact of laws and customs regarding patrician marriages created a multitude of affluent single men living in Venice, who ultimately found sexual relations outside of the state of marriage. Furthermore, both the Church and State considered prostitutes legal alternatives to criminal sexual acts such as adultery, fornication, rape, and homosexuality, all of which jeopardized the moral foundations of Venetian society.<sup>36</sup> These numerous

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<sup>34</sup> In 1535, a satirical poem written in the form of a dialogue between a Venetian gentleman and a newly arrived foreigner called *La tarifa delle puttane di Vinegia* (The Price List of the Whores of Venice) was published and listed 110 prostitutes and twenty-five *ruffiane* (procurers) living in Venice. Visitors in the late sixteenth-century could consult a printed catalog, the *Catologo di tutte le principal et più honorate cortigiane di Venezia* (Catalog of all the principal and most honored courtesans of Venice), that listed the addresses and prices of over two hundred *cortigiane*. See Michele Anne Laughran, "The Body, Public Health and Social Control in Sixteenth-Century Venice" (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 1998), 64-5.

<sup>35</sup> Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Renaissance Venice*, 18.

<sup>36</sup> Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 9-15.

factors undoubtedly contributed to the vast number of concubines, prostitutes, and deflowered virgins in Venice, who often sold sexual services to be able to afford a dowry for marriage.<sup>37</sup>

However, the arrival of syphilis in the early 1490s became a serious public health concern for the Venetian government, inciting the first of many shifts in the perception of prostitutes and their tolerated roles in the city.<sup>38</sup> Steadily, prostitutes were transformed into the leading distributors of the disease. During the 1550s, Antonio Musa Brasavola (1500–55) proposed a theory that syphilis originated within the body of a beautiful prostitute.<sup>39</sup> Around the time the Zitelle was founded Brasavola’s treatise reached a wide audience in Venice, with an Italian translation in 1556 and reprints in 1559 and 1565. Brasavola recounted that after the French invasion of Italy, a beautiful prostitute with a festering sore on her abdomen served and infected the troops. He contended that “this illness began to stain one man, then two, and three, and one hundred, because this woman was a prostitute and most beautiful, and since human nature is desirous of coitus, many women had sexual relations with these men (and became) infected with this illness.”<sup>40</sup> The mentality concerning beauty and its effect on public health became integrated into the admission requirements of both the Casa delle Convertite and the Casa delle Zitelle.

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<sup>37</sup> McGough, 29-30.

<sup>38</sup> Italians commonly referred to syphilis as the *mal francese* (French disease) because the disease was first recorded in Italy in 1495 among the troops of Charles VII of France in Naples. See Pullan, 223.

<sup>39</sup> McGough, *Gender, Sexuality, and Syphilis*, 45-70.

<sup>40</sup> Cited in McGough, 45.

According to McGough, female asylums became apart of the Venetian's response to syphilis, a response that institutionalized gender norms by reinforcing prejudices that held women accountable for the disease.<sup>41</sup>

Another factor contributing to the anxieties prompting prostitution reform was the changing spiritual climate in Venice. By the mid-sixteenth century, the religious turmoil ignited by the Protestant Reformation flourished in Italy. One aspect of religious reform was the association of prostitutes with moral sins. Notably, Reformation writings and visual representations circulated identifying the Catholic Church as the Whore of Babylon. Specifically, Martin Luther's German Bible, the *September Testament* (1522), brought the myth of Rome as the New Babylon into being.<sup>42</sup> Lucas Cranach and his studio created all twenty-one plates for Luther's Bible, which depicted only the events of the Apocalypse. The illustrations included *The Whore of Babylon Wearing the Triple Crown*, which fashioned the papacy as the Whore of Babylon and announced Rome as the harlot city of the Apocalypse. Prostitution had always been considered a sin for those who participated and worked the trade and now also for the governments that tolerated it, such as Rome and Venice.<sup>43</sup>

In Venice, the realities of disease, poverty, and moral corruption did not contribute favorably to the image of the city as *La Serenissima* (the Most Serene Republic). The

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<sup>41</sup> For more on the social and political impact of syphilis in Venice, see McGough, *Gender, Sexuality, and Syphilis*.

<sup>42</sup> See André Chastel, *The Sack of Rome, 1527* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 49-90.

<sup>43</sup> Chase, 41.

visibility of prostitutes throughout the city greatly reinforced the perception of the moral depravity of the Republic. Since its establishment, one purpose of the Castelletto was to create an area easily controlled by authorities. According to Guido Ruggiero, the Castelletto provided a regulated place for women who otherwise would have remained unconfined throughout the city.<sup>44</sup> However, by 1460 the district had fallen into financial ruin, and simultaneously, while the confinement of prostitutes decreased, their numbers increased. Both the quantity and visibility of prostitutes greatly threatened the city's social stability and reputation as sex workers became indistinguishable from honorable members of the urban fabric.<sup>45</sup> To regulate and restore stability to the city, in 1542, the Senate officially specified the types of women to be classified as *meretrici* to aid authorities in policing and controlling wayward women.<sup>46</sup> Laws were also put into effect

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<sup>44</sup> Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*, 153.

<sup>45</sup> The concern of prostitutes assimilating with respectable society was addressed as early as the Castelletto's foundation. Legislation of 1360, while aiming to keep prostitutes accessible in the Rialto, also ensured their invisibility by prohibiting their movements throughout the city. Prostitutes were required to remain in their *callicelli* (side streets or alleyways) and prohibited from soliciting in one of the major streets leading to the state-owned butcher shops. See Clarke, "The Business of Prostitution," 426.

<sup>46</sup> In the decree of 21 February 1542, the Senate defined *meretrici* as "those women who, being unmarried, have dealings and intercourse (*comercio et praticha*) with one or more men. It shall also apply to those who have husbands and do not live with them, but are separated from them and have dealings (*comercio*) with one man or more." Cited in David Chambers and Brian Pullan, eds., *Venice. A Documentary History, 1450-1630* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 127.

to limit the movement of prostitutes throughout the city, their residences, and their fashions.<sup>47</sup>

Of particular importance to the *Zitelle*, the government began rigorously prosecuting pimps and procuresses, especially those who abused or exposed young girls to prostitution. The government recognized the household as the center of the sex industry and forbade courtesans, prostitutes, and other dishonest women from hiring female servants under the age of thirty in their homes.<sup>48</sup> As previously noted, most young women from the lower classes were too poor to marry, and instead many entered into the labor market as domestic servants. Frequently girls as young as seven and eight were hired as domestic help. Domestic servitude was often a precursor to prostitution because the occupation left young women exposed and unprotected to being abused by their

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<sup>47</sup> The Senate had used sumptuary legislation, that is, laws intended to regulate consumption and reinforce social hierarchies, to segregate prostitutes as early as 1416 when prostitutes were mandated to wear a yellow scarf while out in public. Sumptuary legislation was the most common form of prostitution regulation since Antiquity. For instance, Roman prostitutes were forbidden to wear the *stola*, the traditional dress for Roman matrons, and were instead required to wear the male *toga*. See Laughran, “The Body,” 56-61. A Senate decree of 1542 noted that a prostitute was forbidden to wear “gold, silver, or silk, except for her coif, which may be of pure silk; and such women may not wear necklaces (*cadennelle*), pearls, or rings with or without stones, either in their ears or in any other imaginable place, so that gold and silver and silk and the use of jewels of any kind shall be forbidden to them, where at home or outside, and even outside this city.” Cited in Chambers and Pullan, *Venice*, 127.

<sup>48</sup> It is noteworthy that no laws prohibited children from working in men’s households, where they were just as likely to become sex workers as in the homes of women. It was not uncommon for parents to place their daughters in the home of a Venetian gentleman with the goal of their daughter accumulating a dowry or obtaining a prospect of marriage. The girls were often abandoned years later, while the more fortunate were placed in arranged marriages, introduced to a courtesan house, or kept as concubines. See Joanne M. Ferraro, “Youth in Peril in Early Modern Venice,” *Journal of Social History* 49, no. 4 (2016): 767-69, Project MUSE.

masters and other servants.<sup>49</sup> In 1559, the same year the Zitelle was founded, the *Consiglio dei Dieci* (Council of Ten), the city's most important governing body, noted that the growing number of prostitutes put children in danger of being infected morally and physically, and ordered all prostitutes who had been in the city for fewer than two years to leave.<sup>50</sup> To further withdraw young girls from morally compromising situations, in 1562, the government began removing prostitutes' daughters between the ages of nine and twelve from their homes and placing them at the Zitelle.<sup>51</sup>

The combination of religious and moral anxieties led to a revitalized system of poor relief in sixteenth century Venice. The female asylums were intended to complement the city's existing *ospedali* and charitable fraternities such as the *scuole*. Brian Pullan characterized Venetian poor relief as the "new philanthropy" because of the reformed methods of enclosing and educating the indigent.<sup>52</sup> According to Pullan, the Venetian government overhauled its welfare system from 1528–1529 to account for the growing sense of responsibility toward the spiritual and material needs of the poor. Forces such as famine and recurrent outbreaks of diseases, such as syphilis and the bubonic plague, prompted the government's active interest in the administration of poor relief throughout the city.

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<sup>49</sup> Ruggiero, 15.

<sup>50</sup> Ferraro, "Youth in Peril," 766.

<sup>51</sup> Ferraro, 767.

<sup>52</sup> Pullan, 239-326.



The government tremendously relied upon the numerous philanthropic institutions in their effort to administer poor relief throughout the city. As at the Zitelle, charitable institutions were usually founded by patrician men and women with the help of religious societies. During the 1520s–40s Venice became a popular destination for religious reformers and founding members of every significant new order visited the city, including Ignatius Loyola of the Jesuits, Gaetano Thiene of the Theatines, Girolamo Miani of the Somascans, and Girolamo Marta of the Barnabites.<sup>53</sup> Across Italy Catholic reformers responded to the criticism of the Protestant Reformation by promoting a more spiritual Christian life and by providing aid to the poor, sick, and orphaned to restore the spiritual program of the Catholic Church. The reformers' advocacy for charity inspired many noble laymen and women to establish purposefully designed institutions to care for socially problematic populations, such as the indigent, syphilitics, and prostitutes.<sup>54</sup>

In comparison to other charitable institutions established during the sixteenth century, a paramount situation materialized at the Zitelle. The administrative and staff duties distinctively demonstrated the clear intent of the female founders to create a secluded

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<sup>53</sup> Chase, 44-6.

<sup>54</sup> The catalyst of charitable activity occurred in Venice with the foundation of the Ospedale degl'Incurabili. The Venetian nobleman Gaetano Thiene founded the Compagnia del Divino Amore in Venice in 1521. The Divino Amore was one of the earliest reform groups, first organized in Genoa by Ettore Vernazza and Caterina Fieschi-Adorno in 1497. Two years later the members founded the Incurabili in Genoa to care for syphilitics. Male and female Divino members soon established hospices across Italy, in Naples (1519), Florence (1519), and Brescia (1520). In Venice, with the help of two noblewomen, Maria Malipiero and Marina Grimani, Thiene founded the Incurabili in 1522 to care for syphilitics, as well as repentant prostitutes and orphans. See Aikema and Meijers, 131.

community where women controlled almost every aspect of the institution. Indeed, it was the *governatrici* who oversaw all aspects of the administration and daily proceedings of the Zitelle even though ultimate authority lay with the *governatori*. Chojnacka describes the male governors as providing little more than a “rubber stamp,” alluding to their absence at the Zitelle outside of dealing with legal matters.<sup>55</sup> To safeguard their control, the constitution established that no men, not even the male governors, were allowed to enter the Zitelle. The resulting environment offered the female members an exceptional level of autonomy for women in the early modern era.

For example, the women involved in the founding and staffing of several charitable institutions elsewhere in Italy maintained less control over the institutions than the women at the Zitelle. In Naples, Maria Longo obtained permission from Leo X in 1519 to establish a confraternity of noble donors to fund the building of the Hospital of the Incurabili at Santa Maria del Popolo. Even though she purchased the first parcels of land on which the hospital was built, negotiated tax exemptions for the patients’ food and drink, and held the position of *governatrice generale* of the Incurabili, a committee of seven governors controlled the creation of the hospital over the next decade.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the Zitelle’s two Roman counterparts lacked prominent female leadership, and laywomen hardly participated in either institution’s foundation or management. At

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<sup>55</sup> Chojnacka, 74.

<sup>56</sup> Maria Longo established the committee of seven governors in 1523. Longo was the widow of one of the three *reggente* (regents) appointed by the Spanish king to rule Naples. See Catherine E. King, *Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy c. 1300-1500* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 197-98.

Santa Caterina dei Funari, a small order of Augustinian nuns was directly responsible for the care and education of the *zitelle*.<sup>57</sup> However, the sisters were under the supervision of the Compagnia delle Vergini Miserabili, the confraternity responsible for the foundation of Santa Caterina. Men exclusively made up the confraternity's administration; a Cardinal Protector, three deputies, and two confraternity brothers and their assistants handled daily business of the organization, including fundraising, and six men were entrusted with the well being of the girls. This included procuring dowries, arranging marriages, and visiting married couples. Although laywomen contributed time and money to the confraternity, none are known to have exercised an active role in its administration.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, at the Luogo Pio delle Zitelle Disperse, a group of women supervised the *zitelle* under the direction of a *protectrice* (a Roman noblewoman), but the institution was under the authority of a Cardinal Protector, who was appointed by the Pope.<sup>59</sup>

Instead, the level of authority patrician women had enjoyed at the Incurabili and the Derelitti must have inspired the female hierarchy of the Zitelle. It is significant that the

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<sup>57</sup> Barbara J. Sabatine, "The Church of Santa Caterina dei Funari and the Vergini Miserabili of Rome" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1992), 27-33; and Lance G. Lazar, "Daughters of Prostitutes, the First Jesuits, and the Compagnia delle Vergini Miserabili di Santa Caterina della Rosa," in *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy: Ritual, Spectacle, Image*, eds. Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole Ahl (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 267-68.

<sup>58</sup> Lazar, "Santa Caterina della Rosa," 263.

<sup>59</sup> Chase, 68.

female founders were involved at both *ospedali* before the foundation of the Zitelle.<sup>60</sup> At the Incurabili, patrician women were so involved in the institution's foundation and administration that when the Patriarch of Venice discovered in the 1520s that the nurse Elisabetta da Fermo was giving communion to the sick, he became exceedingly concerned.<sup>61</sup> Gaetano Thiene, who founded the institution with Venetian noblewomen Maria Malipiero and Marina Grimani, defended Da Fermo's actions because of the hospital's lack of male priests, and he convinced the Pope to overrule the Patriarch of Venice and allow da Fermo to resume giving daily communion.

At the Derelitti, the female founders were further exposed to unconventional female authority. In 1544, the Milanese Barnabite Order and their female colleagues, the Angelics, were invited to the Derelitti to oversee the institution's spiritual matters.<sup>62</sup> The Angelics soon began to care for and preach to the female orphans and also to the ailing female and indigent inhabitants. As with da Fermo, female spiritual authority perturbed members of the government, the Church, and even the Derelitti's male governors. In 1551, female preachers, the Barnabite Order, and the Angelics were expelled from Venice and all its territories. However, the Angelics had developed an important relationship to the Venetian women who served at the Derelitti, including the Zitelle's

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<sup>60</sup> Notably, the Jesuit Benedetto Palmio, whose oratory prompted the foundation of the Zitelle, preached at the Incurabili after he arrived in Venice; this is where the founder's most likely first encountered Palmio. See Aikema and Meijers, 225.

<sup>61</sup> Chase, 47-48.

<sup>62</sup> Chase, 52-3.

founding members Adriana Contarini, Lucrezia da Ponte, Isabella Grimani, and Isabetta Loredan.

Although the founders were careful not to incite similar backlash when they established the Zitelle, eventually the women used their dominant positions within the institution's hierarchy to embark on an extraordinary endeavor typically associated with their male colleagues. While women enjoyed an unusual level of autonomy at charitable institutions during the sixteenth century, especially in Venice, at no other were women the principal patrons, as at the Casa delle Zitelle.

### **The Architectural Complex at the Casa delle Zitelle**

Since the Casa delle Zitelle's establishment, the female founders and administrators devised a strategic curriculum to transform the *zitelle* into virtuous young women. The institutional visions of the *governatrici* were fully realized during the renovation of a new property they purchased on the Guidecca in 1561.<sup>63</sup> Although women had to use intermediaries in such purchases, it is telling that the founders chose not to rely on male kin. To retain more control of the purchase, the women founders enlisted two *cittadini* men as intermediaries, Antonio di Cristoforo and Giovanni Francesco Carantan.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The Giudecca property was purchased for 8,500 ducats from Girolamo Venier on April 5, 1561. It took almost twenty years for the debt to Girolamo Venier to be paid off. *Governatrice* Adrianna Contarini paid the final one thousand ducats in March 1581 by either using her own funds or a bequest from Madaluzza Tron, who had bequeathed 1000 ducats to the Zitelle in 1580. Additional building funds came from donations or charitable gifts from the public, with the promise that the *zitelle* would pray not only for their benefactor's health but for the Republic of Venice as well. See Chase, 125-126.

<sup>64</sup> Chase, 88 n. 43.

Carantan eventually became a *governatore* and the accountant of the Zitelle in the 1570s-90s.

From 1575–1597, the *governatrici* and the administrators contributed to formulating a design that best integrated the tenets of the school and the city’s poor relief ideologies within the spatial organization of their new building. Vanessa Scharven Chase argues the vital role the *governatrici*, and in particular, the *Madonna* Marina Bernardo, assumed in the patronage and oversight of the architectural complex.<sup>65</sup> Considering the Zitelle was inhabited and governed solely by these women, the female members of the administration would have had the foremost understanding of how to guide the spatial organization of the building to shape the behaviors of the *zitelle* and reform them into respectable women. Surviving account books in the Istituzioni di Ricovero e di Educazione (IRE) in Venice testify to their active participation in the building process. Chase notes that since governing boards were often responsible for construction decisions it is likely that Bernardo, along with rest of *governatrici*, played a significant role in the building’s planning.

Bernardo was the *madonna* of the Zitelle from 1560 until her death in 1607. Her *Libro di madonna* is one of the few surviving documents to testify to the early period of the Zitelle’s construction (1575–77) and substantiates that she was the principal official of the Casa involved in the building project.<sup>66</sup> The *Libro* documents Bernardo paying

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<sup>65</sup> See Chase, chapters 1-3 and 6.

<sup>66</sup> See Cooper, *Palladio's Venice*, 283. For the documentary evidence of the Zitelle’s construction from 1563-85, as discussed below, see Chase, 98-111.

workers for their services and purchasing a wide variety of building materials including pylons and planks for scaffolding, stonework for new foundations, fireplace, kitchen and laundry ovens, and auxiliary building materials such as nails, lime, sand, and soil.

*Governatrice* Adrianna Contarini and *Coadjutrice* Soprana Corner also participated in the early stages of construction as well. Contarini had her *fator* (factor) arrange payments for a shipment of wood, and Corner dispersed the construction manager's salary. Registers of material and labor costs were also primarily managed by Bernardo, although the Confessor Battista Belin, Carantan, and Corner signed receipts as well. For example, Bernardo's name appears on twenty-four of the sixty-three receipts, whereas Belin signed twenty-two, Cornaro signed eleven, Carantan five, and Contarini, one.

During the period of construction between 1596–97, Bernardo's on-site management further demonstrates her enormous contributions to the Zitelle's building project.<sup>67</sup> Although during the final building campaign a *proto* (project manager) named Bortolo was hired, Bernardo still approved nearly every item received and service contracted. Of the 200 records between 1596 and 1597, Bernardo accepted 151 entries. She further commissioned over three-quarters of the total *polizze* (permits) in the final phase of construction: a total of seventy-two out of ninety of the *polizze* for the garden wall, and 151 out of 198 *polizze* for the new west wing. The *governatrici* signed four orders as an entity, signifying their involvement supervising construction as well, although Bernardo was the only person involved in the construction from beginning to end. She also paid for construction costs herself, including expenses for water, lime, tile, and bricklayer's

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<sup>67</sup> For the documentary evidence from 1596-97 as discussed below, see Chase, 209-12.

salaries. In total Bernardo provided roughly sixteen percent of the entire amount raised for the fourth building campaign, a total of 3,386 *lire* sixteen *soldi*. The final stages of construction, as argued by Chase, ultimately underscore the authority Bernardo and the *governatrici* exerted over the planning and construction of the Casa delle Zitelle.

The renovated building was transformed into an innovative H-shaped design with residential quarters flanking the church on both sides. According to Chase, unlike at charitable hospitals where wings were designed to separate diverse populations of inhabitants, such as male syphilitics, female syphilitics, and orphans at the Incurabili, or male indigents, female indigents, male orphans, and female orphans at the Derelitti, each floor at Zitelle had a specific use and purpose in the girls' daily lives.<sup>68</sup> Each wing of the Zitelle has three floors systematically devised to provide strict enclosure and assist the *zitelle* in their education. The ground floor was primarily used for public and communal spaces such as the *parlatorio* (visiting room), kitchen, and refectory. The first floor provided rooms for education, industry, and prayer in the front. The infirmary was located in the rear eastern wing, while the administration and staff's living quarters were located in the western rear wing. The second floor was the most private and reserved for the girl's dormitories. At the center of the institution, both spatially and programmatically, is the church of the Zitelle, Santa Maria della Presentazione.

The founding members of the institution, including the *governatrici*, *madonna* and staff, accomplished a monumental achievement for women patrons in Venice. Most often for women in Venice, and across Italy, the opportunities to publicly display their

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<sup>68</sup> Chase, 184-89. For more on the architecture of charitable institutions in Venice see, Aikema and Meijers.



influence and patronage were usually facilitated by or on behalf of men.<sup>69</sup> The most documented instances of patronage on behalf of Venetian laywomen are altarpieces and funerary monuments commissioned by patrician wives and widows for their male kin, usually their fathers or husbands.<sup>70</sup> This was the most culturally accepted mode of patronage for women in Renaissance Italy. For example, Orsa Malipiero, the widow of Simeone Malipiero, commissioned the *Adoration of the Magi in the Presence of Saint Helen* (1525–26) from Palma Vecchio for the high altar of Sant’Elena in Castello (now in the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan).<sup>71</sup> As executor of the will of her deceased husband, Zuane Soranzo, Elisabetta Lise Soranzo commissioned a painting for the high altar of San Sebastiano, *The Virgin and Child in Glory with Saints* (1565), from Paolo Veronese.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Angela Marisol Roberts, “Donor Portraits in Late Medieval Venice c.1280-1413” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, 2007), 196.

<sup>70</sup> Noblewomen in Venice also participated in the exchange of visual culture through bequeathing works of art, often to their female servants. Dennis Romano distinguished between two types of patronage systems in Renaissance Venice: primary, a relationship between a patron and a client, and secondary, where objects are essentially recycled when donated or bequeathed to third parties. Romano gives examples of patrician women, such as Beta Malipiero, Agnesina the widow of Francesco dal Orto, and Lucia the wife of Zorzi da Zara, who bequeathed paintings and other items to their female servants in return for spiritual benefits. As Romano demonstrated, through expanding the definitions of patronage to include systems in which women actively participated, a better picture emerges of how women interact with visual culture in the early modern period. See Dennis Romano, “Aspects of Patronage in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Venice,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 712-733, JSTOR.

<sup>71</sup> Paola Tinagli and Mary Rogers, *Women and the Visual Arts in Italy c.1400-1650: Luxury and Leisure, Duty and Devotion, a Sourcebook* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 264-65.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Humfrey, “Veronese’s High Altar for San Sebastiano: A Patrician Commission for a Counter Reformation Church,” in *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797*, eds. John Martin and Dennis

Finally, Elisabetta Querini, the widow of Lorenzo Massolo, commissioned an altarpiece from Titian on her husband's behalf.<sup>73</sup> Titian's altarpiece, *The Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence* (c.1547-1559), originally occupied an altar on the right side nave of the church of Santa Maria Assunta dei Crociferi (now at the Chiesa dei Gesuiti, Venice).<sup>74</sup>

Architectural commissions were even more rare among Venetian laywomen.<sup>75</sup> On occasion women completed funerary monuments on behalf of their deceased male relatives and very rarely of their own accord. For instance, Agnesina Badoer commissioned a sculptural memorial from an artist in the circle of Pietro Lombardo for her late father in their family chapel in the church of San Francesco della Vigna.<sup>76</sup>

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Romano (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 365-88. See also Patricia Fortini Brown, "Where the Money Flows: Art Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Venice," in *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, ed. Frederick Ilchman (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Publications, 2009), 51.

<sup>73</sup> The testament of Lorenzo Massolo demonstrates women's competence to commission altarpieces through explaining that his wife, Elisabetta Querini, controlled their commission. He notes that the altarpiece should be brought to completion according to certain intentions and instead of specifying the criteria he directs the reader to his wife, who "knows it all." See Allison Sherman, "Murder and Martyrdom: Titian's Gesuiti 'Saint Lawrence' as a Family Peace Offering," *Artibus et Historiae* 34, 68 (2013): 47 n. 87, JSTOR.

<sup>74</sup> Titian and his shop produced no fewer than three portraits of Elisabetta Querini. Collectively, Pietro Bembo and the papal nuncio to Venice, Giovanni Della Casa, owned two, however, they only survive in copies. One of the lost paintings moved Pietro Aretino to write a sonnet on Querini's behalf. See Sherman, "Murder and Martyrdom," 41.

<sup>75</sup> By contrast, in Rome affluent women played an important public role as patrons of architecture in the sixteenth century. See Carolyn Valone, "Architecture as a Public Voice for Women in Sixteenth-century Rome," *Renaissance Studies* 15, no. 3 (September 2001): 301-27, JSTOR.

<sup>76</sup> See below, 71-3.

Badoer was the executor of her father's will and took over the altar project after her father died in 1495.

Margarita Vitturi Emiliani (d. 1455) is the best-known example of a Venetian woman patronizing a chapel of her own accord, but her chapel was not realized during her lifetime.<sup>77</sup> She commissioned the first centrally planned chapel in Venice on the left-hand side of the church of San Michele in Isola to honor the Annunciation for the people of Venice. The most remarkable part her commission was that her stipulations were so demanding that she completely controlled her commission from the grave. In 1427, soon after the death of her husband Giovanni Emiliani, she made her will and chose the Procurators of San Marco de Citra as her executors. Upon her death in 1455 the executors were to invest the value of most of her estate in the *Camera degli Imprestiti* (the Public Loan of Venice) until an adequate amount accumulated to pay for the chapel's construction. It was not until 1500 that ample funds were available; however, construction did not begin until 1526 when a suitable site was chosen. The bold investment strategy undertaken by Vitturi ultimately allowed her to erect a lavish chapel she normally could not have afforded and inevitably kept her fortune out of the hands of her male relatives by commissioning a project for the city of Venice.

Women in Venice did contribute to group commissions, although not on the scale of the administrators at the Zitelle. Further, men usually instigated the projects women contributed towards. For example, in her will of 13 April 1509, Caterina Contarini, the

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<sup>77</sup> King, *Renaissance Women Patrons*, 90-94.

wife of Niccolò Morosini, paid twenty ducats for the commission of a painting for the high altar of San Giovanni Crisostomo.<sup>78</sup> Her donation was part of a project with more benefactors organized by the church's parish priest, Alvise Talenti. Talenti commissioned Sebastiano del Piombo (1485-1547) to paint the San Giovanni Crisostomo Altarpiece (c. 1510-11), which depicts Saint John Crisostomo with Saints Catherine, Mary Magdalene, Lucy, John the Evangelist, John the Baptist, and Theodore. This mode of patronage allowed women of modest means the opportunity to contribute to projects outside of familial ventures and in a similar collaborative manner as Venetian men.

Carolyn Valone asserted that “Architectural patronage has always been understood to be a potent tool for shaping both the physical and cultural environment, allowing the patron an opportunity for self-fashioning and the expression of public sentiments.”<sup>79</sup> The female patrons at the Zitelle were well aware of this tradition and utilized their administrative autonomy to engage as corporate patrons on par with their male counterparts, purchasing real estate and instigating a building project at a time when women were often confined to erecting family funerary monuments. Along the Giudecca canal, the Casa delle Zitelle complements the pious landscape of churches and civic buildings commissioned by ecclesiastic and government committees. Just as their male counterparts, the women founders at the Casa delle Zitelle were able to carve out a sphere of influence within the geography of the city by responding to the city's religious and

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<sup>78</sup> Caterina's will stipulated that the terms were to be fulfilled following the death of her husband, who died in the spring of 1510; Caterina predeceased him. See Augusto Bertini and Chiara Gentili Bertini, *Sebastiano: la pala di san giovanni crisostomo* (Venice: Arsenale, 1985), 9-15.

<sup>79</sup> Valone, “Architecture as a Public Voice for Women,” 301.

political campaign to refashion itself as a moral Republic. The resulting building, in both form and function, not only transformed the *zitelle*, but also enhanced the visibility of women of all classes in the Venetian urban landscape.

## Chapter Three

### The Church of Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle

The church of Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle (Figure 3) was built at the center of the Casa delle Zitelle between 1581 and 1588. Befitting an institution founded to house virgins, Santa Maria della Presentazione was dedicated to the Presentation of the Virgin. The Protoevangelium of James recounts that after miraculously conceiving a child in their old age, Joachim and Anne took their daughter Mary to the Temple in Jerusalem when she turned three years old to consecrate her to God. Mary remained at the Temple until her twelfth birthday, wholly dedicating herself as a servant of the Lord. In many ways, the young virgins entering into the female community at the Zitelle paralleled Mary's life at the Temple. The dedication, therefore, linked the *zitelle* to the idea of virginal purity associated with the Virgin Mary.<sup>1</sup> The patrons' specific placement of the church physically delineated religious devotion as the central component of the inhabitant's lives. The iconography of the imagery in the church further emphasized the chastity and spiritual devotion necessary for the girl's pious transformations. The ability to assist the Virgin Mary and the governors in rescuing the virginity of the *zitelle* was especially articulated in the altarpiece commissioned by Elisabetta Foppa. Foppa's altarpiece reiterated the Casa delle Zitelle's institutional message through its distinct subject matter and composition, specifically emphasizing characteristics of ideal womanhood to the *zitelle*.

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<sup>1</sup> Vanessa Scharven Chase, "The Casa delle Zitelle: Gender and Architecture in Renaissance Venice" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2002), 128.



**Figure 3.** Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, c. 1581-88. Venice, Italy.  
Photo: author.

The design of Santa Maria della Presentazione is as remarkable as the H-shaped complex devised by the patrons of the Zitelle. The rectangular space available for the church was transformed into a square, central-plan surmounted by a dome, with an atrium and sacristy at the front and high altar at the rear (Figure 4).<sup>2</sup> A few years prior, in 1577, the Senate had rejected a central-plan for the church's neighbor, Il Redentore (1577–92).<sup>3</sup> Longitudinal and Greek cross plans were more commonly used in Venetian churches. Most often monastic churches in Venice followed a longitudinal plan, such as Jacopo Sansovino's San Francesco della Vigna (1534–60s). However, the addition of domed crossings to longitudinal churches, such as Andrea Palladio's San Giorgio Maggiore (1565–1609), was also employed to associate buildings with the domed, Greek cross plan of the Basilica of San Marco.<sup>4</sup> The church of the Zitelle was built using the architectural idiom of Palladio, and the white stone façade and dome connect the church with the look of San Giorgio Maggiore, Il Redentore, and the Basilica of San Marco, presenting the Zitelle as a prominent example of Venetian piety in the urban landscape.<sup>5</sup>

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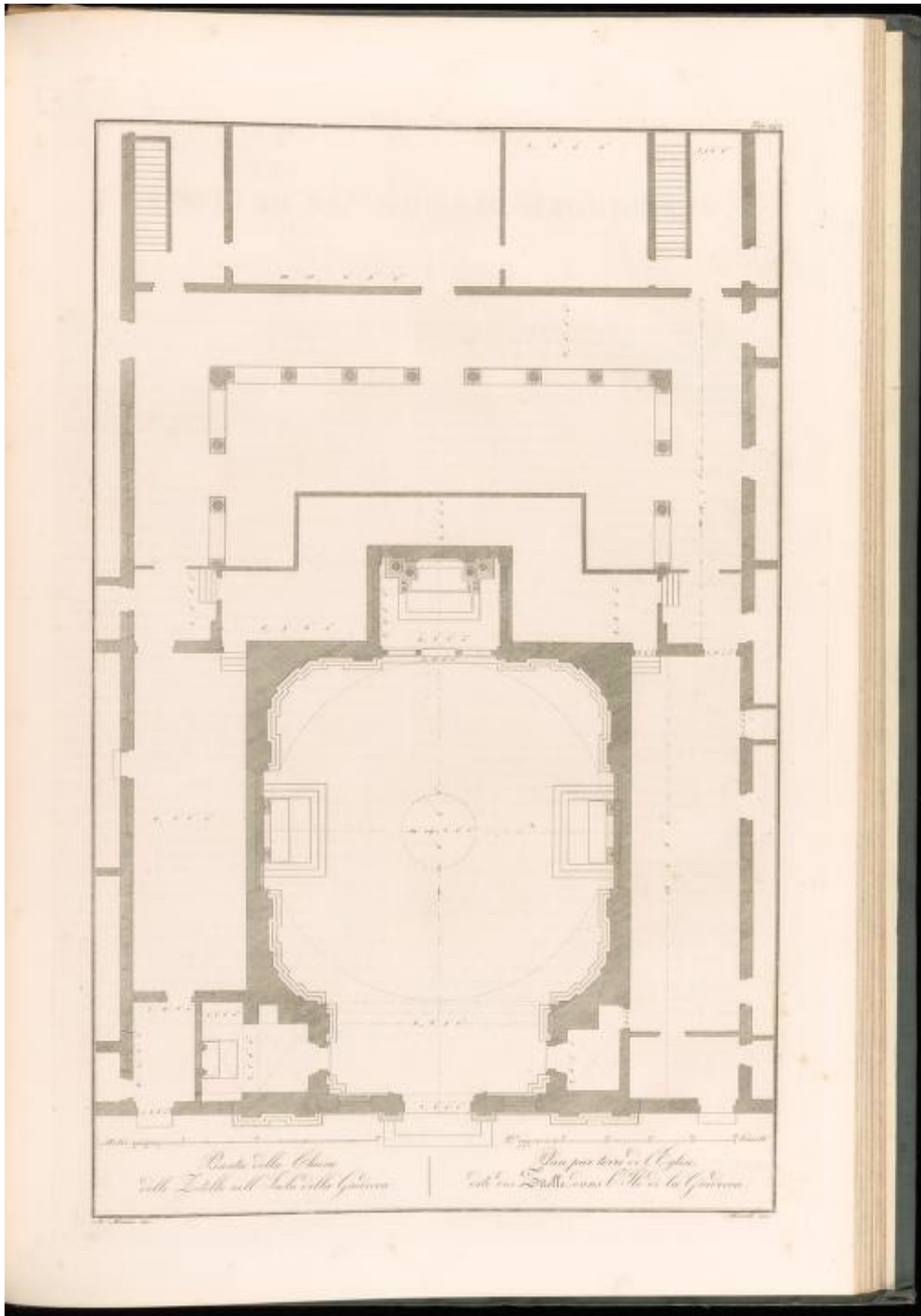
<sup>2</sup> Chase, "The Casa delle Zitelle," 128-9.

<sup>3</sup> The Senate ultimately chose the domed basilican plan designed by Andrea Palladio for the site. The Redentore is dedicated to Christ the Redeemer and built as a votive church after the great plague of 1575-77 in Venice. See Tracy E. Cooper, *Palladio's Venice: Architecture and Society in a Renaissance Republic* (New Haven: Yale University, 2005), 231-57.

<sup>4</sup> Chase, 137.

<sup>5</sup> See Chase, chapter 7.





**Figure 4.** Leopoldo Cicognara, Antonio Diedo, and Giovanni Antonio Selva, Plan of Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle in *Le Fabbriche e i monumenti piu conspicui di Venezia* (Venice, 1858), plate 240. Image placed in the public domain by the Getty Research Institute, [https://archive.org/details/gri\\_33125014244046](https://archive.org/details/gri_33125014244046).

The church has three altars, a high altar, and two side altars, each individually patronized by private donors. Each altarpiece remains *in situ*, that is, in its original location, and was commissioned from a prominent Venetian artist from the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. The high altar was completed by 1586 and is located within a barrel-vaulted chapel, and a gold-encrusted marble frame surrounds Francesco Bassano's altarpiece, *The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* (Figure 5). The painting depicts the patron, *Governatore* Bartolomeo Marchesi and his wife Gerolama Bonomo, at the foot of the staircase, looking on as the young Virgin Mary ascends the temple's thirteen steps.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bartolomeo Marchesi was one of Zitelle's first governors. In his will of 12 July 1583, he arranged for his chapel to be built and for him and his wife to be buried at the foot of the altar, although his wife was never buried in the church. Marchesi was a wealthy merchant who originated from Bergamo and was awarded Venetian citizenship on 18 April 1580 by Doge Nicolò da Ponte. See Chase, 130 n. 13; Dante Luigi Gardani, *La Chiesa di S. Maria Della Presentazione (delle Zitelle) in Venezia* (Venice: Stamperia di Venezia, 1961), 22-26; Bernard Aikema and Dulcia Meijers, *Nel regno dei poveri: Arte e storia dei grandi ospedali veneziani in età moderna, 1474-1797* (Venezia: Arsenale, 1989), 234-37; and Barbara Mazza, "Committenti e artisti nell'età delle riforme: l'arredo della chiesa di S. Maria della Presentazione," in *Le Zitelle: Architettura, arte e storia di un'istituzione veneziana*, eds. Lionello Puppi and Giuseppe Ellero (Venezia: Albrizzi, 1992), 130-33, 150-51.



**Figure 5.** Francesco Bassano, *The Presentation of the Virgin*, c. 1586. Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.

Both side altars were finished in the early seventeenth century and are each set within a classicizing marble frame. *Governatore* and Procurator of San Marco Federico Contarini (25 August 1538 – 20 October 1613) patronized the left side altar, located on the east wall of the church.<sup>7</sup> He is portrayed in his procuratorial robes, opposite Saint Francis, in the foreground of Antonio Vassillacchi's altarpiece *The Madonna and Child with Saint Francis and Federico Contarini* (Figure 6). Elisabetta Foppa patronized the right side altar, located on the west wall of the church. She and her brother Pasquale are depicted in the foreground of the altarpiece, *The Agony in the Garden*, painted by Palma Giovane (Figure 7).

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<sup>7</sup> Federico Contarini became a governor at the Zitelle following the death of a founding governor. He established his connection to the Zitelle through his wife Lucrezia Mocenigo di Zuanne, whom he married in 1555. Lucrezia was the niece of *Governatrici* Cristina Dolfin and Elena Priuli and sister of Agnese Mocenigo Bernardo, and *Madonna* Marina Bernardo and *Governatrice* Andriana Contarini's sister-in-law. See Chase, 130 n. 14. Contarini also served in the 1590s as one of the *Provveditori sopra gli Ospedali* and was one of the founders of the Casa del Soccorso. He is buried at the Zitelle and established a perpetual chaplaincy and a dowry trust for the benefit of ten poor girls. See also Gardani, *La Chiesa di S. Maria Della Presentazione*, 30-37; Brian Pullan *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1971), 404-05; Aikema and Meijers, *Nel regno dei poveri*, 237-38; and Mazza, "Committenti," 133-35, 151-54, 241.





**Figure 6.** Antonio Vassillacchi, *Madonna and Child with Saint Francis and Federico Contarini*, early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.



**Figure 7.** Jacopo Palma il Giovane, *The Agony in the Garden*, c. 1618. Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.

A screen of Corinthian pilasters further recapitulates the church interior. Placed in between each pilaster is a painting by the school of Palma Giovane. Starting on the west wall, from the entrance portal and progressing toward the high altar, hangs: *The Charity*, *Elijah in the Desert*, *The Resurrection*, *The Dispute in the Temple*, *Noli me Tangere*, and *The Dinner in Emmaus*. Beginning on the east wall from the entrance portal and progressing toward the high altar, hangs: *Faith*, *Moses Causes Water to Flow*, *The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth*, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, *The Nativity*, and *The Miracle of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes* (see appendix). *Governatrice Moceniga Mocenigo* (1591–1676) gifted the twelve paintings to the Zitelle in 1675.<sup>8</sup> She additionally bequeathed three paintings for the entrance wall of the church; all three scenes precede the painting cycles representing Mary and Jesus placed throughout the church interior. Hanging above the door is *The Birth of Mary* by Pietro Ricchi, and flanking the entrance to either side is *The Welcome Offer* and *The Angel's Announcement to Joachim*, both by the school of Palma Giovane.

### **Elisabetta Foppa: cittadina Patron of the Arts**

Elisabetta Foppa established her legacy at the Casa delle Zitelle through the construction and decoration of the right side altar and numerous properties and artworks

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<sup>8</sup> Moceniga Mocenigo came from a prominent patrician family and was the daughter of Alvise Mocenigo. She joined the Zitelle in 1655 and served as *Governatrice* for sixteen years. For the paintings Mocenigo bequeathed to the Zitelle, see Appendix. See also Mazza, 137-38, 159; Silvia Lunardon, “Le Zitelle alla Giudecca,” in *Le Zitelle: Architettura, arte e storia di un'istituzione veneziana*, eds. Lionello Puppi and Giuseppe Ellero (Venezia: Albrizzi, 1992), 35-37; Chase, 129 n. 11; and “Ritratto Della Nobildonna Moceniga Mocenigo,” *Gioielli Nascosti di Venezia*, accessed March 22, 2019, <https://www.gioiellinascostidivenezia.it/ritratto-della-nobildonna-moceniga-mocenigo/>.

she bequeathed to the institution. Her inventory of 16 February 1622 reveals she owned a residence in the *contrà*, or parish, of San Salvador near San Marco.<sup>9</sup> The Foppa originated from Bernareggio in the region of Lombardy, just northwest of the Veneto. They had been Venetian citizens, or *cittadini*, since brothers Simone and Pietro Foppa were conferred citizenship on 28 May 1392.<sup>10</sup> From her generous gifts to the institution there is enough information to suggest that the Foppas were an affluent Venetian family. Her brother Pasquale was a doctor, an occupation that provided those practicing medicine the opportunity to amass a considerable fortune.<sup>11</sup>

Both Foppa and her brother are buried at the foot of the altar. Her brother appears to have predeceased her, as she mentions the provisions concerning her brother's burial were taken care of by Zaccaria di Lanzi, who was to buy her house in San Salvador upon her death.<sup>12</sup> It is conceivable that she died between the time her will was written on 14 January 1622, when she expressed the desire to be buried in the church of the Zitelle,<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Mazza, 157 appendix 18.

<sup>10</sup> Gardani, 29.

<sup>11</sup> According to Guido Ruggiero more than two thirds of all physicians and surgeons practicing medicine in fourteenth-century Venice were immigrants to the city. Many practicing medicine accumulated considerable fortunes and permeated the cities highest social and intellectual circles. For more on medical practitioners in Renaissance Venice, see Guido Ruggiero, "The Status of Physicians and Surgeons in Renaissance Venice," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 36, no. 2 (April 1981): 168-184, JSTOR.

<sup>12</sup> Mazza, 136.

<sup>13</sup> "Vuol essere sepolta nella Chiesa della casa delle Cittelle con proibitione che nella sua arca non possa esser altra persona ma quello sia osservato e facendo il contrario priva detta casa delle Cittelle di quanto le lassa." Cited in Mazza, 155 appendix 15.



and 16 February 1622, when an inventory of her property in San Salvador was amended to reflect the change of ownership to Lanzi.<sup>14</sup> Although the inscription on the altar, “Here in living memory rest the bones of Pasquale Foppa and his sister Elisabetta / 1618,” declares a burial date of 1618.<sup>15</sup> It is possible the tomb inscription refers to the year the altar was completed or the year of her brother’s death.

Foppa bequeathed numerous properties on the mainland and artworks to the Zitelle. Her most notable bequest came in the form of a fully furnished property, a *casa dominical* (residence), in the town of Camponogara.<sup>16</sup> In Camponogara she also gifted forty *campi* (fields) categorized as *Prà Bassi* (meadows intended for raising livestock), and fifteen *campi* with a *casa di muro* (walled house) in Arzerini, a village in the municipality of Camponogara.<sup>17</sup> In the town of Arquà she gifted twenty-one *campi* with a *casa di muro*. Further, she left 10,000 ducats to the Zitelle to invest in *monacar*

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<sup>14</sup> “Denuncia dei beni appartenuti (Casa di S. Salvador, ora di Zaccaria di Lanzi, barbier all’insegna della Rioda)... Si tratta dello stesso Zaccaria di Lanzi al quale Elisabetta Foppa ordina la sua sepoltura.” Cited in Mazza, 158 appendix 19.

<sup>15</sup> “UT IBI MEMORIA VIVE OSSA ECC.MI / PASCHALI(S) FOPPA EIUSQ. / SORORIS HELISABET / QUIESCUNT / MDCXVIII.” Cited in Gardani, 26. Gardani discusses the multiple mistakes in the inscription, most noticeably the misspelling of both Elisabetta and Pasquale’s names.

<sup>16</sup> Mazza, 136.

<sup>17</sup> “Alla casa sudetta delle Citelle campi quindici a Campo Nogara chiamati li Arzerini, con casa di muro, altri campi quaranta in circa, chiamati i Prà bassi, tutti a Campo Nogara... altri campi 21 con casa di muro in Arquà.” Cited in Gardani, 29.

(making a nun) or *maridar dette fiole* (marring these girls).<sup>18</sup> Lastly, she gave the Zitelte a portrait of herself and her siblings to be placed in the refectory and a portrait of her brother and sister-in-law with Saint Louis and Saint Catherine, to be placed in the oratory, with the provision that every day the *zitelle* were to say three prayers for the souls of the deceased Foppa family members.<sup>19</sup>

The most visible expression of Foppa's contribution to the Zitelte remains the altar and accompanying devotional objects she commissioned for the west wall of the church. Her will stipulated her estate was to pay the Zitelte twenty-five ducats a year when she gained legal rights to the altar.<sup>20</sup> The altar was constructed on 14 March 1610. Its classicizing marble frame includes the Foppa family coat of arms on either side of the altar; the top half of the shield is gold with a green branch placed in the center, and the

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<sup>18</sup> “Siano fatte Quattro parti che credo sarà ducati 5000 per parte. Due parti lassa alla casa delle Cittelle, con obbligo di investirli per monacar o maridar dette fiole.” Cited in Mazza, 155 appendix 15.

<sup>19</sup> “Lasso alla ditta casa (delle Zitelte) il mio quadro ove son retratta con mio sorella e li altri miei fratelli. Voglio sia messo ditto quadro in refettorio a ciò che le pute, quando le averà mangià... Li do anche a ditta casa due retrati, mio fratello e mia cognata fatti con il beato Lovigi (Luigi) e l'altro con Santa Caterina e rimessi in lo oratorio e che le fie dichì ogni giorno 3 De Profundis a l'anima dei morti da ca' Foppa...” Cited in Mazza, 156 appendix 16.

<sup>20</sup> “Aggravio lassa a dette Cittelle di pagar una mansionaria di ducati 25 all'anno, che detta testatrice restò debitrice a detta casa, quando li fu concessa l'Arca e fabbricò il suo altar l'anno 1610, 14 marzo.” Cited in Mazza, 155 appendix 15. Foppa specified another twenty-five ducats to have two *mansionerie* in the church at her altar praying three times a week and on the first Sunday of the month. “Item altra mansionaria di ducati 25 l'anno, sì che vuole che siano due mansionerie in detta chiesa al suo altar perpetue e si dichino messe tre alla settimana e la prima domenica al mese.” Cited in Mazza, 155 appendix 15.

bottom half is solid red.<sup>21</sup> She decorated her altar sumptuously, most notably with a silver cross adorned with reliquaries crafted specifically for the altar before her death. She also bequeathed tablecloths, *pianete ricamate* (embroidered liturgical vestments), and four bronze candlesticks to be placed on the altar during solemn feasts.<sup>22</sup>

Without the survival of Foppa's will to indicate her involvement in commission, it would have been difficult to ascertain patronage from only the tomb inscription and donor portraits represented in the altarpiece. Not surprisingly, her brother was listed first on the tomb inscription. He also assumed an active role and is depicted in the place of honor on the right side (viewer's left) of the composition. In compliance with tradition, this position was reserved for the (male) patron's portrait, especially when conjugal donor portraits were present in altarpieces. Typically in these images, the man knelt to the right of the Madonna and Child or saint, and his wife knelt to the left.<sup>23</sup> Women were often depicted in conjugal donor portraits in ways that emphasized characteristics of ideal womanhood, such as piety, modesty, and obedience.<sup>24</sup> This is also the case with Foppa,

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<sup>21</sup> Gardani, 29.

<sup>22</sup> "Una croce d'argento con reliquie... fatta avanti la mia morte per mio altar... Voglio che li quattro candelieri di bronzo sia messi le feste solenni sul mio altare." Cited in Mazza, 156 appendix 16.

<sup>23</sup> Angela Marisol Roberts, "Donor Portraits in Late Medieval Venice c.1280-1413," (PhD diss., Queen's University, 2007), 205. Roberts also notes that the positing of a figure to the left of the holy figure could also indicate that the person depicted was already deceased. However, this is unlikely the case for Foppa because documentary evidence indicates her death after the completion of the altarpiece.

<sup>24</sup> Angela Marisol Roberts notes that in *trecento* Venice, women were depicted in surviving donor portraits less than men, and only under specific circumstances. Roberts collected twenty examples of individualized female donor portraiture in the fourteenth

who is pictured in a sober nun-like habit, engrossed in prayer, emphasizing her feminine qualities, although it is not a husband and wife being displayed, but a brother and a sister. By upholding the traditions of donor portraiture and presenting herself with a male family member, Foppa eliminated the possibility of presenting herself outside the established conventions for representing female honor in portraiture.

In a patriarchal society such as the Venetian Republic, it would have been unconventional for a woman to exercise independent patronage or fund a project that included independent portraiture.<sup>25</sup> As noted in Chapter Two, the most common and culturally accepted mode of patronage for women in Renaissance Venice was the commissioning of altarpieces and funerary monuments on behalf of deceased fathers and husbands. It is possible that *The Agony in the Garden* was commissioned from Palma Giovane to commemorate the death of her brother. This hypothesis, in turn, was not entirely unprecedented in Venice. In the late fifteenth century, patrician Filippa di Benedetti commissioned a sculpted altarpiece in San Giovanni e Paolo for her brother Andrea de' Benedetti da Serico and herself (Figure 8). In her will of 1494, Benedetti spoke of "the altar which I have had made, where I have buried the body of my most

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century, of which five are of the *dogaresa* with her husband, the doge, above his tomb monument; in seven examples, the female donor is identifiably an abbess or a nun of a convent; and in six examples the woman is the spouse of a patrician or *cittadino*. See Roberts, "Donor Portraits in Late Medieval Venice," 195-230.

<sup>25</sup> Roberts, 214.

excellent brother Andrea.”<sup>26</sup> The altarpiece is attributed to Pietro Lombardo and consists of a triumphal arch frame with a single statue placed in each niche.<sup>27</sup> The central arch formerly held a fourteenth-century statue of the Madonna but has since been replaced by a statue of Mary Magdalene from Santa Maria dei Servi. The sibling’s patron saints flank the Magdalene, with Saint Andrew in the position of honor on the left and Saint Philip on the right. Benedetti’s status as a widower and childless heiress gave her the monetary resources to commission such an ornate altar, and through commissioning an altarpiece for her brother, Benedetti was also able to secure her funerary commemoration.

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<sup>26</sup> Cited in Catherine E. King, *Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy c. 1300-1500* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 104-07.

<sup>27</sup> At the altar’s original location in the church, a funerary tomb slab reads “Andrea de’ Benedetti da Serico and to Filippa de’ Benedetti, his sister.” Cited in King, *Renaissance Women Patrons*, 107.



**Figure 8.** Attributed to Pietro Lombardo, *Altarpiece with Saints Andrew and Philip*, c. 1485. San Giovanni e Paolo, Venice. Photo: author.

The published excerpts of Foppa's will do not indicate other familial connections, and therefore, it is possible she was the sole heiress to her family's estate. In this regard, her altar stood to commemorate not only her brother, but also the Foppa family lineage. As in the example of Benedetti, it seems that heiresses and widows could take on important

dynastic responsibilities in Venice. For example, as the executor of her father's will and only heir, Agnesina Badoer commissioned a sculptural memorial by an artist in the circle of Pietro Lombardo for her late father, Girolamo Badoer (1429-95), in their family chapel in the church of San Francesco della Vigna (Figure 9).<sup>28</sup> Her father had begun plans for the marble altar and its iconography in 1494. When Badoer took over the project after her father died in 1495 she altered her father's iconographic plans. She replaced the figure of Saint Benedict her father had included to commemorate her first husband, Benedetto Badoer who died in 1494, with that of Saint James, as a tribute to both her father and second husband, Girolamo Giustinian, whom she married in 1497, and added the figure of Saint Jerome in the central panel of the triptych. Notably, Badoer placed Saint Michael the Archangel and Saint Agnes in the place of honor to the viewer's left (Figure 10). Through placing the patron saints of her mother and herself on the side conventionally taken by male patrons, her revision of the iconographic program prominently put the Badoer women at the forefront of the commission. In a similar fashion to both Benedetti and Badoer, while commemorating her brother and establishing a funerary monument for the legacy of the Foppa family, Elisabetta used the opportunity to surreptitiously account for her own funerary commemoration.

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<sup>28</sup> Douglas Lewis, "Patterns of Preference: Patronage of Sixteenth-Century Architects by the Venetian Patriciate," in *Patronage in the Renaissance*, eds. Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 354-80; and Lewis "The Sculptures in the Chapel of the Villa Giustinian at Roncade, and their Relation to those in the Giustinian Chapel at San Francesco della Vigna," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 27, no. 3 (1983): 307-52, JSTOR. See also, King, 54-7.





**Figure 9.** Circle of Pietro Lombardo, *Altarpiece with Saints Agnes, Michael, Jerome, James and Antony*, 1497-1508. Cappella Badoer-Giustinian, San Francesco della Vigna, Venice. Photo: author.



**Figure 10.** Circle of Pietro Lombardo, *Altarpiece with Saints Agnes, Michael, Jerome, James and Antony* [detail], 1497-1508. Cappella Badoer-Giustinian, San Francesco della Vigna, Venice. Photo: author.



## **Transforming *zitelle***

The subject of Foppa's altarpiece, the Agony in the Garden, is included in the Passion of Christ and takes place immediately before Christ's arrest and Crucifixion.<sup>29</sup> After the Last Supper, Christ visited the garden of Gethsemane with Peter, James, and John. He asked his disciples to pray with him throughout the night. However, the disciples fell asleep twice while he prayed. According to the Gospel of Luke, an angel appeared to comfort and strengthen Christ as he struggled against his mortal agony, such that "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22: 43-44). In his prayer to God, he said twice to "let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will," emphasizing his impending sacrifice and acceptance of God's plans (Matthew 26: 39). When he finished praying, Christ went to the sleeping disciples and told them to "get up, let us go. Look, my betrayer is at hand" (Matthew 26: 46). Upon arrival with an armed crowd and the arresting soldiers of the high priest Caiaphas, Judas betrays Jesus by identifying him with a kiss (Matthew 26: 46-49). The "kiss of Judas" directly resulted in the arrest of Jesus and culminated in his Crucifixion by the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate.

In Palma Giovane's painting, Christ kneels in a vibrant red robe on top of a stone cliff and in his agony, red beads of sweat drip down his forehead. To his left, dark tempestuous clouds surround him. To his right, a bright stream of light enters with the arrival of the angel holding a golden chalice. The angel's sudden appearance causes his blue mantel to swirl around him. The heavenly light casts a halo around Jesus's head and

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<sup>29</sup> The Agony in the Garden is recorded in New Testament and Synoptic Gospels, see Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; and Luke 22:39-46. The Passion of Christ refers to the final period in the life of Jesus, beginning with his entrance into Jerusalem and culminating in his Crucifixion and Entombment.

the brilliant golden light floods on the disciples who lie below. The bodies of Peter, James, and John stretch across the canvas as they are consumed in a deep state of slumber. A backlit shrub and two leafless trees isolate Jesus and disconnect him from the disciples, splitting the composition into three simultaneous but separate realms; heaven, earth, and the physical space of the church. In the foreground of the canvas are donor portraits of the Foppa siblings, Elisabetta on the left (viewer's right), and Pasquale on the right (viewer's left). Foppa is shown in profile, with her hands raised in a gesture of prayer. She averts her gaze from the viewer, looking beyond her brother in the direction of the high altar. Her brother, on the other hand, looks confidently out at the viewer and with his right-hand gestures toward both the depicted scene and his praying sister.

The Zitelle's constitution provides valuable insight regarding the viewing conditions of Foppa's altarpiece through the inclusion of the building's spatial regulations and security procedures. The constitution was quite strict about access, and restrictions probably stemmed from the rules of *clausura* (enclosure) enacted in convents during the Catholic Counter-Reformation, which ultimately called attention to the importance of virginity in the sixteenth century. Just as with nuns in Venetian convents, the young girls at the Zitelle were enclosed on the Giudecca to prevent their succumbing to corruption and disease. The *clausura* of the Tridentine Decrees directly affected the architectural organization of conventional churches, imposing modifications of bars, grilles, screens, curtains, and choirs to isolate nuns from the laity.<sup>30</sup> One of the most fundamental

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<sup>30</sup> The Council of Trent (1545-63) restored *clausura* during its Twenty-fifth session. See J. Waterworth, ed. and trans., *The Council of Trent: The Twenty-Fifth Session*, (London: Dolman, 1848), 240-41, <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct25.html>.

principles devised in the constitution was that the girls were never to leave or be seen by the outside world. At the *Zitelle*, enclosure was implemented through various spatial strategies. The church and Casa were to have independent entrances from the street and the residential quarters because the church also functioned for the urban community.<sup>31</sup> The public visited the church through a doorway directly on the street, and a small chamber located to the right of the church entrance provided access to the Casa. It appears that the wards and governors primarily used the church and occasional visitors included lay worshippers, donors, priests, and maintenance workers.

From 1589 to 1591 two choirs were added onto the church, one behind each side altar (Figures 2 and 11).<sup>32</sup> Just as the architectural complex was designed to specifically shape the behaviors of the *zitelle*, the choirs ensured the girls would not have to leave the residential portion of the building and could remain invisible during church services. Each choir had two levels. The *coro da baso*, or lower choir, is located behind three grilled windows at the height of the pedestals that support the engaged columns

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<sup>31</sup> The constitution established a system of complex locks and keys to the doors between the Casa and the church. “The greatest care also must be taken that the door through which one enters the casa from the church and all the other doors of the casa, and especially the principal door, be closed with their own chains and keys; and the doors of both the church and the casa may only be opened by the Madonna or the Coadjutrice, and the Portineria may receive these keys from them. Every time that the door which goes from the casa to the church is open, either for cleaning, decorating or arranging the altars, the Madonna and Coadjutrice must be very careful that the door of the church which goes onto the street is always closed, with its chains and keys, and when it happens that someone is in the church, similarly the door to the Church which goes into the Casa must be closed with its chains and keys, which are in the hands of the Madonna, or the Coadjutrice, as all the keys of the casa ought to be.” Benedetto Palmio, *Costituzioni della Casa delle Zitelle* V, LXXVII-LXXX, cited in Chase, 156.

<sup>32</sup> Aikema and Meijers, 231-32.

surrounding each side altar. The *coro di sopra*, or upper choir, is identifiable by a grated lunette below the entablature. It is known from a document of 1598 that the Zitelle had a choir of thirty-four singers, divided into five voices, and included as many as eight of the governesses.<sup>33</sup> In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Venetian charitable institutions were best known for their *figlie del coro* (girls choirs), especially the Ospedale della Pietà, that was famously associated with the virtuoso violinist and composer Antonio Vivaldi.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Between 1605 and 1610 the governors of the Mendicanti donated the sum of twenty ducats a year to the Zitelle so its choir could join with the girls of the Mendicanti in the services of compline during lent. See Deborah Howard and Laura Moretti, *Sound and Space in Renaissance Venice: Architecture, Music, Acoustics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 188 and 333 n. 114.

<sup>34</sup> For more on the Venetian *figlie del coro*, see M. V. Constable, “The Venetian ‘Figlie del Coro’: Their Environment and Achievement,” *Music & Letters* 63, no. ¾ (July–October 1982): 181-212, JSTOR.



**Figure 11.** Left side altar, early 17<sup>th</sup> century. Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.



The visual effect of the Zitelle's choir grilles are best illustrated in the late eighteenth century frescoes painted by Jacopo Guarana in the Sala della Musica at the Derelitti, also known as the Ospedaletto (Figures 12-13). Flanking the central concert scene, Guarana painted two grated windows that disguise fictive choirgirls and mirror the actual choir on the opposite wall of the hall (Figure 14). The frescoes in the Sala della Musica demonstrate the function of the choir grilles at the Zitelle, although it is unclear whether or not the parishioners in the church below could have seen the girls. Even if the girls were not visible, the function of grates implemented during the Catholic Reformation drew attention to the separation of girls through visibly advertising their confinement.<sup>35</sup>



**Figure 12.** Jacopo Guarana, *Concerto delle Putte*, 1776. Sala della Musica, Ospedaletto, Venice. Photo: author.

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<sup>35</sup> Helen Hills, "Cities and Virgins: Female Aristocratic Convents in Early Modern Naples and Palermo," *Oxford Art Journal* 22, no. 1 (1999): 34, JSTOR.





**Figure 13.** Jacopo Guarana, *Concerto delle Putte* [detail], 1776. Sala della Musica, Ospedaletto, Venice. Photo: author.





**Figure 14.** Choir of the Sala della Musica, 1776. Ospedaletto, Venice. Photo: author.

The specific placement of the two choirs also provided the *zitelle* with unobstructed views of the two side altars. From the choir above the left altar, the *zitelle* would have had clear visibility of Foppa's altarpiece (Figure 15). Those who regularly accessed the east *coro di sopra* would have undoubtedly become acquainted with the Eucharistic iconography of the altarpiece throughout their residency at the *Zitelle*. According to the constitution, the sacraments were fundamental to the development of the *zitelle*. With good governance and "through the institution of Christian piety, and with the virtue of the blessed sacraments," the young girls of the *Zitelle* would become the very image of pious



Christian women.<sup>36</sup> Of the seven “blessed sacraments,” the Council of Trent declared the Eucharist the most sacred of the Catholic Church in its Thirteenth Session, reinforcing the belief that the Eucharist is understood to be a visible expression of the presence of Christ.<sup>37</sup>



**Figure 15.** View from the east *coro di sopra* toward the right side altar, 1589-91. Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.

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<sup>36</sup> Palmio, *Costituzioni*, 26v-27r, cited in Chase, 1.

<sup>37</sup> The seven sacraments were codified in the Council of Trent’s Seventh Session, Canon I. “If any one saith, that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by Jesus Christ, our Lord; or that they are more, or less, than seven, to wit, Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Order, and Matrimony; or even that any one of these seven is not truly and properly a sacrament; let him be anathema.” See J. Waterworth, ed. and trans., *The Council of Trent: The Seventh Session*, (London: Dolman, 1848), 54, <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct07.html>.

The sacrament of the Holy Eucharist commemorates the Passion (or Crucifixion) of Christ and asserts the real presence of Jesus's body in the Eucharist. In the Christian rite, known as Holy Communion, or Mass, bread and wine transform into the Body and Blood of Christ, known as transubstantiation. Christ instituted the Holy Eucharist during the Last Supper. After taking the bread, blessing and breaking it, and giving it to his disciples, he said: "Take and eat; this is my body. Then he took a cup [of wine], and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you.' This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 6:26-28).

The Eucharist is most often displayed in the symbolic form of the host and the chalice, as presented to Jesus by the angel in Palma's painting (Figure 16). The iconography of the chalice communicates the importance of the Holy Eucharist, which would have been ritually enacted at the altar during Mass, reminding the *zitelle* and churchgoers not only of the real presence of Christ but also of his sacrifice on their behalf. For the *zitelle*, the Agony set an essential example of acceptance and submission to God as they were reformed into honorable young women, and furthermore, for the patron, the Agony would have been a meaningful subject for a woman reflecting on the inevitable approach of death.



**Figure 16.** Jacopo Palma il Giovane, *The Agony in the Garden* [detail], c. 1618. Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.

In Venice, the Holy Eucharist was celebrated prominently long before the Council of Trent. The Feast Day of Corpus Christi was one of the most important annual events in Venice. Latin for “Body of Christ,” the Feast of Corpus Christi celebrated the real presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. The oldest known Corpus Christi procession in the city began in 1317, and the oldest recognized church dedicated to Corpus Christi in Venice is dated from 1366.<sup>38</sup> During the procession, the Eucharist was carried under a white canopy to the Basilica of San Marco, a spectacle that could take up to five hours, as it did in 1506.<sup>39</sup> The ceremony began when the doge, “dressed in cloth of gold with a mantle of crimson satin and a crimson corno,” entered

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<sup>38</sup> Garry Wills, *Venice: Lion City: The Religion of Empire* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2001), 195.

<sup>39</sup> Wills, *Lion City*, 195.

San Marco, confessed to the patriarch, and took his seat in the choir ahead of the magistrates and senators.<sup>40</sup> Then the procession, which consisted of members of the *scuole grandi* and *scuole piccoli* dedicated to the Eucharist, and of friars, guildsmen, and congregations of seculars, entered the church.<sup>41</sup> These important *scuole*, known as the Scuole del Sacramento, or the Confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament, were devoted to the cult of the Eucharist and proliferated during the Counter-Reformation and were found in nearly all the parishes of the city by the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>42</sup>

The city's prominent devotion to the Eucharist can also be traced to the Fourth Crusade in 1204 when the Republic of Venice conquered Constantinople.<sup>43</sup> One of the many *spolia* (spoils) brought back from Constantinople was a vessel containing some of the blood shed by Christ in his agony in the garden of Gethsemane.<sup>44</sup> This relic was so

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<sup>40</sup> See Patricia H. Labalme and Laura Sanguineti White, eds., *Venice, Città Excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo*, trans. Linda L. Carroll (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 371.

<sup>41</sup> Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 224. For descriptions of Corpus Christi processions between 1509 and 1532, see Labalme and White, *Venice, Città Excelentissima*, 369-72.

<sup>42</sup> Patricia Fortini Brown, "Where the Money Flows: Art Patronage in Sixteenth-Century Venice," in *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, ed. Frederick Ilchman (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts Publications, 2009), 47.

<sup>43</sup> Wills, 195.

<sup>44</sup> The Basilica of San Marco became a shrine of Byzantine *spolia*. These objects include the *Quadriga Domini*, the four horses of San Marco, that were placed on the balustrade above the narthex of the basilica and were believed to have been cast for Alexander the Great; the Pillars of Acre; the Four Tetrarchs, a porphyry statuary group that dates to the late Roman imperial period, placed at the southeast corner of the church; and the *Altar of the Nicopeia Madonna*. See Marilyn Perry, "Saint Mark's Trophies:

crucial to Venice that the doge wore a long deep red robe, the *corruccio*, to honor the blood of Christ.<sup>45</sup> Finally, the Venetians' dedication to the Eucharist is wholly apparent in their response to the famous interdict of Pope Paul V, who prohibited them from celebrating the sacraments in 1606-7.<sup>46</sup> The government banned the circulation of the papal decree, and specifically ordered that the Corpus Christi procession be held in defiance of the pope; the resulting procession was reportedly one of the most striking to ever occur. Thus, long before the Council of Trent reaffirmed transubstantiation in 1551, the Venetians maintained the tradition of emphasizing the significance of the Eucharist.

Still, the Eucharistic iconography was not the only didactic element of the altarpiece. The inclusion of Foppa's donor portrait was equally as important for its female audience for two reasons. First, she is presented as an example of feminine spirituality and piety, not only to the young girls residing at the Casa, but also to the Zitelle's administrators and visitors of the church. Foppa does not engage the viewer but instead is pictured in complete obedience to the Lord. Her hands are clasped in a gesture of prayer and she imitates Christ in his prayer to God. Significantly, where his disciples had failed, Foppa succeeds in praying with Christ. She is presented as demonstrating her own devotion to Christ, as well as suggesting that spectators join in Christ's worship and love of God. Her brother's gesture in both the direction of her portrait and the depicted scene further

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Legend, Superstition, and Archaeology in Renaissance Venice," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 40 (1977): 27-49, JSTOR.

<sup>45</sup> Wills, 196.

<sup>46</sup> Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, 228-29.

instructs the viewer to take notice of and imitate her piety. By leading by example and acting as a visual stepping-stone into the divine space of the painting, her altarpiece encourages the *zitelle* to become the women of valor described in the constitution.<sup>47</sup>

Foppa's portrait offers perpetual spiritual mentorship to the *zitelle*, no doubt the kind the young girls lacked before entering into the female community at the Zitelle.

Finally, it is notable that Foppa's portrait gazes in the direction of the high altar. Not only does her portrait instruct spectators on to how to behave, but she also guides spectators where to look. Bassano's painting for the high altar, *The Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* (Figure 5), carried specific messages for its young female viewers and external visitors in the church. The altarpiece focuses on the figure of the Virgin Mary, kneeling on the steps before the priest at the Temple entrance. The altarpiece was intentionally fashioned so the *zitelle* could identify with the image of the young Virgin entering the temple, and served as an example of the lifestyle they were to adopt living at the Casa. Virginity played an important role in early modern Venice. Venetian patricians elaborated a widely believed description of the republic, referred to as the so-called "myth of Venice," which relied heavily on a metaphor associating Venice as a virgin republic, as the republic was never conquered or penetrated by an enemy force

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<sup>47</sup> To "make these girls into women of valor," the combination of the purity of their virginity, "with the basis of true humility, with the integrity of obedience, and the sincere union of charity with devotion to oratory, the girls will be clothed in sanctity, goodness, justice, honesty, modesty, simplicity of desires, which will render these girls worthy of being presented before the Majesty of Our Lord." Palmio, *Costituzioni*, cited in Chase, 1.

until 1797.<sup>48</sup> The reputation of the republic came under direct attack because of the city's association with carnal pleasure, and through the numerous religious and political reforms enacted throughout the sixteenth century the city attempted to refashion itself as a moral republic. As a center for safeguarding virginity, the girls at the Zitelle played an essential part in the urban iconography of the self-proclaimed city of the Virgin. The fictive architecture in Bassano's painting would have undoubtedly resonated with viewers by calling to mind the architecture of the Zitelle, ultimately reminding inhabitants and churchgoers of the purpose of enclosing the *zitelle*.

Unlike Foppa's altarpiece, the high altar was not as easily accessible to the *zitelle* from within the *coro di sopra* (Figure 17), and therefore, would have had to be viewed directly in the church. From the published portions of the constitution, it is not clear when or if the girls would have inhabited the church. Often in female religious communities, especially after the enforcement of *clausura*, women's movement in sacred spaces was highly restricted.<sup>49</sup> At the Zitelle, this restricted mobility is evidenced in the addition of the two choirs that allowed the *zitelle* to participate in church services without leaving the residential portion of the building. It is possible that after the construction of both choirs the *zitelle* subsequently had limited access to the high altar. In this regard, Foppa becomes an even more significant element in the spiritual training of the girls.

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<sup>48</sup> Laura J. McGough, "Raised from the Devil's Jaws: A Convent for Repentant Prostitute in Venice, 1530-1670" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1997), 63. For the Myth of Venice, see Muir, 13-61.

<sup>49</sup> For example, see Gary M. Radke, "Nuns and their Art: The Case of San Zaccaria in Renaissance Venice," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (Summer, 2001): 430-459, JSTOR.



With limited visual mobility to view the high altar, Foppa's donor portrait perpetually guided the *zitelle* to reflect upon the subject matter of the high altar and to contemplate the purpose of their stay at the Casa delle Zitelle.



**Figure 17.** View from the east *coro di sopra* toward the high altar, 1589-91. Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.



The scene in the foreground of Bassano's painting also seems especially to have been fashioned to appeal to the patrons and laity who visited the church. Placed in the foreground are two personifications of charity, each a woman with a child, one under the donor's portrait and the other at the base of the painting. A young boy draws the attention of the personification at the base of the composition, gesturing toward a poor traveler on the left side of the painting. The traveler looks up toward the young Virgin Mary and has brought with him an offering of two doves. Depicted in sharp contrast to the traveler, is a group of men above him entirely engrossed in their activities. They surround birds and a basket of eggs on the temple's steps. The group does not notice the Virgin, nor do they see the cherry falling near Marchesi's knee, the symbol of Christ's Passion, on the step right in front of them. To viewers, the devout traveler would have resonated as a symbol of charity and the group of men, a representation of a non-Christian conception of life. The altarpiece, therefore, highlights the need to be charitable toward not only the poor, but also, as Bernard Aikema and Dulcia Meijers note, institutions that raise young girls to lead a virtuous life.<sup>50</sup>

Through following the gaze of Foppa's donor portrait, worshippers were encouraged to divert their attention to Bassano's altarpiece. For the *zitelle*, the high altar reinforced the importance of their chastity, guiding them to follow in the Virgin Mary's footsteps. The devotional propaganda apparent in Bassano's altarpiece further promoted the importance of charity to the laity and reminded viewers of the institutional purpose of the *Zitelle*— to raise imperiled girls in the Casa in the same manner Mary was raised in the

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<sup>50</sup> Aikema and Meijers, 236.

Temple. Mary's ultimate association as a mother, likewise, may have influenced a majority of the girls at the Zitelle to follow in her footsteps, encouraging them to marry after the completion of their training. As previously mentioned, Foppa donated 10,000 ducats to the institution for this purpose. Moreover, providing the *zitelle* with an additional role model, the iconography, composition, and placement of Foppa's altarpiece directly aligned with the tenets of the school outlined in the constitution, encouraging piety, spiritual devotion, and chastity from the *zitelle*. Ultimately, Elisabetta Foppa creatively utilized portraiture and patronage conventions to make a statement about her responsibility as a patron by taking a didactic role so unusual for women depicted in the visual arts. And through her bequests to the institution, she further emphasized her personal and familial concerns, providing not only for her funerary commemoration but also for the spiritual well being of the female-based community at the Casa delle Zitelle.

## Chapter Four

### The Visual Arts and Reforming Beauty in Early Modern Female Asylums

In early modern Italy, charitable institutions offered women of all social classes new personal and professional opportunities. Especially in Venice, affluent women's autonomy as founders, administrators, and patrons of philanthropic institutions enabled them to partake in ventures not traditionally available to women. However, at the same time these institutions aligned with government strategies to maintain public order through the condemnation of prostitution. Subsequently, charitable institutions, and in particular, female asylums, were embedded with gendered prejudices that held beautiful women accountable for spreading disease.<sup>1</sup> In the churches of many women's asylums in Italy, altarpieces were commissioned to persuade and influence institutionalized wayward women and young girls in peril, as part of the campaign to decrease prostitution and disease during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

This chapter will consider altarpieces in both Venice and Rome comparable to those in the church of Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, to place them within a larger body of altarpieces commissioned to control women in female asylums in early modern Italy. In addition to Francesco Bassano's *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*, and Jacopo Palma il Giovane's *Agony in the Garden*, the high altar and right side altar, respectively, of Santa Maria della Presentazione, the altarpieces examined in this chapter from Venice include Carlo Caliari's *Madonna and Child with Saint Mary*

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<sup>1</sup> See Laura J. McGough, *Gender, Sexuality, and Syphilis in Early Modern Venice: The Disease That Came to Stay* (England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

*Magdalene and Convertite* for the high altar of the Casa del Soccorso, and from Rome, Guercino's *Penitent Magdalen with Two Angels* for the high altar of S. Maria Maddalena delle Convertite, Guglielmo Cortese's *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* for the high altar of Casa di Santa Marta, and Livio Agresti's *Martyrdom of Saint Catherine*, once the high altar of the church of Santa Caterina dei Funari. Together the altarpieces follow a particular iconographic model. Specific female saints were depicted to influence audiences of *meretrice* (common prostitutes), *convertite* (converted prostitutes), and *zitelle* (unmarried girls), suggesting that the group should be analyzed as a specific type of charity present in the visual culture of poor relief in early modern Italy.<sup>2</sup>

### **Saint Mary Magdalene**

The gender-specific charitable institutions that developed in sixteenth-century Italy each differed in their purpose and constituencies. However, all female institutions shared a common goal— to eliminate prostitution and disease. In Venice, as we have seen, the network of women's asylums included the Casa delle Convertite, a convent for repentant prostitutes, and the Casa delle Zitelle, a conservatory for imperiled maidens. The third asylum, the Casa del Soccorso, was a temporary shelter for prostitutes and adulterous

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<sup>2</sup> For allegories of charity explored in the visual arts of charitable institutions in Venice, which include nursing women and begging *poveri* (often women, either with dependent children or elderly) receiving alms, see Jutta Sperling, "Allegories of Charity and the Practice of Poor Relief at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* LXX (2009): 119-46, JSTOR. See also Bernard Aikema, "L'immagine delle 'Carita Veneziana'," in *Nel regno dei poveri: Arte e storia dei grandi ospedali veneziani in età moderna 1474-1797*, eds. Bernard Aikema and Dulcia Meijers (Venice: Arsenale, 1989), 71-98; and Tom Nichols, "Secular Charity, Sacred Poverty: Picture the Poor in Renaissance Venice," *Art History* 30, no. 2 (April 2007): 139-69, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8365.2007.00536.x>

women. The foundation of the Casa del Soccorso is associated with the infamous *cortigiana onesta* (honest courtesan) Veronica Franco. In a *supplica* (petition) drafted to the Venetian Senate, she pointed out the problems with the strict admission requirements of the Convertite and the Zitelle; not all women wanted to resign their freedom to a convent or met the age and chastity requirements of the Zitelle.<sup>3</sup> Although the residents could leave to get married or reconcile with their husbands, Rachel L. Geschwind notes that the administrators and donors explicitly encouraged the fallen women at the Soccorso to enter cloistered life at the Convertite.<sup>4</sup>

The institution's promotion of the veil is visually articulated in the former high altar of the Casa del Soccorso, Carlo Caliari's *Madonna and Child with Saint Mary Magdalene and Convertite* (c. 1598-1601) (now at the Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice). Caliari divided the altarpiece into three groups of women. The top left corner depicts the Madonna and Child with Mary Magdalene seated in a heavenly cloud surrounded by angels. The Magdalene gestures to a group of lavishly dressed women who kneel on the right side of the composition. The Virgin and Child incline their gaze to the women at the Mary Magdalene's request. To the left, a group of six modestly dressed women are situated under a portico.

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<sup>3</sup> See above, 33.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the stipulation of seven wills given to the Soccorso, between 1652 and 1683, expressly stated that the money donated to these women could be used only for spiritual dowries. See Rachel L. Geschwind, "Magdalene Imagery and Prostitution Reform in Early Modern Venice and Rome, 1500-1700" (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2011), 150.

Saint Mary Magdalene is known as the sinful woman, a prostitute, who repented and became a follower of Jesus. Her figure is derived from several Biblical and Apocryphal texts. According to the four canonical gospels— Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John— the Magdalene traveled as one of Jesus’s followers and witnessed his Crucifixion, Entombment, and Resurrection. Mary Magdalene has been identified with the unnamed sinful woman who anointed Christ’s feet (Luke 7:36) and Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus of Bethany, who also anointed Christ’s feet (John 11:2). The popularity of the Magdalene coincided with the Catholic Counter-Reformation’s sacramental validation of penance (confession). Mary Magdalene, therefore, represented an exemplary penitent sinner, and symbolized the possibility of salvation from a life of sin and redemption through penance and prayer. As a repentant prostitute she was subsequently hailed as a role model for fallen women in various forms of Catholic discourse, such as sermons, liturgy, plays, and paintings.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, the city of Venice had a long-established tradition of venerating Mary Magdalene. In addition to having a wide repertoire of images depicting Mary Magdalene, the earliest known Venetian dedication to Mary Magdalene was a memorial chapel erected by the Baffa or Baffo family in her honor in 1155 in Cannaregio; Santa

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<sup>5</sup> Pamela M. Jones, *Altarpieces and their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 202. Mary Magdalene is either portrayed in two ways in the visual arts, either before conversion or as a penitent. Her invariable attribute is her jar or vase of ointment, and her hair is depicted untied, long and flowing; she is also often pictured with a crucifix, skull, and sometimes a whip and crown of thorns. See James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2008), 208-09.

Maria Maddalena Penitente was later enlarged to become the local parish church.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the Magdalene's name had already been associated with philanthropic activities in Venice involving women since the fourteenth century. In 1361 a hospice for seven old women in the parish of the Arcangelo Raffaele was placed under the patronage of Mary Magdalene; the charitable institution included an oratory dedicated to the saint.<sup>7</sup>

The inhabitants of the Soccorso would have unequivocally identified with the women in Caliarì's altarpiece. Notably, the two groups of women in the foreground depict a "before and after" of female converts.<sup>8</sup> Viewers witness the group's transformation from beautiful, wayward women to *convertite*. Particularly, one of the unconverted women is shown stripping herself of her sumptuous jewels and placing them on the ground, providing a model of repentance for the women who entered the Soccorso's care. The women in the altarpiece are also similar in their youthfulness and beauty to the women who found shelter at the Soccorso. The Soccorso required penitents to be both young and beautiful; the shelter was not meant to support aging prostitutes who wanted to retire. Of the 104 women who entered the Convertite from the Soccorso between 1656 and 1675,

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<sup>6</sup> See Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalene: Myth and Metaphor* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 272-86. For an analysis of the sensuous images of Mary Magdalene in Venetian art, see Anne Christine Junkerman, "Bellissima Donna: An Interdisciplinary Study of Venetian Sensuous Half-Length Images of the Early Sixteenth-Century" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1988), 406-29.

<sup>7</sup> Haskins, *Mary Magdalene*, 272.

<sup>8</sup> Geschwind, "Magdalene Imagery," 137.

sixty percent were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Mary Magdalene is also depicted at a similar age to the female inhabitants, demonstrating her role as a model repentant prostitute and intermediary between the Virgin and Child for converted women. At the Soccorso, the iconography of Caliari's altarpiece expressly promoted the institutional reform of prostitutes and their conversion to the Convertite.

At the Convertite's Roman counterpart and predecessor, Santa Maria Maddalena delle Convertite al Corso, the Augustinian nuns could too envision themselves reflected in an image of Mary Magdalene. The monastery was built in 1520 to house former prostitutes who wished to lead penitential lives and dedicate themselves to the Rule of Saint Augustine. The church and monastery of Santa Maria Maddalena delle Convertite was founded by one of the earliest reform groups in the sixteenth century, the Compagnia del Divino Amore.<sup>10</sup> The Divino Amore first began caring for syphilitics in Incurabili hospitals, and eventually, turned their attention to caring for prostitutes, whom they regarded as the cause of the disease. Guercino's *Penitent Magdalene with Two Angels* (Figure 18) once occupied the high altar of the church of the *convertite* at Santa Maria Maddalena delle Convertite (now at the Pinacoteca, Vatican). Guercino depicted the Magdalene kneeling at Christ's tomb. Her hands are positioned in prayer, and she mournfully gazes down at a single nail presented to her by an angel. A second angel looks out toward the viewer and points toward heaven. Christ's crown of thorns and

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<sup>9</sup> Laura J. McGough, "Raised from the Devil's Jaws: A Convent for Repentant Prostitutes in Venice, 1530-1670" (PhD diss, Northwestern University, 1997), 68-9.

<sup>10</sup> Jones, *Altarpieces*, 203-4.



white shroud also lie on the tomb; in combination with the single nail, the three symbols remind spectators of Christ's sacrifice.



**Figure 18.** Guercino, *Penitent Magdalene with Two Angels*, c. 1622. Pinacoteca, Vatican. Photo: Author.

The nuns of the Convertite would have physically identified with Guercino's depiction of Mary Magdalene. Not only is her clothing similar to the sober nature of their habit but also the Magdalene's youth and beauty would have resonated with the *convertite*. In fact, the exclusionary criteria concerning the nuns' appearances were listed in the Convertite's constitution. Requirements for entrance into the monastery included:

Neither to the infirm, nor to those encumbered by age do we concede entrance [into the monastery of S. Maria Maddalena delle Convertite], given that under those conditions the trade of sin abandons them, and not the other way around. Nor do we concede entrance to ugly women, nor to married ones, because it would be impious to separate married women from their husbands. As far as the deformed, ugly ones are concerned, they do not feel compunction in their hearts, but instead want to enter these cloisters because due to their ugliness [they cannot attract customers].<sup>11</sup>

As with the Venetian Convertite, the stipulations concerning age and appearance prevented the convent from becoming a retirement home for aging prostitutes because it was thought that only women who were still young and physically attractive could genuinely follow in the Magdalene's footsteps. The Convertite's physical requirements ultimately reinforced the gendered ideologies that identified beautiful wayward women as distributors of disease.

The austerity of Guercino's Magdalene was also undoubtedly influenced by the constitution, which made explicit remarks about the nun's sexuality. There was specific concern over the reverse effect that viewing erotic imagery could have on the former prostitutes, reminding them of the sinful pleasures they had once enjoyed but had to leave

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<sup>11</sup> *Gli statute della Compagnia della Charita di Roma* (1536), 12, cited in Jones, 214. Jones notes that the criteria listed in the Convertite's constitution was drawn from the statues of the Arciconfraternita della Carità, which had long governed the monastery.

behind by “sacrificing their flesh” to Jesus.<sup>12</sup> According to Pamela M. Jones, while Mary Magdalene’s bare shoulder may have evoked memories of the women’s prior occupation, the emphasis on her penitence most likely resonated with the nuns, as the women’s prayers and ascetic practices reflected those of their patron saint.<sup>13</sup> In Guercino’s altarpiece, the *convertite* found a spiritual role model in the figure of Mary Magdalene to guide them through their repentance.

### **Saints Martha, Catherine of Alexandria, and the Virgin Mary**

Alternatively, at the Casa di Santa Marta in Rome, the female residents were encouraged to marry, instead of entering a convent. Santa Marta initially resembled the Venetian Soccorso in both purpose and constituencies. The Compagnia della Grazia, founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) sometime prior to 1543, with the help of a group of Roman noblewomen, founded Santa Marta in 1541 as a temporary house for prostitutes, adulteresses, and abused wives.<sup>14</sup> When it was first established, the women who found shelter at Santa Marta had the option to marry, reconcile with their husbands, or for those who felt compelled to take religious vows, enter Santa Maria Maddalena delle Convertite. However, in 1547, half of Santa Marta became an Augustinian convent to accommodate the women who wanted to take the veil, and by

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<sup>12</sup> Jones, 217-18.

<sup>13</sup> Jones, 218.

<sup>14</sup> Geschwind, 120. See also Lance G. Lazar, *Working in the Vineyard of the Lord: Jesuit Confraternities in Early Modern Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), chapter 2.

1561, the penitents were transferred to Santa Chiara, and Santa Marta became an Augustinian convent exclusively.<sup>15</sup>

Guglielmo Cortese's altarpiece for the high altar of the church, *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* (c. 1672) (now at the Santi Quattro Coronati, Rome, the ex-Casa Marta), emphasizes the institution's original intention of reinserting women into society through utilizing the figure of Martha. Saint Martha is believed by Catholic theologians to be the sister of Mary Magdalene and is known as the personification of the busy housekeeper, the active type, who greatly contrasts with her contemplative sister.<sup>16</sup> The Gospel of Luke recounts that when Jesus visited the sisters in their home, Mary sat at Jesus's feet listening to him speak, while Martha prepared him a meal (Luke 10:38-42). Martha's hospitable role toward Jesus is the reason she became the patron saint of housewives and domestic activities.

In Cortese's altarpiece, the active figure of Martha contrasts with the contemplative figure of Mary Magdalene. Christ reaches his arm toward Martha and makes direct eye contact with her, reaffirming her prominence in the painting. Despite the actual cloistering of the nuns at Santa Marta, the iconography of the altarpiece served to guide the nuns because they served as educators to young girls who came to the convent.<sup>17</sup> Through their education, the nuns were able to educate and reinsert the young girls back into society; the majority of whom would now be prepared for marriage. Although the

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<sup>15</sup> Geschwind, 131.

<sup>16</sup> Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, 207.

<sup>17</sup> Geschwind, 132-3.

function of Santa Marta evolved, through the iconography of the high altar and the education system enacted by the nuns, the original purpose of the institution was fulfilled through the young girls who were educated by the nuns at Santa Marta.

Similarly, marriage was promoted at Santa Caterina dei Funari (also known as Santa Caterina della Rosa), the Casa delle Zitelle's Roman predecessor, in the figure of Saint Catherine of Alexandria.<sup>18</sup> The church and conservatory of Santa Caterina were established by the Compagnia delle Vergini Miserabili, also founded by Saint Ignatius Loyola. The primary aim of the confraternity was to protect poor, at-risk young Roman girls from falling into prostitution by providing them with shelter, education, and a dowry to either marry or join a convent. The confraternity's Cardinal Protector, Federico Cesi (c. 1559-64), commissioned the original altarpiece for the high altar chapel, *The Martyrdom of Saint Catherine* by Livio Agresti (c.1564-65) (now lost, but survives in an engraving by Giovanni Battista Cavalieri in the collection of the Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica, Rome).<sup>19</sup> Agresti's altarpiece depicts the moment just after Catherine was bound to four wheels studded with iron spikes. The emperor Maxentius devised the instrument of torture after being unsuccessful in undermining Catherine's faith in Christianity.

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<sup>18</sup> Catherine of Alexandria was formerly venerated as a Christian saint and Virgin martyr; however, in 1969 the Catholic Church removed her from their Calendar because of her uncertain historicity. For the purpose of this thesis, she will be referred to as Saint Catherine, as she was venerated in the sixteenth century. See Hall, 60.

<sup>19</sup> Barbara J. Sabatine, "The Church of Santa Caterina dei Funari and the Vergini Miserabili of Rome" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1992), 100-01. See also Louise Smith Bross, "Livio Agresti, Cardinal Federico Cesi, and the Compagnia delle Vergini Miserabili di Santa Caterina della Rosa," in *Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy: Ritual, Spectacle, Image*, eds. Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole Ahl (New York: Cambridge University Press, 200), 280-97.

However, a thunderbolt from heaven destroyed the wheel before Catherine could be harmed. Agresti shows Saint Catherine kneeling and praying in the center of the composition, unaffected by the divine blast that sends bystanders hurtling in all directions. She looks up toward heaven, where Christ appears holding a large cross in one hand, and a crown in the other. Angels carrying the instruments of her execution surround him; iron spikes from the wheels and the sword, which was used to behead Catherine after the wheel was divinely destroyed.

The altarpiece clearly demonstrated Saint Catherine's heroic defense of Christianity and would have been not only instructional but also inspirational to the *zitelle* who entered the conservatory.<sup>20</sup> Saint Catherine provided a model of Christian virtue to the young girls who had been removed from their own challenging situations. The girls admitted to Santa Caterina were either the daughters of prostitutes or indigent mothers. Catherine's unshakable faith would have clearly assisted the young girls in their salvation. The girls residing at Santa Caterina would have also seen themselves reflected in the figure of Catherine, not only in her age but also in her beauty and purity. The *zitelle* entered the conservatory between the ages of nine and twelve, and resided there for a minimum of seven years, making a majority of the girls close to Catherine's age at the time of her death, about seventeen or eighteen. Additionally, a *zitella* was also to be healthy, attractive, and without physical impairments, and like Saint Catherine, a virgin.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Sabatine, 118.

<sup>21</sup> Sabatine, 25.

Saint Catherine's identification as the patron saint of young maidens would have undoubtedly resonated with the *zitelle*. Despite being given the choice of marriage or entering a convent, the option to enter the convent at Santa Caterina was difficult. In 1560 Pope Pius IV authorized the order of sisters at Santa Caterina to be twelve in number; the sisters were all former residents of the conservatory. According to Barbara J. Sabatine this limited any temptation on the confraternity's part to keep dowry money by influencing the girls to remain at Santa Caterina as nuns.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, because of the limited availability for monacation at Santa Caterina, the *zitelle* would have likely chosen to marry. In the figure of Saint Catherine, the *zitelle* could find a role model to inspire their pious transformations.

The examination of altarpieces commissioned in both Venice and Rome presents a specific type of charity utilized in the visual culture of early modern female asylums. In each altarpiece, a particular female saint— Mary Magdalene, Martha, or Catherine— was chosen for her ability to reform potential, active, and converted prostitutes. Geschwind and Jones show how the figure of Mary Magdalene was depicted to encourage repentance in convents and shelters for *convertite* and fallen women, whereas Geschwind and Sabatine emphasize the influence of the figures of Saint Martha and Catherine, who prompted residents to marry, instead of entering a convent. Likewise, at the Casa delle Zitelle, which served as a preventative institution for beautiful poor girls who were in danger of losing their virginity, the Virgin Mary was chosen as the institution's titular

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<sup>22</sup> Sabatine, 27-9. The Compagnia delle Vergini Miserabili was in charge of both the convent and the conservatory of Santa Caterina.

saint for her ability to inspire the *zitelle* as they were reformed into ideal versions of early modern womanhood— wives and mothers or nuns.

As explored in Chapter Three, the iconography of two of the altarpieces commissioned for Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle evidences their place in the corpus of altarpieces discussed in this chapter. As in the examples of high altars for other Venetian and Roman female asylums, Francesco Bassano's *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* (Figure 5), for the high altar of Santa Maria della Presentazione, was fashioned to carry a specific message for its young female viewers. The image of the young Virgin Mary was intended to resonate with the *zitelle* as they entered into the “temple” of the Casa delle Zitelle, and furthermore, the young Virgin provided an example of the lifestyle the *zitelle* were to adopt living at the Casa. The Virgin Mary's primary association as a mother may have influenced a majority of the girls at the Zitelle to follow in her footsteps. Out of a collection of 119 dowry contracts from the 1620s, a majority of the girls chose marriage over monacation; only fifteen, or 12.6 percent, entered a convent.<sup>23</sup> It is likely that Bassano's altarpiece expressly encouraged the *zitelle* to marry after the completion of their transformations at the Zitelle.

While the previous examples of religious imagery utilized in the churches of women's asylums occupied the high altar, at the Casa delle Zitelle the right side altar provided additional guidance to its young female audience. Although Palma Giovane's *Agony in the Garden* (Figure 7) does not rely on the iconography of a female saint, it does, however, depend on the donor portrait of a Venetian woman. Through the

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<sup>23</sup> See above, 27.



inclusion of her portrait, Elisabetta Foppa inserted herself as an additional female role model for the *zitelle*. Not only does she possess important feminine qualities, such as passivity and piety, but she also instructs spectators on to how to behave by suggesting they pray with Christ. Furthermore, the altar's subject matter instructed viewers of the divine nature of the Sacrament, encouraging both the young girl's devotion to Christ and chastity as they prepared to re-enter society as wives or nuns.

In Venice, the propagandist religious imagery in female asylums continued into the eighteenth century with paintings such as Francesco Pittoni's *Noli Me Tangere* (c. 1721) at the Ospedale delle Penitenti. The Penitenti was the fourth female asylum established in the city, and the third to provide refuge to women who worked as prostitutes.<sup>24</sup> Just as the other altarpieces examined in this chapter, the subject matter of Pittoni's painting was intended to catch the attention of the women at the Penitenti and to encourage them to imitate Mary Magdalene and her repentance.<sup>25</sup> Analyzing altarpieces in women's asylums in Venice and Rome makes evident that administrators and patrons utilized the potential of sacred art to supplement poor relief in the early modern period. The influence of images of women, specifically Saints Mary Magdalene, Martha, Catherine, and the Virgin Mary, and the pious Venetian laywoman Elisabetta Foppa, were intended to assist in decreasing prostitution and disease by visually instructing institutionalized

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<sup>24</sup> The Penitenti was founded in 1357; however, due to financial difficulties it was not a functional hospital for *convertite* until 1703. See Bernard Aikema and Dulcia Meijers, eds., *Nel regno dei poveri: arte e storia dei grandi ospedali veneziani in età moderna, 1474-1797* (Venezia: Arsenale, 1989), 273-80.

<sup>25</sup> "Cristo appare alla Maddalena (Noli me tangere)," *Gioielli Nascosti di Venezia*, accessed March 22, 2019, <https://www.gioiellinascostidivenezia.it/en/christ-appears-to-mary-magdalene-noli-me-tangere/>.

wayward women and *zitelle*. As we have seen, the didactic iconography of the altarpieces visually contributed to protecting or reforming a beautiful woman's honor, effectively deviating her from the Devil's jaws and further contributing to the societal, moral, and health problems that plagued *La Serenissima* in the early modern period.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

The activities, experiences, and identities of Venetian women are often disregarded, however, this study of the Casa delle Zitelle reveals an exceptional situation in early modern Venice. The Zitelle was an enduring location of unparalleled and unconventional female authority and patronage. As shown by Monica Chojnacka, women dominated the institution administratively and the control of the *governatrici* and female staff afforded patrician women an exceptional level of autonomy in sixteenth-century Venice. Even though upper-class women were often involved in founding and funding charitable institutions, especially female asylums for the reform of women and at-risk adolescents, at similar institutions in Venice, and throughout Italy, many female staff members had little to no administrative control and were subsumed under and monitored by male governing boards. At the Zitelle, the institution's constitution explicitly delineated the authority necessary for women to establish a constant female governed community.

The establishment of a female-centered community not only challenged women's place in the urban fabric of the city by presenting an opportunity for women to exercise agency and influence in the public domain but also set the stage for the unique tradition of female patrons that emerged at the Casa delle Zitelle over the next century. As we have seen, the predominant patrons of the institution were Venetian women. In fact, it seems that at no other charitable institution were women the principal patrons, as at the Zitelle. From 1575 to 1597, the founding *governatrici*, *Madonna* Marina Bernardo, and *Coadjutrice* Soprana Corner oversaw the renovation of the new property they purchased

on the Giudecca in 1561. Building documents and account books presented by Vanessa Scharven Chase attest to the constant presence of Bernardo, along with the rest of the administration, and reveal the significant role these women played in the building's development.

The founding female members of the institution accomplished a monumental achievement for women patrons in Venice. Most often for patrician women, and women across Italy, the opportunities to publicly display influence and patronage were facilitated by or on behalf of men. Architectural commissions were unusual among Venetian laywomen, as demonstrated in the few case studies available (i.e., Agnesina Badoer and Margarita Vitturi Emiliani). Despite this limited tradition, the Zitelle's patrons utilized their administrative autonomy to engage as a corporate entity, which allowed them to act on par with their male counterparts by purchasing a new property and instigating a building project at a time when women were often confined to erecting family funerary monuments.

Yet, as this thesis shows, the founding female administrators were not the only patrons present at the Zitelle. Venetian women also commissioned a majority of the decorations in the church of Santa Maria delle Presentazione delle Zitelle. Incredibly, two women, Moceniga Mocenigo and Elisabetta Foppa, patronized sixteen out of the eighteen paintings presently hanging in the church. While Chapter Three briefly addresses Mocenigo's gifts to the institution, which included fourteen paintings by the school of Palma Giovane and one painting by Pietro Ricchi, there is much more to be said about her. A study of Mocenigo's life and relation to the Zitelle, in addition to her

enormous contribution to decorating the interior of the church, would greatly enrich our understanding of the visual culture of the church, as well as of women's commissioning habits in seventeenth-century Venice.

At the same time, Foppa also left a prominent legacy to the Zitelle. Not only did she bequeath numerous properties and artworks to the institution, but also the most visible expression of her patronage remains the altar and accompanying devotional objects she commissioned for the west wall of the church. Foppa's contributions to the Zitelle certainly contribute to filling a gap in the study of Venetian patrons by representing both a woman outside the traditional social class and conditions prevalent for a woman's patronage. Foppa not only came from a *cittadino* family, but also her altar most likely commemorated her brother; both situations deviating to a certain extent from the prevailing circumstances that represented a majority of women's funerary commissions in Venice. By utilizing her affluence and maneuvering patronage and portraiture traditions, she was able to secure the legacy of her family as well as account for her own funerary commemoration. Thus, Foppa succeeded in redefining her sphere of influence in Venetian society.

Studying the achievements of female patrons, particularly at the Casa delle Zitelle, also gives prominence to the use of architecture and visual imagery for the specific purpose of influencing and reforming beautiful young women and girls. As discussed in Chapter Two, the female administrators aimed to create an institution that not only prevented young girls from being forced into prostitution but also prepared for their reentry into society as wives or nuns. To achieve this, the spatial organization of the new

building innovatively integrated the tenets of the school with the city's poor relief ideologies. The three floors of the building were systematically devised to provide strict enclosure, as well as assist the *zitelle* in their education, which included reading, writing, industry, and religion. The result of the building campaign was an architectural space, which in both form and function transformed the *zitelle*.

As proposed in Chapter Three, the initiative to reform the *zitelle* continued in the religious imagery in the attached church, where *The Agony in the Garden* by Palma Giovane adorns Foppa's altar. This chapter examined the distinct subject matter and inclusion of Foppa's donor portrait in the altarpiece, which explicitly communicated the characteristics of ideal womanhood, encouraging piety, spiritual devotion, and chastity from the *zitelle*. Ultimately, the altarpiece contributed to reinforcing the Zitelle's institutional commitment to reform the at-risk poor girls who found shelter at the Zitelle, just as the architectural complex of the Zitelle had been designed to do. As such, this examination of Foppa's important, yet understudied, altarpiece provides an understanding of and contributes to interpreting iconographic trends in the visual arts located in the churches of early modern female asylums.

The research for this thesis has revealed that Foppa's altarpiece is part of a larger corpus of altarpieces intended to persuade and influence institutionalized women and young girls. As considered in Chapter Four, the visual imagery in the churches of female asylums was especially beneficial for the campaign to decrease prostitution and disease during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Charitable institutions, and in particular, female asylums, were embedded with gendered prejudices that held beautiful women

accountable for spreading disease, and thus, in the churches of many women's asylums in Italy specific female saints were depicted to influence audiences of *meretrice*, *convertite*, and *zitelle*. When analyzed together, a particular type of charity emerges and emphasizes how administrators and patrons utilized the potential of sacred art to supplement poor relief in the early modern period.

The scope of this thesis was limited to female asylums; however, understanding the potential of visual imagery to aid in the reform of women could be extended to similar charitable institutions, such as the *ospedali* and *scuole*. For example, in Venice female saints were utilized at both the Ospedale degli Incurabili and at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco to communicate with the organization's specific audiences of women, such as Venetian noblewomen and the female governors at the Incurabili or prostitutes receiving charity at San Rocco.<sup>1</sup> Despite art historians overlooking the visual arts commissioned for the city's charitable institutions, especially its female asylums, many works of art remain *in situ*. The altarpieces at the Casa delle Zitelle, Santa Maria delle Penitenti, Santa Maria dei Derelitti, the Ospedale della Pietà, and the Ospedale di San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti remain opportune locations for exploring women's involvement in the reform of and for women, as well as the implementation of visual imagery as a supplement to early modern poor relief.

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<sup>1</sup> For the Ospedale degli Incurabili, see Sabina Brevaglieri, "Assistenza e patronage femminile a Venezia: la compagnia di s. Orsola, tintoretto e l'altare degli incurabili," *Quaderni Storici* 35, 104 (Agosto 2000): 355-391, JSTOR. For the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, see Elizabeth Carroll Consavari, "Tintoretto's Holy Hermits at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco," in *Mary Magdalene, Iconographic Studies from the Middle Ages to the Baroque*, eds. Michelle A. Erhardt and Amy M. Morris (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 135-160.

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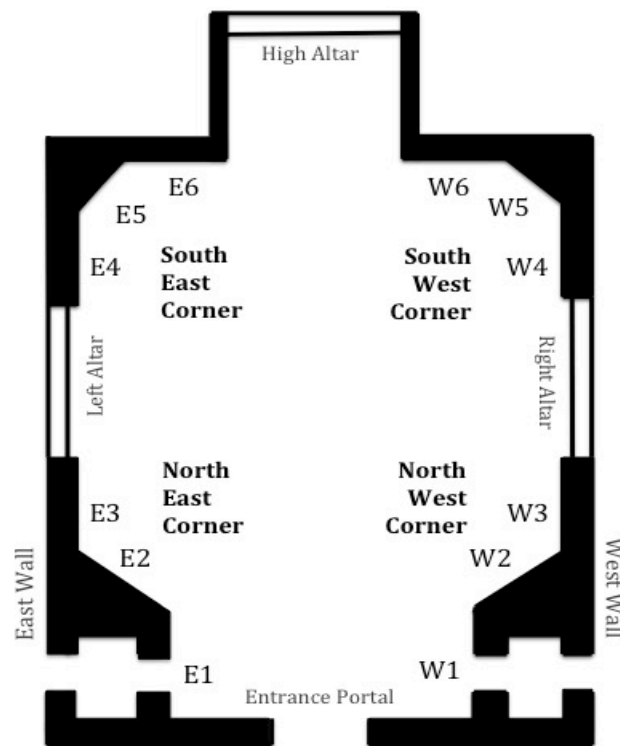
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## APPENDIX

### THE LEGACY OF MOCENIGA MOCENIGO

*Governatrice* Moceniga Mocenigo bequeathed a total of fifteen paintings to the church of the Casa delle Zitelle. The paintings are mentioned in her extended will of 11 May 1675, although they were already installed in the church as of 1672. In her will she stated, “I left my best paintings be placed in the church.”<sup>1</sup> Mocenigo also gifted a large silver *cesendello* (hanging lamp) for the Blessed Sacrament, two large *cesendelli di latton* (tin hanging lamps) for two other altars, and eight large silver candlesticks. Remarkably, in virtually every corner of the church hangs a painting gifted to the Casa delle Zitelle by Mocenigo.



**Figure 19.** Graphic showing the placement of twelve paintings by the school of Jacopo Palma il Giovane [E1-E6 and W1-W6]. The paintings were bequeathed by Moceniga Mocenigo for the east and west walls of the church of Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle. Graphic: author.

<sup>1</sup> “Lascio che li migliori miei quadri siano messi nella chiesola.” Cited Barbara Mazza, “Committenti e artisti nell’età delle riforme: l’arredo della chiesa di Santa Maria della Presentazione,” in *Le Zitelle: Architettura, arte e storia di un’istituzione veneziana*, eds. Lionello Puppi and Giuseppe Ellero (Venezia: Albrizzi, 1992), 159 appendix 21.





**Figure 20.** School of Jacopo Palma il Giovane, *Faith* [E1], 17<sup>th</sup> century. Entry Portal, Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.



**Figure 21.** School of Jacopo Palma il Giovane, *The Charity* [W1], 17<sup>th</sup> century. Entry Portal, Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.



**Figure 22.** School of Jacopo Palma il Giovane, *Moses Causes Water to Flow* [E2], 17<sup>th</sup> century. North East Corner, Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice.  
Photo: author.



**Figure 23.** School of Jacopo Palma il Giovane, *The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth* [E3], 17<sup>th</sup> century. North East Corner, Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice.  
Photo: author.





**Figure 24.** School of Jacopo Palma il Giovane, *The Assumption of the Virgin* [E4], 17<sup>th</sup> century. South East Corner, Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.



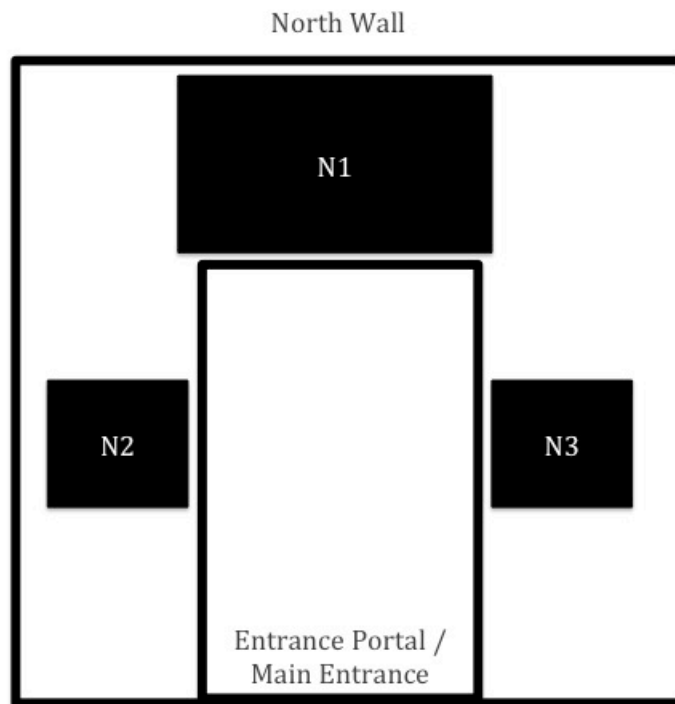
**Figure 25.** School of Jacopo Palma il Giovane, *The Nativity* [E5] and *The Miracle of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes* [E6], 17<sup>th</sup> century. South East Corner, Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.



**Figure 26.** School of Jacopo Palma il Giovane, *The Resurrection* [W2] and *Elijah in the Desert* [W3], 17<sup>th</sup> century. North West Corner, Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.



**Figure 27.** School of Jacopo Palma il Giovane, *The Dispute in the Temple* [W4], *Noli me Tangere* [W5], and *The Dinner in Emmaus* [W6], 17<sup>th</sup> century. North West Corner, Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.



**Figure 28.** Graphic showing the placement of the three paintings [N1-N3] bequeathed by Moceniga Mocenigo for the main entrance of Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle. Graphic: author.





**Figure 29.** Photograph showing the three paintings [N1-N3, as well as E1 and W1] bequeathed by Moceniga Mocenigo for the main entrance of Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle. Entrance Portal, Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.



**Figure 30.** Pietro Ricchi, *The Birth of Mary* [N1], c. 1660-1670. Entrance Portal, Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.

Silvia Lunardon proposed that the female figure pouring water into a basin at the center of Pietro Ricchi's painting is, in fact, a portrait of Mocengio.<sup>2</sup> The figure, which is dressed in contemporary clothes and adorned with jewels, greatly resembles her portrait in the collection of the Istituzioni di Ricovero e di Educazione in Venice.

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<sup>2</sup> Silvia Lunardon, "Le Zitelle alla Giudecca," in *Le Zitelle: Architettura, arte e storia di un'istituzione veneziana*, eds. Lionello Puppi and Giuseppe Ellero (Venezia: Albrizzi, 1992), 36.





**Figure 31.** School of Jacopo Palma il Giovane, *The Welcome Offer* [N2], 17<sup>th</sup> century. Entrance Portal, Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.



**Figure 32.** School of Jacopo Palma il Giovane, *The Angel's Announcement to Joachim* [N3], 17<sup>th</sup> century. Entrance Portal, Santa Maria della Presentazione delle Zitelle, Venice. Photo: author.