

- *Victoria Avery* -

THE HOUSE OF ALESSANDRO VITTORIA RECONSTRUCTED



“FOR MY PARENTS IN CELEBRATION OF THEIR SIXTIETH BIRTHDAYS...”



'Il Magnifico Messer / Alessandro Vittoria / Morì in questa casa / il 27 Maggio 1608 di anni 83'. So begins a short but poignant inscription which is to be found on a plaque, inserted into the façade of the Hotel Bisanzio, which dominates the northern end of the Calle della Pietà in Venice. The inscription records how the current plaque was erected by the town council of Venice in 1952, in memory of an earlier one, that had been placed 'in homage to the outstanding sculptor' on the front of what had been his house. Despite the addition of a second and third floor, this house was still intact and serving a domestic purpose in 1908, when it was mentioned by Riccardo Predelli in his commentary on the personal papers of Alessandro Vittoria, published to coincide with the third centenary celebrations of the sculptor's death.

However, in the late 1920s, the original arrangement of the ground floor rooms was altered to accommodate part of the Cinema Savona, which operated until the late 1950s. After it closed, the property lay abandoned until 1962, when it was purchased by Sr Primo Busetti, who converted it into the Bisanzio, which opened in 1965. Since then, it has undergone yet further modifications: in 1968, for example, it was united with the adjoining *albergo* – also owned by Sr Busetti – to create one large hotel. Thus most of the current interior division is entirely modern.

Nonetheless, the original sixteenth-century beams are still "in

situ" in several rooms and the shell of the property survives intact, with most of the exterior window and door openings seemingly in their original positions. Moreover, there is a wealth of documentation concerning the property, most important among which are Vittoria's meticulous records of the expenses incurred on its renovation and upkeep and a probate inventory of his moveable possessions which was drawn up on 29 and 30 May 1608, straight after his death. As a result, we can establish the layout of the rooms, with their rough dimensions and form a remarkably good impression of the appearance of the house where Alessandro Vittoria – the pre-eminent sculptor of cinquecento Venice, as well as one of the greatest Venetian sculptors – lives and worked for almost forty years, from 1569 until his death.

As will be shown, the sculptor succeeded in transforming a rather unremarkable – if substantial – habitation into a dignified residence consonant with his pretensions to be seen as a well-to-do gentleman and a distinguished connoisseur. Most rooms on the *piano nobile* had a polished *terrazzo* floor, a grandiose stone fireplace, brightly painted doors and ceiling-beams, wall draped in expensive gold brocades or fashionable green cloth and were elegantly furnished, providing a worthy setting for his large collection. This boasted over fifty paintings, mostly landscapes and portraits, amongst them works by Parmigianino, Titian and Veronese, as well as Schiavone, Jacopo Bassano and Palma il Giovane. Vittoria also owned wax, terracotta and gesso models after works by Michelangelo, drawings by Parmigianino and other masters, prints and even a couple of antique busts.

These were kept in his workshops on the *piano terreno* until shortly before his death, when they were transferred, together with his sculptural tools and his own working drawings, models, plaster casts and intaglio moulds, to the house of his primary heir, his sculptor-nephew Virgilio Rubini, at San Vio.

Thus, Vittoria's house and art collection together served to display his discernment, erudition and wealth. In January 1569, a large (c. 200 m²), two-storied, south-facing property at the north end of Calle della Pietà, in the parish of San

Giovanni in Bragora, was offered for sale at public auction. This comprised two separate, self-contained dwellings: a two-storied *casa da sazeni* with an apartment that occupied the entire first floor and a wine shop that occupied the eastern part of the ground floor, while a single-storied *casetta* occupied the remaining part of the ground floor to the west. It also came with its own north-facing courtyard and ample garden at the rear (c. 185 m² in total).

The property was quite new, having been built some fifteen years earlier (c. 1554) by the nobleman Giovanni Maria Memmo on land inherited from his mother – the plot just visible in Jacopo de' Barbari's birds's eye view of Venice of 1500.



It was immediately rented out, though not for long: on 29 April 1567, it was confiscated from Memmo by the *Governatori delle entrate*, as a result of tax debts also inherited from his mother. Vittoria would have known this property well because, from 1553 until 1569, he rented part of Cà Gritti which lay on the west side of Calle della Pietà. He would, therefore, no doubt have heard about its confiscation – an event that occurred just nine days after his second marriage – and had ample time to consider whether to purchase it. Although the property was already rather dilapidated, it was highly attractive.

From a professional standpoint, it was a major advantage that the ground floor *casetta* could be converted into a spacious sculptor's workshop (it measured c. 57.5 m² excluding internal walls), which would save the expense of continuing to rent studio space. Moreover, the courtyard and garden could be used to store stone. The fact that it was detached except for part of its north side (which adjoined a house belonging to the Memmo family), *meant that it was very light by Venetian standard, a prerequisite for a sculptor studio. The property was also ideally located in the central St Mark's Square - Rialto - Arsenal triangle.* This meant only a short walk between Vittoria and his clients, mainly patricians or merchants,



or those privately run bronze foundries near the Arsenal, where some of his statuettes may have been cast. Finally, its specific location at the junction of the Calle della Pietà, the Calle dietro la Pietà and the Calle Bosello, meant that it was easily accessible both by foot and boat, since these streets led to three navigable canals – the Gran Canal, the Rio della Pietà and the Rio dei Greci. This meant labour costs would be kept to a minimum whether transporting uncarved blocks of stone or finished statues. Personal factors would have enhanced the property's appeal still further.

The living quarters above the wine shop could easily accommodate any off-spring that Vittoria may have envisaged having with his new wife, Veronica Lazzarini. Moreover, the spacious garden – a bonus in Venice – abutted that of Veronica's widowed mother, Elisabetta Lazzarini; while Veronica's brother, Giammaria Lazzarini, was the priest of the local parish church of San Giovanni in Bragora. Furthermore, the purchase of the property would automatically have lent Vittoria social cachet, since he owned it freehold, which was unusual when most non-patrician occupants, Pietro Aretino, Titian and Veronese included, were merely tenants.

And he could boast that he had purchased it indirectly from a nobleman celebrity: Giammaria Memmo was both a knight and doctor whose literary works were sufficiently eminent to merit his inclusion in Francesco Sansovino's select list of the most notable contemporary Venetian authors.

It may well be that Vittoria was further persuaded of the benefits of property ownership by his former teacher, Jacopo Sansovino, who had himself bought and rebuilt a house for his son, Francesco. Finally, in the later 1560s, Vittoria was well-off, with the necessary capital for the purchase: at some time after 24 October 1566, he had inherited the 350-ducat dowry of his late wife, Paola Venturini which, as she had specified in her last will, could be 'invested in houses, land, possessions or other goods either in the city [Venice] or its environs', whilst after 20 April 1567, as a result of his second marriage to Veronica Lazzarini, he had received a dowry worth 1,000 ducats. Some if not all of these factors must have compelled Vittoria to purchase the property: on 28 February 1569, Ottaviano Contarini, the son of his beloved friend and patron Giulio Contarini, paid the full cost of 1,010 ducats to secure the property for Vittoria, who then paid for the house on 4 March 1569. He moved in at

the start of April 1569. Almost immediately after gaining possession of the property, Vittoria embarked on the labour-intensive, time-consuming and expensive task of renovating and embellishing it – an undertaking that in parts involved entire remodelling. As a report drawn up by Marco Soranzo and Andrea Corner in January 1576 stated: 'Vittoria has built a house on the old walls of what had been a shop'.

Through unstinting efforts, Vittoria succeeded in converting a rather dilapidated and undistinguished dwelling into a genteel residence. Indeed, the property's transformation is clearly borne out by the difference in the rent that is commanded before and after Vittoria's intervention: in 1569, just before he bought it, the property was let for a total of fifty-three ducats a year and in September 1608, after he died, for ninety-five ducats a year.

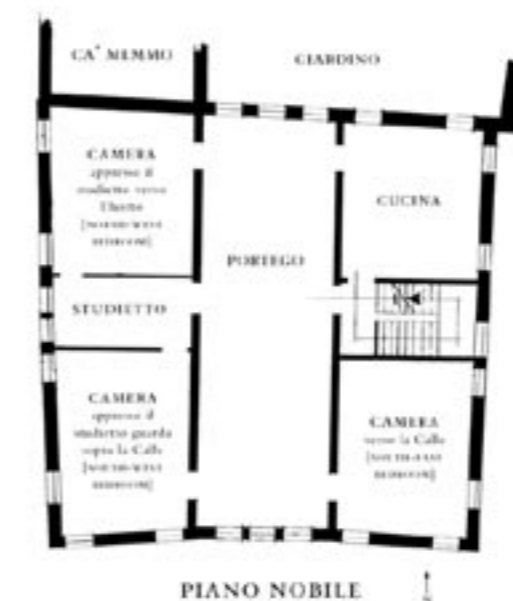
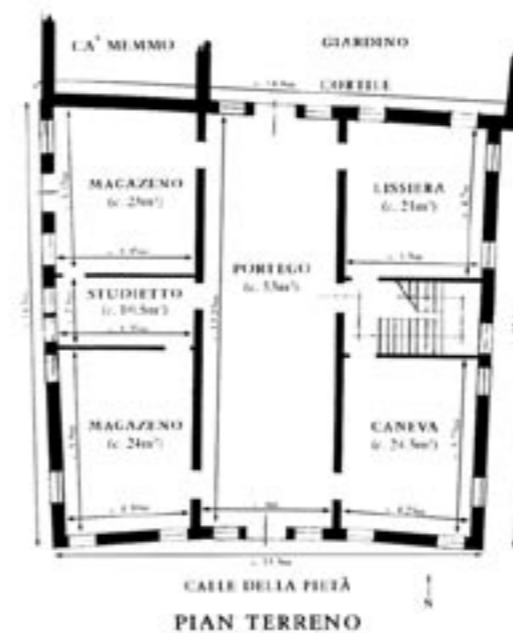
A proportionate increment applies to the purchase price of the property: in April 1619, fifty years after Vittoria's purchase, the property was auctioned for 2.165 ducats, having been officially valued at 2.104 ducats by Giammaria Torello, *proto* of the *Officio del Proprio* and Francesco Contin on 9 February 1619. Since price increases of this magnitude cannot be explained by inflation alone, one can only conclude that Vittoria's intervention must have improved the property beyond recognition. This is confirmed by the fact that the property was reclassified. When Vittoria bought it, it was defined as a *casa da sazenti*, a comparatively humble dwelling of the type in which most Venetian renaissance artists appear to have lived as tenants. However, by November 1570, it was defined as a *casa da statio*. According to Jürgen Schulz, this denoted 'an upper-class residence or one with upper-class pretensions... [which] implied certain means and conferred a certain status that were desirable'. Vittoria's *casa da statio* was, therefore, consonant with his aspirations to be regarded as a gentleman, which helps explain why he was prepared to expend so much time, effort and money on its renovation. This desire to be so remembered also manifested itself in his ennobling funerary monument, which, based on the one that he had designed for the nobleman Giulio Contarini, included a dignified portrait-bust of himself *all'antica*. It is understandable that Vittoria wanted to ensure that his gentrified house was kept in his own family after his death, as an heirloom and an outward expression of status: in the codicil to his ninth and final will, he stipulated that 'my house, along with the investments resulting from it.... are always to remain under my name of Alessandro Vittoria, and are to be registered as such with the *Dieci Savi*, and are to remain as such in perpetuity.

It is thus ironic that little more than a decade after his death, the house was auctioned off to one Alessandro Zoi, a vendor of linen articles (*linariol all'insegna del Melon*). The final ignominy to befall the property was its conversion,

some three hundred years later, into a cinema and the a hotel. Vittoria was careful to note every payment made in connection with the renovation of his house. Indeed, for all the work carried out in the first and most expensive phase of 1569-70, he often recorded the same payment in two separate files: in the first, the payments are listed in strict chronological order; in the second, they are arranged chronologically under type of work (for instance, payments to carpenters or to plasterers). The records of the first file are most extensive, running until October 1595, but those of the second are more detailed. While these records provide information on the fabric of the property, the probate inventory of late May 1608 reveals much about its decor in terms of fixtures, furniture, works of art and soft furnishings at the time of Vittoria's death. In comparison with many inventories, it is quite detailed, mentioning, for example, the presence of cornices and fireplaces and the existence of the garden. Even though the descriptions of individual paintings are very general, such attributions as are given are very likely to be correct since Vittoria had expressly commanded in his final will that his long-standing maid, Lorenza, be present when the inventory was drawn up, 'because she knows extremely well that which is to be found in my house having been for many years the housekeeper'. By implication, this was why Andrea dell'Aquila, his relative and former pupil, was also charged to be there. In compiling an inventory, it was customary for assessors to work systematically round a room, as valuers still do today, so objects juxtaposed on their list may be taken as having been in close proximity.

Analysis of the inventory suggests that Vittoria was thoughtful in his hanging, grouping paintings according to genre and size, favouring symmetrical arrangements with, for example, pairs of landscapes hung over pairs of doors and single paintings hung centrally over individual pieces of furniture. He also appears to have taken the function or location of a room into consideration, dividing his religious paintings exclusively between his study and the north-west bedchamber where he seems to have slept during his final years. Many of his landscapes were also hung in this bedchamber, presumably because of its proximity to the garden. That Vittoria liked his paintings to be well illuminated is proven indirectly by his having so many new windows inserted, despite their cost. This is confirmed by a passage in his third will, in which he bequeathed Schiavone's *Pietà* to the nuns of San Sepolcro, on condition that it 'be placed high up where it will have light and be well seen'. A similar concern is clearly displayed in his fourth will, when he ordered that his own funerary monument 'should be placed high enough from the ground so that one cannot touch it and so that it is well lit'. However, the rooms may well have been differently decorated at other times in Vittoria's long life: we know for example, that

after Veronica's death in 1591, he undertook an extensive redecoration campaign. Moreover, individual objects would have been moved around to create new, visually pleasing arrangements as additional works of art or pieces of furniture were acquired and other sold or given away. Nonetheless, through analysis of the available evidence, both visual and written, it is possible to reconstruct the floor plan and appearance of Vittoria's house during his life-time. The front (south façade) of the house originally simple whitewashed,



was entirely revamped in spring 1592. Its upper part was frescoed in a tripartite scheme, the sides painted by one Antonio and the central section decorated 'con alcune figure' by Vittoria's great friend Jacopo Palma il Giovane (c. 1548-1628), as recorded by Boschini. Regrettably, these frescoes



have not survived but we know from a folio of sketches by Palma in the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich, that the front door was gracefully crowned by a pair of semi-reclining female figures, possibly allegories, since that on the left is holding a sphere. Vittoria presumably went to the expense of frescoing the façade not only because it was so prominent at the exposed north end of the Calle della Pietà, but also to give his house added grandeur. The façade of the neighbouring Cà Gritti had been frescoed by Battista dell'Angolo del Moro (c. 1515-1573 or after), so Vittoria may have intended to dupe passerby into thinking that his, too, was the residence of a grandee. Below the frescoed section, the façade appears to have been covered rather unusually with *terrazzo*, while a hundred metal bosses decoration. There also seem to have been balconies under some of the windows. One entered the house through a large, centrally-positioned larch-wood front door. Its limestone frame was flanked by two windows with surrounds in the same stone, larch-wood shutters and black-pained grilles.

The light from these windows would have illuminated the southern end of the large front vestibule (*portego*, *portico* or *intrada*, which in characteristic fashion, ran through the depth of the entire floor, while its northern end was lit by two similar windows that flanked the back door. The *portego* was grandly proportioned (c 13.25 meters long by c. 4 meters wide and c. 2.5 meters high), and was no doubt elegantly furnished during Vittoria's prime in order to impress his clients and visitors. From his wills, we know that



a graceful pair of marble *Caryatids*, which Vittoria carved in the mid-1560s for his own funerary monument, flanked the inside of the front door for over thirty years, until late November 1602 when they were erected on his monument in S. Zaccaria. The walls may well have been lined with other sculptures by Vittoria, perhaps portrait busts such as that of Sebastian Venier or of himself, which he retained until the end of his life. If so, it was probably here that he kept his two antique busts, one of an unspecified consul, the other of the Emperor Elagabalus which we know he owned thanks to a letter sent by the art dealer Jacopo Strada to Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria in July 1567.

However, by the time the probate inventory was compiled, the hall was sparsely furnished with just two spear-like weapons and two old chairs which, like much of Vittoria's furniture, were in walnut, the wood from which most high-class furniture was carved. The ceiling beams, which were recently re-exposed in part, were originally brightly painted. Following Veronica's death, they were grained to simulate larch, together with those of several other ceilings. As part of the same decorative campaign, the walls of the *portego* were whitewashed, along with those of all the other ground floor rooms and the staircase. Leading off the



front hall were three westfacing, interconnecting rooms, comprising a small, central study – the *studietto da basso* or a *pe pian*; currently the hotel bar – between two larger rooms, referred to as either *li dua mezadi a pe pian* or *li magazen in portico da basso* – currently the *Salottino*

TV and the *Salottino Pendola*. These three rooms almost certainly constituted Vittoria's workshop. Although there is no absolute proof for this hypothesis, several factors make it extremely likely.

The strongest evidence is the lack of rental payments for other properties that might have been used as studios.

Further evidence is provided by the scale of the renovation work that Vittoria undertook here: it is inconceivable that he would have gone to the effort and expense of inserting eight new windows with limestone surrounds, secured by grilles and larch shutters, as well as six new pine doors with



limestone frames and sturdy locks, had these rooms served purely as storage areas. Finally, the fact that the rooms were virtually empty when the inventory was compiled endorses the view that this was Vittoria's workshop had been, for as we have seen by May 1608 all his studio effects had been transferred to the house of his nephew, Virgilio Rubini.

All three rooms had floors flagged in Paduan stone and brightly painted ceiling beams (entirely visible in the bar and partly exposed in the *Salottino TV*).

The small (c. 10.5 m²), self-contained study was presumably where Vittoria created his preparatory drawings and preliminary, small-scale, wax and terracotta *bozzetti*, while the larger (c. 24 m² and c. 23 m²) rooms on either side must have been where the full-scale gesso *modelli* were made and the carving took place. We can only guess how the works of art in these rooms were displayed, since they had been removed before the probate inventory was compiled. However, their importance to Vittoria suggests that they would have been kept very carefully on shelves or brackets, as did his contemporary Giambologna, with the most prized models, such as those after Michelangelo, perhaps placed on the console which Vittoria had had inserted around the walls of his *studietto*, a safer location than the two flanking *magazeni*. If the hanging of his paintings is a guide, Vittoria probably displayed his work of art according to medium and size, as well as subject-matter and/or symmetry.

In addition to the front hall and the workshop area, there were two other rooms on the ground floor: a laundry room

(c. 21 m²) in the north-east corner, and a wine store (c. 24.5 m²) in the south-east corner, which were separated from each other by a self-contained staircase.

The laundry (*il magazen da lissia* or *le Lissiera*, currently the boiler-room and staircase) had at least two windows, and originally a door that led out under the portico at the back of the house, but this was blocked up by Vittoria shortly after moving in. It also had a Paduan stone floor, and ceiling beams grained to resemble larch. It contained a Paduan stone stove with a larch cover and probably the indoor well with a stone cover. It is possible that this is where Vittoria's pupils had slept during their training since, in addition to a sifter, two cauldrons, an old pew and a small vat, the inventory listed two bedsteads here.

The wine store (*Càneva*; currently the office and the rest of the reception) was where Vittoria stored his olive oil and wine. This was also, presumably, where he kept the flour that he recorded purchasing on several occasions, along with other provisions and his firewood. Little can be gleaned about the store's appearance, except that it had a beamed ceiling (which is still visible) and windows with larch shutters. In contrast with the frescoed front, the back of the house was simply plastered, but seems to have been enlivened by a little *portico* (*sotoportico* or *porticheto*). A large back door, identical in all respects to that at the front, opened out onto the paved courtyard (*corte*) and garden (*l'orto*) beyond, neither of which survives. The main feature of the courtyard was a stone well, the first of which had been installed in 1569-70, but shortly afterwards, in February 1571, had cracked because of the expansion of ice, and had to be repaired. In May 1578, it was replaced by a more striking one in red Verona 'marble', located by the back wall of the house. The exposed north and east sides of the garden were enclosed by a high Trevisan-stone wall, capped with tiles, clearly shown in Pietro Chevalier's engraving of the northern end of Vittoria's garden, published in 1838.

To improve access, Vittoria had two doors with limestone frames inserted into this: one in the back wall, which opened onto the garden of his mother-in-law (which partially survives and is just visible in Chevalier's engraving); the other, in the side wall opened onto the communal Corte Bollani (then Corte da Cà Memmo), from which he could reach the Rio della Pietà canal in seconds. Given the demand for land in Venice, a garden as extensive as Vittoria's was a comparative rarity and luxury which would certainly have brought 'maggior onorevolezza alla Casa', to quote Scamozzi. Vittoria seems to have put a great deal of work into it, transforming it from little more than an abandoned plot into one of Venice's most impressive gardens, recorded in Francesco Sansovino's guidebook of 1581.

One can imagine Vittoria and his wife inviting guests to lavish dinners *al fresco*, much as Titian appears to have



done. A rather sad impression of the garden's bygone glory is reflected in Chevalier's engraving, which includes a circular niche with a marble bust of Vittoria, attributed to Jacopo Albarelli, which remained in the garden until 1832.

While this bust was almost certainly added after Vittoria's death as a tribute, it may well be that he similarly displayed pieces of marble sculpture in his garden. The *piano nobile* – identical in layout to the floor below – was reached by a self-contained, internal staircase. Composed of sixteen steps carved from stone quarried at Nanto near Padua, it was divided into two flights, with a small landing halfway up and another at the top. From this upper landing one could reach the attic by a more modest flight of wooden stairs. The staircase was closed from sight, dust and noise at ground level by three doors, which presumably opened onto the front hall, the laundry and the wine store.

A fourth, larger door – also of pine and with limestone frame – was placed halfway up, presumably at the head of the lower flight of stairs. On the landing at the top was another large door, which led directly into the *portego*. The light entering through two windows (with limestone surrounds and larch shutters) would have been reflected off the polished *terrazzo* floors and landings, onto the

whitewashed walls and underside of the stairs, lightening the stairwell. The walls of the staircase were enlivened by a cornice, its vaults painted in oils by Palma il Giovane in 1592, though whether this was with figures, or perhaps decorative motifs is not known. The *portego di sopra* was the principal reception room of the *piano nobile* and, like the vestibule below ran through the depth of the entire floor, giving access to the rooms that lay off it.

It was well lit: in 1585, Vittoria had what was almost certainly a three-mullioned window with decorative capitals inserted into the south wall overlooking the Calle della Pietà, no doubt aligned over the front door. Two years later, he similarly inserted three centralised windows into the north wall overlooking the garden, above the back door. The *portego* was decked with a polished *terrazzo* floor and a beamed ceiling painted to resemble larch. There were eight pine doors, each with an outer *anteporta* and finely turned door-knobs. In 1592, all the doors of the *portego* were brightly painted in oils by Palma il Giovane. Their stone frames had been carved in 1570 by Francesco di Bernardin Smeraldi (active second half of the sixteenth century), another great friend of Vittoria. A painted cornice ran around the walls, which were hung with fashionable green woollen cloth. The largest pieces of furniture in the room were a walnut dresser and a great pine table with a walnut veneer which, when not serving as a dining table, appears to have been covered with what may have been a Turkish rug.

The *portego* also served as drawing room, judging from the large number of chairs: in addition to a pine bench behind the table, there were six matching walnut chairs, four matching beech chairs, four chairs for ladies and two walnut armchairs. There was also some pine shelving and a wooden coat stand. We may safely assume that, as was customary in Venice, this room had no fireplace, since none is mentioned in the documents. The only works of art known to have graced this room were five framed landscapes by Paolo Fiammingo (c. 1540-1596), otherwise known as Pauwels Franck, placed as overdoors. From the *portego* one could gain access to Vittoria's study (*studietto*) which must have been on the west side of the house, since it looked onto Cà Soranzo. The *studietto* also had a beamed ceiling, green cloth hangings decorating the walls beneath a painted cornice and a *terrazzo* floor. Lit by two windows with wooden shutters, it contained a few fine pieces of furniture, such as two large walnut storage chests, which probably doubled as seats. By the time that the inventory was compiled, Vittoria's small walnut bureau, now full of assorted valuables and cash had been placed inside one of the chests; the other contained some silverware. There was also a small, but strong side-table covered with a green cloth, upon which one of Vittoria's bronze statuettes of St Sebastian stood. Although their location is not specified in



the inventory, given Vittoria's penchant for placing similar object together and the esteem in which they were held, it is more than likely that his statuettes of St John the Baptist and St Zechariah were also displayed in the *studietto*. The former was his first independent commission, the latter very probably his last work, carved as its pendant. There were two more religious works of art in the *studietto*: a *Presentation in the Temple* and a *Dead Christ*, both by Andrea Schiavone (c. 1510/1563). It is probable, given the similarity of the subject matter, that these are identical with the 'circoncisione di Christo' and 'pietà sostenuta da un angelo' mentioned in Vittoria's third will. Whilst it is not possible to match the *Presentation* with any known work by Schiavone, the *Dead Christ* is almost certainly identical with a *Lamentation* in Dresden. In addition, there were four landscapes: while the location of a large, framed *Tournament set in a Landscape* by an unidentified Flemish master in unrecorded, a pair of pastoral scenes served as overdoors and a smaller landscape was hung on the wall above the small side-table. Finally, there were two distinctive mirrors, presumably small and convex, in glass. One was unusually framed in ebony, while the other had what was probably a cover painted with an untraced 'small portrait of a lady by Titian'. Although its location is not specified in the inventory, it is tempting to conjecture that the *Self-Portrait in a mirror* by Parmigianino (1502-1540) may have been hung close to these mirrors as a witty conceit, since all three dealt with reflections, either real or illusory. This was certainly the

most important and cherished portrait in Vittoria's collection, purchased on 14 January 1561 for 10 *scudi* from Andrea Palladio, who was acting as an agent for Elia Belli, who had inherited a large art collection amassed by his father, Valerio, the famous engraver of crystals. Vittoria's pride in this painting and his awareness of its significance – not least because of the prestige it brought him – is clearly seen in its having been mentioned in five of his wills, often being bequeathed to eminent collectors. In the second and third wills, for example, Vittoria bequeathed it to Cosimo I de' Medici, on account of his being 'that great patron of all virtuous men', whilst in his final will the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II was named as its recipient, since 'it was for so long desired by his father, his Sacred Majesty the Emperor Maximilian, and his Sacred Majesty himself'.

There were also three bedchambers on the first floor, identical in dimensions to the rooms beneath. They were described in the inventory as 'the bedchamber next door to the small study near the garden', which must have been in the north-west corner since the *studietto* faced west and the garden lay to the north; the 'bedchamber next door to the small study looking over the Calle', which must have been in the south-west corner, since the Calle della Pietà lay to the south; and 'the other bedchamber near the Calle', which must have been situated on the other side of the *portego* – after which room it does indeed occur in the inventory – in the south-east corner. Regrettably, the inventory does not specify which of these was Vittoria's personal bedchamber, but several factors suggest that in the years immediately before his death, he may have retired to the north-west one: in addition to having direct access to the *studietto*, it was also the closest to the garden, which could be viewed from the windows at the north end of the *portego*, and probably the quietest, having only one wall exposed to the street. It also contained the grandest bed and most of the painting collection. That it was in use at the time of Vittoria's death may also be indicated by the presence of firedogs in the grate; there were no firedogs in the other bedchambers when the inventory was compiled.

However, certain payment records indicate that this had not always been his room. We know for example that in his earlier years, Vittoria occupied the lighter and slightly larger south-west bedchamber, for 3 June 1580 he recorded paying for planks to mend the beams 'of my bedroom that faces Ca' Gritti. Payment records indicate that all these bedchambers had polished *terrazzo* floors and painted cornices. The south-west chamber had a beamed ceiling, which was painted and gilded in 1592. Each room had a fireplace set into the thick exterior walls, whose plain rectangular opening was ennobled by a striking moulding in polished stone.

Chimney-pieces of this type – known either as *nape francesi* or

nape alla Romana – were very fashionable in mid-sixteenth-century Italy. These replaced more modest chimney-pieces. The *nape francese* in the south-west chamber, made of polished mottled stone (*pietra macchiata*), was the first to be carved and installed, between July 1578 and September 1582, that is, during Vittoria's occupancy of this room. The other chimney-pieces were made in 1592. That in the north-west chamber (*la camera rincontro cha soranzo*) was of red Verona 'marble' (*pietra rossa*); while that in the south-east bedchamber (*la camera rincontro la Pietà*) was carved from a type of stone whose mottled surface resembled that of an almond kernel (*pietra mandolata*). The effort made by Vittoria in the decoration of these bedchambers is also revealed by the inventory. By the time it was compiled, the south-west chamber was furnished somewhat spartanly – as was the custom – with a square walnut bed, a large pine seat, a pair of old leather chairs, a small old walnut table and three walnut storage chests full of clothes and linen. At one time, the walls had been resplendently hung with gilded leather or brocade drapes, presumably alternately according to the season. Certainly expensive, they recall similar extravagances on



Vittoria's part, such as his purchase of Florentine silk hangings for 10 *scudi* on 20 May 1562 and others on 16 April 1567 for almost 94 ducats, which were undoubtedly acquired in order to impress Veronica, whom he was to marry four days later. Vittoria had obviously decided to ignore the new sumptuary regulations of 1562, which forbade such things: 'Wall-hanging and all other kinds of upholstery worked with gold, silver or silk or whatever size are absolutely forbidden...; one must not hang on the walls... silk material of any kind'. Whether any works of art were displayed here is unknown: at the time of Vittoria's death there was no one. The walls on the south-east bedchamber were also decorated with forbidden, striking brocade hangings, but by Vittoria's death these appear to have seen better days. By May 1608 this

room contained only a bed, a giltwood dressing-table, two clothes-horses and four old pine chests, though there may once have been more furniture. It was decorated with eight portraits: in addition to a small one of an unidentified male which hung above the cornice, there were portraits of seven unidentified females, two of which were large and hung from the cornice while the others were above it. These were almost certainly family members, for although the inventory left both sitters and artists unidentified, Vittoria's third will of November 1570 mentioned several portraits of his spouses and other female relatives: 'I desire that all of the portraits of my first wife Paola go to my second wife Veronica, and that she has that part she wishes of the other small portraits, such as that of herself, as well as one of the two which portray me, and those of her sisters as a sign of my love for her'.

The portrait of an unidentified man may also have been a kinsman, perhaps Vittoria's father or Veronica's brother Giammaria Lazzarini, but there is no further documentary evidence concerning this painting and, like the female portraits, it cannot certainly be identified with any known portraits. The final painting in this rooms depicted 'una figura di donna nuda', which may well have been reclining Venus in a landscape of the type invented by Giorgione and popularised by Palma Vecchio and Titan. It was small and hung above the cornice. The north-west bedchamber was even more spartanly furnished, with just three painted pine storage chests, walnut shelving above the fireplace, which probably once contained the clock, and a gilded iron bed with three panels, possibly with scenes from the *Aeneid* by Andrea Schiavone. However, the paucity of furniture was made up for by the abundance of pictures – twenty-eight in all – which formed the nucleus of Vittoria's collection. They consisted of eleven landscapes, eleven portraits and six religious works, including two by Vittoria's own hand. Unfortunately, the landscapes are only cursorily described in the inventory, so that they cannot be identified with known paintings. There were two unframed landscapes by Jacopo Bassano (c. 1510-1592), probably a pair, since they were recorded together in the inventory and fairly small, as they were overdoors. They were accompanied by five other variously sized landscapes by Paolo Fiammingo, possibly mythological fantasy scenes for which he was particularly famed, one of which was specified as hanging above the fireplace. The four remaining landscapes were simply described as 'di buona mano'; two served as overdoors and two were hung from the cornice. In addition, there were the eleven portraits, all of which portrayed contemporary artists – a sort of personal *Uomini Illustri* pantheon – amongst which were no fewer than five of Vittoria. His decision not to hang these with the rest of the family portraits in the south-east bedchamber, but rather in the midst of his collection of

famous north Italian artists of the day is an unambiguous manifesto of his desire to be perceived as playing a central role in the contemporary art scene. Vittoria's portraits of his *artist-friends* included a *Portrait of Titian* by Paolo Veronese (1528-1588) and a *Portrait of Paolo Veronese* by his son, presumably Carletto, who was more proficient than Gabriele. These were interspersed with three small self-portraits: one by a Brescian painter, unidentified but almost certainly either Savoldo or Moretto; another by Alessandro Maganza (1556-after 1630) and a third by Jacopo Palma il Giovane. There was also a small portrait of *Tintoretto as a Young Man* with no author specified, but since it is recorded immediately after two small self-portraits and we know that Vittoria tended to hang like with like, it is highly probable that it was a self-portrait. These were supplement by 'two large portraits and three small ones of ...Signor Alessandro [Vittoria], portrayed at different ages, and painted by different hands'. The only portrait universally accepted as depicting Vittoria is that by Giovanni Battista Moroni (?1520/24 – 1578 or after) of c. 1551 (fig. 20 Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. It was presumably one of the two portraits of himself that Vittoria mentioned in his third will of 1570. There are two further portraits of sculptors: a vigorous man in his mid-forties by Veronese (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and the portrait of



an elderly sculptor by Palma il Giovane (Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna). Since they almost certainly portray Vittoria, although other identities for the sitters have been proposed, it is very likely that they were also once part of his painting collection. Given this abundance of painted portraits and Vittoria's supreme skill in the field of portraiture, the absence of any sculpted portrait busts in the probate inventory is surprising. Portrait medals are equally conspicuous by their absence: given his vanity, surely Vittoria would have kept at least one example of both versions of his self-portrait medal? One can only assume that they were considered to be part of his studio property and were thus transferred to Virgilio Rubini's house before the inventory was compiled. As for the six religious paintings, we know that one was large, framed *Madonna* by Schiavone, which was probably identical to that mentioned by Vittoria in his third will as a '*madonna con il puto in braccio et san Zuane fanciulo accanto*'. This cannot easily be equated with any known works by Schiavone. There were also another *Madonna*, an unidentified female saint – both small and unattributed – and a *Noah's Ark* by Jacopo Bassano, again untraced. Most intriguingly, there were two paintings – a *Madonna* and an *Ecce Homo* – which were ascribed to Vittoria's own hand. While the generalised inventory descriptions thwart attempts to identify them, there is no reason to doubt that they were painted by Vittoria, given that in his sixth, seventh and eighth wills, he spoke of 'my profession as a sculptor, painter and architect', a detail underlined by his inclusion of a personification of Painting on his funerary monument. The final room on the *piano nobile* appears to have been a well equipped kitchen (*la cosina* or *la cusina*), of which the main feature was a large, wide, round-hooded fireplace which Vittoria had had installed in January 1570. It would have been a pleasant room to cook in, since it was large (c. 21 m²), and had at least two windows overlooking the garden. It had a red *terrazzo* floor and a beamed ceiling painted in 1592 to simulate larch. The furniture consisted of two old cupboards, a small pine table and an old chest. In addition to the various copper and brass pots and pans, ninety pieces of assorted maiolica and 161 large and small tin plates, there were five brass candlesticks, a small brass holy water stoup and a pair of iron firedogs. Above the *piano nobile* was a large attic (*soffitta*) known only from the records of expenses incurred during the various phases of its renovation, which included laying a new brick floor in 1583 and, in 1591, inserting ten *luminal*, presumably skylights or perhaps dormers. Two were north-facing; two east-facing; three south-facing and three west-facing. Both these costly projects were probably undertaken to render the attic more pleasant as living quarters for the maid(s), in the hope that this would induce loyal and devoted service in return. The fact that Vittoria kept no personal property in

the loft – which accounts for its absence from the inventory – provides further indirect evidence that this was where the servants slept. Little can be deduced about its appearance, except that it contained some pine shelving. Although only the shell survives, thanks to his meticulous records and the thorough probate inventory, Vittoria's house is remarkably well documented, enabling us to reconstruct its arrangement and appearance during the sculptor's lifetime. This reconstruction provides new insights into Vittoria's character, his desire to live surrounded by beautiful and precious objects and the aristocratic lifestyle to which he aspired. Such a secure and detailed reconstruction is all the more important because of its rarity; it would be impossible to reconstruct, to this level of precision, the appearance and original character of the homes of most other Venetian renaissance artists since few survive, and when they do, as in the case, for example, with those of Tiziano, Sansovino, Veronese and Tintoretto, the documentary evidence is minimal in comparison to the wealth of information in Vittoria's papers.

Victoria Avery