

The Vivaldis of Brescia

The family of the composer Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) moved to Venice in 1664, but information about its prior existence in Brescia has been scant.¹ He is a composer for whom we have only a blurry picture of personal heritage and musical formation. Recent research has delved deeply into his maternal forebears, who were predominately Venetian.² His paternal lineage, which is largely Brescian, has resisted many attempts to divulge its secrets. New findings reported here trace three anterior generations of Vivaldis in Brescia and examine the early decades of activity of those who emigrated to Venice in 1664. By following the Vivaldis' often-changed occupations we may form some impression of the personal qualities that enabled them to adapt to ever-changing needs. In tracing the composer's direct line of descent, we take 1641 as a starting point because it is the latest date to offer a comprehensive portrait of the Brescian family. Their transition began in the 1650s.

Antonio Vivaldi's immediate predecessors were his father, Giovanni Battista, and his paternal grandfather, Agostino (Agostino I). Giovanni Battista lost his father at an early age. His older brother, Agostino II, played a major role in looking after the orphaned Vivaldi siblings. After setting out the family's circumstances in 1641, we recoup information on Gio. Paolo, the father of Agostino I and the composer's great-grandfather. Turning next to the Vivaldis' slow transition to Venice, we examine the family's situation as presented in the *stato libero* of Agostino II. The metamorphosis of Giovanni Battista Vivaldi, the youngest child of Agostino I, from his youth to his emergence as a violinist of note, brings us up to the death of Agostino II in 1693, the year in which Gio. Battista's son Antonio began his journey to the priesthood.

¹ The research reported here was initially supported by a grant from the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation, to whom I convey my cordial gratitude. In Brescia, Marco Bizzarini, Gabriella Bruni, Ugo Ravasio, and Mariella Sala devised pathways to restricted resources that have greatly benefited this research. Their networks of contacts (including Luigi Bertolotti, Italo Frolidi, Signora Guarneri, Carissimo Ruggieri, and Armando Scarpetta) have been similarly helpful. For archival and other assistance, I am greatly indebted to colleagues outside Brescia, including Bojan Bujić, Marie Cornaz, Michela Dal Borgo, Alberto Pinto, Paolo A. Rismondo, and Alessandra Sambo.

² See ELEANOR SELFRIDGE-FIELD E MARGHERITA GIANOLA, "La famiglia materna di Antonio Vivaldi/The maternal family of Antonio Vivaldi", *Studi vivaldiani: Rivista annuale dell'Istituto Italiano Antonio Vivaldi della Fondazione Giorgio Cini*, 15 (2015), pp. 13-53.

Until the devastating plague of 1630-31, in which the city lost half its people, Brescia had been a thriving center for trade and a crossroads of various mercantile, military, and agrarian affairs. Being so close to the western edge of the Venetian Republic, its military readiness was understandable. Its *castello* still houses an impressive collection of weapons. Its Augustan age underpinnings, although poorly preserved, complement Celtic residues and medieval treasures carefully housed in the Museo Santa Giulia. Few places in northern Italy offer such a multifaceted constellation of past epochs in so concentrated a space.

The year 1641 still bore the scars of the plague, so vividly portrayed in Alfredo Manzoni's *I promessi sposi*—the story of an innocent couple whose betrothal was sabotaged over and over by deepening crises of sickness and famine. In prior decades, the Venetian administration of Brescia had relied on the periodic collection of *polizze d'estimo*—listings of property, family members, livestock, and occupations—on which statistical profiles could be based. Today these records form the most intact source for understanding local history up to about 1650. Most individual filers dictated their reports to scribes who were inclined to be inattentive, inconsistent, and in some cases confused about what they were being told. The evidence is rampant in the documents presented below. By mid-century so many Brescians had died or relocated that the city's energy seemed to have vanished. The once proud traditions of Brescian music were incidental victims.

The aim of the 1641 canvass was to verify who was still living and what operations were still functional. The society was in principle ready to function again, but its resources were scattered and weakened. This collection was begun in 1637 (or earlier), but the vast bulk of what survives is dated four years later. The finished work amounted to some twenty-two *mazze* (large stacks) of records compiled by heads of households and institutions. Despite the bulk, the physical records testify to a significant decline not only in total population but also in its collective wealth.

The trunk of the Vivaldi family tree

Agostino I (1601-1656/62)

Our first subject, Agostino I Vivaldi (1601-1656/62), lived inside the city walls in the populous north central section of town [Document 1]. In July 1641, he was 40 years old, his wife Margarita 32. They had four living children: Orsola (aged 8), Paulo (aged 6),

Domenica (4), and Carmina (12 months). By way of an occupation, Agostino described himself as a “tessadro et esercito l’arte di tessadro.”³ Gio. Paolo Vivaldi is cited as the father of Agostino (I) in this *polizza d’estimo*.⁴

Agostino I had a house and a shop in the “contrada delle Carmini”, which runs along the southern perimeter of the religious establishment of Santa Maria del Carmine. It lies a few hundred yards north of the church of San Giovanni Evangelista, where various records of the Vivaldi family survive. The approximate location was equidistant to the churches of SS. Faustino e Giovita and San Giovanni Evangelista. Santa Maria del Carmine was a prosperous monastery with substantial grounds and an opulent interior. Its organs were greatly admired. Agostino was paying twenty *lire* a year for his house and bottega. He was receiving three *lire* a year from Marc’Antonio Portalaga, who was paying down a loan of sixty *lire*.

One of the mysteries of Agostino’s 1641 *polizza* is that none of the children named in it appears in any subsequent documentary context. This may be owe partly to sparse documentation. His children born through 1640 would have been adults by the 1660s, when we next return to his affairs. We have evidence of one further but short-lived child—a son named Angelo (b. 1646), whose existence is verified only by a burial record (3 November 1650) at SS. Faustino e Giovita.⁵ On Agostino’s daughter Cecilia, see “From Brescia to Venice” below.

Agostino II (1641-1693)

Agostino II was evidently born to Agostino I and his wife Margherita a few days after the *polizza d’estimo* was notarized. A newly discovered entry in the archive of San Giovanni Evangelista confirms his baptism on 20 Luglio (1641). He would likely have been born approximately a week earlier. The entry [Document 2] is not otherwise informative. It merely records that “Agostino, the son of Agostin Vivaldi and M.a Malgherita, his legitimate

³ *Tessadro* is an archaic term for a weaver but was also used more broadly for those engaged in the cloth trade. Since few such citations occur in the massive 1641 poll, the term confers a degree of recognition and respect.

⁴ Rendered as “Fivioldi,” a spelling that suggests the pervasive imprint of local speech from the Alto Adige and adjacent Swiss provinces. F/V and R/L exchanges are very common in Brescian records. The ending “-oldi” was more frequent than “-aldi”.

⁵ Brescia, Archivio parrocchiale di SS. Faustino e Giovita, *Repertorio de morti dall’anno 1650 al 1781*, p. 8.

wife, was baptized by P. Innocentio da Padova, with M. Giacomo Butina as the infant's godfather."⁶ Most of what we know about Agostino II comes from his *stato libero* (1664), which is discussed under the heading "From Brescia to Venice".

Giovanni Battista (1655-1736)

Giovanni Battista Vivaldi was the youngest son of Agostino I and the youngest brother of Agostino II. He was baptized on 13 April 1655 at San Giovanni Evangelista [Document 3] and must have been fatherless by the age of seven (1662), when Agostino II joined the Venetian forces. The baptismal entry for Gio. Battista reveals only the names of the infant's parents, the name of the priest (Francesco Cappaccio), and the identity of Gio. Battista's godfather, Domenico Uberti.

The name Domenico Uberti is shared with a graphic artist whose lifespan and travels paralleled those of Agostino II. Uberti enjoyed commissions in Venice and the eastern Adriatic between the 1660s and 1690s.⁷ Retrospective commentaries link his work to church properties in scattered Dalmatian locales including Hvar and Zara, both in Croatia. One of Uberti's best documented works is an altarpiece (exhibited in Venice in 1692) in St. Stephen's Cathedral, Hvar. Depicting the Holy Family with saints, it resulted from a commission from Pietro Priuli (1669-1728),⁸ a Venetian nobleman serving as a priest in nearby Traù and later (1708) named a cardinal-deacon of San Marco. Incisions showing flattering portraits of religious figures were also in Uberti's portfolio. The artist seems occasionally to have worked with Pietro Liberi in Venice.⁹ While we cannot be sure that Gio. Battista's godfather and the graphic artist were the same person, it is hard to miss the parallel interests of Uberti and the *pittore* Gio. Paolo Vivaldi but also of the parallel migrations of Uberti and Agostino II.

⁶ Gabriella Bruni and the church archivist Signora Guarneri deserve our sincere thanks for retrieving this the long-elusive entry and photographing the source.

⁷ Uberti was mentioned in several chronicles of Venetian art, including MARCO BOSCHINI (*Descrizione di tutte le pubbliche pitture della città di Venezia*, 1733); p. 172. Boschini claims (p. 87) that Uberti was a Venetian and credits him with work for the Palazzo Mocenigo. GIANANTONIO MOSCHINI, *Guida per la città di Venezia* (Venice, 1815), p. 521, mentions his involvement in paintings at San Moisè. LUIGI MASCHEK, *Manuale del regno di Dalmazia* (Zara, 1872), pp. 212-223, cites work in the eastern Adriatic.

⁸ CVITO FISKOVIĆ, *Hvarska katedrala* [The Hvar Cathedral], Čakavski sabor, Split, 1976, p. 64. Fisković's text was excerpted from the main body of the book and translated from the Croatian by Bojan Bujić, to whom I extend my cordial thanks.

⁹ E.g. ANTONIO ZANCHI's *Simboli predicabili, estratti da sacri evangeli che corrono nella Quadragesima* (Ferrara: B. Barbero, 1692).

With regarding to the direct lineage of the Vivaldis, the length of a generation in this family was exceptionally long. Gio. Paulo (b. 1554) was forty-seven when Agostino I was born. Agostino I (b. 1601) was forty when Agostino II was born and fifty-four when Giovanni Battista came into the world. Giovanni Battista, in contrast, was a mere twenty-three when his son Antonio appeared in 1678.

Gio. Paulo di Vivaldi, *Pater familias* (1554—1613/1626)

Gio. Paulo's first wife and family

Agostino I, the composer's grandfather, must have been the last child born to the first wife of Gio. Paulo. The earliest reference to Gio. Paulo di Vivaldi (b. 1554) occurs in a marriage register in San Giovanni Evangelista [Document 4]. Here we learn that on 11 June 1579 he wed Jacoma (Giacoma), the daughter of *quondam* Francesco di Barzesi (Barghesi).¹⁰ The banns were read on Sunday the 24th, Tuesday the 26, and Thursday 28th May, the last having been the (moveable) feast of Ascension. That the wedding occurred two weeks later rather than immediately no doubt sought to avoid conflicts with the many festivities that followed Ascension.

Gio. Paulo Vivaldi is the best documented figure in the Vivaldi lineage.¹¹ After 1579, we next encounter him in a *polizza d'estimo* from 1588, when he was living in the "3.za [terza] Faustina" district [Document 5]. His age was given as thirty-four. Jacoma's was stated to be twenty-two, but if she were born in or about 1566, she would have to have been married at thirteen, which seems unlikely. The couple's living children in 1588 were Francesco (age 8), Pauola (5), and Doralia (2). Gio. Paulo was paying an annual rent of twelve *lire*. His current debts totaled fourteen *lire*. The notary signing the report was Vincenzo Bargnardis.

When the couple's daughter Francesca Angiola arrived, she was baptized in the church of SS. Nazaro e Celso, on 26 February 1589 [Document 6].¹² The officiant at her baptism

¹⁰ Barghe is a small community along the Rio Chiese (Rio Gambarà in older maps) between Lakes Garda and Iseo.

¹¹ Ugo Ravasio kindly shared two documents from San Giovanni Evangelista and one from SS. Nazaro e Celso with me in 2009. He had found them in 2005 while preparing material for an exhibit of bowed string instruments. At the time there was no way to link any of them with the later composer.

¹² I have not interpreted this date as *more veneto*, but there is no way to be certain what the local practice was. Church scribes, following the practice of Rome, usually advanced the year on 1 January, even though secular record-keepers in the Venetian Republic often did not advance it until 1 March.

was the priest Gio. Domenico Iacchini.¹³ A point of interest in the baptismal entry is that her godfather was Gerolamo Casara (Casari). Almost a century later the affairs of the Casari and the Vivaldi were still intertwined.¹⁴ This suggests a familial connection of long standing.

Gio. Paolo's computed year of birth (1554) is based on this report, in which he identified himself as the son of "Antonio Vivaldi Veronese." This indicates that the later Venetian composer was named for his paternal great-great-grandfather. Antonio Vivaldi Veronese was evidently living in 1588 but was not resident in Brescia. He is not mentioned in any of the Brescian *polizze d'estimo* of the later sixteenth century. Gio. Paolo described himself as "habitante in Brescia pittore". Perhaps the phrasing indicates that Gio. Paolo did not regard himself as a permanent Brescian.

Gio. Paolo's profession

Gio. Paolo's self-designation as a *pittore* allows for a range of interpretations. Beyond pointing to an involvement in decorative arts of some kind, we remain ignorant as to the nature of his skills. His name does not appear in references on art of the time, but the amount of work available during his lifetime in churches, monasteries, and palaces was significant. Altarpieces and side-chapel decorations were often unsigned. Brescia's best-known painters—Gio. Battista Moroni and Alessandro Bonvicino ("il Moretto")—had workshops to extend their production capabilities. Gio. Paolo could easily have been employed in one of them. The institutions most convenient to the Vivaldis' location in the city were the conventual Santa Maria del Carmine and two parochial churches—SS. Faustino e Giovita and San Giovanni Evangelista. The presence of a chapel (left front) dedicated to Santa Cecilia in San Giovanni Evangelista distinguishes it from others nearby houses of worship and nods to the substantial population of instrument-makers living nearby. The painting, showing the saint with two other virgins and several cherubs, is unsigned. [Figure 1].

¹³ Brescia, Archivio della parrocchia SS. Nazaro e Celso, *Libro vocchetato de battezzati*, n. 2, dell'anno 1584 sin l'anno 1604, f. 63.

¹⁴ A contemporary of Gio. Battista Vivaldi, cited as "Antonio Casari, figlio d'un altro Antonio", served as a notarial witness in 1675. Between that time and this baptism, an Antonio Casari (*quondam don* Enrigo Barbero) was wed to Catharina Bellami on 18 August 1630 (Brescia, Archivio parrocchiale di San Zenò, *Matrimoni*, 1572-1641, p. 131).

<Figure 1. Chapel of Santa Cecilia (San Gio. Evangelista, Brescia).>

Gio. Paolo's second family

Jacoma must have died not later than 1601. The likelihood that Agostino I was born by 1601 suggests the possibility that she died giving birth to him. On 22 September 1602 Gio. Paolo took as his second wife Maria de Bettini (c1582-after 1617) [Document 7]. In the context of Brescian records, this marriage entry is unusual in providing a surname for the bride.

The marriage registration is unusually precise in noting its conformance to church proprieties — “secondo la forma del *sacramento* [del] Concilio di Trenta” — and the reading of banns (*le denontie*) on 15, 21, and 22 September. Don Alfonso Rovati, the curate of San Giovanni Evangelista, conducted the ceremony, with Messers Paolo di Francotti and Francesco di Martinelli as witnesses. Similar elements of conformance to observance of principles enforced by the Council of Trent were present in the entry concerning the groom's first wedding as well, although they do not appear in most entries in the same parish books. Why was this? Was there a cleric of significance in the family tree? We lack information to interpret this style of speech.

Paolo's second marriage produced at least four more children: (1) a son whose name is not known, (2) a second daughter named Pauola, whose dates are undetermined, (3) a son named Antonio (b. 1613), and (4) a daughter named Malgarita (b. 1617). It is possible that the first two of these children did not survive childhood.

The Pauola who is listed in a *polizza d'estimo* of 1627, when she was the widow of Marc'Antonio de Zudes, was almost certainly the product of Gio. Paolo's first marriage and was therefore born in 1583. She was now living in the *breda bella* in a property she rented from an otherwise unknown Giacinto Vivaldi.¹⁵ The orchard was in the parish of San Barnaba. She was raising her [step-?] brother Antonio, who was first mentioned in a

¹⁵ Because of proximity, the twins Domenico and Ottavio Vivaldi may have been closely related to Giacinto, though exactly how is unclear. They were the sons of the late (15 maggio 1627) Faustino Vivaldi, living in the prima Alexandri district, which in their own *polizza* they labelled “Santo Barnaba”. Their document (f. 334) helps to unravel the cryptic self-description of Pauola, for the twins were evidently in the dairy business. As a *vocchina*, Pauola likely milked cows. The twins were indebted to Agostino Prigenti (also Prigenti) and the late Agostino Zanchi. The Malgaritta *quondam* Paolo who filed a *polizza d'estimo* on 4 Juni 1637 would have been the fourth child of the first marriage. She was living in the “5.a [quinta] Faustini,” where she paid rent of 2 *lire* a year to m. Giacinto Vivaldi.

polizza d'estimo of 1610. Paola had no surviving children of her own. After Gio. Paolo's second marriage, no further Vivaldis were married or buried at San Giovanni Evangelista.

The Vivaldi Veronesi and other family branches

Apart from Gio. Paolo and his father Antonio, we find only one other mention of a Vivaldi Veronese. This comes from a marriage entry for Iulio Vivaldi (9 April 1619). His wedding to Maria, *figlia del quondam Battista Polotti*, took place in the Brescian church of SS. Nazaro e Celso. Was Iulio a son of Gio. Paolo and therefore a brother of Agostino I? Only the "Veronese" suffix links them. The officiants at Iulio's wedding were Marc'Antonio Botti, curate of the church, and Giorgio Giorgi of Santa Crose [Santa Croce] in the Val Camonica. Of Gio. Paolo's wives, Jacoma was described in their marriage declaration as the daughter of the late Francesco di Barzesi,¹⁶ a further reference to the Val Camonica.

Another hint of connections to the Alta Bresciana, or at least its crafts, comes from a *polizza d'estimo* of 1637, in which Margaritta's occupation was given as the making of silk bookmarks [*nistole di seta*], a skill long practiced in the Val Camonica. The method could have been related to the textile trade conducted by Agostino I at one time, considering that the cloth that Agostino II later sold in Venice may have included silk, velvet, wool, or damask (see "Social and economic contexts of the Vivaldis' occupations").

Parallel branches and possible ancestors of the Vivaldis

Contrary to the fact that the surname Vivaldi occurs sparsely in the northern Italy of today, a significant number of Vivaldi clans could be found in the sixteenth century. Before the plague of 1630, the total number of Vivaldis in the Bresciano exceeded one-hundred fifty. If they all descended from one person, that person would have lived centuries before. In the ample documentation of the sixteenth century, various outliers can be grouped under such headings as possible siblings, Vivaldis by nickname but not by surname, and Vivaldis with no known connection to those discussed here but sharing some element of commonality with those discussed here.

Among possible siblings, one example was Gio. Giacomo Vivaldi, who, like Agostino I, was a *tessadro*. According to the *polizza d'estimo* he filed in 1627, he lived in the Quinta

¹⁶ Brescia, Archivio parrocchiale di San Giovanni Evangelista, *Matrimoni, libro II (1574-1610)*, unnumbered. (Reference kindly provided by Ugo Ravasio.)

Faustina district (colloquially called Monza), where his premises were rented from M.ma Faustina di Bresani. At that time, he had a one-year loan (105 *lire*) from Andrea Stanchieri and a two-year loan (330 *lire*) from Gio. Pietro Stanchieri. Gio. Giacomo was currently forty, his wife Maria thirty. They had a sixteen-year-old daughter (Iulia) and a two-year-old son (Giovanni Battista).¹⁷ Alternatively, the name Gio. Giacomo could correspond to the fourth son of a certain Pietro *detto* Vivaldi who submitted a *polizza d'estimo* in 1587. This lack of a decisive clarification represents a recurrent problem caused by a small pool of baptismal names and large number of family branches.

The use of the name Vivaldo or Vivaldi as a nickname came mainly from the Bassa Bresciana, particularly from Manerbio, Seniga, and Verola. Like the Vivaldi Veronesi and the Vivaldi of Brescia itself, all Vivaldis were *cittadini*. Several heads of households nicknamed "Vivaldo" or "detto Vivaldi" bore the surname Loda at the start of the sixteenth century. As time passed, some became Loda *detto* Vivaldi or, in the style of our *pater familias*, "di Vivaldi". These uncertainties should be seen in the context of the rising trend to perform baptisms in the sixteenth century. It was coupled with an increased effort to assign and track surnames. In contrast to family trees governed by patronymics, the surname Vivaldi was diffuse in regions lying between Provence and Verona by the fourteenth century. In the case of Gio. Giacomo (above), it is impossible either to refute or to confirm a close link between him and the concentrations of Vivaldis cited below or those considered in detail above.

Although little weight has been given the Loda *detto* Vivaldi overall, we must acknowledge that the baptismal name Agostino (sparse both in Brescia and its northern villages) was common among *both* the Vivaldi *and* the Loda *detto* Vivaldi in the Bassa Bresciana. In 1614, Gio. Battista, the son of Gio. Pietro (also recorded as Zan Peder) Loda *detto* Vivaldi counted among his children a son named Agostino (born c1589) plus three younger children. The earliest Loda not *detto* Vivaldi in Brescian records was named Agostino [Loda] (c1470-before 1565).¹⁸ Another Agostino da Lodi (not nicknamed Vivaldi)

¹⁷ Brescia, Archivio di Stato, Archivio Storico Comunale, *Polizze e petitioni d'estimo*, busta 259A, fasc. 1627. Gio. Giacomo may have been a dyer. His report (f, 199, where his surname is recorded as Vibaldi) appears to say "tessadro di pigmenti."

¹⁸ His son Vincentio (b. 1500) and Vincentio's wife Margarita (b. 1511) were the parents of three sons whose progeny had moved to Brescia by the early seventeenth century. In 1661 there still lived in Manerbio

appeared once in the records of San Giorgio, where he was described as a *prigionero*. We know of him though his burial record (4 February 1646/7).¹⁹ No details of his life are given in the parish register, one of the few that survives from this church.

An interesting trait of the “southern” Vivaldis was the pronounced incidence of twins among them. The earliest noted in this inventory were the brothers Gio. Francesco and Jo: Baptista (born in 1548).²⁰ By 1565 both had moved to the San Faustino district of Brescia. Could it have been their proximity that prompted Gio. Paolo to distinguish himself within the neighborhood as a descendant of the Vivaldi Veronese? The Vivaldis from Manerbio, Seniga, and Verola Alghise who moved into the city otherwise settled in parishes nearer the Porta di Sant’Alessandro (the south gate). A smaller number lived in the parishes of Sant’Afra and Sant’Eufemia, on the east side of town.

One other curiosity of the southern Vivaldi population is a low incidence of *tessadri*. We might consider the case of Benedetto Loda, who identifies himself as a *tessadro*, aged 42, in Manerbio in a *polizza d’estimo* of 16 “febri” 1593. Like many of the Loda, he tended some land belonging to the Luzzago family, but, unlike most, he had no family members living with him. His house and other property were valued at 600 *lire*, a high value in comparison to reports from city dwellers.

The Vivaldi population that remained in Manerbio and environs was substantial. More than a hundred Vivaldis could be found there in *polizze d’estimo* from the early sixteenth century through the mid-seventeenth. It is not possible to determine whether any of them were musicians (an unlikely calling in the countryside), but we note with interest that the Venetian agent Domenico Gritti prohibited Lucrezio and Antonio Gambara from holding *feste da ballo* (with music by violins) during Carnival 1694 in Verola Alghisi, where they had enormous land holdings.²¹

an Agustino Loda *quondam* Tomaso *quondam* Zovan Antonio, then aged 35, with a seven-year-old son named Tomaso (*Polizze d’estimo*, busta 75B, fasc. 1661, pezzo 76).

¹⁹ Brescia, Archivio parrocchiale di San Giorgio, *Registro de morti II*, p. 6. (The only surviving registers from this church record *morti* and are housed in one cabinet of the narthex of SS. Faustino e Giovita.)

²⁰ However, there were multiple Loda called Gio. Francesco, including one who, in a 1548 *polizza d’estimo*, was listed in the 2.da [seconda] Alexandri as the son of “*quondam* Tomaso” (Brescia, Archivio di Stato, Archivio Storico Comunale, busta 75A, fasc. 53, 1548, f. 123). His household included his wife Medea (aged 20), his mother Antromeda (60), his daughter Lucrezia (1), and another female named Maffia (20).

²¹ Brescia, Archivio di Stato, *Archivio famiglia Gambara*, busta 186, mazzo V2, n. 12. In mazzo 19 this transgression was laid at the feet of the mayor, Gio. Piero Zadini.

Crusaders and Adventurers

Centuries before, the surname Vivaldi was found among early crusaders and Knights Templar. Clues arise from fragmentary information and parallel family trees in Provence, Liguria, and Mondovì (Piedmont). Following from the First Crusade (1099), when stalwart defenders of Christianity from Provence led their followers to Jerusalem to “rid the city of Muslims”, a brigade of elite warriors, known afterwards as the Knights Templar, was formed in 1119. Their military order benefitted from the cooperation of King Baldwin II, the patriarch of Jerusalem, and Hugues de Payens, a knight of Champagne. The Knights Templar were so named for their desire to locate their headquarters on the exact spot where the Temple of Solomon (recently used as a mosque) had once stood. The Order of the Knights existed for two centuries, but its residues lasted for many more. Although the order eventually took a vow of poverty, they were in their heyday showered with monetary gifts from powerful figures.²²

In Bartolomeo de Pozzo’s original *Ruolo dei Cavallieri Gierosolimitani* we read that Domenico Antonio Vivaldi was the captain of the crusader vessel [*La*] *Croce Bianca*.²³ He was accompanied at sea by the brothers Alessandro and Carlo Giustiniani. A *frère* Costanzo Vivaldi was included among the associates of another vessel, the *Baglio di Napoli*.²⁴ Starting from Genoa, which had been evangelized earlier, the Vivaldi brothers Ugolino and Vadino de Vivaldo conducted an expedition through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Atlantic Ocean. Their intended destination was India,²⁵ but no mention of their arrival or return was ever recorded. The annals of Jacopo d’Oria (1280-1293) claim that the brothers sighted the Canaries in 1291. In some legends, their adventure gave rise to tales of rounding the Cape of Good Hope before Vasco de Gamba, while in others they reached North America before Columbus. Today these are best regarded as lore, but their adventures were echoed by Dante. The descendants of these explorers played a role in

²² In the commentary below that mentions Pressano, the monastery that preceded the Querini villa had been built in the eleventh century with the aim of hosting pilgrims going to and from the Holy Land. It eventually became a strategic point in the passage of the Knights Templar.

²³ BARTOLOMEO DE POZZO, *Ruolo dei Cavallieri Gierosolimitani* (Torino, 1689), rev. ROBERTO SOLARO DI GOVONE (Torino, 1714), p. 256.

²⁴ Pozzo, *Ruolo*, p. 112.

²⁵ In *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, ed. GEORG HEINRICH PERTZ, *Scriptorum*, Tomus XV HI (Hanover, 1863), pp. 288-356, p. 33.

establishing maritime merchant networks in England, but their efforts are poorly documented. Their success as fourteenth-century Genoese bankers is better founded.²⁶ The surname Vivaldi was occasionally found in Tuscany, but its footprint was small.

Civic leaders in the Piedmont

We know little about the origins of a patrician family named “Vivalda” in the hill-town of Mondovì, near Cuneo. Mondovì’s origins, like those of Brescia, are traceable to the bronze age. Between 1557 and 1789 twelve generations of Vivaldis lived there. Several were styled marquises, counts, or barons. Their family crest displayed an *aquila nera*.²⁷ Five of the sixteenth century Vivaldis of Mondovì (Luigi, Giambattista, Costanzo, Filippo, and Domenico Antonio) were Knights Templar.

Many of the Mondovì Vivaldis held leadership roles. They found callings in the church, in military occupations, and in civic councils. The town, which nestles near the border of Provence, had a long history of political and military conflict. Rumors of Waldensian heresies are poorly substantiated. We note with interest that the progeny of Clemente Vivaldi of Mondovì (d. 1617) included male twins born in 1592.²⁸

A Jesuit poet from Liguria

A Ligurian priest named Agostino Vivaldi published a book of poetic devotions in the late sixteenth century that became a favorite of Jesuits. His *Meditationi sopra li evangeli che tutto l'anno si leggono nella messa e principali misteri della vita, e passione del Nostro Signore* (Antwerp, 1593; 1599) enjoyed many reissues. Its Latin elaboration (*Evangelicae historiae imagines: Ex ordine Evangeliorum, quae toto anno in Missa sacrificio*, Antwerp, 1596) was especially widely circulated. Under the vernacular title *Cento cinquanta*

²⁶ See ALBERTO MAGNAGHI, “Precursori di Colombo? Il tentativo di viaggio transoceanico dei genovesi fratelli Vivaldi nel 1291” (*Memorie reale Soc. Geogr. Italiana*, 18), Rome, 1935; ALWYN RUDDICK, “Alien hosting in Southampton in the fifteenth century,” *Economic History Review*, 16, No. 1 (1946), pp. 30-37. For context see JEAN RICHARD, “European voyages in the Indian Ocean and Caspian Sea (12th-15th centuries),” *Iran*, 6 (1968), pp. 45-52.

²⁷ Shared, coincidentally, by plucked-string instrument-makers from Füssen, who were in business in Venice before 1600.

²⁸ The information on Mondovì was compiled from manuscript sources in the general reference room of the Archivio di Stato, Torino. The sources are by MANNO [lacking a baptismal name], “Patriziato subalpino”, vol. xxvii (Lettere U-Z), a typescript carbon copy, with some genealogies pasted in at the ends, and “Frammenti genealogici” in TORELLI ms. IV, f. 284.

meditationi sopra li vangeli (Rome, 1599) verses were interleaved with etchings by Hieronymus Natali. The poet Agostino Vivaldi died in Genoa on 29 August 1641, roughly six weeks after the birth of Agostino II Vivaldi in Brescia. This near coincidence of dates disallows any close familial connection, but it does not exclude a dim awareness among the Brescian Vivaldis of a Genovese connection.²⁹

The Saints Nazaro and Celso in Brescia and Verona

Only two documents link a Brescian Vivaldi with the Brescian church of SS. Nazaro e Celso, but through this church we are reminded of the Knights Templar: on its north wall a Maltese cross (a symbol widely used by the Templars) is embedded near the northwest entrance. These saints, who were fourth-century Christian martyrs (honored on 28 July), had been sent by St. Ambrose of Milan to evangelize Liguria. The majority of the saints' relics are preserved in the seventh-century Veronese monastery of SS. Nazaro e Celso, but scattered remnants reside in a surprisingly large number of smaller churches stretching between Como and Verona. By Renaissance times, the Veronese institution had become a prosperous abbey and was richly endowed with paintings. In the milieu of the faithful of SS. Nazaro e Celso, Brescia, "Veronese" could suggest an association with the artefacts of this movement.

The church dedicated to the saints in Brescia has had an unfortunate recent history. Damage from the Second World War destroyed some of its interior and exterior walls as well as most of its parish registers. Its archive might otherwise offer pertinent information on the pertinent Vivaldis. In its current state, the paucity of material barely gives a coherent picture of its seventeenth century congregation. Yet a faint link between the current "as-is" facility and what it may once have been is suggested by the occasional use of altar cloths on which are embroidered Maltese crosses. It turns out that this flimsy connection is not pure fantasy. In the year 1101 a Mantuan blacksmith working in Brescia

²⁹ According to MICHELE GIUSTINIANI (*Gli scrittori liguri*, Rome, 1667, I, 37) the poet spent four years (1577-1581) studying at the Seminario Romano. As a Jesuit he became "a religious of good faith and commendable doctrine." Agostino Vivaldi the poet was also cited in GIOVAN MARIA CRESCIMBENI's *Le vite degli arcadi illustri scritte da diversi autori* (Rome, 1710), II, p. 88.

willed his shop to the Templars so that they could establish a hostel for pilgrims *en route* to the Holy Land.³⁰ It stood where the church is today.

From Brescia to Venice: The *stato libero* of Agostino II Vivaldi (1641-1693)

It was essential for a man preparing for marriage to present his *stato libero* (a set of credentials attesting to his Christian upbringing and an absence of other marital commitments) to a ranking cleric in the place where he intended to be wed. In Venice that cleric was the patriarch. The process was inevitably more cumbersome if the candidate, or his intended spouse, had been raised outside the Venetian Republic or outside the Roman Catholic faith, but neither condition pertained in this case. It is not clear why the *stato libero* for Agostino II, which we present in its entirety in Appendix 1, is as ample as it is. Vio reported it years ago, but at the time it lacked a social context.³¹ It now gains much from the presence of one. It may be that because the Vivaldi family were not resident in Venice and felt they needed to introduce themselves to officialdom. Another possibility is that Giovanni Floighen, the future father-in-law of Agostino II, wanted to promote the importance of this pending union.

Two testimonials for the groom were the norm. Five were presented for Agostino. The bride might have none or one, but this bride offered a combined statement from two Venetian neighbors who had known her since childhood. Nearly all the witnesses for Agostino II came from Brescia. All the statements [Document 8] were signed on 7 November 1664.

The collection begins with a preamble stating that “Agostin, the son of another Agostin of Brescia, now aged about twenty-three, is a provisioner who had been living at SS. Apostoli since he was about twenty-one. He left his home and went to Zara [Zadar] with the general of the Venetian armies, where he stayed for about ten months.³² After passing through Venice, he returned [to Brescia], then departed for this city [Venice] roughly

³⁰ FEDERICO ORODICI, *Guida di Brescia. Rapporto alle arte ed ai monumenti antichi e moderni* (Brescia: Francesco Cavalieri libraio-editore, 1853), p. 101.

³¹ See GASTONE VIO, “Appunti vivaldiani,” *Informazioni e studi vivaldiani*, 12 (1991), pp. 77-88.

³² According to Agostino’s mother (witness #4), the general stayed in Zara for ten months, while Agostino stayed on under a different command for an additional year.

twelve days ago. He has always been free up to this point from any matrimonial involvements.”³³ The cover page then lists Agostino’s witnesses:

1. *Agostin de Zuanne Preato da Vicenza*
2. *Vincenzo quondam Domenego Soleri da Città nova [Neustadt] in Germania*³⁴
3. *Giovanni d’altro Gio: Floighen da Lubliana [Ljubljana]*³⁵
4. *Margarita [Margherita] vedova quondam Agostin Vivaldi da Brescia*
5. *Paulo quondam Carolino Allegri da Brescia*

The geographical distribution of these witnesses gives some sense of what the securing of provisions for Venetian troops may have entailed. One witness currently resided in an unidentified German province, another was originally from Slovenia [then under Austrian rule], a third from Vicenza, and two lived in Brescia. The individual testimonies proceed in order.

The most important fact to emerge from these documents is that Agostino I had died some years before the remainder of his family made this move to Venice. No one confirms Agostino’s existence after 1655, the year of Giovanni Battista’s birth, although one witness implies that he and Agostino I were present together in the cloth shop on at least one (undated) occasion. By 1657 Margarita and her children, while remaining principally in Brescia, were making periodic trips to Venice on behalf of the textile business of Agostino I. There is no mention of him, but it is natural to assume he was still actively running his *bottega* in Brescia, even though it is not explicitly confirmed.

Witnesses for the groom

In relation to Agostino II, the twenty-three-year-old Zuanne Preato (witness #1) is a compatriot, a peer, and a colleague. He seems to have met Agostino II in 1657 when he began to work in the shop of Agostino I, conversing with the father and helping him sell fabrics. Preato could have influenced Agostino’s decisions to enter military service

³³ The recent recovery of the baptismal record for Agostino II confirms that in November 1664 he was 23 years old. The underlined phrase “d’anni circa 21” may indicate his age at the time he left Brescia to go to the Adriatic.

³⁴ In a recent count, nine places in German-speaking lands were identified by the name Neustadt.

³⁵ Gastone Vio read this surname as Floigher. In most cases it appears to me to be Floighen, but either is possible.

(c1662), to move permanently to Venice (1664), and to pursue formal studies for two undatable years.³⁶ Currently serving as a secretary to Colonel Sagramosa, Preato says that he has known Agostino for a total of seven years, at the start of which he was serving “in the company of *Signore Spinetta* at the Castello” in Brescia.³⁷ Preato describes Agostino’s father as a *sartor* and as a *biave*.³⁸ This indicates that Agostino I distributed but did not necessarily weave cloth. Preato notes that his friendship with Agostino II has continued in Venice over the previous five years, which in turn tells us that Agostino was making regular trips to Venice by 1659.

Vincenzo Soleri (witness #2) is a soldier aged twenty-three who has recently served in the company of *Signore Girolamo Capua*. He resides in a *camera locante* at SS. Aspostoli (the same one in which the Vivaldis are resident). He has known Agostino II for about ten years. During the latest five of these he has been serving (apparently as a soldier) in Brescia, in the company of *Novello Rossi*. He too has met Agostino’s father, who worked as a tailor (*sartor*) and sold cloth (*drappi*).

The future father-in-law and business partner of Agostino II, *Giovanni Floighen* (witness #3), was aged forty-five in 1664. He came from Ljubljana. He is a figure of particular interest because Agostino II be his son-on-law and would be his business partner for more than a decade. He writes that he has known Agostino II for nine or ten years [since 1655 or 1656], which reinforces the earlier information that Agostino had been making trips to Venice since shortly after the birth of *Giovanni Battista* (1655). *Floighen* (sometimes read as *Floigher*) first met Agostino and his mother, *Margherita*, in the company of *Captain Nicolò Saracino*, a friend who used to stay in *Floighen’s* guesthouse in Venice. According to *Floighen*, the *Vivaldis* would visit Venice roughly twice a year and remain for variable lengths of time up to fifteen days.

³⁶ We might assume that “studying” was not coincident with military service. Preato gives the impression that Agostino’s studies took place in Venice.

³⁷ In the seventeenth century Brescia followed the model of provincial centers of the Venetian Republic in having several *rettori*, one group (the *corte pretoria*) under the Podestà and another (the *corte prefettizia*) under the Capitano. The first group handled legal affairs and tax matters. The second was responsible for military affairs. The Podestà and Capitano were Venetian noblemen who ruled on behalf of the Serenissima.

³⁸ A *biave* (or *biaverol*) was often a grocer, but in these statements, it is evident that a spectrum of merchantile activities could be so designated. As his career developed, Agostino II became a wholesaler.

Floighen is the first witness to describe Agostino's recent visit to Dalmatia with the commander of the Venetian fleet as one of "eight or nine" months. Recently, Agostino came to Venice with his brother of "about ten" [*recto*: nine] and his sister Cecilia, who was now "about twenty-four years old."³⁹ The Vivaldis' intention, he said, was to make their home here in Venice. They are currently staying in "my" house, he tells us, and "because we have been acquainted for some time", Floighen's wife Betta has decided to offer her niece Nella Bonamigo [Domenica Petternella Bonamigo] as a wife to Agostino. (We learn from later accounts that Nella had lived with the Floighens since she was seven or eight years old.) Some witnesses say Nella is from Treviso, others from Tarvisio, but these turn out to be compatible, if confusing, designations.⁴⁰

Witness #4 was Margherita Vivaldi, the mother of the groom. It was a rarity for a mother to testify to the fitness of her son for marriage. Yet her testimony proves to be valuable. She says she is fifty years old, leading us to deduce that she was born in about 1614 (or to judge from other documents, slightly earlier). She is currently living at the parish of SS. Apostoli, Venice, in the house of Zuanne Floighen, who is a solicitor in the Ducal Palace. He has worked in Venice for eight or nine years. She is qualified to testify on behalf of Agostino II because "he is my son". She has been bringing him to Venice for about eight years [i.e. since 1656]. On each visit she has rented a place in the home of Signor Zuanne (Floighen), as she is currently doing. This time she has brought her other children—her daughter, Signora Cecilia, and her son Zan Battista, because they [the family] want to settle here. They plan to live with Agostino after he marries.

She echoes Floighen's information, saying that his wife, Donna Betta, has suggested that Agostino marry her niece, Donna Anella [Margherita's rendering of the bride's name], who "is from Treviso". Agostino has been acquainted with her for 9 [19] months. According to Margherita, Agostino has been in Dalmatia for "about a year and a half" [i.e. since the spring of 1663] with the Venetian General de Spar [Sbarco], and he [Agostino] has now returned with him to Venice.⁴¹ Margherita is certain of Agostino's freedom from prior commitments,

³⁹ If this number is correct, Cecilia would have been born in c1640, a year before Agostino.

⁴⁰ Nella came from a villa named Tarvisio at the edge of Treviso. The estate is highly visible (as "Trevigny ou Tarvisi Ville d'Etat de Venise") in Pierre Mortier's 1704 etching of Treviso.

⁴¹ The French title Sparre for the commander of a military division was usually rendered as Sbarco in Venetian commentaries. The Venetian war-in-progress was the Guerra di Candia (the war in Crete; "Candia"

since she would know if he had disobeyed her. Like some other witnesses, Margherita signs her statement with an X.

Margherita's deference to others is evident in the titles of address she uses. In contrast to other witnesses, she identifies all the men as Domino, all the women as Donna. The consensus among all other witnesses is that Agostino was in Dalmatia for nine or ten months, but Margherita's estimate is roughly double that. While the written cipher (9 vs 19) is ambiguous, the phrase "circa un'anno e mezzo" is not. She seems to be saying that of the year-and-a-half Agostino spent in Dalmatia (perhaps not all of it in Zara), the general was present for one half the time ("about nine months"). This is feasible. Venetian commands changed often.

The final witness (#5), Paulo Allegri, is twenty-seven years old. Another Brescian, he has known Agostino since he was a small boy. Allegri still lives in Brescia, where he makes swords ("faccio il spaden, spaderi"). Here and elsewhere Allegri's mode of speech is seasoned with Germanicisms (e.g. *frei stante*). He is in Venice only briefly on business. He knew Agostino's father, who was a tailor (*sartor*). They used to converse with one another. He verifies that Agostino went to school [prior to] going to sea "about a year ago". Then Agostino returned to Brescia, he says, and carried on with the business until he moved to Venice. During his latest Brescian stay, he told Allegri he wished to marry.

Witnesses for the bride, Domenica Petternella (Nella) Bonamigo

One statement in the packet contains a joint testimonial for the bride signed by two witnesses—Martin Lorenzi (the son of the late Pietro, of Venice) and Maffio di Borgo from Val Camonica. Their statement is dated 8 Novembris 1664. Although her name is uniformly given as Nella [Bonamigo], the bride's baptismal name was Domenica, followed by her mother's maiden name, Petternella. Nella was the daughter of the late Camillo Bonamigo of Tarvisio.⁴² She is about twenty-three years old. She has lived in the parish of SS. Apostoli, in the household of Domino Giovanni Floighen, her uncle (*barba*), since she was seven or eight years old. She has had no attachments during these years.

referring strictly Heraklion). It lasted from 1645 to 1669. The Adriatic ports formed a supply chain that continued into the following century.

⁴² That is, the villa named Tarvisio at the edge of Treviso.

Lorenzi has known Nella for about fifteen years, since she lives in the house of their neighbor, the “German” Zuanne Floighen, who is her uncle. Nella came to Venice, we learn, when she was eight or nine years old. Nella is at home every day. She is completely free of matrimonial involvements. Lorenzi’s letter is signed with an X.

The second witness, a mirror-merchant (a *specchiere*), is thirty-eight years old. He lives and works in the parish of SS Apostoli and has resided in Venice for twenty-five years. He has known Nella since she was seven or eight years old. She has always lived with her Aunt Betta, who is always at home. The *specchiere* has seen Nella daily for all these years. He too affirms that Nella is free of marital obligations. He also signs with an X.

Agostino’s marriage and later life

Agostino II and Nella Bonamiga were married five days later, on 12 November 1664, at San Cristoforo della Pace, a small church within the parish of SS. Apostoli.⁴³ The bride’s father, ser Camillo Bonamigo, provided a dowry for his daughter that we learn of only in 1670.⁴⁴ Even later we learn that Agostino was not officially released from the service of captain Angelo Emanuelli in Zara until 12 May 1689,⁴⁵ some twenty-five years after he married! At the time of his discharge, Agostino was officially working as a provisioner (*vettovaglie*).⁴⁶ Does this long tenure mean that Agostino was still traversing the Adriatic in the 1670s and 1680s? Did he have a trade monopoly in Zara? Was his activity as a *biavarol* in Venice spent rounding up provisions to ship across the Adriatic? These questions remain open. What we know about Agostino’s future is that he, his father-in-law, and other partners came to operate a successful wholesale wine trade that earned high regard from Bavarian visitors in the 1680s. In its early years Giovanni Battista was recruited to help with the wine business. An intriguing sidelight is that the family name Petternella (the maiden name of Agostino’s wife) is still associated with the wine trade near Valpolicella. (The surname is otherwise almost extinct in Italy today.)

⁴³ Venice, Curia Patriarcale, Archivio storico, Parrocchia S. Cristoforo della Pace [within the archives of SS. Apostoli], *Matrimoni, reg.* 1625-1667, f. 176.

⁴⁴ Venezia, Archivio di Stato, *Notarile, atti*, notaio Francesco Simbeni, busta 12137, minute [unnumbered]. Further disclosures are found under the date 21 aprile 1670 in b. 12121.

⁴⁵ Venice, Archivio di Stato, *Notarile, atti*, notaio Francesco Simbeni, busta 12137, minute.

⁴⁶ Busta 12137.

Agostino II had eight children—six sons and two daughters. He must also have been a surrogate father to Giovanni Battista. He was undoubtedly a worthy role model. Vio called attention to Agostino’s cunning in the selection of godfathers for his sons. They included “il serenissimo principe Harmast [the prince of Darmstadt], langravio di Assia”, “l’illustrissimo signore Ottavio baron Tassis”, “il colonnello Zuan Battista de Holin”, the Venetian noblemen Francesco Malipiero *quondam* Lorenzo, and Zuane Querini.⁴⁷ This is an impressive array of authority figures of the 1660s and 1670s. Descendants of all of them would play some role in the careers of subsequent Vivaldis, though not necessarily those of Agostino’s children. What is especially striking is that in his planning of baptisms Agostino followed a model of patronage that closely paralleled that of Venetian opera.⁴⁸

Cecilia and Margherita in Venice

The Brescian Vivaldi females did not fare as well as the men in Venice. Cecilia, the sister of Agostino II, remains something of a mystery. In baptismal records, infants usually were identified by two names, but in census and land polls only one was given. Cecilia could therefore have been one of the daughters listed (by an alternative baptismal designation) in the 1641 *polizza*. We have two accounts of her age. One is from Floighen’s statement in Agostino’s *stato libero* file, which suggests that she was twenty-four years old in 1664. (She could have corresponded to Carmina, the twelve-month-old Vivaldi in the 1641 *polizza d’estimo*. Alternatively, her name could have been mis-transcribed there. Her name could also have been accidentally omitted in the *polizza*.) Her age at death (8 September 1672) was recorded as thirty-eight, which would indicate a birth year of 1634. Floighen’s projected age seems the more plausible. Cecilia was living “alli forni”,⁴⁹ indicating she was under Agostino’s roof, when she succumbed to a fever of eighteen day’s duration. Upon her death, “don Agostin” looked after her burial at the church of San Martino.⁵⁰ She was memorialized in the naming of Agostino’s next child, Cecilia Agostina, who was baptized on 11 January 1674.⁵¹

⁴⁷ GASTONE VIO, “Antonio Vivaldi e i Vivaldi,” *Informazione e studi vivaldiani*, 4 (1983), p. 90.

⁴⁸ That is, the dedicatee of a libretto was typically a prominent figure who was scheduled to be in Venice at the time of the performance.

⁴⁹ Venice had six footpaths called Calle de’ Forni. This one lay close to the Arsenal.

⁵⁰ Venice, Archivio parrocchiale di San Martino, *Morti, reg. 6 (1633-1677)*, n. 3505.

⁵¹ Venice, Archivio parrocchiale di San Martino, *Battezzati, reg. 4 (1661-1715)*, f. 44, n. 989.

We know almost as little about Margherita, the mother of Agostino II and Gio. Battista. She was probably born between 1612 and 1614, but no baptismal record for her has come to light. We have no clue as to her maiden surname. We know only that she had many children, but it is unlikely that those mentioned here represent a complete list. Her witness statement for Agostino's *stato libero* shows that Margherita was respectful of her associates and superiors. She died after a seventeen-day illness (*febre e cattaro*) on 7 March 1677 and was buried by her sons Augustin and Gio. Battista in the sacristy of San Giovanni in Bragora.⁵² Her age at death was recorded as seventy-four, implying a birth year of 1603.

Social and economic contexts of the Vivaldis' occupations

The dominant character trait that emerges from these generations of Vivaldis as they pass from livelihood to livelihood is their adaptability. In much of Europe, trades stayed in one family for generations. The Vivaldis' openness to change stood apart. Agostino moved from the textile business to foodstuffs in early adulthood, before gradually moving laterally into the wine trade. His younger brother Gio. Battista side-stepped the wine trade to become a violinist. Gio. Battista's son Antonio, who was trained as a priest, became a musician and composer of international repute. It was a family in which no one followed a local precedent.

These changes took place in social and economic contexts that are unfamiliar to or at least unobserved by most musicians. Agostino I must have entered the textile trade at a time when the wool and silk industries of the Veneto were reaching their plateau. The cloth taken to Venice by Agostino II may have been destined for export, perhaps to Germany and Holland. Because of its proximity to the Fondaco de' Tedeschi, the parish of SS. Apostoli was well positioned for export. Venice was also a convergence point for a variety of textiles—silk cloth being a specialty of Vicenza, silk thread one associated with Verona and Bergamo. Silk was essential for decorative fabrics including velvet (in demand throughout Italy) and damask (much prized in Venice), which could be made from wool or silk. In the late sixteenth century Brescia was one of only five cities where the weaving of grey silk and black velvet, two products in especially high demand, was permitted.⁵³

⁵² Venice, Archivio parrocchiale di San Giovanni in Bragora, *Libro dei morti* 9 (1675-1705), f. 34.

⁵³ This account is based on EDOARDO DEMO, "Wool and Silk. The urban textile industry of the Venetian mainland (15th-17th centuries)," in *At the centre of the old world: Trade and manufacturing in Venice and the*

The growth of the Venetian wine trade over the course of Agostino II's working years was nothing short of spectacular. His father-in-law, Giovanni Floighen, was the apparent architect of Agostino's career transition. Floighen, when we first encountered him in 1664, was a bread distributor. The possibilities for symbiosis in the distribution of other consumables were no doubt considerable. After Agostino moved in the 1670s with his growing family to the parish of San Martino, he was in an enviable location for supplying both departing galleys and Arsenal workers. The Arsenal offered a huge consumer base for wine, most of it watered down and delivered via a special fountain, to slake the thirst of its workers throughout their long days. The estimated amounts of "water-wine" consumed by Arsenal workers added up to an impressive 600,000 liters for the year of 1660.⁵⁴ We have no idea what share of this figure (if any) was supplied by Agostino and his father-in-law, but in the 1680's the Floighen-Vivaldi company was considered the wine supplier of choice by the Bavarian court.⁵⁵

Gio. Battista's transition to a musical career

***Seicento* Brescians who marked a path to the musical future**

When we turn to Gio. Battista Vivaldi's first two decades in Venice, it is difficult not to imagine some subliminal attraction to a continuing Brescian identity.⁵⁶ He was nine years old. His family had been attached to the church that valued music (San Giovanni Evangelista) for generations before he was born. The church's *maestro* at the turn into the seventeenth century was Floriano Canale (fl 1575-1612), a composer of substantial energy and talent with lateral interests in medicine and astronomy. (Canale's name appears from time to time as an officiant in the church's baptismal registers.) Its location near numerous

Venetian mainland, ed. PAOLA LANARO (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2006), pp. 217-244.

⁵⁴ ROBERT C. DAVIS, "Venetian shipbuilders and the fountain of wine," *Past and Present*, 156 (Aug. 1997), pp. 55-86; see table on p. 78.

⁵⁵ Work-in-progress.

⁵⁶ Many enlightening articles describe the innovations of Brescian music in the sixteenth century. Among them RODOLFO BARONICINI's "Origini del violino e prassi strumentale in Padania: "sonadori di violini" bresciani attivi a Venezia in ambito devozionale (1540-1600)," *Liuteria e musica strumentale a Brescia tra cinque e seicento*, *Atti del convegno, I: Sessione organologica*, ed. MARCO BIZZARINI - BERNARDO FALCONI - UGO RAVASIO (Brescia: Fondazione Civiltà, 1992), pp. 157-219, is especially important. We read of invitations to Brescian musicians by Venetian merchants' guilds (the Scuole Grandi di San Rocco and Santa Maria della Carità). Baroncini has rigorously explored potential sources of information on musical performance in Brescia in the time of the early Vivaldis only to be deflected by the complete absence of surviving guild records after 1560s.

violin- and cittern-makers favored a thriving musical environment. The side-chapel painting of Santa Cecilia (shown in Figure 1), which is undated, is a reminder of this connection. For Gio. Battista, who was baptized here in 1655, an odd linkage,⁵⁷ apparently arbitrary in nature, connected them to the Venetian church of San Salvatore, where they worshipped after their move to Venice's Fondamente del Carbon (1729). It was in this church that Gio. Battista was buried in 1736.

We have no reason to suppose that Gio. Battista, once he was in Venice, crossed the path of Biagio Marini, in Venice, but Marini, a Brescian of considerable social standing and a precocious gift in playing and composing for the violin, spent his twilight years in Padua, where he was employed in the service of the bishop Giorgio Corner.⁵⁸ A touch of irony lurks in the fact that Gio. Battista's son, Antonio, and Marini's grandson, the scenographer Bernardo Canal, collaborated on several productions at the Teatro Sant'Angelo in the 1710s and, briefly, in Rome.⁵⁹

It is certain that Gio. Battista and Antonio were well acquainted with Brescia's most famous composer, Carlo Francesco Pollarolo. Several members of the prolific Pollarolo family were prominent church musicians in Brescia. Pollarolo succeeded his father as organist at the cathedral in 1676, becoming head of music there in 1680, and assuming musical direction at the Accademia degli Erranti the following year. Among his Brescian appointments was one at SS. Nazaro e Celso (1683). It required his presence on high feasts. In relatively few years he assumed analogous positions in Venetian institutions.

Carlo Francesco and his family resettled permanently in Venice in 1690, when he was appointed an organist at San Marco. He was named *vice maestro* two years later. In Venice he became better-known as a composer for the stage than for the church, although he served San Marco until his death (1723). The musical symbiosis between Brescia and

⁵⁷ Ultimately, the two churches seem to have been linked by common patronage. Venice, Archivio di Stato, *Fondo corporazioni religiosi sopresse, San Gio. Evangelista, Brescia*, buste 1-5, documents highlights of the eighteenth-century Brescian church, where Bernardino Moroni was a major patron. Numerous inventories of his worldly possessions, including many paintings, are itemized in several dozen fascicles. San Salvatore, Venice, was similarly suppressed in the late eighteenth century (Venice, Archivio di Stato, *Fondo corporazioni religiosi sopresse, chiesa di San Salvatore di Venezia*, inventario 228).

⁵⁸ PAOLO ALBERTO RIMONDO, "Il genio natio contaminato da conversazioni composte da inevitabile fatalità': Biagio Marini a Brescia, Neuburg e Padova", *Recercare: Rivista per lo studio e la pratica della musica antica*, 26,1/2 (2014), (1-2) pp. 57-87.

⁵⁹ Canal was the son of Elena Marini, a daughter from Marini's third marriage.

Venice continued until the end of Pollarolo's life. In 1711, Pollarolo recruited Giovanni Battista Vivaldi, his son Antonio, and the San Marco musician Antonio Lotti, first organist at San Marco, to provide music for the feast of Purification at the Brescian church of Santa Maria della Pace.⁶⁰ Pollarolo undoubtedly found musical life in Venice more stimulating and served by better resources. Strikingly, the loss of one third of the Venetian population in 1630-31 had not crippled the city to nearly the same degree as it did Brescia. The musical silence of Giovanni Battista's Brescian childhood is suggested by the absence of any mention of individual members of the (Brescian) *arte de' sonadori* in the voluminous returns of the 1641 *polizze d'estimo*.

Seicento Venetians who fostered musical skills

We have no ready explanation for Gio. Battista's burgeoning interest in music a decade after the family's move to Venice. Agostino II kept him busy with chores, and his name appeared occasionally in wine-business documents into the 1680s. Once Gio. Battista's attention turned towards music, the music he pursued would have been very different from the genres favored in Brescia in recent generations. In Venice, he would have been exposed to string ensembles in chamber venues and theaters, then organ and choral music after he became affiliated with San Marco (1685). Music was everywhere in Venice—on public squares, at wedding celebrations in the smallest *calli*, in various Carnival capers, in many of Venice's 160-plus churches, in its six theaters, and in private palaces when holidays and rites of passage were being marked. By the 1680s Venice was able to support more than 150 professional musicians, the overwhelming majority being string players and, in many cases, *professori di musica* as well.

Sonatas that ignored pre-existing models of "correct" composition (as required for organists' auditions at San Marco) suited beginners with talent but no training. The emphasis on sonority for its own sake may have lured Gio. Battista to precincts where he could develop his skills rapidly. Sonatas explored the myriad possibilities that lay in variations on scales, patterned basses, and the art of diminution—techniques that were easy for good ears to master but were not dependent on the facile sight-reading ability

⁶⁰ OLGA TERMINI, "Vivaldi at Brescia: The Feast of the Purification at the Chiesa della Pace (1711)," *Informazioni e studi vivaldiani: Bollettino annuale dell'Istituto Italiano Antonio Vivaldi*, 9 (1988), pp. 64-74.

desired in church music. Gio. Battista was greatly enabled by a generous degree of musical aptitude to his new calling.

His informal apprenticeship in the later 1670s of the shop of Francesco Bottion (1632-1697) would undoubtedly have offered him exposure to the trio sonata—a composition for two violins and a string or keyboard bass. The shop's entry on the Riva del Vin, near the Rialto, displayed the emblem of *tre cappelli d'oro*. It seems doubtful that this sign of three golden hats was related to the Grimm fairy tale (*Le tre cappelli del diavolo*), in which the presentation of the hats entitled the bearer to the hand of a mythical princess. The less fanciful significance of the imagery would have been to advertise the availability of Bottion's hats and other fine headwear. Bottion was a member of the Venetian barbers' guild,⁶¹ and his enterprise was understandably described as a barbershop. In 1652 sixty-three barbers were registered with the Venetian barbers' guild. Of these, twenty had apprentices who were designated *sonadori* (ensemble instrumentalists), while another seventeen had *musicisti* (keyboard players) as apprentices. The alliance between barbers and the teaching of music is not well understood, but it was widespread across Europe. Bottion concentrated on *sonadori*. His premises contained an armoire of string instruments, a chest of music, and ten seats lining the walls.⁶² The resources would have enabled aspiring players to make music with one another. Although we might suppose that the results were provisional, his players progressed in their training.⁶³

By 1677 one of Bottion's apprentices was Gio. Battista Vivaldi. We have no other account of his musical training. Vivaldi must have departed (or alternatively joined the guild) by 1681, when three other Bottion apprentices—Antonio, Iseppo, and Santo—were cited for their failure to do so. They were reminded that they would not be allowed to play in any public gathering without such an affiliation—and the provision of the requisite dues.

⁶¹ The account of Bottion's premises and activities is based on Gastone Vio, "L'arte dei sonadori e l'insegnamento della musica a Venezia", *Recercare: Rivista per lo studio e la pratica della musica antica*, 18 (2006), pp. 69-111.

⁶² The inventory reported by Vio (*op. cit.*) comes from Venice, Archivio di Stato, *Giudice de petizion, inventari*, busta 395, n. 23.

⁶³ Payments to the *arte de' sonadori* were required. The guilds supported Venetian galleys (E. Selfridge-Field, "Annotated membership lists of the Venetian Instrumentalists' Guild, 1672-1727," *RMA Research Chronicle* (1971), pp. 1-52. [Barber/music-apprentice relationships](#) have been documented in Germany and England in the seventeenth century and in remote parts of southern Italy in recent times.

Vivaldi's relationship with Bottion must have remained cordial, for in his will of 1697, Bottion left his former apprentice a gift of ten ducats. The statutory inventory of his premises taken after his death listed many hats (both black and white) but no wigs; hats made from felt, wool, velvet, and other fabrics; mantillas, collars, and black laces; a silver horn-of-plenty; numerous packages of damask and other fabrics; coins; and a few dozen paintings. We are led to wonder whether Bottion's existence was discovered by Agostino or Gio. Battista in course of delivering some of these resources. The Vivaldis' involvement in the cloth trade seemed to fade away in the later 1660s, soon after the marriage of Agostino II. The prompt for Gio. Battista's sudden interest in music may have been his marriage in 1676 (to Camilla Calicchio). He and his wife spent the first year of their married life on the Campo San Giacomo dall'Orio.

By 1685, Gio. Battista was carving his own path to musical prominence. On 23 April he was hired as a violinist by the new San Marco *maestro di cappella* Giovanni Legrenzi (1626-1690). An active composer for the theater, Legrenzi is likely to have discovered Vivaldi in an opera orchestra. Although not precisely Brescian, Legrenzi was a kinsman in that he came from nearby Bergamo. The *maestro's* motivation for sprucing up the ducal chapel's musical resources in 1685 was probably the imminent arrival of several foreign dignitaries. Four years later (22 July 1689) Vivaldi was additionally engaged as *maestro di strumenti* at the Ospedale dei Mendicanti,⁶⁴ which at the time was considered among the four Venetian *ospedali* to have the most accomplished musicians. It was also during this period that he was invited to play a violin solo for the Elevation of the Host during mass at San Marco. This called for playing so plaintive that communicants would be moved to weep for their redemption. Piety reached its peak in the later 1680s, and, in some indirect sense, music responded very nimbly.

A black sheep named Zuan Paolo Vivaldi

When Agostino II died in 1693, most of his children were grown. His eldest son, Zuan Paolo, inevitably involved himself in the wine trade but not as a supplier. He worked in a government office, where his task was to collect duties on wine. He partnered with

⁶⁴ I explore this briefly in my book *Pallade Veneta: Writings about Music in Venetian Society, 1650-1750* (Venice: Fondazione Ugo e Olga Levi, 1985), but it will receive fuller treatment in my forthcoming study of Vivaldi.

Gasparo Salvioni, who kept the office's books. The crime of which the two were found guilty in 1705 was embezzlement—from the Venetian government. The case was unusual enough to cause a plaque to be placed on the north wall of the ducal courtyard. It reads, "Gio. Paulo Vivaldi, già contador all'ufficio del dacio del vin, e Gasparo Salvioni, già scontro nello stesso ufficio, restarono banditi come ministri infedeli, e come rei di grossissimo intacco della casa dell'ufficio del dacio del vin." Zuan Paolo was hardly a throwback to his homonymous great-grandfather, although the word *zoso* in Gio. Paulo's 1588 *polizza d'estimo* [Document 5] may refer to gambling debts.

Sporadic reports of Zuan Paolo's execution have proved to be false. Earlier misadventures show that the Vivaldis were perennially adept at avoiding the punishments officialdom tried to impose on them. In most cases banishment from the Republic meant a sentence of exclusion for three years, but a financial penalty in lieu of two years' banishment could often be negotiated. Zuan Paolo must have pursued this route. He was somewhere in the vicinity of Venice at the end of 1708, when his uncle Gio. Battista Vivaldi registered a loan from this nephew of twenty-five ducats. The uncle offered as collateral two diamond rings, a silver box, and two rare violins—one Brescian, by [Paolo] Virchi, and one Cremonese, by [Antonio] Stradivari. Because the lender was not personally present, additional safeguards were required.⁶⁵ The agreement was finalized in Venice on 11 December.

This information colors the perspective we have formed of Gio. Battista. To judge by his hiring at San Marco in 1685 and at the Mendicanti in 1689, he progressed rapidly in his career as a violinist. His interest was clearly in solo playing, which was part of his remit at San Marco. Yet it comes as a surprise that he owned two rare violins by 1708.⁶⁶ This shows not only that he had the means to acquire such instruments but also that he had the ear to justify their acquisition. The availability of such instruments indicates that when Gio. Battista's son Antonio began to compose and perform concertos variously featuring one,

⁶⁵ The credit for discovering this source—Venice, Archivio di Stato, *Giudici del Mobile, dimande*, busta 69, c. 261—belongs to Beth L. Glixon (2007), to whom I offer cordial thanks.

⁶⁶ It is not possible to determine the source of these instruments *en route* to Gio. Battista. STEFANO PIO's precise inventories (*Liuteria veneziana, 1640-1760*, Venice: Venetian Research, 2004) do not mention these instruments among the Pietà's holdings. (Gio. Battista never worked at the Pietà.) The Mendicanti had a valuable collection amassed by Alberto Gozzi, but descriptions are general and details of individual instruments are lacking.

two, or four soloists (in *L'estro armonico*, 1711) his father may have supplied the violins on which they were first performed.

In ways that become apparent only in the unfolding of Antonio's career, we see the accretions of a generalized ability to prevail irrespective of the immediate context. The Vivaldis dealt with challenges by forming alliances, however transitory, and by indulging the needs, however foreign, of those whom they chose to honor. What becomes eminently clear in the career of Antonio is that each new opportunity was evaluated not on the basis of its musical merits, nor in alignment with existing social expectations, but instead by its potential to be of benefit in the future. For Antonio, who was thirty years old when his father arranged the loan from Zuan Paolo, this approach proved to be more effective as the years passed. Yet we will notice many indications that Antonio was managed by his father in much the same way as Gio. Battista had been managed by Agostino II.