

# 8

Marco Bellabarba

## POWER, FRIENDSHIP, AND PROTECTION

### Venetian Rectors in Verona Between the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

A now lost cycle of frescoes, the Venetian *podestà* Agostino da Mula (fig. 8.1), and the Venetian mainland city of Verona form the backdrop for this chapter. The element binding the three together can be found in the biographical profile of Da Mula written many years ago by Gaetano Cozzi for the *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*.<sup>1</sup> Elected *podestà* of Verona on 17 January 1613, Da Mula was no ordinary patrician. Indeed, he arrived in Verona following a brilliant political career. He had been *savio agli ordini* in 1587, *podestà* and captain of Belluno in 1593, and *savio di Terraferma* almost uninterruptedly for a decade between 1602 and 1612. He had furthermore been a part of Paolo Sarpi's circle during the Interdict, gaining a reputation as one of the Papacy's most intransigent adversaries among Venetian patricians. This was fitting, as Verona was no ordinary place either. Located 'in the heart' of the Venetian territorial state, at the starting point of the roads for Germany, and deemed the 'most beautiful and densely populated' ('più bella et popolata') city on the Venetian mainland (*Terraferma*),<sup>2</sup> Verona was one of the most challenging towns in the dominion, since it was full of 'men of high intellect' ('cervelli alti'),<sup>3</sup> who were often uneasy about Venice's sovereignty, as captain Alvise Contarini put it in 1575.

Documentation from the period suggests that Da Mula encountered no significant obstacles during his rule (*reggimento*) in Verona. Except a disagreement with the local ecclesiastical inquisitor (when he held fast to his right to detain men and women on trial in the *podestà's* prisons)<sup>4</sup> and a few instances in which he had to intervene in matters pertaining to crimes carried out by members of the local nobility, the issues he addressed in his correspondence with the Senate and the heads (*capi*) of the Council of Ten fell within the bounds of ordinary administration.

Likewise, proceedings of the city council of Verona attest to no friction or tension between him and the city council as they

executed their respective powers. Conversely, in the two years prior, between 1610 and 1612, the city council had been involved in a bitter jurisdictional dispute with the captain Girolamo Corner.<sup>5</sup> 'In spite of this, or perhaps precisely because of this', Da Mula had wanted to leave behind evidence of his time in the city, attesting to the 'peace and good harmony he'd been able to establish with the inhabitants of Verona'.<sup>6</sup> Thus, he commissioned Antonio da Gandino, Paolo Veronese's pupil, to produce a painting cycle to decorate the hall of the Palazzo Pretorio.

Antonio da Gandino followed the complex iconographic programme that Da Mula had solicited from Ottavio Rossi,<sup>7</sup> a man of letters from Brescia, who had already performed similar work for others in Da Mula's position. Graced with eighteen allegorical paintings, the programme involved elaborately decorated hall walls and a ceiling akin to the one in the Ducal Palace in Venice. The hall's walls were divided into panels bound by Corinthian columns that supported entablatures from which were suspended 114 shields showcasing the coats of arms of each *podestà* in service after 1517 (the year Verona was permanently conquered by Venice; some of the shields were left empty for subsequent office holders). Twelve niches between the columns housed the painted allegories, above which were depicted two large Victories. Atop each column were two golden coats of arms, commemorating Da Mula, in his capacity as *podestà*, and the captain in service alongside him, Silvestro Valier.<sup>8</sup>

Da Mula charged Francesco Pola, a noble man of letters from Verona,<sup>9</sup> with the task of explaining the painting cycle in a dialogue-form booklet, *Lo Stolone ovvero della sala pretoria veronese* (fig. 8.2). The book was published by a local printer in 1615, when the decoration of the hall was complete.<sup>10</sup> In the imagined dialogue, Pola described the many virtues, portrayed in the frescoes, required of a 'good rector', all of which Da Mula clearly possessed.

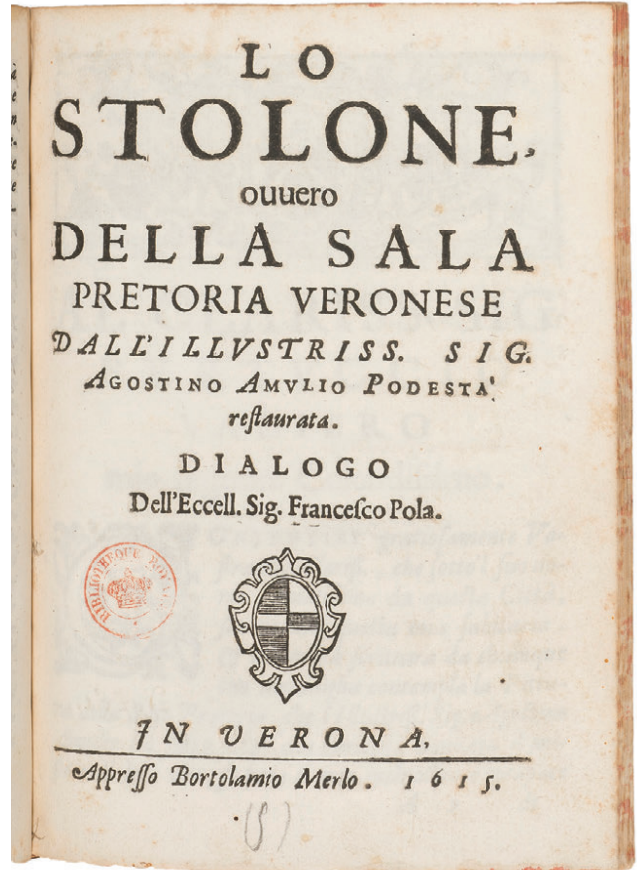
8.1

Bust of Agostino da Mula, Belluno, Museo Civico. Reproduced with permission.



8.2

Frontispiece of Francesco Pola, *Lo Stolone, ovvero della Sala pretoria veronese. Dialogo*, Verona, appresso Bortolamio Merlo, 1615. Photo: BnF, Gallica. Reproduced with permission.



The painting cycle and Pola's booklet each attested, in Cozzi's words, to 'Da Mula's unbridled ambition, both as a man and as a Venetian patrician'. The cycle celebrated the power and wisdom of the Republic, but it was 'Da Mula, the depositary of that grandeur and wisdom, who stood in the foreground'. No one — as Stolone, the main character of the booklet's dialogue, declared — had ever exercised justice better, with more rigour, fairness, or patience, than Da Mula; and no Venetian rector could boast a nobility as grand as the one required to govern a city as important as Verona.<sup>11</sup>

Pola's dialogue was written in close proximity to an historical phase in which the Republic 'had had to exert effective and meaningful control over the state's many embodiments' in the dominion's largest cities, 'particularly those represented by forces that tended to be hostile'<sup>12</sup> towards Venice. By pushing their way into the Republic's most important magistracies

(the Senate, the Collegio, the Council of Ten), the 'new' patrician families<sup>13</sup> had managed to implement a series of legislative measures extending the sphere of action of mainland rectors.<sup>14</sup>

The redundant extolling of Da Mula's virtues in *Stolone* seems to reflect these ongoing changes in the relationship between Venice and its subject cities during the early 1600s. It certainly attests to a shift when contrasted to the documents describing the duties of Venetian rectors published ever since Venice's early Renaissance territorial expansion. Well-known texts from the late 1400s (namely, *De bene instituta re publica* by Domenico Morosini<sup>15</sup> and *Rerum venetarum ab urbe condita libri xxxiii* by Marcantonio Sabellico<sup>16</sup>), as well as Giovanni Tazio's works published in the 1560s, list the essential virtues that a rector should possess. These included moderation and prudence, avoiding exceedingly close relations

with subjects,<sup>17</sup> and being careful not to leave too strong a recollection of his rule in the local community, for instance in the form of paintings and sculptures, once his assignment was over.<sup>18</sup> Such precautions were also detailed in a substantial corpus of legislative measures. Starting in the early 1400s, laws had been in place to prohibit customs considered inappropriate. For instance, orations and ceremonial speeches (*sermones et arengas in laudem suam*) were not to be delivered upon the rectors' arrival, *armigeros* were not to escort rectors during their entries, painted or sculpted decorations showcasing the rectors' coats of arms were not to be displayed on the walls of their residences, and, by 1545, rectors were not to be named godfathers or sponsors to the children of local families during baptism or confirmation ceremonies.

A Senate law promulgated on 22 June 1609, a few years before Da Mula arrived in Verona, summarised a detailed list of prohibitive measures passed over the course of the previous century by the sumptuary magistracy of the *provveditori alle pompe*. This once again clarified that rectors should not be accompanied by more than six Venetian patricians (*più dei sei nobili*), participate in parties or public banquets, or accept presents upon stepping down from their rule. Additional minute prescriptions — such as the instruction not to have more than twelve chairs in the house at any time (upholstered in velvet, 'without gold') or more than eight people in the combined staff of the stables and palace — explained the type of conduct rectors and their families were expected to observe during their daily lives.<sup>19</sup> Establishing exceedingly close relations with subjects, or becoming 'too tightly bound to one local pressure group or another, thus creating in them the illusion that they'd found, in the Venetian representative, a faithful and friendly intercessor with the Prince should the need arise',<sup>20</sup> were also censured behaviours, punishable by harsh penalties.

In fact, despite the many measures aiming to assign rectors to cities to which they lacked ties, the sixteen months of their office allowed for many encounters and the establishment of personal relations.<sup>21</sup> Rhetorical recommendations and legislative precepts were almost turned on their heads during rectors' entry rituals, which were so rife with political significance that local legislations were compelled to govern them in minute detail. The new Veronese statutes of 1450<sup>22</sup> opened with a paragraph titled 'De honorifico introitu Domini Potestatis': each new *podestà* arriving from Venice was

to pass through Santo Spirito's gate, and go first to the Basilica of San Zeno; from there, the procession was to continue to Piazza delle Erbe (the *platea Communis*), where the *podestà* was to walk up the steps of the marble capital, receive the city sceptre (*sceptrum*), and listen to a speech delivered in his honour by a city council emissary.<sup>23</sup> The entry ceremonies for the *provveditore* and captain sent to the nearby fortress of Legnago were identical in form, albeit more sober.<sup>24</sup> The ritual likely took place in a similar fashion in other cities of the dominion (fig. 8.3). The passing of the procession through the city gates, the rector's meeting with the local notables either in the cathedral or beneath the loggia of the city hall (*Palazzo del Comune*), and his oath to abide by local laws were described with great care by the local statutes.<sup>25</sup> As for the instructions each rector was given before taking his office ('mandates' or 'commissions'), local statutes were fairly vague: they merely listed strict rules concerning the behaviours deemed unacceptable for those holding the office of captain or *podestà*, largely taken from decrees issued by Venetian magistracies.

Thus, no words other than those uttered in the administration of the office were to be exchanged between rectors and subjects, and no mingling was to occur apart from on public occasions. Yet this strict protocol, though reiterated repeatedly, nevertheless had a weak hold. In Verona, as we have seen, the veto on *sermones et arengas* delivered in honour of Venetian rectors was circumvented by local statutes. Indeed, in Verona and elsewhere, the literary genre of encomiastic orations sustained the publishing market, offering city printers an important revenue source. Other speeches praising rectors, often displaying an even more extravagant taste for the celebration of their virtues, were delivered at the end of their office. On the evening of 16 June 1560, a local jurist delivered an opening speech in exquisite Latin ('in bellissimo latino') before the rectors, Elders (*Anziani*, i.e. the city's heads), and city council of Bergamo extolling the achievements of the *podestà* Lorenzo Bragadin, who was about to leave his post in the hands of his successor Francesco Venier. In February, the Elders' council (*Consiglio degli Anziani*) had charged the painters Andrea Calepio and Marco Passi with affixing the insignia of Bragadin and the captain Pizzamano on the facades of the *Palazzo Pretorio*: the two men's heraldic figures, topped by the *Serenissima's* coat of arms, were completed at the beginning of June just in time for the scheduled handover.<sup>26</sup>

## 8.3

Pietro Damini, *The exchange of the baton and keys of the city of Padua between the city governors, the brothers Massimo and Silvestro Valier*. Padua, Musei Civici, 1621. Reproduced with permission.



At least in this case, Bergamo's Anziani had followed the law: as stated in a decree issued by the Council of Ten in 1540, frescos of rectors' coats of arms and names was allowed on public palaces so long as these renditions were 'simple' and not chiselled on the walls or made in stone. Conversely, they had completely disregarded the prohibition on reciting and printing orations extolling rectors. Repeatedly — in 1567, 1582, and 1616 — the Council of Twelve (the city assembly's executive body, comprising the uppermost echelons of the ruling class) had set forth regulations regarding how these speeches could be delivered in public; to avoid that the chance absence of certain councilmen might prevent the spectacle from taking place, it had been decided that the obligation to deliver the speech ('munus orationum') for the *podestà* and the captain would fall to the youngest jurist among the Twelve, or to another jurist purposefully elected by the Council itself.<sup>27</sup>

Celebration of the 'union and love' between the two rectors was an ever-present commonplace in the reports rectors read before the Venetian Collegio or Senate once returned to Venice. This practice was a way of recalling the bond between each 'patrician and the state-aristocratic body' they had kept alive during their months away from the lagoon.<sup>28</sup> Yet in the inscriptions commissioned in Bergamo — as in the cycle of frescoes painted in the Palace of Verona — reference to the harmony between the rectors described an emotional and social bond that had been built in the governed city. The traditional repertoire of patrician virtues (obedience, love for the Republic,

humility, prudence) virtually shifted from the patriciate as a whole to individual interlocutors. The 'generous and grateful inhabitants of Verona' ('Veronesi, generosi e grati riconoscenti'), for instance, recognized captain Nicolò Corner's qualities as he was about to leave their city in August 1606, because he had ruled it with prudence. Corner had entered into 'reciprocal bonds of friendship' with the *podestà*, and above all — as highlighted by the oration's author, jurist Vincenzo Manuelli — had been the 'most diligent executor of all laws, and mainly of those set forth in our own statutes and privileges'.<sup>29</sup>

Such comments point toward the existence of a dense network of relations, political and personal, which the urban aristocracies of the Venetian mainland entertained with rectors both during their *reggimenti* and after their return to Venice. Giovanni Florio has described this ongoing conversation as a relation 'at the intersection between kinship and clientelism' able to create a steady, two-way 'exchange of resources between the community-client and the rector-patron'.<sup>30</sup> Viewed within a rhetorical framework rife with stereotypes — in which the Republic figured as a 'mother', rectors as 'fathers' and 'patrons', and the subjects as 'children'<sup>31</sup> — these relations highlight an essential, constitutive feature of Venetian law, namely, the existence of a 'direct relationship between the subjects and the Republic's institutions',<sup>32</sup> which was to be unimpeded by obstacles or other forms of mediation apart from those the rectors themselves embodied.

A passage from *Stolone* — appearing significantly before

the lengthy description of the *podestà*'s virtues — clarifies the relationship envisioned between Da Mula and the subject community. When asked about the coat of arms hanging on the hall's left side, in front of the emblems belonging to the *podestà* and the captain, Stolone answers:

That is the coat of arms of our city, which is placed under the holy protection of the Republic of Venice, of which the Lion is the glorious and famous symbol. And the *podestà* decided to place it amidst the other coats of arms in order to show the passionate and rightly-partial love that, throughout his ruling period, he showed towards [our city], her privileges, and her laws, of which he proved to be a devout custodian and guarantor.<sup>33</sup>

Da Mula offered the inhabitants of Verona his 'passionate love' and 'protection'. Similar terms often appeared in reference to Venetian authorities in the proceedings of the city council. In 1606, for example, they were used to explain the decision of sending orators to Venice to celebrate Leonardo Dona's ducal election. As representatives of Verona, the orators had 'to show the happiness of our city and our thankfulness to him for his patronage that will be remembered forever by future generations since he benignly helped us when the situation was most difficult'.<sup>34</sup> In 1614, upon the arrival of the *provveditore generale* in Terraferma ('mainland commander in chief') Antonio Lando, four orators were requested 'to provide humble assistance to the patron himself'.<sup>35</sup> In 1615, when another *provveditore*, Gerolamo Corner, the captain of Verona in 1610, was about to arrive, the Veronese councillors stated: 'we indeed are not just aware of the fact that he proved benign towards us more than once, but we are also familiar with his heroic virtues, and are ready to welcome the rich fruits of his paternal protection and his high authority'.<sup>36</sup> Thus, rectors and former rectors were constantly styled as protective figures (or patrons) for whom the exercise of authority implied 'paternal protection' (*paterna protezione*) towards their subjects. Proceedings from a council session held in 1616 in memory of the *podestà* Giacomo Contarini once again employ a formula ('he affectionately defended our hometown and our citizens')<sup>37</sup> that — precisely because it was so often repeated — must be understood within its proper lexical and institutional context.

In the earliest editions of the *Vocabolario della Crusca*, the word protection (*protezione*) and its variants encompassed several meanings: a political-institutional or personal introduction (*raccomandazione*, thus equivalent to the Latin words *defensio* and *tutela*), the gifting of something, or 'favours bestowed on others, protection, assistance, defence'.<sup>38</sup> Favours, graces, protection, and defence all describe the relationship subjects entertained with their rectors, who were the most immediate point of contact between their world and the Republic and, in many

cases, the only tangible embodiment of Venetian sovereignty. Rectors were not ordinary officials, who — as in princely states — were mere conduits for orders from above but actual depositaries of a kind of republican sovereignty, thus preserving the irreducible difference in administrative structure between the *Dominante* and the *Terraferma*.<sup>39</sup> Given these premises, the concept of protection (and associated notions taken up by modern historiography, such as friendship, clientelism, mediation, and patronage brokerage) can only be understood within the institutional architecture of the time, in relation to the configuration of existing powers, hierarchical differences among patricians (based on wealth, career, family), and the relative weight of the cities where rectors carried out their posts.<sup>40</sup>

Verona's wealth and military position situated it among the 'first rate' *reggimenti*. This post was reserved for patricians from families close to the summit of republican power (as in the case of Da Mula in 1613) or endowed with financial resources adequate to allow them (and their retinue) to enjoy a lifestyle suitable to the prestige of the post. 'This lord must be a grand and rare senator',<sup>41</sup> the imaginary interlocutor in Stolone claims with conviction, drawing attention to the fact that only a member of the Venetian Senate — not one of the many, often poor patricians of the Great Council — would have what it takes to govern Verona. Further, it is thanks to his success in administering the city that Da Mula, 'God willing, will justly achieve the highest dignities of his grand Republic'.<sup>42</sup> As evoked in the Stolone, Da Mula's career seems to allow a contact between Verona and Venice, the provincial city and the capital. It is first and foremost Da Mula's personal qualities that make it possible for these two geographical poles to come into contact. Indeed, the political abilities listed in Pola's dialogue and painted in the fresco in the *Palazzo Pretorio* allow the *podestà* to take up his role as leading figure.

The logic of this argument appears reversed in the orations commissioned by the city council of Verona in those years to praise the leaving rectors. Homage was paid to the wisdom, moderation, and equity the rectors had shown during their rule (*reggimento*), as a matter of course, but the praise was framed differently. Indeed, texts foreground other virtues coming from the rectors' pasts and from events in their personal lives, which were interwoven with other virtues related to the patrician houses in which they had been raised. Looking at these speeches, a narrative built on elements that had been disregarded by Stolone is immediately apparent. For instance, in the *Oratione all'Illustrissimo Sig. Giovanni Cornaro, Capitano di Verona* written by Pola in 1596,<sup>43</sup> and in the text written shortly afterwards by Vincenzo Manuelli for the captain Nicolò Corner, recollection of the rectors' governance of the city is conjoined with the praise of their descentance from one of the most powerful families in Venice. The Corners



## 8.4

Frontispiece of *Varie compositioni scritte in lode dell'illustrissimo sig. Giovanni Cornaro capitano di Verona*, Verona, appresso Girolamo Discepolo, 1596. Photo: Roma, Biblioteca Universitaria Alessandrina, with permission from the Italian Ministry of Culture.

have these walls, these rooms, this whole palace been more richly adorned with silk and gold, according to the different seasons of the year? [...] What governor has ever entertained with such courtesy, or offered more splendid banquets, or welcomed in his dwelling a higher number of distinguished guests and, not seldom, his first and wealthier citizens?<sup>45</sup>

'Magnanimous' and 'most magnificent', so generous he had sometimes paid out of his own pocket for the entertainment of the local citizenry, Giovanni Corner certainly benefited from the prestige and affluence of his house. While signs of the bare-faced nepotism accompanying his later assignments, ending in his election as doge in 1624, were at the time still untraceable, his inclination to put familial logic ahead of his public role must have been easily detectable by the urban elite in Verona. Indeed, it was prominent enough to become the unifying element of the *Varie compositioni scritte in lode de l'illustrissimo Sig. Giovanni Cornaro Capitano di Verona et de l'illustrissima Sig. Chiara Delfina, sua consorte*, a collection of poetry in Latin, Italian vernacular, and the dialect of Verona printed in 1597 (fig. 8.4).

These poems all revolve around the 'exaltation of the virtues and nobility possessed by Giovanni and Chiara, their ancestors' political and military careers (from both the Cornaro and the Dolphin families), their erudition and their generosity'.<sup>46</sup> Though perhaps mitigated to avoid the most lavish praise of the personal qualities of the rector, this family-based model of oration was very influential, as attested by the text juriconsult Manuelli wrote for captain Nicolò Corner years later. Son-in-law of doge Marino Grimani and brother of Marco, the bishop of Padua, Corner was a 'most liberal lord' ('Signore liberalissimo') who enchanted the citizens of Verona with his incomparable standard of living:

When has this palace ever been richer in all sorts of provisions? When has it been more richly adorned, according to the different seasons of the year? What representative of the Doge of Venice, as you are, had kinder manners, or a wealthier apparatus of gold and silverware, or has offered as many and as sumptuous state banquets, or had among his guests so many noble foreign and important citizens of this city, which is subject to your authority?<sup>47</sup>

Recollection of Corner's 'grandeur' takes over the pages of the oration. Inevitably, such grandeur produced a governing style marked more by clemency than justice, as Manuelli himself

— an 'old', traditionally pro-papal, and extraordinarily rich patrician family — gain centre stage here.

As he praises the 'incomparable senator' (*Senatore incomparabile*) now set to return to Venice, Pola compiles a celebratory catalogue of the ecclesiastical posts members of the Corner family have held throughout the years. He refers to the 'prelates, abbots, bishops, cardinals with which your house has always supplied the Christian Republic',<sup>44</sup> thus characterising the family's involvement in the church as a hereditary, almost undisputed legacy. Yet it is the family's immense wealth that Pola identifies as a distinguishing feature and dwells on most: 'che si potrebbe dire dell'immense vostre ricchezze? De' vostri monti d'oro? Chi non vede che le sustanze vostre eccedono lo stato senatorio? Che i tesori vostri s'agguagliano a Regii, a gli Imperatori?' ('What can one say of your immense richness? Of your piles of gold? Who does not see that your wealth exceeds that of a senator, and that your treasures are rather those of kings and emperors?'). This is not an occasional homage, for it is precisely the magnitude of the family's economic means, the 'heaps/piles of gold' owned by the Corners, that made possible for the rector 'la maniera di vivere più splendida et più magnifica' ('the most splendid and magnificent way of living') ever witnessed in Verona:

Who has ever admired more virtuous, better-dressed, more numerous, and better-behaving servants than yours? Whenever

highlighted in his speech: ‘if justice lets laws be maintained in a city, clemency lets the subjects be kept in their homeland: this has happened (under your rule) more than once for your own glory and the satisfaction of the Veronese nobility’.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, what seemed decisive for a rector’s destiny was neither his integrity nor his ability to govern but the rank of his lineage. Following this model, roughly all orations produced during this period positioned the *podestà* and captain within their family history,<sup>49</sup> suggesting that their permanence in Verona was not an isolated instance. It was always possible for authors to find documentary proof (authentic or not) of a *podesteria* held by the ancestors of the rector in office. This evidence was enough to speculate that a bond existed between the city and the rector’s lineage, which had started in the past and would extend into the future.<sup>50</sup> After all, from the perspective of the Veronese nobility commissioning the work, the rector’s wealth and fame demonstrated the importance of their own city. Praise for Giovanni Corner’s lavish lifestyle — in the form of a tale in some cases resembling ‘a parody’ of the regulations in force — ‘was perhaps intended to indicate that the inhabitants of Verona themselves maintained a knowing extraneousness from the attempts made by the Venetian state to regulate their socio-economic activities in the city, both publicly and privately’.<sup>51</sup> In Pola’s and Manuelli’s texts, the public banquets, dozens of servants, and luxurious furnishings in the Palace of the *podestà* (*Palazzo podestarile*) reflected a type of sociability that was sensitive to public manifestations of status, something even the aristocratic families of Verona could not renounce. This was especially true in the late 1500s, when noblemen with a seat on the city council felt the need to commission dozens of family stories and grand fresco cycles evoking the former independence of Verona<sup>52</sup> as ‘a veiled and prudent, but clear, political answer’<sup>53</sup> to Venetian sovereignty.

The strong comeback made by the local aristocratic identity involved a competition in prestige in which symbols were paramount (the ostentation of wealth and a certain lifestyle, the renovation of private and public residences). Venetian representatives themselves could not refrain from taking part in this game. Nonetheless, the chances that the nobility’s self-awareness and promotion would lead to openly challenging the ‘protection’ ensured by rectors were, until the early 1600s, very slim. Far from rejecting the rectors’ protection, the local nobility effectively viewed it as a reciprocal promise.

A very long oration delivered at the *Accademia Olimpica* in Vicenza in 1579 in honour of the *provveditore generale* in *Terraferma* Giacomo Soranzo addressed this issue, as it discussed the ‘proper government’ (*buon governo*) of subjects. The oration’s author spoke on the city’s behalf, and his celebratory tone — for instance comparing the rectors to demigods

(*Semidei*) possessing heroic virtues (*eroiche virtù*) — did not prevent him from reminding Soranzo of the promise he had made ‘with sweet and courteous words’ (*con sì cortesi et dolci parole*) to offer Vicenza ‘honoured protection’ (*honorata protection*). The text explained at length what this promise entailed in practice: the privileges and exemptions acquired by the city were to be defended, and the pacts underwritten at the time of the city’s first *deditio* were to be maintained. Soranzo’s commitment to upholding his promise would result in the people’s ‘love and obedience’ (*amore e ubbidiente*) for ‘their protector and benefactor forever, and in all places’ (*sempre, et in ogni luogo nostro protettore et benefattore*).<sup>54</sup>

With its multiplicity of variants and nuanced meanings, the vocabulary of protection cast light on the ‘clearly strategic nature of rectors’ position, placed at the intersection of an eminently political and mediatory role, as local terminals of the dominant power, and the heavy burden of the centuries-long communal tradition, which at least the *podestà* was to embody’.<sup>55</sup> Undoubtedly, government action frequently modelled on a fundamentally unchangeable power structure characterised each sixteen-month rule *reggimento*. However, compared to the first century of Venetian rule, the ‘substantial isolation’ in which Venetian rectors operated vis-à-vis the inhabitants of mainland cities had changed.<sup>56</sup> Though the dozens of aforementioned fifteenth-century laws aimed at preventing orations and other activities devised by rectors for purposes of self-glorification and at regulating entry rituals and the placement of coats of arms were accompanied by penalties — a hefty monetary fine and immediate removal from office — they were not enough to curb what, at first glance, appears to have been an uncontrollable ‘privatisation’ of the public space.

Yet the personal ambitions do not explain why such laws were completely ignored. More in-depth investigation of the events surrounding the renovation and rebuilding of *podestà* palaces as early as the period following the Battle of Agnadello (1509) suggests that subject communities were not forced to accept the imposition of an ‘outside’ architectonic style. Rather, they actively participated in this work, commissioning paintings and frescoes cycles in which episodes of the city’s history were interwoven with those of the *Dominante*.<sup>57</sup> In 1595, for the birth of Giovanni Corner’s and Chiara Dolfin’s son, Verona’s Council of Twelve hired artist Felice Brusasorzi to commemorate the event. His painting depicted a woman wearing a crown of stones, a symbol of Verona, as she passed the couple’s son to the bishop so he could be baptised in the waters of the Adige. The iconography of this work was devoid of any reference to Venice. Conversely, attempts were made to connect the Corner dynasty to the independence of Verona<sup>58</sup> and exploit the rector’s protection as a guarantor for the city vis-à-vis Venice. Similarly, the hundreds of painted or sculpted *armae*

identifying the rectors — in open violation of an order by the Council of Ten from 1489 — which could be found not only on the palaces but also in many other public places throughout the subject cities (on squares, bridges, and gates) were mostly commissioned by the communities,<sup>59</sup> not the rectors themselves, who sometimes even objected to their production.

We can thus conclude that, once the submission phase<sup>60</sup> symbolised by the entry rituals and taking of office was over, the distance between rectors and subjects gave way to a myriad of private and public encounters, conversations held outside the palace, and occasions for friendly rapport (often in academies, as in Verona's case the Philharmonic Academy),<sup>61</sup> which regulations on conduct in Venetian law were in no way able to control.

This system of exchanged favours and network of different legal traditions and customs, identities and political ambitions,<sup>62</sup> surfaces in *Stolone* as well. The harmony Cozzi alludes to in relation to Da Mula's relationship with the city is marked by acts that were far from occasional. On 27 November 1614, 'optante Ill.mo D. Augustino Amulio optimo Praetore', the Council of Twelve resolved to allocate a sum of money to clean up the tombs of the Della Scala family in the cemetery of Santa Maria.<sup>63</sup> The Verona's nobility also seems to have played some part in the writing of *Stolone*, if the Council's resolution from March 1615 — the year the dialogue was published — to examine a 'librum eulogiorum' by Francesco Pola so it could be sent to press, is to be trusted.<sup>64</sup>

While it is uncertain whether the book referenced in the resolution is indeed *Stolone*, that Pola belonged to the urban milieu is beyond question. A man of letters well-informed about the politics of Verona, the author of encomiastic orations, and a jurist from the studium of Padua, Pola included the following affected declaration regarding the intimate bonds between the city and the rector at the end of his dialogue:

So, be sure that the veneration of our city for this very man is immense, our city's love for him is extraordinary, his authority over us is uncontested, be also sure that the fame of all this spreads everywhere, the honour that he gained is triumphal, the glory that follows him is more than human, and the immortality of his name will last forever in our hearts.<sup>65</sup>

That the reciprocity between the 'veneration' ('Venerazione') the citizens of Verona felt for the *podestà* and the latter's 'incredible love' ('incredibile Amore') for the city were perceived as capable of potentially undermining the delicate balance of power on which the Venetian 'jurisdictional state' was founded is clear from the sudden acceleration of laws aimed at disciplining the rectors' sphere of action in the 1600s. The law promulgated in 1609, echoing similar measures from 1598 and 1600, was followed by a second law voted by the Senate on

11 March 1653.<sup>66</sup> Based on a long report by the *provveditori alle pompe*, the text made the catalogue of prohibited behaviours even more cogent and thorough, delving into the private, almost intimate sphere of the rectors' activity. Now the entire duration of a rector's assignment (not just the entry and exit rituals) was subject to a detailed protocol. Individual paragraphs addressed how the palace could be furnished, the style of clothing members of the *podestà*'s family could wear, and the type of carriages (indeed the number of horses) that were to be used in the city and in trips to the countryside. Even the daily lives of the rector's family members — the people they could frequent and the civil and religious ceremonies they could and could not attend — were regulated in detail.

Nearly fifty years apart, the two laws pursued the same end: they censored 'the overspending needlessly introduced' by rectors during their assignments ('le eccessive spese con molta superfluità') and called for a return to 'the moderation upon which the Republic has always modelled itself' ('quella moderatezza che è stata sempre di particolar instituto della Repubblica'). These problems were 'regrettably well known' ('purtroppo note'), the *provveditori alle pompe* added, and accounted for how difficult it was to find Venetian patricians willing to hold offices requiring such high expenditures. In those decades, political waters in Venice were troubled by conflicts originating from wealth imbalances within the patriciate that had been set off by Giovanni Corner's *dogado*.<sup>67</sup> The two laws regulating rectors' behaviours attempted to overcome those conflicts. However, the Senate did not confine itself to addressing its own representatives on the mainland: in the last few lines, after detailing the inquisitorial procedures awaiting those failing to fulfil their obligations, the Senate ordered that rectors immediately publish the laws in their cities of residence, though omitting the chapters regarding sumptuary excesses (furnishings in palaces, number of servants, ornaments for carriages, and so forth). The core of the prohibitions, about which everyone had to be informed, pertained to regulating the informal contacts and network of relationships linking rectors and their subject communities. This aim certainly was not lost on the senators, many of whom were former rectors and knew that the 'love' and 'protection' described in the orations commissioned by the subject cities referred to social bonds and forms of political obedience that could not be cancelled by a command from above. If the informality of these encounters could be accepted (on the grounds that the encounters ultimately benefited Venetian sovereignty), the fine line between Venice and its subject cities, between the former's patriciate and the latter's nobility, between relations of reciprocal 'friendship' and binding 'patron-client relations' nevertheless had to be walked very carefully.<sup>68</sup>



- <sup>1</sup> Cozzi, 'Da Mula, Agostino', 32.
- <sup>2</sup> The citations are from two reports by the inquisitorial syndics (*sindici inquisitori*) (1555 and 1591) published in Melchiorre, *Conoscere per governare*, p. 118 and pp. 185–86.
- <sup>3</sup> In Tagliaferri, ed., *Relazioni dei rettori veneti in terraferma*, IX, p. 97.
- <sup>4</sup> ASVE, SEN, Dis., Ret., Verona, f. 11, not numbered, 8 and 13 October 1614.
- <sup>5</sup> Some documents regarding the conflict with Corner can be found in *Statuti, ordini, e parti*, pp. 306ff. For a profile on Corner, see Derosas, 'Corner, Girolamo'.
- <sup>6</sup> Cozzi, 'Da Mula, Agostino', p. 379.
- <sup>7</sup> Marzullo, 'La raccolta di lettere di Ottavio Rossi', particularly pp. 347ff.
- <sup>8</sup> Guzzo, 'La decorazione della Sala pretoria', p. 48.
- <sup>9</sup> Information about Francesco Pola is rather scarce, except for a short biographical profile by Brugnoli, 'Una villa e una cappella di Francesco Pola a Negrar'. Born around 1568, Pola studied jurisprudence in Padua and practised law in Verona, holding prestigious positions in the city's political life despite his non-noble origins. A teacher at the Studium of Padua and member of the Philharmonic Academy of Verona, he probably died in 1616; Marzullo, 'La raccolta di lettere', pp. 348–49, footnote 85.
- <sup>10</sup> Pola, *Lo Stolone*.
- <sup>11</sup> Cozzi, 'Da Mula Agostino', p. 379.
- <sup>12</sup> Povoletto, 'Un rapporto difficile e controverso', p. 406.
- <sup>13</sup> On the friction between 'old' and 'new' patrician families, see, first and foremost, Cozzi, *Venezia barocca*.
- <sup>14</sup> As observed by Povoletto, *L'intrigo dell'onore*, p. 157, it is likely that many of the laws set forth by Venice, which were 'sometimes suspended, or corrected, and often adjusted a short time after being put into effect, also had the purpose of forcing ruling classes in subject cities to take concrete action for themselves, by allowing them to catch sight of other, heavier intrusions'.
- <sup>15</sup> Cozzi, 'Domenico Morosini e il *De bene instituta re publica*'.
- <sup>16</sup> Cozzi, *Ambiente veneziano, ambiente veneto*, pp. 13–86.
- <sup>17</sup> Thus, 'è cosa appartenente a colui che è in magistrato di esser molto cauto et circonspecto a fuggire la conversazione intrinseca de' sudditi, perciocché, oltre che dalla molta familiarità ne nasce un dispregio del magistrato'. Tazio, *L'ottimo reggimento del magistrato pretorio*, pp. 136–37.
- <sup>18</sup> Tazio, *La imagine del rettore*, pp. 115ff.
- <sup>19</sup> ASVE, SEN., Del., Terra, Fil., f. 191, not numbered, 22 June 1609.
- <sup>20</sup> Viggiano, *Governanti e governati*, p. 68.
- <sup>21</sup> For an eloquent example of these ties, see Chambers, 'Marin Sanudo, Camerlengo of Verona'.
- <sup>22</sup> On Venetian-era statutes, refer to the extensive description given by Varanini, 'Gli statuti della Terraferma veneta nel Quattrocento'; close relations between members of the local legal class, the renowned Bartolomeo Cipolla, and the podestà in office, Zaccaria Trevisan, who was referred to as the city's 'protector precipuus' (p. 282), are documented in Verona at the time the statutes were being written.
- <sup>23</sup> *Statutorum magnificae civitatis Veronae, liber primus*, pp. 1–2.
- <sup>24</sup> Vallerin, *Il Comune di Legnago nel XVI secolo*, pp. 106–14; Trecca, *Legnago fino al secolo XX*, pp. 146–51.
- <sup>25</sup> Papal legates entering subject cities following a protocol very similar to the one observed by Venetian rectors, according to the description provided by Fosi, "'Parcere subiectis, debellare superbos'", p. 111. As with all city rituals, entry rituals too 'were commentaries on the city, its internal dynamics, and its relationship with the outside world'. Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, p. 5.
- <sup>26</sup> Cappelluzzo, ed., *Lo 'Statuto del podestà di Bergamo*, pp. 35–36.
- <sup>27</sup> On the 1567 law, see ASVR, AAC, Reg., reg. 87 (*Atti del Consiglio*, 1565–1569), fol. 147v, 9 November 1567; on the literary genre of orations praising the podestà, see the suggestive overview provided by Raines, *L'invention du mythe aristocratique*, I, pp. 208–25, where special attention is paid to the veritable surge in published orations in the early 1600s.
- <sup>28</sup> Del Negro, 'Forme e istituzioni del discorso politico veneziano', p. 431.
- <sup>29</sup> 'Scambievoli leggi d'amicizia'; 'esecutore diligentissimo di tutte le leggi, e di quelle principalmente che negli Statuti e privilegi nostri si contengono'. Manuelli, *Orazione all'Illustrissimo Signor Nicolò Cornaro*, p. 37 and p. 39; citations are from the edition published in the 1800s *Per le faustissime e nobili nozze Bianchini-Dubois*, Venice 1863. On friendship in early modern period, see, to start: Dewald, *Aristocratic experience and the origins of modern culture*, pp. 104ff; Österberg, *Friendship and love, ethics and politics*, Deschermes, Heuser, Krüger, Loy, eds., 'Varieties of Friendship'.
- <sup>30</sup> Florio, 'Rappresentanti e rappresentazioni', p. 235 and p. 242.
- <sup>31</sup> Florio, 'Rappresentanti e rappresentazioni', p. 234.
- <sup>32</sup> Povoletto, 'Un rapporto difficile e controverso', pp. 413–14.
- <sup>33</sup> 'Ella è l'arma publica de la città nostra, che sta sotto la protezione beata della Republica Vinitiana, di cui è non men gloriosa che notoria insegna il Leone. Et il Signor Podestà l'ha voluta qui in mezzo collocare, per dar a divedere l'amore sviscerato et giustamente parziale, ch'egli in tutto il fortunato suo reggimento ha mostrato verso di lei, et de le ragioni et de le legi sue; de le quali egli è religiosissimo custode et conservatore'. Pola, *Lo Stolone*.
- <sup>34</sup> 'Ad declarandam patriae nostrae laetitiam, gratulationemque agenda per illudque in aeternum filii, nepotibus, nostris memorandum patrociniū quod nobis benigne praestitit in rebus nostris magis arduis'. ASVR, AAC, Reg., reg. 100 (*Atti del Consiglio*, 1604–1607), fols. 77v–78r, 15 January 1606.
- <sup>35</sup> 'Ipsi patrono humillime assistant'. ASVR, AAC, Reg., reg. 102 (*Atti del Consiglio*, 1612–1616), fol. 101r, 25 November 1614; indeed, in the preceding lines Lando was referred to as 'eminētibus virtutibus ornatum et in primis propensum patriae nostrae cuius iura et Privilegia non semel benigne tutatus est'.
- <sup>36</sup> 'Nos enim non semel experti sumus benignam animi sui propensionem erga nos, novimusque Heroicas virtutes suas, uberrimosque percepimus fructus paternae protectionis et summae suae auctoritatis'. ASVR, AAC, Reg., reg. 102 (*Atti del Consiglio*, 1612–1616), fol. 134v, 12 July 1615.
- <sup>37</sup> 'Patriam nostram, nosque singulos amanter protexit'. ASVR, AAC, Reg., reg. 102 (*Atti del Consiglio*, 1612–1616), fol. 168r, 12 April 1616.
- <sup>38</sup> 'Grazia, che si conferisce in altrui, protezione, aiuto, difesa'. *Vocabolario Crusca* (1612), ad vocem 'Favore'.
- <sup>39</sup> Povoletto, 'Un sistema giuridico repubblicano'.
- <sup>40</sup> Povoletto, *L'intrigo dell'onore*, p. 104.
- <sup>41</sup> 'Bisogna che questo Signore sia un grande e raro Senatore'. Pola, *Lo Stolone*.
- <sup>42</sup> 'Dio volente, conseguirà opportunamente le maggiori dignità della sua grande Republica'. Pola, *Lo Stolone*.
- <sup>43</sup> Pola, *Oratione all'Illustrissimo Sig. Giovanni Cornaro*, without page numbers. A profile of Giovanni Corner appears in Povoletto, 'Corner, Giovanni'. Giovanni Corner was elected doge on 4 January 1625.
- <sup>44</sup> 'Prelati, gli Abbati, i Vescovi, i Cardinali, che la medesima vostra Casa ha sempre somministrato alla Republica Christiana'. Pola, *Oratione all'Illustrissimo Sig. Giovanni Cornaro*.

- <sup>45</sup> 'Chi mirò mai la più nobile, la più attilata, la più numerosa, la più ben regolata servitù domestica di cotesta vostra? Qual vostro predecessore fece calcare le nostre strade da più generosi et leggiadri destrieri de' vostri? Quando mai queste pareti, questa sala, questo palagio tutto fu secondo le varie stagioni dell'anno più riccamente addobbato, con più sete et con più oro fregiato? [...] Qual Preside mai con modi più cortesi, con conviti più lauti, ricevè nei suoi palagi più frequente numero di gran Signori Ospiti, et non rare volte i primarii cittadini et ottimati suoi soggetti?'. Pola, *Oratione all'Illustrissimo Sig. Giovanni Cornaro*.
- <sup>46</sup> The text, another work for which Pola was likely commissioned, is examined in Alison Smith's essay, p. 158, which contains much that is relevant and interesting to the issues addressed here.
- <sup>47</sup> 'Quando mai questo palagio fu più abbondante di tutte le cose, quando fu secondo le varie stagioni dell'anno più riccamente addobbato? Qual Rappresentante di grandissimo Prencipe, come Voi, con modi più cortesi, con maggior apparato d'argento e d'oro, con più solenne pompa di tanti e sontuosi conviti hebbe nei suoi palagi più frequente concorso di gran Signori forestieri, et infinite volte de gli Ottimati di questa città al vostro Imperio soggetta?'. Manuelli, *Orazione all'Illustrissimo Signor Nicolò Cornaro*, pp. 32–33.
- <sup>48</sup> 'Se con la giustitia si conservano le leggi alla Città, con la clemenza si conservano i cittadini alla Patria: per la qual cosa con molta vostra gloria e soddisfazione della Nobiltà Veronese s'è veduto alcuna volta avvenire'. Manuelli, *Orazione all'Illustrissimo Signor Nicolò Cornaro*, p. 38.
- <sup>49</sup> This genealogical glorification was shared by the rectors themselves (Pesaro, Badoer, Grimani, Morosini), as the texts dedicated to the cycles of frescoes inside the captain's tower make clear: Costantino, Napione, and Valdinoci, eds, *La torre del capitano*.
- <sup>50</sup> The issue is addressed in depth by Povoletto, 'Il protettore amorevole'.
- <sup>51</sup> Smith, 'Ersilia Spolverini', p. 156: 'forse voleva indicare che i veronesi stessi mantenevano una consapevole estraneità ai tentativi dello stato veneziano di regolare le loro attività socio-economiche in città sia pubblicamente sia privatamente'.
- <sup>52</sup> Varanini, 'L'uso pubblico della storia'.
- <sup>53</sup> 'Una velata e prudente, ma chiara, risposta politica'. See Berengo, 'Patriziato e nobiltà: il caso veronese', pp. 194–95; see also Lanaro Sartori, *Un'oligarchia urbana nel Cinquecento veneto*.
- <sup>54</sup> Angiolello, *Oratione de l'Angiolello Academico Olimpico*. On Soranzo, one of the most influential Venetian patricians of the 1570s, refer to Caterina Caverzan's meticulously researched 'L'affaire Soranzo'.
- <sup>55</sup> Varanini, 'Gli ufficiali veneziani nella Terraferma veneta quattrocentesca', p. 162; also, by the same author, 'La Terraferma veneta nel Quattrocento'.
- <sup>56</sup> Varanini, *Gli ufficiali veneziani*, p. 164.
- <sup>57</sup> Matarrese, 'I Maganza per il Palazzo del Podestà di Vicenza'; more in general, Zucconi, 'Architettura e topografia delle istituzioni nei centri minori della Terraferma'.
- <sup>58</sup> As correctly noted by Smith, 'Ersilia Spolverini', p. 153.
- <sup>59</sup> ASVR, AAC, Reg., reg. 103 (Atti del Consiglio, 1617–1620), fol. 33r–v.
- <sup>60</sup> Fosi, "Parcere subiectis, debellare superbos", p. 111.
- <sup>61</sup> Rectors' participation in the gatherings of the Philharmonic Academy of Verona are well documented, as pointed out by the essays published in Magnabosco, ed., *L'Accademia Filarmonica di Verona*. For more on this topic, see Raines, *L'invention du mythe aristocratique*, pp. 221–23; Benzoni, 'Aspetti della cultura urbana nella società veneta del '5-'600'.
- <sup>62</sup> An important resource for anyone interested in this interpretation of the ceremonies is Benigno's *Favoriti e ribelli*, p. 125.
- <sup>63</sup> ASVR, AAC, Reg., reg. 102 (Atti del Consiglio, 1612–1616), c 102r, 27 November 1614, in Council of Twelve 'Pro purgando Mausoleis Scalligeris in cimiterio S. Mariae Antiquae optante Ill.mo D. Augustino Amulio optimo Praetore nostro ut mausolea praedicta purgentur, decretum fuit quod in opere ipso expendantur ducati decem currentes ex aere publico de quibus praesens consilium disponere potest'. Varanini, 'L'uso pubblico', p. 96, further observes that in the late 1500s, while the councilmen's attention was directed at the early communal period, they 'entirely disregarded the Della Scala cemetery and its sarcophagi [...]. They left it in a complete state of abandonment, and showed the utmost indifference for the equestrian statue depicting Cangrande I, which, struck by lightning, lay on the ground for almost thirty years, damaged and mutilated'.
- <sup>64</sup> ASVR, AAC, Reg., reg. 102 (Atti del Consiglio, 1612–1616), fol. 121r 18 March 1615 'Pro Excell. D. Francisco Pola. Cum summo labore et virtute ipse Excell. Pola composuit librum elogiorum eumdemque dicaverit huic Magnifice Civitati manuscriptum, decretum fuit ut volumen ipsum videatur et recenseatur per Magn. cos DD. Provisores comunis et per Magn. um D. Petrum Paulum Malaspinam Marchionem et eo viso refferant huic consilio eorum opinionem circa impressionem'.
- <sup>65</sup> 'Insomma, abbiate per costante che la Veneratione di questa Città verso questo Signore è immensa, incredibile l'Amore, l'autorità sua sopra di noi omnina et piena, che la fama che riporta, vola per tutto sonora, che l'Honore ch'egli s'ha acquistato è trionfale, che la Gloria che lo segue è più che humana, che l'immortalità del suo nome durerà eternamente ne' nostri cori'. Pola, *Lo Stolone*.
- <sup>66</sup> ASVE, SEN., Del., Terra, Fil., fol. 587: the Senate law is dated 11 March 1653; the attached report by the *provveditori alle pompe* is dated 3 March 1653.
- <sup>67</sup> Cozzi, *Venezia barocca*.
- <sup>68</sup> On this issue, see Eisenstadt 'Personal Relations, Trust and Ambivalence', p. 2: 'These relations are usually defined in terms of mutual intimacy, of moral and emotional obligations, stressing above all trust and empathy, and sometimes the sharing of common 'pure' pristine values, as well as some equality. In the relation of friendship, this mutual trust is consistently based on the relative equality of the participants in this relationship, while patron-client relations entail hierarchical differences between the patron and his protégé, his "client".'