

ALBERTI AT RIMINI:
THE PROCESS OF PATRONAGE IN FIFTEENTH-CENTURY ITALY

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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In 1450, Leon Battista Alberti was hired by the condottiere Sigismondo Malatesta to redesign the church of San Francesco in Rimini, now known as the Tempio Malatestiano. Alberti's design has been recognized as the first classically-inspired church façade of the Renaissance. For the other decorative facets of this project Sigismondo employed accomplished, high profile personalities: Piero della Francesca, Matteo de' Pasti, Agostino di Duccio. Yet Alberti had a notable absence of architectural training or experience. This dissertation explains why Alberti was selected for this high-profile commission, despite his lack of architectural résumé. Therefore I approach the Tempio Malatestiano not as an exemplar of Italian Renaissance architecture, but rather as the starting point of an effort to understand the various forces at work in the process of artistic patronage in fifteenth-century Italy.

This study investigates how and why Sigismondo and Alberti came together to produce the monument of the Tempio Malatestiano. The analysis addresses the complex issue of the definition of the architect in the transitional period of the mid-fifteenth century – a development in which Alberti himself was a key player – and explores the backgrounds of both protagonists in an effort to determine why Alberti was chosen over

the many established architects of the period. I show that Alberti had many other qualifications in his myriad intellectual activities; in this regard he was no exception to Sigismondo's rule of hiring accomplished courtiers. Furthermore, Sigismondo's patronage agenda had as much to do with his personal and political aims and circumstances as it did artistic ones, and I show how only Alberti could satisfy these goals. In the process a new view of Alberti's important and controversial time in Rome is proposed. Finally, this study contributes to the wider field of Alberti studies in its discussion of the ways in which Alberti's other intellectual activities contributed to his career as architect and how these played out in the design of the Tempio Malatestiano.

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Introduction

Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) is one of the best-known, and well-studied, architects of the early Renaissance. He was born in 1404, the illegitimate son of Lorenzo Alberti, a Florentine merchant who directed a commercial enterprise that reached throughout Europe. As a result of his father's exile from Florence by the Albizzi family, Alberti spent most of his life traveling throughout the Italian peninsula. As a youth he studied with the humanist Gasparino da Barzizza in Padua and went on to take a law degree at Bologna. Alberti returned to Florence in 1429, and through the 1430s he spent time there as well as in Rome as a member of the papal courts of Eugenius IV and Nicholas V, and in Ferrara at the humanist court of Leonello d'Este. Alberti's extensive humanist writings include treatises on painting, sculpture, and architecture, in addition to those on mathematics, government, and society. His 1450 design of the Tempio Malatestiano for Sigismondo Malatesta in Rimini was the first of an architectural career that later included important religious and secular commissions in Florence and Mantua.

Alberti's buildings are included in every standard art history textbook and are featured on any tourist's itinerary of Florence, Mantua, and Rimini. He worked with the most powerful figures of his age, including no fewer than three popes, as well as princes and leading merchants. In spite of this prominence, however, Alberti's buildings are for the most part poorly understood. Despite years of archival toils by various scholars, we still do not know precisely how Alberti intended many of his buildings to look (partially because none of them were completed in his lifetime) or even exactly what his role was in their design and construction. Alberti's buildings have traditionally been seen as characteristic of early Renaissance classicism and simultaneously of his personal

approach to architectural design that aims at incorporating native styles. But this general characterization takes Alberti's involvement as a matter of course and fails to account for the unique circumstances of his participation. For art historians, Alberti was an architect, much as the contemporaries with whom he is usually discussed, Brunelleschi and Rossellino, were architects. In point of fact, however, Alberti was not an architect for the first forty-five years of his life. He was a writer, a poet, a linguist, an athlete, and an engineer, but at no time during this early period did Alberti acquire the traditional training of an architect or practice architecture.

This fact did not stop Sigismondo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini (1417–1468), a wealthy condottiere on the rise in the mid-fifteenth century Italy, from enlisting Alberti in his most prominent artistic commission, the renovation of San Francesco, his family church in Rimini, an Adriatic seaside town. The commission entailed the construction of a new marble shell encasing a thirteenth-century Franciscan church, beginning with a chapel dedicated by Sigismondo's mistress, Isotta degli Atti, in 1447. Subsequent facets of the project included the application of a marble façade and the transformation of the remaining seven chapels. With a sculptural program based on the themes of the Planets, Angels, and Liberal Arts by the Florentine Agostino di Duccio, and a fresco portrait of Sigismondo Malatesta with his patron saint by Piero della Francesca, San Francesco was to be a showpiece of the mid-fifteenth century art and architecture.

Why then did Sigismondo choose Alberti, who had no architectural training or experience, to design the prominent renovation of San Francesco? This dissertation seeks to answer this critical question by investigating the patron's goals for the project and how Alberti, given his specific and unusual experience, could help to achieve them. This

query is considerably more complex than it first appears and the answer, like its subject, is multi-faceted. Like the proverbial elephant and the blind men, each of whom “saw” something different depending upon which part of the animal they touched, Alberti is an ever-changing figure, eluding our intellectual grasp, a vivid image dissolving into thin air just as we think we are upon it.¹ Yet, as this dissertation will show, this very complexity is in fact the answer to our simple inquiry.

The first chapter presents the history and appearance of the building and its renovation, its role in the city of Rimini, and introduces Sigismondo Malatesta. Chapter Two reviews the extensive literature on the Tempio Malatestiano and Alberti, establishing the lacunae that exist in both fields. The third chapter reviews the roles of architect and of patron in this period and considers some of the other contenders that Sigismondo passed over or eliminated when he made the unprecedented choice of Alberti for this important commission. Chapter Four explores the role Alberti played in Sigismondo’s humanist court and discusses Alberti’s qualifications for the commission beyond and in spite of his lack of experience in the practical side of the fine arts, that is, his stellar reputation as a man of great humanist learning. I argue that Alberti’s academic background and intellectual experience in Florence and Rome were as attractive to Sigismondo as any portfolio would have been. The final chapter examines the renovation of San Francesco – its architecture, sculpture and painting components – in light of Alberti’s unusual and specific experience and artistic theories. I will show further how Alberti helped Sigismondo to accomplish his patronage goals in the Tempio in ways not yet acknowledged in the limited traditional attribution to him of the new façade.

¹ I first came across this analogy in a discussion some years ago with David Marsh who also employs it in his review of current Alberti literature: “Leon Battista Alberti at the Millennium,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 55 (2002): 1028–37.

While the early period of any artist's career – for that matter any aspect of Alberti's multifaceted career – always merits investigation, there are further justifications for selecting Rimini as the subject for the study of this phenomenon of the development of the role of the architect in this critical, transitional period. Due to the unusual circumstances of its unproven, indeed untrained architect, the San Francesco commission becomes an interesting case study for trends in artistic patronage of the period, in particular the process by which an artist was chosen for a commission.

This work seeks to contribute to the larger field of Alberti scholarship and patronage studies by proposing a logical question that has never been raised, thereby casting a wider net regarding this building and expanding the inquiry beyond the traditional scope of stylistic attribution. This will be achieved by bringing Alberti the polymath and courtier – rather than just Alberti the architect – to bear on the process of patronage, on the commission, and on the building. Finally I will relate the three protagonists, Sigismondo, Alberti, and the Tempio to one another, by elucidating the ties that bind them and providing new insight into the motivations and mechanics of artistic patronage and how their relationships played out in the monument we know today as the Tempio Malatestiano.

Chapter 1: The Commission and the Patron

The Building and its Renovation

The church of San Francesco is situated in the southeastern section of the original walls of Rimini, facing northwest onto a small forecourt at the intersection of via Quattro Novembre and via Tempio Malatestiano (Fig. 1). In 1257, the tenth-century church on the site, Santa Maria in Trivio, was transferred to the Franciscan monks of Pomposa who rebuilt it and rededicated it to St. Francis.² From 1447 until 1456, Sigismondo Malatesta, signore of Rimini, whose family had long patronized the church, undertook its renovation. Several artists contributed to the various components of the renovation. Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72) provided the design for the façade around 1450.³ Agostino di Duccio (1418-c.1484) executed the interior sculptural decoration of the Tempio from 1449 to 1457 based on a program devised by Sigismondo's court humanists.⁴ Piero della

² Luigi Tonini, Compendio della Storia di Rimini. Parte Prima: Dalle origini all'anno 1500 (Rimini: Tipografia di Emilio Renzetti, 1895), 525; Pier Giorgio Pasini, ed., Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico (Milan: Skira, 2000), 195. Pasini's chronology is based on documents published by Oreste Delucca, Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche (Rimini: Stefano Pataconi 1997).

³ Tonini claims Alberti was in Rimini as early as 1447. Tonini, Compendio della Storia di Rimini. Parte Prima: Dalle origini all'anno 1500, 526. But Ricci dates his arrival as 1450 based on Matteo de' Pasti's commemorative medal. Corrado Ricci, Il Tempio Malatestiano (Milan, Rome: Bestetti & Tumminelli, 1925), 253. This date is open to interpretation, see below. As will be discussed, Alberti provided his designs by correspondence from Rome. On the dating of his design, see Cecil Grayson, Alberti and the Tempio Malatestiano: An Autograph Letter from Leon Battista Alberti to Matteo de' Pasti (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1957); Franco Borsi, Leon Battista Alberti. The Complete Works (New York: Electa/Rizzoli, 1986); Robert Tavernor, On Alberti and the Art of Building (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Anthony Grafton, Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); Stanko Kokole, "Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style" (Ph.D diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1997), 22–23, n. 85–87; Charles Mitchell, "The Imagery of the Tempio Malatestiano," Studi Romagnoli 2 (1951): 77–90; Charles Burroughs, From Signs to Design (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 211; Piero Scapecechi, "Victoris Imago. Problemi relativi al tempio Malatestiano," Arte Cristiana 74 (1986): 155–64. The dating of Alberti's façade will be discussed in due course.

⁴ Ricci, Il Tempio Malatestiano, Pasini, Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico, 104, 158; Kokole, "Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style," 5. Charles Yriarte brought the name of Agostino to light

Francesca (c.1420–92) painted a fresco of Sigismondo Kneeling Before St. Sigismund in the Cell of the Relics in 1451 (Fig. 2). Matteo de' Pasti (c.1420–67) served as supervisor of the worksite and cast several bronze commemorative medals of the building and its patron throughout the 1440s and '50s.⁵

The renovation entailed two phases. The first campaign, begun in 1447, concerned only two chapels, the Chapel of St. Sigismund and the Chapel of Isotta. Around 1450, the project expanded to include the remodeling of four additional chapels and a new façade and shell to encase the existing thirteenth-century brick church.⁶ Documentation pertaining to the renovation is sparse. The first record of Sigismondo Malatesta's undertaking at San Francesco is a papal bull of September 12, 1447, in which Pope Nicholas V granted Sigismondo's mistress, Isotta degli Atti, permission to donate 500 gold florins to "repair and remodel" the Chapel of St. Michael.⁷ Later that year, an anonymous Riminese chronicle refers to the blessing of the foundation stone for the Chapel of St. Sigismund on October 31, 1447.⁸ Sigismondo's patronage rights to the Chapel of St. Sigismund were reconfirmed and extended by a papal bull of 1448.⁹

as the author of the reliefs. Un condottiere au XVe siècle. Rimini; études sur les lettres et les arts à la cour des Malatesta d'après les papiers d'état des archives d'Italie (Paris, J. Rothschild, 1882).

⁵ These various facets of the campaign and their authors will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

⁶ Ricci's monograph is still indispensable. Chapter IX, pp. 217–51 addresses the history of the interior. Invaluable as well are Brandi's volume, Cesare Brandi, Il Tempio Malatestiano (Turin: Edizioni Radio italiana, 1956), and the numerous studies by Pier Giorgio Pasini. The most recent review and re-assessment of these findings and exposition of remaining problems and clarification of the chronology is Charles Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano," Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 55 (1992): 51–154. Kokole's extensive study also sets forth the chronology insofar as it pertains to the interior decoration by Agostino. See note 4 above.

⁷ Pasini, Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico, 196.

⁸ A.F. Massera, ed. Cronache malatestiane dei secoli XIV e XV, Rerum italicorum scriptores, xv, 2 (Bologna, 1924), 121. (more easily accessible in Delucca, Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche, 490; and Pasini, Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico, 196.)

⁹ Pasini, Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico, 196–97. Patronage rights had already been confirmed; this bull extended those rights to the chapel and its content and endowment and

Two other important pieces of evidence that refer specifically to Alberti's design survive. Matteo de' Pasti's commemorative foundation medal displays the projected façade of the church, which was left unfinished (Fig. 3). The medal is the only indication we have of Alberti's intentions for the façade as a whole. The medal is dated 1450, but this is accepted to be a commemorative date, referring to the year Sigismondo made his vow to reconstruct the church.¹⁰ The date also coincided with the Jubilee Holy Year declared by Pope Nicholas V. The medal, however, likely was struck much later, in 1453 or 1454.¹¹

The only evidence regarding Alberti's own ideas about the San Francesco project is a letter he wrote from Rome on November 18, 1454, to the construction supervisor on site, Matteo de' Pasti, and his builders.¹² The letter is, in fact, the only document that directly connects Alberti to the commission at all. First published in Venice in 1779, it was not again seen until 1956, when it entered the collection of the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, allowing for its publication in 1957 by Cecil Grayson. In it Alberti discusses structural concerns related to the façade, roofing system, projected dome, and windows of the church.

In addition to the redecoration of the interior, there were structural concerns in the project. Alberti's façade and exterior preserved the existing external walls within, but, as Charles Hope described, the interior chapels were altered in what he describes as an "ad

released Sigismondo from any financial obligation to the friars of the church. Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano," 59.

¹⁰ As we learn from the Greek inscriptions on the exterior of the church; see below.

¹¹ On the dating of the medal see Charles Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano," 52, n. 4.

¹² Grayson, *Alberti and the Tempio Malatestiano: An Autograph Letter from Leon Battista Alberti to Matteo de' Pasti*.

hoc” manner. One result of these changes is the irregularity we find in the dimensions of the interior chapels. For instance, the balustrades of the Chapels of St. Michael and St. Raphael do not project as far from the nave wall as those on either side of them. Likewise, the widths of the various chapels are not consistent.¹³ The entrance piers of the first two chapels on either side (the Chapel of St. Sigismund on the right and the Chapel of the Madonna dell’Acqua/Ancestors on the left) also project further into the nave than do the subsequent ones. In turn, the width of the nave is inconsistent. The enlargement of the spaces that the patron desired necessitated their expansion on the interior, but enabled the retention of the existing exterior structure.¹⁴

The unfinished façade of white Istrian marble (Fig. 4) features a central arch flanked by two side bays in its lower story, a scheme that echoes that of the nearby ancient Arch of Augustus (Fig. 5).¹⁵ Four engaged, fluted Composite columns define the tripartite scheme. An inscription in classical lettering, proclaiming Sigismondo as its patron and creator, runs across the entablature:

SIGISMVNDVS PANDVLFVS MALATESTA PANDVLF . F[ILIVS] .
V[OTO] FECIT . ANNO . GRATIAE . MCCCCL¹⁶

¹³ Hope goes on to enumerate various decorative inconsistencies as well: differing numbers of reliefs among chapels and differing articulation of balustrades and entrance piers. Hope, “The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano,” 51.

¹⁴ As Alberti’s design was for the exterior, these inconsistencies cannot be attributed to him or his lack of building experience. As we will see in Chapter 4, his influence on the interior was limited to advising on the decorative program.

¹⁵ This model will be discussed in Chapter 5.

¹⁶ Helen Ettlinger notes the ambiguity of the abbreviation “F V” in the inscription, providing various possible interpretations. The most obvious is “Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Son of Pandolfo, makes this offering (i.e., the remodeled church), in the Year of Grace 1450.” But in her interpretation of the façade as intended for the tomb of Sigismondo’s brother Galeotto Roberto, she suggests that “the ‘F’ could also be read as ‘filio,’ thus changing the meaning to ‘Sigismondo...makes this voto (in the sense of something promised) to the son of Pandolfo, i.e., Galeotto Roberto.” Helen Ettlinger, “The Image of a Renaissance Prince: Sigismondo Malatesta and the Arts of Power” (Ph.D diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1989), 224–25. See also her article, “Sepulchre on the Façade: A Re-Evaluation of Sigismondo Malatesta’s

The unfinished upper story continues the tripartite division of the lower. The façade is peppered with porphyry and various colored marble slabs (Fig. 6). Other decorative elements include garlands with Sigismondo's emblematic elephants, the Malatesta coat of arms, and the intertwined S and I monogram of Sigismondo and his mistress, Isotta degli Atti (Fig. 7).

The exterior flanks of the church each feature seven arches supported by piers (Fig. 8). The podium of the facade continues here and raises the arcade above the ground. Under the arches on the right side¹⁷ are sarcophagi housing the remains of Sigismondo's courtiers: the poet Basinio da Parma, legal consultant Giusto de' Conti, Greek philosopher Gemisthos Pletho, engineer Roberto Valturio, and doctors Gentile and Giuliano Arnolfi. On the right corner, a plaque bearing a Greek inscription dedicates the building to God and the commune of Rimini (Fig. 9).

Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, son of Pandolfo, Bringer of Victory, having survived many and most grave dangers during the Italic War, in recognition of his deeds accomplished so felicitously and with such courage, for he obtained what he had prayed for in such a critical juncture, has erected at his magnanimous expense this temple to the Immortal God and to the City, and left a memorial worthy of fame and full of piety.¹⁸

Rebuilding of San Francesco in Rimini." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 53 (1990): 133–43, and below, p. 183ff.

¹⁷ Ettlinger speculates that the left side may have been vacant because it formed part of the cloister and to allow for the burial of religious figures, in compensation for the loss of the graveyard to accommodate the new church expansion. Ettlinger, "The Image of a Renaissance Prince," 219.

¹⁸ The inscription was furnished by Ciriaco d'Ancona during his stay in Rimini in 1449. Translation from Marilyn Lavin, "Piero della Francesca's Fresco of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta before St. Sigismund: *Theoi Athanatoi Kai Tei Polei*," *Art Bulletin* 56 (1974): 345–74; Lavin, "The Antique Source for the Tempio Malatestiano's Greek Inscriptions," *Art Bulletin* 59 (1977): 421–22.

The interior architecture of the church is typical of the late Gothic style: the pointed arches of the chapels and foliate windows are a notable contrast to the classicism of the façade. The church's Latin Cross plan is comprised of a nave with a wooden roof and eight vaulted side chapels (Figs. 10, 11). Fluted Corinthian pilasters designate the bays of the nave, and an eighteenth-century apse is defined by a round arch set upon fluted Corinthian pilasters. The spandrels of the chapels' Gothic pointed arches are decorated with carved foliate motifs and multiple instances of Sigismondo's personal shield. A frieze of garlands and Malatesta shields surmounted by slender fluted pilasters links the enclosed sacristies and the open chapels.

Eight of the current twelve subsidiary spaces were remodeled by Sigismondo and have traditionally been known by their decorative programs rather than their sacred dedications. In addition to two closed rooms are six chapels. On the left from entrance to apse are the Chapel of the Sibyls (dedicated to Our Lady of the Water), the Cell of the Fallen, the Chapel of the Children's Games (St. Raphael), and Chapel of the Liberal Arts (St. Augustine). On the right are the Chapel of St. Sigismund, the Cell of the Relics (the Sacristy which housed Piero della Francesca's fresco of Sigismondo with his patron saint),¹⁹ the Chapel of Isotta (St. Michael the Archangel), and the Chapel of the Planets (St. Jerome). Each chapel is defined by a marble balustrade projecting from the threshold and a Gothic pointed arch, on which the Latin inscription of the church's façade again proclaims Sigismondo's patronage (Fig. 12).²⁰ Each pier supporting the pointed arches is decorated with relief panels related to the iconographic theme of each chapel.

¹⁹ A June, 2012 visit revealed that the fresco has been re/dis-located from its original siting in the sacristy to a more visible location in the last chapel on the right, part of the eighteenth-century renovation.

²⁰ The irregular arrangement and dimensions of the floor plan is discussed by Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano," 51–2, 57. Tavernor speculates that the tomb was originally intended to rest

The tomb of Sigismondo is discretely attached to the right interior façade wall (Fig. 13).²¹ The simple composition of white stone is relatively restrained in the context of the ornate Gothic style that pervades the rest of the interior. Sigismondo's simple inscribed sarcophagus sits atop a base decorated with a garland of fruits suspended between the Malatesta family's and Sigismondo's personal crests. The sarcophagus is crowned by a pediment faced with red and green porphyry; the wall behind it echoes the façade with two small roundels of green porphyry. A frieze of acanthus leaves and a simple egg and dart motif adorn and unite two decorated Corinthian piers. A round arch continues the theme of fruits and leaves and its soffit bears flowers as well as the Malatesta crest and intertwined SI monogram. The tympanum is notably devoid of embellishment while two rectangular relief panels inserted into the wall above the round arch portray a laurel-crowned Sigismondo in profile. The face of the sarcophagus bears a classical inscription:

SVM. SIGISMUNDVS. MALATESTE. E. SANGVINE. GENTIS.
PANDVLFVS. GENITOR. PATRIA. FLAMINIA. EST.
VITAM. OBIIT. VII. ID. OCTOB. ETATIS. SVE. ANN. I. ET. L. MENS. III. D.
XX. ET. MCCCCLXVIII

Next to Sigismondo's tomb, the first chapel on the right is dedicated to his patron saint, St. Sigismund, and was part of Sigismondo's initial renovation campaign. The threshold pilasters depict allegorical figures of the Cardinal and Theological virtues as well as youths holding the Malatesta crest, all sculpted in high relief (Fig. 14). Classical festoons and cornucopias, combined with the heraldic motif of Malatesta crest sit atop the columns of the balustrade. An all'antica Tuscan tabernacle holds a figure of St.

beneath the planned dome depicted in Matteo de' Pasti's commemorative medal. Tavernor, On Alberti and the Art of Building, 68.

²¹ Ricci, Il Tempio Malatestiano, 336–64.

Sigismund seated between two Malatesta elephants, and a frieze below is inscribed with his name (Fig. 15). Above the seated saint, a large frescoed sun radiates golden rays against a rich blue ground. On the right wall an angel carved in the round bears a carved billowing curtain held open by two pairs of angels carved in schacciato relief, a space likely intended for the tomb of Sigismondo (Fig. 16).²²

Adjacent to the Chapel of St. Sigismund a small portal facing the nave marks a sacristy, the Cell of the Relics (Fig. 17). The bronze doors are outlined by monochromatic marble panels and punctuated by two roundels of green porphyry along with six instances of Sigismondo's crest, all surmounted by a large circle of red porphyry. A seated figure of Fortitude sits in the architrave. Two schacciato putti ride dolphins in the spandrels above. The simple door opens onto a small vaulted room; on the entrance wall above the door is Piero della Francesca's 1451 fresco, Sigismondo Malatesta Kneeling Before St. Sigismund (Fig. 2), which will be considered in detail in Chapter 5.

Isotta degli Atti's burial chapel, the Chapel of St. Michael, sits to the east of the sacristy (Fig. 18). Along with the Chapel of St. Sigismund, this was part of the original project mentioned in the 1447 papal bull that already referred to it as the Chapel of Angels.²³ A colonnaded balustrade of white marble with ten standing putti holding Malatesta shields define the entrance to the chapel. Pilasters on either side of the threshold are each decorated with six of Agostino di Duccio's white reliefs of music

²² In addition to the accounts by Ricci and Pasini, a detailed chronology and evolution of the Chapel of St. Sigismund is provided by Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano," 68–81, including his speculation on the tomb and his hypothetical reconstruction of it, pp. 73–80, 84. See also Stanko Kokole's thorough study on the Tempio's decorative and iconographic program: Kokole, "Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style," especially pp. 11–49.

²³ Kokole, "Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style," 17–18. Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano," 58–9.

making angels and putti against a blue ground. The top two panels on each pilaster bear the SI crest.

The altar wall features a statue of St. Michael Archangel in a tabernacle, and on the right wall is a large painted wooden crucifix of around 1300 by Giotto. The most prominent feature of the space however – and the source of the chapel’s alternate name, the Chapel of Isotta – is the ornate tomb of Isotta degli Atti suspended high on the left wall, the entirety of which retains traces of decorative frescoes. Malatesta elephants standing on corbels support the sarcophagus, and an inscribed gold panel held by putti identifies its occupant: D. ISOTTAE. ARIMINENSI. B.M. SACRVM. MCCCL.²⁴ Again the SI crest appears, this time sitting prominently atop the sarcophagus. A canopy of marble drapery is spread behind the entire tomb ensemble, cascading down from a military helmet and crown. On the wall high above, two elephants in profile with unfurled trunks bear banners that read the Malatesta family motto *TEMPUS LOQVENDI* and *TEMPUS ITACENDI*.²⁵

The third chapel on the right, the Chapel of St. Jerome, is referred to as the Chapel of the Planets for its planetary and zodiacal imagery based on an iconographic program devised by court poet Basinio da Parma and executed by Agostino di Duccio from 1454 to 1455 (Fig. 19).²⁶ The crab of Sigismondo’s astrological sign Cancer rises above a vista of the city of Rimini on the face of the left pilaster (Fig. 20). The panels on the threshold pilasters each display six allegorical figures of the planets in conjunction

²⁴ “Mistress Isotta of Rimini. Sacred place of her good memory 1450.” Hope notes that one of Pius’s criticisms was the reference in this inscription to Isotta as divine, but Hope maintains Ricci’s interpretation as “dominae.” Hope, “The Early History,” 72.

²⁵ “Time for speaking,” “Time for silence.”

²⁶ A figure of St. Jerome was located above its altar until the eighteenth century. Kokole, “Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style,” 14, and Chapter 7, pp. 513–669. The iconographic program is investigated by Mitchell, “The Imagery of the Tempio Maltestiano.”

with their corresponding zodiac houses: Diana (of the moon), Saturn, Capricorn, Mercury, Venus, Gemini, Taurus, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Jupiter, Aquarius, and Mars (Fig. 21). The nocturnal characters adorn the external face of pilaster, the diurnal the interior. On the vault of the arch, the Sun overlooks the entire composition. Malatesta imprese highlight a balustrade of red Verona marble and are interspersed with white fluted pilasters. The empty tabernacle on the altar wall of red Verona marble once housed a statue of the titular saint.²⁷ A frieze of garlands and Malatesta crests runs along the wall below the tabernacle and the Venetian Gothic windows on either side of it.

The first chapel on the left is the Chapel of the Ancestors (Fig. 22). It sits directly across the nave from the Chapel of St. Sigismund, and was conceived as a pendant to it. It houses the remains of Malatesta ancestors as well as those of two of Sigismondo's children. It was originally consecrated to the Martyrs, but is today dedicated to the Madonna dell'Acqua for the fifteenth-century alabaster Pietà in the altar wall's tabernacle²⁸ that is invoked in periods of drought.²⁹ Ten figures of sibyls and two of prophets³⁰ sculpted nearly in the round and seated in classical niches grace the entry pilasters.³¹ These pilasters are each supported by two elephants and profile portrait reliefs of Sigismondo wearing a laurel wreath of victory (Fig. 23). A white marble balustrade is carved into crests, SI monogram and festoons, with columns surmounted by standing

²⁷ Pasini, Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico, 142.

²⁸ The original appearance of this chapel was vastly altered in a nineteenth-century intervention by Luigi Poletti, from 1856–1868, which included the replacement of the fifteenth-century alabaster Pietà by the Maestro di Rimini with the current eighteenth-century group in the tabernacle. Pasini, Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico, 174; Luciano Luizzi and Pier Giorgio Pasini, Il Tempio Malatestiano. Un finestra su Rimini (Rimini: Ramberti Arti Grafiche, 1997), 15.

²⁹ Anna Ferrari-Bravo, ed., Emilia Romagna (Milano: Touring Club Italiano, 1991), 921.

³⁰ Identified by Kokole as Micah and Isaiah, Kokole, "Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style," 15.

³¹ Only one of the Sybils is securely attributed to Agostino. Pasini, Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico, 174. Kokole, "Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style," Chapter 5, 349–409.

putti. The focal element of the space is an ornate tomb on the left wall: the Arca degli Antenati, which gives this space its common name of the Chapel of the Ancestors. The great tomb sits beneath a canopy of brilliant blue embellished with gold stars and acanthus leaves (Fig. 24). Four fluted pilasters delineate three panels of the tomb's façade. Two side reliefs carved by Agostino in late 1454 depict the Triumphs of Minerva and of Scipio, from whom the Malatesta dynasty was reputed to have descended.³²

Documents indicate that the iconographic program was devised by the most prominent of Sigismondo's court humanists, Roberto Valturio and Poggio Bracciolini.³³ The central panel of the sarcophagus is inscribed:

SIGISMVNDVS PANDVLFVS MALATESTA PANDVLFV F INGENTIBVS
MERITIS PROBITATIS FORTITVDINIS QVE ILLVSTRI GENERI SVO
MAIORIBVS POSTERIS QVE³⁴

A second small sacristy, today the Chapel of the Fallen, sits directly across the nave from the Cell of Relics. Its entry is decorated with four figures of Old Testament heroes and a roundel with a portrait of Sigismondo in its architrave.³⁵

The last two chapels on the left were part of a final stage in the alteration process, one Hope describes as an "ad hoc...series of compromises and adaptations."³⁶ Next to the

³² Pasini reviews the documentary evidence related to the authorship and chronology of this chapel, Pasini, *Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico*, 174. On the tradition of Scipio as Malatesta ancestor, see Kokole, "Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style," 413–30, and Mitchell, "The Imagery of the Tempio Malatestiano."

³³ Luciano Liuzzi and Pier Giorgio Pasini, *Il Tempio Malatestiano* (Rimini: Ramberti arti grafiche, 1997), 15.

³⁴ "Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Son of Pandolfo, [out of] the great rewards of his probity and courage, [set up this sarcophagus] for his illustrious family, ancestors and descendants." Translation by Margaret Ann Zaho, *Imago triumphalis: The Function and Significance of Triumphal Imagery for Italian Renaissance Rulers* (New York: P. Lang, 2004), 75.

³⁵ Ricci, *Il Tempio Malatestiano*, 511–12.

Chapel of the Fallen, is the Chapel of the Children's Games.³⁷ Reliefs of children playing outdoors, swimming and sailing animate the entrance piers (Fig. 25). The original dedication of this chapel is unknown, but at one time it housed the Tomb of the Malatesta Women and from the end of the seventeenth century until the end of the eighteenth, it was dedicated to the Blessed Galeotto Roberto Malatesta and housed the remains of Sigismondo's first two wives, Ginevra d'Este and Polissena Sforza.³⁸ It is now dedicated to St. Raphael. For many of these later reliefs, Agostino was aided by his assistants, including Ottaviano di Duccio, Agostino's younger brother who arrived in Rimini in 1456.³⁹

The last chapel on the left is known as the Chapel of the Liberal Arts for its standing figures of the trivium (grammar, rhetoric and dialectic) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geography, music, and astronomy) (Fig. 26).⁴⁰ Except for that of Apollo, the identification of the remaining figures is uncertain.⁴¹ This was the last chapel altered during Sigismondo's renovation and the panels on the entrance pilasters are the latest work of Agostino, dating from 1455–56. The interior of this final chapel is devoid of decoration. The space has upheld various dedications over the centuries⁴² but is thought

³⁶ Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano," 52.

³⁷ Ricci, *Il Tempio Malatestiano*, 517–28.

³⁸ Pasini, *Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico*, 168 upholds Ricci, *Il Tempio Malatestiano*, 517.

³⁹ Pasini, *Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico*, 168.

⁴⁰ Ricci, *Il Tempio Malatestiano*, 529–57.

⁴¹ On the iconographical choices of this chapel's program and previous interpretations of it, see Anna Eorsi, "Lo studiolo di Lionello d'Este e il programma di Guarino da Verona," *Acta Historiae Artium* 11/1–2 (1975): 15–52; and Catherine King, "Mnemosyne and Calliope in the Chapel of the Muses, San Francesco, Rimini," *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 51 (1988): 186–87. Pasini believes that the program was devised in 1447 by Guarino da Verona. Pasini, *Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico*, 158.

⁴² Pasini, *Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico*, 158, Ricci, *Il Tempio Malatestiano*, 529.

to have been originally consecrated to St. Augustine, as a complement to the chapel of St. Jerome, another Doctor of the Church, directly opposite.⁴³

San Francesco / Tempio Malatestiano

The church of San Francesco in Rimini is officially dedicated to St. Francis but is commonly known as the Tempio Malatestiano. Modern historians have connected this moniker to the egomania of its patron and especially to Pope Pius II's castigation of Sigismondo and epithetical description of the building as a "temple of heathen devil worshippers."⁴⁴ On his famous commemorative medal, Matteo de' Pasti was likely the first to identify San Francesco as a temple, with the inscription "ARIMINI TEMPLVM,"⁴⁵ and the façade as designed and portrayed on the medal certainly evokes that of a classical temple with its raised podium and all'antica ornamentation. Yet, as Helen Ettlinger noted, the reference is not to Sigismondo but to the illustrious city of Rimini.⁴⁶ Indeed, early sources such as the Cronaca Malatestiana, written between 1440 and 1480 by Sigismondo's court historian Gaspare Broglio Tartaglia (1407–1483), consistently refer to the church as simply "chiesa" or San Francesco.⁴⁷

By the seventeenth century, however, San Francesco was frequently referred to as "tempio," a term that at the time was interchangeable with "chiesa." In these cases it was

⁴³ It has been suggested that the intention was to create a decoration symmetrical with that of the chapel opposite (Isotta/San Michele) as much from a formal as conceptual point of view. Luizzi and Pasini, Il Tempio Malatestiano, 16.

⁴⁴ See discussion of Pius and his relationship with Sigismondo below.

⁴⁵ As Hope noted, on the medal and on the altar of the Chapel of St. Sigismund the word templum appears for the first time; it "does not figure in any of the earlier texts relating to his interventions at S. Francesco." Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano," 67.

⁴⁶ Ettlinger, "The Image of a Renaissance Prince," 185; Grayson, Alberti and the Tempio Malatestiano, 229.

⁴⁷ Antonio G. Luciani, ed., Cronaca Malatestiana del secolo XV (Rimini: Bruno Ghigi Editore, 1982).

still associated with its titular saint or the city: “Tempio di San Francesco” or “Tempio Arimini,”⁴⁸ as in the famed medal. The Tempio’s prominence in Rimini was recognized by a Napoleonic decree in 1805 that designated it as the Cathedral of the city.⁴⁹ Yet it is not known, as the cathedrals of so many Italian cities are, as il duomo. Instead, by the later nineteenth century, San Francesco had become so identified with its primary patron that it had assumed his name as well, as the lengthy bibliography with titles of, or including “Tempio Malatestiano,” attest. Indeed, Luigi Tonini (1807–1874), the most authoritative historian of Rimini of the nineteenth century, in his Guida storico-artistica di Rimini lists and describes the churches of the city, all of which are identified by their titular names (Agostino, Giuliano, Giovanni e Paolo), save one: Tempio Malatestiano.⁵⁰ Today, this identity defines the church and extends to its surroundings: the street running along the arcade side of the church is even called via Tempio Malatestiano.

Rimini and the Malatesta

Today’s glitzy, bustling resort town of Rimini, located in the province of Romagna, 65 kilometers south of Ravenna on the Adriatic coast, boasts ancient origins. Established as an Etruscan town, it was conquered by the Romans in the third century BC and given the name Ariminum.⁵¹ The Roman colony occupied a prominent location at

⁴⁸ Cesare Clementini, Raccolto storico della fondazione di Rimini e dell’origine e vite de’Malatesti, Rimini, 1617; F.G. Battaglini, Della vita e d fatti di Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Rimini, 1784, cited by Ettlinger, 1990, p. 133, n. 5. Garuffi cited by Kokole, “Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style,” 133.

⁴⁹ Luigi Tonini, Guida storico-artistica di Rimini (Rimini: Tipografia Commerciale, 1926), 69.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ On the pre-Malatesta history of Rimini, see Tonini, Compendio della Storia di Rimini, Parte Prima dalle origini all’anno 1500; and Grazia Gobbi and Paolo Sica, Rimini. La città nella storia d’Italia (Rome: Editori Laterza, 1982), 3–29.

the intersection of two major roads leading to Rome, the via Flaminia and via Aemilia.⁵²

Ruins of the ancient city had been visible to the Riminese and formed a critical part of their civic identity throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance. The Roman character of Rimini was integrated into the citizens' daily lives as they entered and left the city through the ancient Arch of Augustus⁵³ that marked the via Flaminia.

The Malatesta first appear in Riminese history in the first decade of the thirteenth century. Citizens of Rimini since 1216,⁵⁴ the Malatesta quickly rose to prominence in city politics: Malatesta di Giovanni was a member of the general council and, in addition to being granted immunity from taxes, was given money to purchase a house there.⁵⁵ The Malatesta adopted San Francesco as the family's traditional church and burial place soon after its founding in the thirteenth century.⁵⁶ By the mid-thirteenth century, Malatesta da Verucchio (1226–1312) had assumed control and established the power basis for the signoria, allying the commune of Rimini with the Papacy and the Guelph party. Malatesta da Verucchio did not, however, enjoy a completely stable rule, a feature that would mark the signoria for the following century.⁵⁷

The first Malatesta papal vicariate was granted by Innocent VI in 1355,⁵⁸ a move meant to secure papal power in a region that had for twenty years prior been in nearly constant revolt against it. In 1362, Pope Urban V appointed Galeotto Malatesta (c. 1305–

⁵² Tonini, Compendio della Storia di Rimini, Parte Prima dalle origini all'anno 1500, 30–32; Gobbi and Sica, Rimini. La città nella storia d'Italia, 14

⁵³ For a history and reconstruction of the Arch based on excavations of 1937 see Gobbi and Sica, Rimini. La città nella storia d'Italia, 14–16.

⁵⁴ Tonini, Compendio della Storia di Rimini, Parte Prima dalle origini all'anno 1500, 209.

⁵⁵ P.J. Jones, The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 26.

⁵⁶ In his testament of February 18, 1311, Malatesta da Verrucchio designated San Francesco as his burial place. He was followed by his family members in 1312, 1317, 1326, 1364. Pasini, Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico, 195.

⁵⁷ The standard reference on the history of the Malatesta family is still P. J. Jones, The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

⁵⁸ Jones, The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History, 76–78.

1385), the fourth signore of Rimini, as Papal Vicar, a political delegate of the Pope.⁵⁹ Under this arrangement, the signore received the protection of the Papacy as well as judicial, legislative, and financial power and privilege. In exchange, the vicar governed territories in his domain that belonged to the papacy and fulfilled financial and military obligations. This event ushered in a period of stability and growth for the commune of Rimini during which the Malatesta territory grew to include Cesena, Pesaro, and Fano. As Jones notes, “From the grant of vicariate therefore the Malatesta gained not power but legal standing.”⁶⁰ With their rule now secure, the Malatesta were in a position to forge other alliances and develop friendly relationships with Florence and Milan in the early part of the fifteenth century.

Sigismondo

Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta was born in 1417, the second illegitimate son of the condottiere Pandolfo Malatesta (c. 1369–1427), the Lord of Fano (Fig. 27). Pandolfo’s brother, Carlo Malatesta (1368–1429), was Lord and Papal Vicar of Rimini and its adjoining territories. When Sigismondo was ten years old, his father died, and Sigismondo and his brothers were adopted by their uncle and his wife, Isabetta Gonzaga, who had no children of their own. Isabetta’s strong religious influence along with Carlo’s well-respected intellect and Sigismondo’s father’s keen military sense and interest in

⁵⁹ Malatesta di Verucchio’s sons, Malatestino (1251–1317) and Pandolfo I (1266–1326) succeeded him as signori. For more on the origin and evolution of the office of the papal vicariate as a check on the despotic power of signori like the Malatesta, as well as the complex history of the Malatesta vicariate specifically, see P. J. Jones, “The Vicariate of the Malatesta of Rimini,” *The English Historical Review*, CCLXIV (July, 1952), 321–351, and Jones, *The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History*, especially Chapter 3, “From commune to papal vicariate,” 42–78.

⁶⁰ Jones, “The Vicariate of the Malatesta of Rimini,” 339.

humanism⁶¹ combined to have a powerful effect on the development of Sigismondo's sensibilities from an early age. In 1427, Sigismondo and his brothers, Galeotto Roberto and Domenico (Malatesta Novello), were legitimated by Pope Martin V, giving them a justified claim to the Malatesta lands and the papal vicariate.⁶²

Carlo's death two years later – when Sigismondo was just twelve years old – left the brothers in control of all Malatesta lands and although public acts were issued in the name of all three, it soon became apparent that the lands would be divided three ways, with Galeotto Roberto taking Rimini, Sigismondo Cesena, and Malatesta Novello Fano. Because of their young age, the Malatesta were challenged by rulers outside Rimini who enlisted the support of the Pope Martin V in their efforts.⁶³

When Eugenius IV assumed the papal throne in 1431, cordial relations between Rimini and Rome resumed, partly due to an old friendship established between Carlo Malatesta and the new pope when he had been a cardinal. Rimini followed the rule of the pope until Galeotto Roberto, a devoted Franciscan, died in 1432. Upon the loss of his brother, power passed to Sigismondo, who enjoyed a collegial relationship with Pope Nicholas V during his pontificate from 1447 to 1455.

⁶¹ Maria Grazia Pernis and Laurie Adams, *Federico da Montefeltro and Sigismondo Malatesta. The Eagle and the Elephant* (New York: P. Lang, 1997), 9; Jones, *The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History*, 165; on Pandolfo's humanist patronage, see Luigi Tonini, *La coltura letteraria e scientifica in Rimini dal secolo XIV ai primordi del XIX*, vol. 1 (Rimini: Tipografia Albertini, 1884). Carlo founded a library in the cloister of San Francesco in 1429. Its holdings however are unknown as little remained after it succumbed to fire in the late fifteenth century. Ettlinger, *Image of a Renaissance Prince*, 199.

⁶² Tonini, *Compendio della Storia di Rimini, Parte Prima dalle origini all'anno 1500*, 474–75. We know little else of Sigismondo's early life, due to the destruction of the Riminese archives by fire in the sixteenth century. It does not seem that he traveled much during his early years, and his military training appears to have taken place in Rimini. See Francesco Arduini, "La vita di Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta," in *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta e il suo tempo* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1970), 3–15.

⁶³ The Pope attempted to take all Malatesta lands for lack of *census* payment. Jones notes that this would have been a common pretext for such action throughout the struggle between vicars of the Church and the Papacy. Jones, *The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History*, 170.

By the time the Sienese Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini ascended the papal throne in 1458 as Pius II, however, Sigismondo's relationship with the Papacy had deteriorated considerably. In Pius's view, Sigismondo was "a man impassioned in the pursuit of secular ambition...it appeared to him the papacy was bent on robbing his dynasty of its legitimate rights to enrich greedy neighbors. To recover those losses or avenge them was duty to his family and to his pride."⁶⁴ The personal tone of Pius's vendetta extended to Sigismondo's artistic activity as well. In addition to referring to Sigismondo's sexual exploits and perversions, Pius claimed that, "He hated priests and despised religion. He had no belief in another world...he built at Rimini a splendid church dedicated to St. Francis, though he filled it so full of pagan works of art that it seemed less a Christian sanctuary than a temple where heathens might worship the devil."⁶⁵

Modern scholars have accepted these allegations seemingly without hesitation and neglected to investigate the motives behind Pius's invective. In the mid-nineteenth century, Jacob Burckhardt identified Sigismondo's dominant traits as "unscrupulousness [and] impiety."⁶⁶ Corrado Ricci's 1925 monograph on the Tempio reasserted the evaluations of earlier scholars Clementini, Garuffi,⁶⁷ Battaglini, Tonini, and Passerini, none of whom could discount Sigismondo's faults, even if they managed to keep their admiration of his great political and military valor untainted.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 175.

⁶⁵ Pius II, *Commentaries of Pius II*, Edited by Margaret Meserve and Marcello Simonetta (Cambridge, MA and London: The I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, 2003), II, 329.

⁶⁶ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1958), 50.

⁶⁷ Kokole notes that in his *Lettera apologetica...in difesa del Tempio famosissimo di San Francesco*, Garuffi already in 1718 remarked that the subjects of the reliefs were in keeping with Christian themes. Kokole also however describes the letter as "polemical," indicating his view was not in keeping with commonly held views of the period. Kokole, "Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style," 133–34.

In his classic History of the Popes, of 1938, Ludwig von Pastor described Sigismondo as “the most horrible figure in the history of the early Renaissance...one of the most detestable rulers of any age.” He goes on to cite Sigismondo’s “depraved and defiant nature...[and] his contempt for the ceremonies of the Church. ...The unchristian temper of his mind was also exhibited in the extraordinary edifice to which his contemporaries gave the name of the ‘Temple of Malatesta’.”⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Charles Mitchell suggests that Sigismondo committed the hubristic act of equating himself with the Sun god,⁶⁹ and Marilyn Lavin calls Sigismondo a “notorious tyrant.”⁷⁰ There have been references to his alleged “acts of cruelty and sexual deviation,” and negative remarks about his devotion to his mistress and later wife, Isotta degli Atti, to whom many contend the entire Tempio was actually dedicated.⁷¹ But the dominant theme in these writings is that Sigismondo was a pagan with no Christian virtue, and this judgement seemed to be borne out by his all’antica restoration of San Francesco.⁷²

In their readiness to maintain this “legend” of Sigismondo⁷³ and indeed relish such salacious charges, these authors failed to consider their source. Why was Pius so vitriolic about Sigismondo? A brief look at the personalities of and relationship between the two and the political circumstances surrounding Pius’s condemnation certainly offers some clues.

⁶⁸ L. von Pastor, The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages, Vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 1949), 116–19.

⁶⁹ Mitchell, “The Imagery of the Tempio Malatesiano,” 88.

⁷⁰ Lavin, “Piero della Francesca’s Fresco of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta before St. Sigismund: Theoi Athanatoi Kai Tei Polei,” 347.

⁷¹ Eg., Sergio Bertelli, Le corti italiane del Rinascimento (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1985), 10, cited by Ettlinger, “The Image of a Renaissance Prince,” 13.

⁷² Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, 21; Ettlinger, “The Image of a Renaissance Prince,” 15.

⁷³ Gaeta’s term seems most accurate. Franco Gaeta, “La ‘Leggenda’ di Sigismondo Malatesta.” In Studi Malatestiani, (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, 1978).

Aeneas Sylvia Piccolomini was born into a noble family in Corsignano in 1405, though by this time their fortunes had declined and Aeneas grew up in impoverished conditions.⁷⁴ He managed however to matriculate at the University of Siena where he studied literature and law, and then went on to pursue further humanist training in rhetoric and oratory, even studying in Florence with Francesco Filelfo.⁷⁵ In 1431, his career was set on course when Cardinal Domenico Capranica passed through Siena en route to the Council of Basel. Aeneas joined the cardinal's retinue as a secretary responsible for drafting letters and composing speeches. This position allowed him to move among the courts of various prelates promoting the anti-papal stance promulgated at the Council. He eventually landed a position in the diplomatic corps of Emperor Frederick III in 1440. Aeneas took religious orders in 1446 and gained the attention and favor of Pope Eugenius IV for his efforts to reconcile the Pope and the emperor. In turn, Eugenius appointed Aeneas apostolic secretary. After a meteoric rise through the ecclesiastical ranks, Piccolomini succeeded Calixtus III as Pope Pius II in 1458. Once on the throne of St. Peter, Pius renounced the position that promoted the power of the church council for which he had written so eloquently and convincingly and now pursued an agenda whose sole goal was to solidify Papal power in the Italian peninsula and by extension undertake a Crusade against the infidel Turks in the recently fallen Constantinople.

⁷⁴ The primary source for Pius's life is his autobiography, the Commentaries of Pope Pius II. There are several modern editions; in English the standard is Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope. The Commentaries of Pius II, Transl. Florence A. Gragg, Edited, with Introduction by Leona C. Gabel (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959). A new translation has been undertaken by Margaret Meserve and Marcello Simonetta, The Commentaries of Pius II. Books I-II, I Tatti Renaissance Library, 12 (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2003). Thus far only Books I and II of the 13 have been published.

⁷⁵ Meserve and Simonetta, The Commentaries of Pius II, vii.

Pius's professional and political ambitions cannot be separated from his personal ones, for like his fellow temporal rulers, Pius was jockeying for power in the war-torn Italian city-states before the Peace of Lodi of 1454. In this contentious environment, every move and agreement or dispute was politically motivated and there were few true allegiances or loyalties beyond individual territorial interests and ambitions. Thus Pius allied himself not only with the house of Aragon in Naples against the French, and with Francesco Sforza of Milan, but also against Sigismondo's greatest nemesis, Federico da Montefeltro of Urbino. (Their common humanist sensibilities, particularly when compared with Pius's castigation of Sigismondo as heathen, likely found kinship as well.) As a trained student of humanist oratory, Pius's professional experience served him well in promoting his own political and professional propagandistic agenda, for he was well-versed in manipulating public opinion with his eloquent prose and rhetoric. Furthermore, throughout his ecclesiastical career, Pius had shown himself willing and deftly able to adopt varying, even opposing, stances when it suited his needs. Neither of these factors should be discounted when evaluating Pius's relationship with Sigismondo.

Pius's entire memoir, the primary source of the worst accusations against Sigismondo, must be viewed from this perspective. The Commentaries of Pope Pius II consists of thirteen books, written during the last two years of his papacy, 1462 – 1464, and was left unfinished at his death. The manuscript was published in 1584 by Pius's grand-nephew, Cardinal Francesco Bandini Piccolomini. Rather than entrusting the writing of his biography to a court humanist, Pius composed it himself, the only Pope ever to have done so, leaving his own carefully constructed and controlled image to his contemporaries and to posterity. Here, too, Pius's humanist background is revealed. As a

modern translator of Pius's memoirs acknowledged, the Pope was known for "drinking freely at the fountain of antiquity, and of nature, Pius was at one with his times in sensing no incompatibility between the Christian and classical worlds."⁷⁶ Thus he modeled his memoir on that of Julius Caesar's own Commentaries, of the Gallic War, and Civil War, written from 100–44 BCE. This inspiration was revealed most obviously by Pius's writing in the third person as Caesar had done. Yet Emily O'Brien has shown that the ancient and humanist influence extended beyond this superficial commonality: on several levels, Pius's autobiographical volumes reveal careful study of its Caesarian prototype. Moreover, by emulating Caesar's memoir, O'Brien has argued, Pius politicized his self-portrait and by extension the seat of St. Peter.⁷⁷ Indeed, his reign can be seen as the birth of the Papacy as a temporal power, a high stakes player in the tumultuous political landscape of the Italian peninsula of the Renaissance.

For his part, Sigismondo was bright and determined and displayed a strong character in everything he did. He enjoyed great success on the battlefield and the esteem and respect of those he commanded.⁷⁸ He was well liked by the Riminese, and there is no evidence of malcontent or opposition to his rule. He was respected by many well-regarded humanists and was recognized for his military strategy and engineering knowledge.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Gragg, Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope. The Commentaries of Pius II, 18.

⁷⁷ Emily O'Brien, "Arms and Letters: Julius Caesar, the Commentaries of Pius II, and the Politicization of Papal Imagery," Renaissance Quarterly 62/4 (2009): 1057–97, esp 1059–60.

⁷⁸ See the even-handed character analysis and its role in Sigismondo's downfall by Mario Tabanelli, Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta. Signore del medioevo e del rinascimento (Faenza: Stab. Grafico Fratelli Lega, 1977), 193–203.

⁷⁹ In a letter to Leonello d'Este, Flavio Biondo noted that he was impressed with Sigismondo's knowledge of Roman history and antiquities and Poggio even dedicated a treatise to him. See Ettlinger, "The Image of a Renaissance Prince," 142–43, on praise for Sigismondo from Biondo, Poggio Bracciolini, and Guarino da Verona. Tabanelli, Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta. Signore del Medioevo e Rinascimento, 197.

Yet despite his stipulated duties as vicar, Sigismondo was a far from loyal subject of the Pope. As a condottiere, his military service and allegiance were clearly for sale regardless of legal obligation. Thus he supported the French claim to the throne of Naples against Papal interests there, backing King Ferrante, the legal heir to Alfonso V of Aragon. In addition to his brother's violation of one of the central tenets of the office of vicar against alienating Papal lands by selling Cervia to Venice in 1463 – but one episode in Pius's "protracted struggle to recover lands wrested from the church"⁸⁰ – were numerous instances of Sigismondo's refusal to pay the annual census due the Pope as papal vicar.⁸¹

Pius's Sienese heritage likely also contributed to his hostility. Pius was known for his loyalty and allegiance to his hometown of Siena and birthplace Corsignano (which he renamed Pienza for himself) almost to a fault. As Pastor remarked, "His too great attachment to his relations is an often recurring blot on the Pontificate of Pius II," and his exercise of political prerogative in appointing his family members and fellow Sienese to positions of power has been documented.⁸² In light of the Pope's patriotic sentiment, Sigismondo's professional conduct did not put him in good stead. While fighting in the employ of Siena in 1454, Sigismondo was found to have been dealing secretly and forging a truce with the enemy, fellow condottiere Aldobrandino Orsini, Count of

⁸⁰ Gragg views this struggle as one of the major theme of Pius's papacy. Gragg, Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope. The Commentaries of Pius II, 23. On the sale of Cervia, see Jones, The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History, 342.

⁸¹ Jones, The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History, 348–9; On Holy Thursday, 1461, Pius excommunicated Emperor Sigismund of Austria on account of violence against Nicholas of Cusa as the Cardinal of St. Peter, and Sigismondo Malatesta for neglecting to pay the tribute due the Church of Rome. The excommunication was repeated the next year..." Gragg, Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope. The Commentaries of Pius II, 186.

⁸² Richard B. Hilary, "The Nepotism of Pope Pius II, 1458–1464," The Catholic Historical Review 64 (1978): 33–35. "A crowd of Sienese relations was introduced into the Prefectures of the States of the Church. ... Those who surrounded the Pope were 'almost all Sienese...' Pastor, The History of the Popes, 124.

Pitigliano.⁸³ Understandably, Sigismondo was relieved of duty and portrayed by the Sienese as two-faced and treacherous – not the way to gain the favor of the city’s most powerful son.

Little surprise then, that in 1460 Pius undertook the unprecedented action of canonizing Sigismondo to hell,⁸⁴ declared him a heretic and a traitor, and revoked his vicariate and other honors before burning him in effigy on the steps of St. Peter’s.⁸⁵ In 1463, Pius finally triumphed over Sigismondo (and the Malatesta dynasty) in a series of humiliating military defeats at Fano, Senigallia, and finally at Rimini itself.⁸⁶

To be sure, Sigismondo had his personality flaws – he was impulsive, short-sighted, and irreverent, and is known to have violated a noblewoman’s honor on at least one occasion.⁸⁷ A recent character study tried to provide a more even-handed portrayal, but the authors couldn’t help but note that Sigismondo “was his own worst enemy.”⁸⁸ Sigismondo was in high demand for his military services and played various contenders against one another, garnering high fees along with an unfavorable reputation as mutable and disloyal. His need to procure an income often took precedence over principles. Sigismondo appears to have thought primarily in terms of immediate advantage and benefit without regard to the political consequences of his actions, thereby alienating himself from many of his peers. Yet while his tactics did not win him friends,

⁸³ Jones cites a reference to this incident in Pius’s *Commentaries*, which was subsequently edited out. Jones, *The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History*, 210–11, note 1.

⁸⁴ Gragg, *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope. The Commentaries of Pius II*, 184.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁸⁶ Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, 127–28; Jones, *The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History*, 232–38.

⁸⁷ Tabanelli, *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta. Signore del Medioevo e Rinascimento*, passim., Jones, *The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History*, 202–03.

⁸⁸ Pernis and Adams, *The Eagle and the Elephant*, 12.

Sigismondo was one of the most celebrated captains in Italy and his conduct was in keeping with the behavior of the typical mercenary Renaissance condottiere.⁸⁹

Even so, not until 1974 did the Malatesta scholar Philip Jones first to come to Sigismondo's defense, recognizing in the origin of this character assassination Pius's "blind and absorbing rancor," and his "obsessive passion to humiliate the Malatesta."⁹⁰ Soon thereafter, Mario Tabanelli was able to offer a more objective, yet sympathetic, assessment. Without denying Sigismondo's "abnormal" characteristics, he concedes: "Tutto ciò contribuì a fare di lui uno strano, spaventevole ed enigmatico personaggio, complesso e difficilissimo da poter studiare e giudicare."⁹¹

Others have since joined the effort to look beyond the dominant rhetoric directed at Sigismondo and the greatest monument to his fame to reveal the true nature of this legendary, nearly mythical, personality. There are those, such as Franco Gaeta, who are sympathetic, even forgiving of Sigismondo without defending or apologizing for him, recognizing his own complexity as well as his victimization by the Pope.⁹² For the "struggle with Sigismondo...did not show the Pope at his most generous. His victory was applauded by many of his contemporaries, but everyone was aware that for Pius it was shaded by selfish ambition."⁹³ And Jones acknowledges that while Sigismondo "was no very devout member of the fifteenth-century church," Pius's "interests as ruler, and possibly as Sienese, envenomed him against Malatesta...Many of these charges can be

⁸⁹ As Jones notes, "...much in Sigismondo's character was indistinguishable from the manners of his age." Jones, *The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History*, 177, and "often enough during the fifteenth century the popes had revealed dissatisfaction with the place of their nominal vicars in the papal states," so that they began to rescind their grants. Jones, "The Vicariate of the Malatesta of Rimini," 349–50.

⁹⁰ Jones, *The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State*, 228.

⁹¹ Tabanelli, *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta. Signore del Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 197.

⁹² Franco Gaeta, "La 'Leggenda' di Sigismondo Malatesta." In *Studi Malatestiani* (Rome, 1978), 159–96.

⁹³ R. J. Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara Pope Pius II 1458–1464* (London: Harvill Press, 1962), 194–95.

dismissed at once as the conventional invective of curia and church.”⁹⁴ Even Pastor admitted the conflict that led to their ongoing feud.⁹⁵

In 1989, Helen Ettlinger made the first systematic attempt to redress Sigismondo’s maligned image in light of his artistic patronage.⁹⁶ In a later article, Ettlinger’s re-reading of Sigismondo’s Sienese correspondence “coupled with other writings from court of Rimini refutes commonly accepted interpretation of the facade design but also reveals a piety hitherto ignored in Sigismondo and places the church squarely within the complex currents of Christian religious tradition and belief.”⁹⁷

Clearly, then, Pius’s vendetta was politically motivated, rooted in his goal of advancing the power of the Papacy and promoting the alliances that furthered that end. These circumstances and Pius’s prejudice should not be discounted when evaluating his later criticisms of Sigismondo, for Pius let his political and “personal resentment”⁹⁸ color his appraisal of Sigismondo’s artistic endeavors as well. As we shall see, however, when we look beyond the centuries of rhetoric and calumny, and focus on the building and the patron, much can be learned about not only the commission but also the individuals involved as well as the larger issue of artistic patronage in the Renaissance.

⁹⁴ Jones, *The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History*, 176.

⁹⁵ Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, 117.

⁹⁶ Ettlinger, “The Image of a Renaissance Prince.”

⁹⁷ Ettlinger, “Sepulchre on the Façade: A Re-Evaluation of Sigismondo Malatesta’s Rebuilding of San Francesco in Rimini,” 134.

⁹⁸ Jones, *The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History*, 235.

Chapter 2: The Literature on the Tempio, Sigismondo, and Alberti at Rimini

San Francesco in Rimini, more commonly referred to as the Tempio Malatestiano, is one of the most enigmatic works of the fifteenth century. The project began in 1447 as the renovation of two chapels: one dedicated to Sigismondo Malatesta's patron saint, the other to Isotta degli Atti.⁹⁹ The effort quickly expanded and just two years later encompassed the renovation of the entire existing church as, according to many, a celebration of his rule and monument to his family.¹⁰⁰ The project is notable for its novel façade design, the extensive use of Greek and Roman imagery in a Christian context, the outsized personality of its patron, and its association with one of the most celebrated architects of the Renaissance, Leon Battista Alberti. Understandably, then, its renovation has received much critical and scholarly attention. Various art historical methodologies have been applied to the Tempio Malatestiano – stylistic, chronological, psychological, iconographic. Studies have focused on almost every aspect of the project from the construction history, the architecture and sculptural and pictorial decoration, to the patron, his ego and iconographic agenda, and the court that helped him create it. Among all of these investigations and analyses, however, one crucial question has never been addressed: aside from what Alberti actually did there and when, why did Sigismondo hire Alberti, above all an intellectual, to design his most important artistic undertaking? This dissertation provides an answer to that question and in so doing allows for a new understanding of the Tempio Malatestiano.

⁹⁹ A brief biography of Isotta can be found in Kokole, "Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style," 131–32.

¹⁰⁰ For the activity in this initial period see Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano."

Early modern discussions of the Tempio Malatestiano were largely limited to physical description of the building and traditional biography of the patron, without failing to highlight Sigismondo's derelict character and his affair with the young Isotta degli Atti.¹⁰¹ In his 1895 history of Rimini from its origins to 1500, Luigi Tonini noted the Tempio's novel classical style, but listed Alberti as only one of its "notissimi...autori."¹⁰² In the first major modern study devoted to the Tempio Malatestiano in 1924, Corrado Ricci dedicated chapters to Pisanello, Matteo de' Pasti, Matteo Nuti, Cristoforo Foschi, and Alvise (all of whom will be considered here in due course) before he comes to Alberti: "difficilissimo é definire quella di Leon Battista Alberti che alcune volte non fu certo più di un consulente artistico, il quale fornì idee generiche a iniziali o suggerimenti o correzioni per lavori affidati, non ad esecutori materiali, ma ad altri notevoli artisti."¹⁰³ Ricci recounted the known facts of Alberti's life and elaborates on his career. But other than presenting the possibility that Nicholas V may have recommended Alberti to Sigismondo when they met during the Holy Year celebrations of 1450¹⁰⁴ and confirming the attribution of the exterior design to him, there is remarkably little discussion of Alberti's involvement with the commission or building in the chapter devoted to him. In a monograph of 1956, Cesare Brandi saw Alberti as "una mente direttiva" but "non un esecutore," a sort of guiding force whose role was decidedly more vague than that of designer.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ The project was originally undertaken in 1447 as a renovation of only two chapels, one of which was Isotta's personal chapel.

¹⁰² Luigi Tonini, *Compendio della storia di Rimini. Parte Prima: Dalle origini all'anno 1500* (Bologna: Forni Editore, 1969), 525–26.

¹⁰³ Ricci, *Il Tempio Malatestiano*, 85.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁰⁵ Brandi, *Il Tempio Malatesiano*, 8.

Iconographic analysis has long been a focus of Tempio studies, particularly with regard to Agostino di Duccio's program of sculptural reliefs. Charles Mitchell sought clues to "Sigismondo's veiled purpose" in the use of Neoplatonic imagery in the Chapel of the Planets reliefs that refer to the "sun-cult" and Sigismondo's immortality.¹⁰⁶ Alberti's design for the Tempio as revealed by Matteo de' Pasti's medal and Alberti's discussion of the details of the projected dome in his 1454 letter to de' Pasti is considered especially as it relates to the solar imagery that Mitchell finds throughout the sculptural program. Mitchell does explore Alberti's involvement beyond that of providing the building's design when he speculates that as one of Sigismondo's advisers, Alberti may even have been the designer of the entire decorative program.¹⁰⁷ More interesting for this study is Mitchell's proposal that "possibly Alberti recalled exchanges with Gemisthos Plethon whose body rests at the Tempio, at the Ferrara-Florence Council."¹⁰⁸ Could it be that Alberti came to Sigismondo's attention by way of Plethon, whose Platonic teachings were so admired by Sigismondo? Mitchell notes the connection but never explores it, preferring instead to leave it as mere suggestion.

Maurice Shapiro's 1959 dissertation also analyzed the sculptural program, this time in terms of "what the Tempio itself shows us"¹⁰⁹ in a strict but thorough iconological study that dispenses with much of the rhetoric, theory, and outsized personalities associated with the project. This approach finds that the subjects of the Tempio's decorative program are patently Christian ones that at the same time draw on classical

¹⁰⁶ Mitchell, "The Imagery of the Tempio Maltestiano," 77–90.

¹⁰⁷ These claims will be taken up again in Chapter 5.

¹⁰⁸ Mitchell, "The Imagery of the Tempio Maltestiano." This would have been in 1438, when Alberti was traveling as a member of the papal retinue of Eugenius IV.

¹⁰⁹ Maurice Shapiro, "Studies in the Iconology of the Sculpture in the Tempio Malatestiano" (Ph.D diss., New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 1959).

and Neo-Platonic sources. As such it is in keeping with traditional and medieval themes of church decoration. More pertinent to our purposes though, in his opening paragraph, Shapiro mentions that Alberti was “called in as architect” and gives him due credit for his “brilliant design” for the façade. Alberti’s architecture is not part of Shapiro’s assessment. Instead, Shapiro nominates Alberti as the “learned programmer” of sculptural decoration in the Tempio. The author finds support for this identification in “evidence that several of the programs are referred to in his writings,”¹¹⁰ specifically themes of justice, which Shapiro links to the programs of the Chapels of St. Sigismund and Children’s Games.¹¹¹ Alberti’s intellectual personality in general also makes him a “plausible candidate for the authorship of its progress.”¹¹²

Most recently, in his 1997 “re-examination of Agostino’s sculptures’ form and content,” Stanko Kokole relies on primary evidence, in this case the “writings of prominent fifteenth-century literati attached to the court of Sigismondo” and the systematic study of their letters, treatises, poems alongside the “form and content” of Agostino’s reliefs.¹¹³ Kokole’s discussion of Alberti is restricted to his potential influence, in the form of De pictura, on the Neo-Attic style of fellow-Florentine Agostino di Duccio.¹¹⁴ Kokole cites connections between Agostino’s style and specific passages in De pictura suggesting that the “possibility that in the Tempio Malatestiano Agostino was consciously and deliberately trying to come to grips with Alberti’s aesthetics of pictorial

¹¹⁰ Shapiro, “Studies in the Iconology of the Sculpture in the Tempio Malatestiano,” 1, 6.

¹¹¹ Shapiro refers to the Chapel of the Children’s Games as the Chapel of the Spiritelli.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 226.

¹¹³ Kokole, “Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style,” xxiii.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 771–75.

representation has wide-ranging implications.”¹¹⁵ Again Alberti’s artistic activity at Rimini is investigated, but not the dynamics of his presence there.

In her 1974 landmark study, Marilyn Lavin turned her attention to Piero della Francesca’s fresco of Sigismondo Malatesta Before St. Sigismund, dated 1451 and located in the sacristy, as a “great document of Renaissance individualism”¹¹⁶ and an illustration of the condottiere’s political philosophy.¹¹⁷ Remarkably, Lavin’s detailed analysis of the style, composition, iconography, and meaning and function of the image and how these served Sigismondo’s intentions makes no mention of Alberti – the designer of the structure in which the fresco is housed, or any reference to the potential implications of Alberti’s highly influential treatise on painting De pictura of 1434.

The following year, Gino Pavan published a reconsideration of his findings presented at the 500-year celebrations of Alberti’s death.¹¹⁸ In light of the absence of documentation, Pavan argued for a date of late 1450 for Alberti’s arrival in Rimini and his presentation of the idea transforming the church along with a wooden model to Sigismondo and Matteo de’ Pasti. Pavan summons facts regarding Sigismondo’s procurement of stone from Ravenna and Fano¹¹⁹ and finds further evidence in passages from De re aedificatoria that reveal a familiarity on Alberti’s part with the local

¹¹⁵ Kokole makes a point to acknowledge the “on-going debate among art historians as to whether or not the De pictura could have already during Alberti’s lifetime had any immediate impact on contemporary artists in practical terms,” and that they could rather “reflect actual workshop practices of the day.” But Kokole’s assertion that Agostino’s relief now in New York is evidence that Agostino did in fact have “concrete” knowledge of Alberti’s treatise is a legitimate argument in favor of the former scenario. Kokole, “Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style,” 73–4.

¹¹⁶ Lavin, “Piero della Francesca’s Fresco of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta before St. Sigismund: Theoi Athanatoi Kai Tei Polei,” 347.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 346. This study and the fresco itself, particularly in terms of Alberti’s thought, will be addressed further in Chapter 5.

¹¹⁸ Gino Pavan, “Leon Battista Alberti a Rimini Considerazioni e Aggiunte,” Studi Romagnoli 26 (1975), 381–93.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 381–82.

geography and topography and building materials of the Romagna, as well as with the Tempio Malatestiano as built, thus providing for a terminus ante quem of 1452.¹²⁰ Some of Pavan's theories are intriguing, but most interesting for our purposes is his support of Ricci's hypothesis for the probable encounter between Sigismondo and Alberti in 1450 at Fabriano while Alberti was in the papal curia of Nicholas V traveling in celebration of the Holy Year 1450 (though Pavan admits that the two may have already met in Ferrara several years earlier).¹²¹

The last part of the twentieth century saw numerous character studies of Sigismondo primarily by Italian scholars such as Mario Tabanelli whose 1977 discussion of Sigismondo's numerous courtiers is based on Battaglini's late eighteenth-century study of the Riminese court.¹²² Tabanelli curiously does not count Alberti among the artists in Sigismondo's court involved with his two main commissions, the Castel Sismondo and the Tempio Malatestiano, though he does list Ghiberti, Luca della Robbia, Pisanello, Piero della Francesca and Agostino di Duccio along with the builders Nuti, Alvise and several engineers.¹²³ Further, Tabanelli notably includes Roberto de' Valturio as superintendent, author (of De re militari), and "consigliere di Sigismondo e suo uomo di fiducia" in this list. Tabanelli moves on to name the administrative figures at court – lawyers, counselors, secretaries and chancellors – and concludes with the group of

¹²⁰ Ibid., 383.

¹²¹ Even if refuted by Hope who disputes the identification of 1450 for Alberti's involvement based on the absence of medals of that year portraying the façade. Hope further argues that although Sigismondo had obtained stone from Istria in 1450, this timing does not necessarily mean that he had decided on Alberti by then. Hope "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano," 95–96. Pavan, "Leon Battista Alberti a Rimini Considerazioni e Aggiunte," 384. (Based on Ricci's mention of the potential event, Il Tempio Malatestiano, 218.)

¹²² Angelo Battaglini, Della corte letteraria di Sigismondo, commentario (Rimini: Tipografia Albertiniana, 1794). Tabanelli, Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta. Signore del Medioevo e Rinascimento, 226.

¹²³ Ibid., 226–30.

“letterati, poeti e filosofi that Sigismondo gathered around him,”¹²⁴ including Basinio, Porcellino, George of Trebizond, and Guarino da Verona. Interestingly, Alberti could qualify for membership in any one of these three groups – artists, administrators, humanists – yet Tabanelli includes him in none.

In 1996, Maria Grazia Pernis and Laurie Schneider Adams added a twist to this trend when they employed Plutarch’s model of twin lives¹²⁵ to present Sigismondo as a foil to his nemesis Federico da Montefeltro and “analyze the contemporary reputations of Sigismondo and Federico and the ways in which they were manipulated by the image-making techniques of fifteenth-century Italy.”¹²⁶ Looking through this historical and biographical lens, they found Sigismondo’s “personal ambivalence” and his “elusive” nature to be the source of “the difficulty of pinning down the meaning of the images in the Tempio Malatestiano.”¹²⁷ The two authors place Sigismondo’s patronage into the fifteenth-century humanist context influenced by Alberti’s thought and writing but do not present him as a key player in the process. They instead limit consideration to the more concrete facets of the Tempio and acknowledge that “Alberti’s role in rebuilding the Tempio Malatestiano is not precisely known, but it is clear that his influence was considerable and that from Rome he advised on the exterior.”¹²⁸ Pernis and Adams address only the commonly accepted aspects of Alberti’s contribution to the building, in particular the triumphal arch motif and classical articulation of the façade, both inspired by ancient models. Here, Pernis and Adams boldly discount the long-accepted model of

¹²⁴ Ibid., 231.

¹²⁵ M. G. Pernis and Laurie Schneider Adams, *Federico Da Montefeltro and Sigismondo Malatesta. The Eagle and the Elephant* (New York: P. Lang, 1997), xi–xii.

¹²⁶ Ibid., xiv.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 80.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 73.

the nearby Arch of Augustus in Rimini in favor of the Arch of Constantine which, they contend, would have been more present and familiar to Alberti who was advising on the Tempio from Rome. The picture that emerges is one of Alberti's being brought in as a hired gun for the façade design rather than as an active contributor to ideas fostered at Sigismondo's court.

The authors' assertion that "Sigismondo separated facets of his character and therefore his patronage,"¹²⁹ and the subsequently limited scope of their interdisciplinary patronage study are unfortunate. Their interpretation of Sigismondo's patronage cites Alberti's theories of the role of architecture in the "politics of magnificence," specifically with regards to the Castel Sismondo,¹³⁰ but nowhere do the authors investigate the fruitful relationship between the two personalities or how it might have played out in the Tempio.

In her 1989 dissertation The Image of a Renaissance Prince: Sigismondo Malatesta and the Arts of Power, Helen Ettlinger cast the net wider by contextualizing the entire Tempio project within Sigismondo's overall political, civic, and artistic patronage. Ettlinger argues that Sigismondo's patronage was motivated by the preservation of the "immortality of being," which he achieved through the manipulation of the "physical remains" of his city.¹³¹ She disputes many earlier interpretations of the Tempio and its program and "consider(s) San Francesco in relation to its functions as a personal and at the same time a civic and religious monument in order to reach an overall interpretation

¹²⁹ Ibid., 72.

¹³⁰ As espoused by Alberti in his De familia of 1433–34. Pernis and Adams, The Eagle and the Elephant, 60–67.

¹³¹ Ettlinger, "The Image of a Renaissance Prince," 1.

which would have been accessible both to the people and the city to which Sigismondo dedicated his final building.”¹³²

As we will see, the Renaissance preoccupation with fame and immortality was particularly strong for Sigismondo, who felt a perpetual insecurity due to his lack of dynastic title legitimating his rule. His need to present himself as “an exemplum of the wise and just prince,” according to both ancient and Christian precepts led to an even more carefully conceived program of patronage¹³³ that would create, rather than merely justify, his rule. Ettlinger highlights Sigismondo’s court and how its members and their activities aided Sigismondo’s creation of the image of fame, immortality, and the just ruler. Yet surprisingly brief mention is made of Alberti in her extended discussions of Sigismondo’s building projects, the reorganization of other cities in his territories, and the humanists and artists he protected at his court: Valturio and Basinio da Parma, Pisanello and Piero della Francesca.

Ettlinger does acknowledge Alberti’s role in Sigismondo’s “desire to enter into the first rank as a patron of the new Renaissance learning”¹³⁴ but takes this as a matter of course, glossing over it without exploring how exactly Alberti satisfied Sigismondo’s aims or the role he played for the leader there. She posits that Sigismondo and Alberti may have met at the papal court in Gubbio in 1449¹³⁵ and that Sigismondo sought to emulate Cosimo de’ Medici and his commission of the Old Sacristy at San Lorenzo as a family burial place in his renovation of San Francesco, which was to serve as a family mausoleum as well. As the heir to Brunelleschian architectural theories and the one who

¹³² Ibid., 207.

¹³³ Ibid., 3.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 217.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 218.

put them “into writing, Alberti was the perfect choice to be the architect to bring those theories to Rimini.”¹³⁶

Although Alberti had not presented these theories in writing until two years after Ettlinger’s accepted date of 1450 for beginning his façade design and we cannot conclusively link the two events, it is reasonable to suggest that an astute, well-connected patron such as Sigismondo may have been aware of Alberti’s architectural interests and the fact that he was working on the treatise.¹³⁷ Regardless, I contend that Alberti was enlisted by Sigismondo expressly to accomplish the larger patronage goal of creating for himself the image of the learned ruler.

In 1992, Charles Hope took a different tack, going back to the documents and carrying out extensive detective work to clarify the Tempio’s building history.¹³⁸ Hope’s “detailed scrutiny of both the extant documents and of the building itself”¹³⁹ seeks to resolve remaining problems related to the building’s original appearance, its chronology, and the iconographic significance of its sculptural program. Hope highlights the problem of “Alberti’s own intentions, since his plan was never carried out in its entirety,”¹⁴⁰ and tackles head on the problem of Alberti’s involvement – particularly as far as the façade, roof and dome are concerned (accepted theories of which he rejects)¹⁴¹ – dissecting the archival and built evidence to discern when Alberti was there and what input he provided.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ The dating of *De re aedificatoria* is controversial to say the least. See Cecil Grayson, “The Composition of L.B. Alberti’s ‘Decem libri de re aedificatoria,’” *Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst* XI (1960): 152–61. See also p. 143 below.

¹³⁸ In addition to several surviving documents related to the construction of the Tempio published by Delucca, literary works produced at the Malatesta court also contribute to our understanding of the project, particularly Roberto Valturio’s *De re militari*.

¹³⁹ Hope, “The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano,” 53.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 96–7.

Hope bases his conclusions on passages from De re aedificatoria, as well as contemporary accounts and extant letters.¹⁴²

Alberti's wooden model of 1454, mentioned in letters of late that year, serves as evidence of his plans from which Hope claims a late date – closer to 1453 than the traditional date of 1450 – for Alberti's involvement. This is based on Alberti's letter and evidence surrounding Matteo de' Pasti's commemorative medal, as well as what Hope views as a stylistic incompatibility of the interior architecture and Alberti's exterior.¹⁴³

This incompatibility forms one piece of evidence to support Hope's challenge to the notion that a single artistic mind determined the entire project. His discussion of the sculptural component of the interior decoration notes that it was executed by Agostino di Duccio, supervised by Matteo de' Pasti, and involved many others, including Maestro Alvise and Matteo Nuti. All of these names recur in the documents¹⁴⁴ and each of the men were consulted on design decisions. For Hope, the input of multiple figures, to which Alberti only later contributed, in large part accounts for the variety of styles and motifs present in the Tempio. The interpretation of the Tempio project as largely a collaborative effort effectively discounts Alberti's involvement and Hope's reading of the construction chronology further obscures Alberti's role, leading to Hope's conclusion that "his [Alberti's] influence on the architecture of the interior seems at best to have been very slight."¹⁴⁵ I will consider Alberti's recommendations as stated in De pictura and De re aedificatoria to demonstrate that there were in fact several ways in which Alberti did influence the interior.

¹⁴² Among these is a contemporary chronicle referring the start of construction that allows Hope to set 1453 as a *terminus ante quem* for Alberti's façade design. Ibid., 94.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 89, 93–94.

¹⁴⁴ Delucca, *Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche*.

¹⁴⁵ Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano," 89, 93.

In any case, in his wide-ranging examination of multiple facets of the project, Hope fails to consider Alberti prior to 1453 and ignores any possible avenues by which Alberti became involved with the commission. Although he discusses at length Sigismondo's letter to Giovanni de Medici requesting a painter and whether or not this referred to Piero della Francesca,¹⁴⁶ Hope neglects to carry out due diligence regarding Alberti's arrival, thus contributing to a lacuna in our understanding of his role there.

Disputing the conclusions of earlier studies, Hope further suggests that Sigismondo, not the friars of San Francesco or even Alberti whom he argues arrived on the scene at the late date of 1453, was the controlling force behind the reconstruction project.¹⁴⁷ To be sure, from procuring the building materials to personally seeking and hiring artists, Sigismondo was actively involved long before Alberti was enlisted and I will argue (in Chapter 5) that his need for control was one of the reasons Alberti, an untested and thus inexpert "architect," was attractive to him. Regardless of the date one accepts for Alberti's arrival, there were specific reasons Sigismondo chose him and these can be accounted for and read in the building Tempio Malatestiano itself in conjunction with Alberti's writings and theories.

In his Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento of 1997, archivist Oreste Delucca provides the most exhaustive modern publication of the extensive archival records related to the construction of the Tempio from which we learn much about the many figures active at the site. Of course the lack of documentation mentioning Alberti's role limits Delucca to discussing Alberti in terms of his relationship with the builders on

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 61.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 60, 65.

site executing his plans. The key documents are Alberti's November 1454 letter to Matteo de' Pasti along with others which discuss Alberti's wooden model and his plans for the roof and how the builders will proceed and in some cases alter them.¹⁴⁸

Angelo Turchini's extensive study of the Tempio, Sigismondo, and Alberti, published in 2000, reveals the scholar's training as an archivist.¹⁴⁹ Turchini starts from the commonly accepted facts and theories of Alberti's activity at Rimini as found in the documentary evidence and moves on to analyze that activity as gleaned from the built structure. He diligently refers to evidence for Alberti's presence at Rimini from "diverse and varied testimonies" in the written record. Besides Alberti's letter, there are passages from De re aedificatoria that reveal his familiarity with the local building materials and geology of the Riminese territory.¹⁵⁰ Turchini dates Alberti's activity from these sources; he doesn't dispute the accepted date of 1454 but argues that it could conceivably be earlier. Alberti's relationship with Riminese figures in the curia¹⁵¹ and the presence of manuscripts of Alberti's Ludi matematici and Momus in Rimini also point to Alberti's presence and influence there. Turchini's study of the built evidence includes the traces of "Albertian pictorial designs from the antique" in two reliefs in the Tomb of Ancestors and the influence of the antique Arch of Augustus in Rimini.¹⁵²

Turchini's comprehensive approach also addresses Alberti's specific role as architect, particularly in relation to that of builders Matteo de' Pasti and Matteo Nuti. Also addressed are Alberti's design methods as revealed by his famous letter, wooden

¹⁴⁸ Delucca, Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche, 296, 309–10.

¹⁴⁹ Angelo Turchini, Il Tempio Malatesiano, Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta e Leon Battista Alberti (Cesena: Società Editrice Il Ponte Vecchio, 2000).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 257–8.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 258.

model, problems related to the dome and siting, and finally, the iconography of his façade design as portrayed in de' Pasti's commemorative medal.¹⁵³ Turchini's broad study deals with just about every facet of our knowledge of Alberti's involvement with the Tempio commission. Yet while he appears at pains to investigate and to some extent even prove Alberti's presence at Rimini, like Hope, Turchini never explores the circumstances by which Alberti found himself there in the first place.

As we can see then, twentieth-century studies of the Tempio Malatestiano followed general art historical trends. Scholars became both more wide-ranging in approach and more specialized in focus, moving beyond strict stylistic analysis of the building as a whole to focus on ever-narrower topics or isolated elements of the commission. As this brief survey demonstrates, Charles Mitchell, Cecil Grayson, Marilyn Lavin, Charles Hope, and Helen Ettlinger, among others, all contributed substantially to our understanding of these various aspects of the Tempio by looking beyond the "pagan" character of the rebuilt church and focusing in particular on aspects such as the building history, the iconography of the decorative program, and patronage concerns.¹⁵⁴ But their consideration of the key figure of Alberti was largely limited to issues of dating and attribution and do not confront the question of his role in the realization of the building.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 277–78.

¹⁵⁴ Helen Ettlinger, *The Image of a Renaissance Prince*; Charles Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano;" Lavin, "Piero della Francesca's Fresco of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta before St. Sigismund: *Theoi Athanatoi Kai Tei Polei*;" Mitchell, "The Imagery of the Tempio Malatestiano," 77–90; Pasini's studies are too numerous to list here – see bibliography; Also, Robert Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998).; Joanna Woods-Marsden, "How quattrocento princes used art: Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta of Rimini and *cose militari*," *Renaissance Studies* 3, (1989): 387–414.; Woods-Marsden, "Images of Castles in the Renaissance: Symbols of 'Signoria'/Symbols of Tyranny," *Art Journal* 48/2 (1989): 130–37.

Alberti scholars have understandably aimed to highlight Alberti's role in the Tempio project, but their attention is for the most part limited to stylistic and iconographic concerns and readings that help to place the Tempio early in the chronology of Alberti's oeuvre. They look to the Tempio for clues and foreshadowings of Alberti's later illustrious architectural career. A few have speculated as to the circumstances by which Alberti came to Rimini. Yet beyond an attempt to identify where, when, and through whom they may have met, no direct examination of Sigismondo's motivation for choosing Alberti has emerged.

Within Alberti scholarship, Alberti was not considered a significant figure involved with the Tempio renovation until the nineteenth century. As one would expect, Alberti's biographer Girolamo Mancini (1832–1924) definitively assigns Alberti the role of designer, asserting, “Battista ideato la facciata a guida d’arco trionfale.”¹⁵⁵ Mancini cites Basinio's references to the projected dome and Alberti's letter to Matteo; his discussion of building materials and the influence of ancient buildings serve to connect Alberti more securely to the Tempio. Mancini offers a lengthy discussion of the various stylistic and decorative elements, connecting them to passages in Alberti's architectural treatise.¹⁵⁶ Mancini's interpretation leads him to the conclusion that Alberti didn't take part in the decoration of the chapels: “La grandiosa maestà della forma esteriore del tempio consuona coi precetti dati da Battista nel trattato sull'architettura, ma la straordinaria profusione degli ornamenti interni vi contrasta.”¹⁵⁷ Mancini considers Sigismondo the ideal patron according to the definition Alberti presents in *De re*

¹⁵⁵ Girolamo Mancini, *Vita di Leon Battista Alberti* (Florence: Sansoni, 1882), republished by Elibron Classics, 2006, 348.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 343–60.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 352–53. I will contest this reading in Chapter 5.

aedificatoria, but he does not explore Alberti's role beyond that of façade designer and does not consider his relationship with Sigismondo.

As discussed above, one of the leading Alberti scholars of the twentieth century, Cecil Grayson, published Alberti's 1454 letter to Matteo de' Pasti in 1957. Along with the text, Grayson provided an analysis of the letter that focused on the important issues of its date and specific contents, specifically the letter's ensuing discussions about the roofing and construction.¹⁵⁸ Grayson does not take up other issues surrounding the commission.

In a 1977 monograph primarily devoted to Alberti's architecture, Franco Borsi views Alberti as a partner of the patron, which for him accounts for the building's "ambiguity...both sacred and pagan."¹⁵⁹ In addition to recounting three stages of the transformation of San Francesco from the initial remodeling of a single chapel to wholesale renovation of the interior and exterior, Borsi finds Albertian themes suffused throughout the building. From inscriptions to certain aspects of the interior decoration and the overall integration of the design of the exterior, Borsi assigns to Alberti the role of adviser.¹⁶⁰ Once Sigismondo decided to completely remodel the Tempio, Alberti took a leading role, as much engineer as designer, showing concern about stability and load-bearing as well as resolving the incompatibility of the Gothic and classical styles.¹⁶¹ Borsi deals with several issues regarding Alberti's involvement. But he takes Alberti's presence in Rimini as a matter of course and never questions how he got there. This is in spite of

¹⁵⁸ These will be addressed in Chapter 5.

¹⁵⁹ Borsi, *Leon Battista Alberti. The Complete Works*, 91. Borsi later elaborates on this ambiguity, explaining that "his life exemplifies these contradictions, and he paraded them openly." *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁶⁰ While the "iconological programme may have been elaborated by Basinio together by Valturius...it is inconceivable that Alberti did not know of it or exercise some influence upon it." *Ibid.*, 92, 96.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

the fact that the previous four chapters of his monograph are devoted to “Themes of Alberti’s Life” and his time at Ferrara, Rome, and Florence. I will show that each of these visits in fact were factors in his obtaining the Rimini commission.

Later studies deal more directly, if briefly, with the question of how and why Alberti ended up at Rimini. These come from an interesting variety of perspectives: the maestro of the Malatesta, Pier Giorgio Pasini, the interdisciplinary classicist, Charles Burroughs, and the more traditional architectural historians Joseph Rykwert and Robert Tavernor. In 1983, Pasini proposed the d’Este court in Ferrara of the mid-1440s as a meeting place for Alberti and Sigismondo and argued that it was Sigismondo who enlisted Alberti in an artistic campaign to create a building with the “perception of authority” that was “exclusively oriented towards the celebration of the signore and his family.”¹⁶²

We know that both Sigismondo and Alberti had close ties to the d’Este court at Ferrara. Niccolo III d’Este (1383–1441) had married Sigismondo’s cousin, Parisina Malatesta (1404–25), and in 1434, Sigismondo in turn married Niccolo’s daughter, Leonello’s sister, Ginevra d’Este (1418–1440). In the same period, Alberti’s relationship with the d’Este grew from a 1435 meeting with Leonello’s brother, Meliaduso, in Florence. In subsequent years, Alberti dedicated books to both of the brothers, and he was hosted in Ferrara during the Council of the Churches in 1439 and throughout the 1440s when he also is known to have been involved with the commission for an equestrian monument honoring Niccolo III d’Este.¹⁶³ Moreover, there are several

¹⁶² Pier Giorgio Pasini, *I Malatesta e l’arte* (Bologna: Silvana, 1983), 82.

¹⁶³ In 1437, Alberti dedicated *Philodoxeos fabula* to Leonello and in *Ludi matematici* of 1452, he referred to Meliaduso as “a close friend.” Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance*, 214. For the Niccolò monument, see Charles Rosenberg, *The Este Monuments and Urban Development in*

instances in which we can see Sigismondo specifically modeling his artistic patronage after that of Leonello, including the artists he employed. It can be no coincidence that three of the major artists who worked on the Tempio – Alberti, Pisanello, and Piero – had also served Leonello.

In From Signs to Design, Environmental Process and Reform in Early Renaissance Rome of 1990, Charles Burroughs followed up on Pasini's investigations and also emphasized the relationship between Sigismondo and Leonello d'Este of Ferrara, "whose esteem for Sigismondo is surely indicated by the series of medals made for the latter by Leonello's court artist, Pisanello."¹⁶⁴

Burroughs' focus, however, is the relationship between Sigismondo and Pope Nicholas V and the personal connections among Alberti, Sigismondo, and Leonello.¹⁶⁵ Offering an alternative to "the familiar account of the Tempio as a direct expression of Sigismondo's personal, dynastic, and especially amatory interests," Burroughs brings into play papal political and economic interests of the period and speculates that Sigismondo and Alberti came into contact in Fabriano in 1450. Nicholas had established a papal residence there to escape the plague a year before, and now returned, to meet with Sigismondo and his brothers regarding papal rule of the Romagna and Marches, among other business. Nicholas was one of Sigismondo's few supporters; Burroughs finds evidence of their strong relationship in the "obsessive frequency" of the date of Nicholas's Holy Year emblazoned throughout the Tempio and its commemorative

Renaissance Ferrara (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 54–82. All of these aspects of Alberti's experience in Ferrara will be further explored in Chapter 4.

¹⁶⁴ Burroughs, From Signs to Design, 211.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 209–16.

medals.¹⁶⁶ It is certainly conceivable that the alliance between Pope and condottiere would extend to artistic patronage as well, just as it did in Sigismondo's utilization of artists recommended by his other allies, Cosimo de' Medici (Piero della Francesca) and Leonello d'Este (Pisanello). Burroughs admits that "no document places Alberti there in that year but there is no more likely period for the visit to the area indicated by personal observations recorded in the *De re aedificatoria*."¹⁶⁷ Albertian architectural themes found in a contemporary papal project in Fabriano, coupled with comments he made about the city in *De re aedificatoria*, also leads to Burroughs's speculation about yet another instance of Alberti's prior architectural activity to justify his involvement at Rimini.¹⁶⁸

Joseph Rykwert's contribution to the catalog of a 1994 exhibition in Mantua provides an extensive formal analysis of the Tempio. In it, however, he feels compelled to acknowledge: "It is not clear for what reasons or under what circumstances Alberti was chosen for the project. He was part of the court of Nicholas V and Sigismondo had probably met him in Florence during the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1439."¹⁶⁹

Robert Tavernor's 1998 survey of Alberti's architecture presents a "first attempt at a digest of more recent thoughts (since Borsi) about Alberti's buildings" and seeks to "show how Alberti translated architectural ideas into practice, and established a professional role for the modern architect within the complex process of building."¹⁷⁰ In his chronological survey focused on theory and design, Tavernor does acknowledge that Sigismondo's choice of Alberti was an unusual one, given his negligible architectural

¹⁶⁶ Burroughs explores their alliance, *ibid.*, 210–11.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 211–12.

¹⁶⁹ Joseph Rykwert, "I committenti e i loro edifici. Sigismondo Malatesta di Rimini e il Tempio Maltestiano," in *Leon Battista Alberti*, ed. Anne Engel and Joseph Rykwert (Milan: Electa, 1994), 378.

¹⁷⁰ Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building*, x.

experience – his only possible prior designing experience being the apse for his small priory church of San Martino a Gangalandi, which he was granted in 1432.

Tavernor relies on self-described “tangential evidence” to expand his search for architectural qualifications by attributing to Alberti “frequent three-dimensional testing of his ideas, perhaps through drawings or even physical models.”¹⁷¹ But he stops short of directly relating this activity to Sigismondo’s commission.

Rather than looking in detail at Alberti’s career before he was “entrusted (with) the redesign of San Francesco,” Tavernor looks ahead to later projects and patrons – Giovanni Rucellai and Ludovico Gonzaga – for whom Tavernor argues Alberti served as a “philosopher-architect.” I contend that this is the role Alberti performed at Rimini as well. For Tavernor this position is both confirmed by and legitimates Alberti’s habit of supervising construction from afar. Alberti “practiced architecture unconventionally”¹⁷² – he planned every detail and made precise drawings and models so he could “afford to be absent from the building site.” The implication is that this practice to some degree made his unconventional background acceptable.

Tavernor does not directly explore or come to a conclusion about how Alberti got to Rimini. But his work is important for this study in his recognition that Alberti’s lack of experience is a historical problem and is substantiated by the efforts of so many scholars: “The absence of evidence of his (Alberti’s) involvement in a major project is one reason why so many unattributed building designs in Rome, and elsewhere have been credited to

¹⁷¹ As he recommended in *De re aedificatoria*, II, i, in L. B. Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, ed. Joseph Rykwert and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 33–34; Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building*, 25.

¹⁷² Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building*, ix.

him.”¹⁷³ Alberti was certainly in the service of the Pope during a period of intense architectural undertaking, particularly Nicholas V’s renovation of the Borgo and the restoration of forty basilicas as well as city walls and aqueducts. But we have no documented proof of Alberti’s involvement, and his activity in this period is still speculative – witness the work of Torgil Magnusson, William Carroll Westfall, Burroughs and Manfredo Tafuri.¹⁷⁴ We do know that Alberti was involved in engineering projects¹⁷⁵ and that he composed several written works, among them treatises on mathematics, engineering, and optics. I will argue that these activities, pursued while a member of the curia, in the thriving center of architectural studies that was ‘400 Rome,, also made him attractive to Sigismondo.

Arturo Calzona also links Alberti’s arrival in Rimini to his time in Rome. In an essay that deals, among other concerns, with the relationship between Piero della Francesca and Alberti, Calzona dates the architect’s trip to Rimini to the early months of 1448, and suggests that Alberti may have been looking to leave Rome in the unstable period preceding the Porcari conspiracy.¹⁷⁶ Tafuri’s and Burroughs’s interpretation that

¹⁷³ Ibid., 25.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 25. The literature on the Nicholine plan is extensive. See especially, Torgil Magnuson, Studies in Roman Quattrocento Architecture, (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1958); Carroll William Westfall, In This Most Perfect Paradise, (University Park: Penn State Press, 1974); Charles Mack, “Bernardo Rossellino, L.B. Alberti and the Rome of Nicholas V,” Southeastern College Art Conference Review (1982): 60–69, and Mack, “Nicholas the Fifth and the Rebuilding of Rome: Reality and Legacy,” In Light on the Eternal City. Observations and Discoveries in the Art and Architecture of Rome, Papers in Art History from the Pennsylvania State University (State College, PA: Penn State, 1987), 31–56.

Tavernor also suggests a potential pre-Rimini project at San Martino a Gangalandi, near Florence, in the early 1430s. On Alberti and the Art of Building, 25; Burroughs, From Signs to Design; Manfredo Tafuri, Interpreting the Renaissance: Princes, Cities, Architects (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006).

¹⁷⁵ See Chapter 4.

¹⁷⁶ “...il trasferimento nella città adriatica potrebbe essere stato favorito dalla difficile situazione venutasi a determinare a Roma dopo la congiura dei Porcari e la minaccia turca seguita alla caduta di Constantinopoli,” Arturo Calzona, “La ‘nuova’ architettura dell’Alberti al Malatestiano di Rimini,” in Leon Battista Alberti e il Quattrocento, ed. Luca Chiavoni, et al. (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2001), 319–50. The date is based on Calzona’s reading of Giovanni Pedrino’s Cronaca Forlivese. See Calzona 322, note 9. The conspiracy didn’t come to fruition until 1453, but Porcari had begun fomenting dissent even before Nicholas became

Alberti's work on Porcari's revolt, De porcaria coniuratione, indicates disapproval or conflict with Nicholas, lends support to this hypothesis.

Alberto Giorgio Cassani's 2005 essay supports this reading and adds to the picture the intermediary role of the poet Giusto de' Conti.¹⁷⁷ Illuminating as they may be, these contributions are limited by the author's focus on circumstances, logistics, and practicalities that do not extend to potential motivations of the involved characters. The likely relationships among Alberti, Sigismondo, Nicholas and the d'Este form one piece of the puzzle, but there is surely more to the story than this circumstantial situation.

Scholars' narrow understanding of Alberti in Rimini over the past two hundred years is puzzling. Their neglect of him as an active contributor to the Tempio commission as a whole or as a significant member of Sigismondo's court gives the impression that Alberti was merely one of many contributors, brought in to apply a new face to the Tempio. The fact that Alberti was largely absent from the worksite for the duration of the construction surely contributes to this impression. But why, particularly in light of the voracious and wide-ranging nature of Alberti studies of the twentieth century has no one looked beyond that surface? Perhaps it is because the bulk of Alberti's contribution to the building was left unfinished. Or maybe because it literally forms an outer shell that has no intrinsic connection – as some have argued both physically and iconographically – to the rest of the church. Whatever the reason, a new approach is required. The threads binding the various aspects of the church, patron, and locale are entwined in Rimini, and to be sure, Alberti is woven into most of them. A look beyond the work on the Tempio to

pope in 1447. Anthony d'Elia, "Stefano Porcari's Conspiracy against Pope Nicholas V in 1453 and Republican Culture in Papal Rome," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 68 (2007), 207–31.

¹⁷⁷ Alberto Giorgio Cassani, "Il principe e l'architetto," *Leon Battista Alberti architetto* (Florence: Banca CR, 2005), 155–64, 163.

the evolution of Alberti scholarship will help to explain the historical failure to acknowledge Alberti's role in a more thorough way and provide a first step towards reassessing his contribution to the Tempio Malatestiano.

500 Years of Alberti

Over the course of more than five centuries, there has been a gradual fragmentation by architectural historians of Alberti's reputation from a unified one that recognized his diverse interests and varied fields of endeavor into that of a narrowly-focused architectural designer. This is partially the result of the absence of a comprehensive effort to incorporate Alberti's buildings into his career as a whole. Such a lacuna has hindered a clear understanding of Alberti's architectural works that moves beyond the basic issues of attribution and chronology to discern his specific role.

In the Quattrocento, Alberti was esteemed as a learned humanist, accomplished in diverse fields of intellectual pursuit. Within a century, however, an emphasis on his architectural works over his other endeavors became common. Such a tendency has been exacerbated by the disintegration of his identity as a "universal man" through the course of five centuries of Alberti scholarship. Since the time when his contemporary, Christoforo Landino, described Alberti as a "chameleon," his character has been transformed from a well-rounded humanist to a singularly focused designer. This evolution has been magnified by – and can in fact be charted through – the course of Alberti criticism.

Early commentators noted the breadth of Alberti's accomplishments and esteemed him for precisely this attribute. But Alberti scholarship of the early modern era

has focused on his architectural activity (specifically on stylistic issues that depend upon formal analysis), in most cases to the exclusion of many of the other aspects of this “uomo universale.” The transformation from Renaissance man to architect seems to have occurred quite quickly and decisively.

One of the most important and influential evaluations of Alberti’s character and his achievements comes from his autobiography, the Vita anonima. Though written in the third person, this work has become acknowledged as by Alberti himself.¹⁷⁸ Written quite early in his career, probably in 1438, the Vita does not refer to architectural projects or his artistic or scientific writings, but does list all of Alberti’s literary works up to that point, save one (Theogenius).¹⁷⁹ More important to Alberti than merely listing his tangible accomplishments was establishing himself as a good person, worthy of respect and high esteem, and an innocent victim of those with evil intentions, namely certain members of his family. In addition to this personality study, we find definitive knowledge of Alberti’s interest in science and technology when he tells of the solace he found in mathematics and physics as a cure for his mental troubles while studying law at Bologna.¹⁸⁰ The Vita also documents Alberti’s burgeoning interest in the arts. In addition to the portraits he painted (the only evidence of his activity as a painter) and faces he

¹⁷⁸ Renee Neu Watkins, “The Authorship of the Vita anonima of Leon Battista Alberti,” Studies in the Renaissance, 4 (1956): 101–112; Watkins, “L.B. Alberti in the Mirror: An Interpretation of the Vita with a New Translation,” Italian Quarterly 30 (1989): 5–30; Roberto Fubini and Anna Maria Gallorini, “L’autobiografia di Leon Battista Alberti: studio e edizione,” Rinascimento 2 (1972): 21–78; Muratori, RIS, 25, col. 295 sqq; L. B. Alberti, Opere volgari, ed. Cecil Grayson (Bari: Gius Laterza & Figli, 1966–73) 1: lxxxix-cix.

¹⁷⁹ Watkins attributes this to the interpretation of Theogenius as a political tract more than a literary one. Watkins, “The Authorship,” 106.

¹⁸⁰ “On the physician’s orders, then, he did give up his legal studies, which had so greatly taxed his memory, just as they were about to bear fruit. Since, however, he could not live without intellectual occupation, he turned to physics and mathematics; these he was sure he could cultivate freely, for he could see that they exercised intelligence rather than memory.” Watkins, “L.B. Alberti in the Mirror,” 8. This episode in Alberti’s life will be taken up in Chapter 2.

modeled,¹⁸¹ we learn of his invention of the camera obscura, the “little box” which demonstrated linear perspective as he had described it in his “little books on painting.”¹⁸² Though the Vita may have been prompted by ulterior motives,¹⁸³ we should note that Alberti was the first to see himself as one learned in many fields, both intellectual and physical, thus furnishing the source for the ideal Renaissance man, an estimation that many scholars would soon follow.

Contemporaries echoed Alberti’s multi-faceted self-image. Flavio Biondo, a fellow member of the papal curia of Nicholas V, was familiar with Alberti and his cartographic and surveying activities in Rome.¹⁸⁴ Also involved in archaeological projects to recover the glory of ancient Rome, Biondo valued Alberti’s many skills and genius. In his Italia Illustrata of around 1450 Biondo describes Alberti as “famous in many versatile and good skills and [he] provides the country with genius.”¹⁸⁵ In his 1481 Apologia di Dante, a commentary on the Divine Comedy, Cristoforo Landino cites Alberti as one of the great Florentines and notes his eclectic character. As one of Alberti’s closest literary colleagues, Landino had helped Alberti judge the latter’s poetry contest of 1441 and together they supported the wide use of the volgare. Yet to Landino, his colleague’s spirit of scientific inquiry stands out: “Where should I place Battista Alberti, or in what generation of learned men do I place him? I would say among the physicists: I certainly agree that he was only born to investigate the secrets of nature. Was

¹⁸¹ For instance the self-portrait medal in the Kress Collection at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

¹⁸² Watkins, “L.B. Alberti in the Mirror,” 11.

¹⁸³ Watkins proposes that the Vita may have been written as a last testament and evidence of his innocent and high moral character by one fearing for his life at the hands of his relatives. *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸⁴ See Chapter 3.

¹⁸⁵ “nobili ad multas artes bonas versatili ingenio patriam exornat,” Flavio Biondo, Italia Illustrata, c. 1450, Brescia, 1482, carta 66v (in Gabriele Morolli, “Saggio di bibliografia albertiana,” Studi e Documenti Architettura 1 (1972), 16, n. 6).

there any branch of mathematics that was unknown to him? He knew geometry, arithmetic and astrology.”¹⁸⁶

Angelo Poliziano, also a contemporary of Landino and intimate of Alberti, similarly de-emphasized Alberti’s architectural activities. Poliziano’s evaluation of Alberti is particularly interesting for it comes in the form of the dedication of the first printed version of Alberti’s treatise on architecture to Lorenzo de’ Medici in 1485. Here Poliziano reinforces the degree to which, long after his buildings had been constructed, Alberti was recognized as much more than merely an architect. In this book devoted exclusively to the field, architecture is presented as only one among many – and not even the primary – field in which Alberti is accomplished: “Among the many excellent works that he left to posterity were the ten books he had composed on architecture...Surely there was no field of knowledge however remote, no discipline however arcane, that escaped his attention...”¹⁸⁷ Poliziano’s encomium emphasizes the breadth of Alberti’s knowledge and accomplishment, describing him in general terms as “a man of refined intellect, keen judgment, and most diligent learning.”¹⁸⁸ Only towards the end of the dedication, does Poliziano refer to Alberti’s qualifications as an architect, as if trying to justify this type of work by a man of such diverse talents: “...his invention was not limited to machinery, lifts, and automata,” – implying that these engineering projects are the works for which he primarily known – “but also included the wonderful forms of buildings.” At the close

¹⁸⁶ “Dove lascio Battista Alberti, o in che generazione di dotti lo ripongo? Dirai tra i fisici: certo affermo lui essere nato solo per investigare e segreti della natura. Ma quale spetie di matematica gli fu incognita?” Landino continues, “Lui geometra, lui aritmetico, lui astrologo, lui musico et nella prospettiva meraviglioso più che huomo di molto secoli.” Gabriele Morolli, “Saggio di bibliografia albertiana,” 19. Further on in his encomium, Landino refers also to Alberti’s artistic talents and his role in advancing the vernacular. Borsi, *Leon Battista Alberti. The Complete Works*, 263.

¹⁸⁷ “Angelo Poliziano saluta Lorenzo de’ Medici suo Signore,” L.B. Alberti, *L’Architettura [De re aedificatoria]*, ed. G. Orlandi (Milan: Edizioni il Polifilo, 1966), 2–3.

¹⁸⁸ “...vir ingenii elegantis, acerrimi iudicii, exquisitissimae doctrinae.” Ibid.

of the fifteenth century then, Alberti had become known as an authority on architecture, yet this was far from his singular or even principal source of his good reputation.

The scholarly isolation of Alberti's architectural accomplishments and the diminished attention paid to his other achievements seem to have begun already in the sixteenth century, when Vasari, in the 1550 edition of his Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects, refers to him simply as "Architect of Florence."

Vasari certainly mentions many non-architectural works as well as Alberti's reputation as a learned and erudite man; this is in contrast to his evaluation of most other artists.

Alberti combined skill and learning, theory and practice, whereby "art becomes much richer and more perfect by the aid of science,"¹⁸⁹ for instance, in the siting of buildings.

Three-quarters of a century after his death, Vasari admits that Alberti's esteemed reputation was still based more on his writings than on the works he produced with his hands.¹⁹⁰ These included, in addition to humanist works in Latin and on architecture, perspective, and painting, "studying geography, the proportions of antiquities...arithmetic and geometry, ten books on architecture in the Latin tongue, three books on painting, a treatise on traction, and the rules for measuring heights, as well as books on the Vita Civile and some erotic works in prose and verse..."¹⁹¹

But the bulk of Vasari's biography of Alberti (as is admittedly appropriate to an anthology of artists' lives) is devoted to the construction projects of this "architect," citing patrons, commissions, and design flaws that resulted from Alberti's lack of

¹⁸⁹ Giorgio Vasari. Lives of the Painters. Sculptors and Architects. Vol. 1. Trans. Gaston du C. de Vere (New York: Everyman's Library, 1996), 414.

¹⁹⁰ "It is no marvel then, if the famous Leon Battista is known more for his writings than for the work of his hands." Ibid., 415.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 415.

practical building experience. Certainly Vasari was aware of Alberti's literary accomplishments and may or may not have known of his technical projects in Rome; but these may have been de-emphasized in order to promote him as a designer or creative artist in contrast to a mere craftsman or theoretical scholar.

Just as Vasari's background as a Florentine at the end of the Renaissance shaped his view of the period, so too did the cultural milieu of scholars of later ages condition the pictures they painted of Alberti. The Romantic view of Alberti presented by Jacob Burckhardt in his Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy of 1860¹⁹² was in large part responsible for shaping modern notions of the Renaissance Man. Burckhardt's characterization was based on Alberti's Vita Anonima and established Alberti as the paragon of the "uomo universale" who embodied the spirit of his age of burgeoning individualism. Like his source, the Vita, Burckhardt's account enumerates Alberti's physical as well as myriad intellectual talents. Here, Alberti's accomplishments in the arenas of painting, sculpture, and architecture merit only passing mention among his great feats of stamina and dexterity and his sensitive character. Also following his model, Burckhardt devotes a relatively long passage to Alberti's invention of the camera obscura, the only actual work that is described.

More curious than this checklist, which is more of a personality profile than analysis, however, is Burckhardt's discussion of Alberti in his later Architecture of the Italian Renaissance.¹⁹³ For here we find a drastic shift of orientation and narrowing of focus. Now Alberti is discussed among the "Theorists," focusing on the De re aedificatoria. Abstract terms like "variety," "concinntas," and "symmetry" predominate,

¹⁹² Jacob Burckhardt, Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (London: Phaidon, 1945).

¹⁹³ Jacob Burckhardt, Architecture of the Italian Renaissance, ed. Peter Murray, trans. James Palmes, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 31–32.

without reference to specific works. The buildings merely mark points in the history of facades, windows, and rustication, without much consideration given to their author. Furthermore, Alberti's architecture is seen in isolation, largely divorced from the other facets of his career and the varied themes that permeated Burckhardt's previous study. This work was in part the product of the development of the discipline of art history within the German philosophical milieu¹⁹⁴ and led to increasingly narrow-focused studies of Alberti and his buildings.

The end of the nineteenth century – not coincidentally the age in which the discipline of art history was in its formative stages – saw the first scholarly studies of Alberti as architect. German scholars and art historians were the first to focus solely on this aspect of Alberti's career, often focusing on single projects. Georg Dehio's 1880 study of Alberti's role in Nicholas V's renovation of the Vatican Borgo instituted a novel approach to Alberti studies: analysis devoted to a single architectural project.¹⁹⁵ Scholars such as Magnuson, Ricci, and Intra picked up this practice in the following decades.¹⁹⁶

Amid this growing trend of viewing Alberti primarily, if not exclusively, as an architect, appeared Mancini's 1882 biography of Alberti. Mancini intended to present a straightforward biography, presenting all sides of Alberti in the most favorable light possible. Since its publication it has become the basic source on Alberti's life. In the process, Mancini re-asserted the universality of Alberti, idolizing him as an ethically

¹⁹⁴ This issue will be further discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁹⁵ Georg Dehio, "Die Bauprojekte Nicholas V und Leon Battista Alberti," *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, 3 (1880): 241–57.

¹⁹⁶ Torgil Magnuson, "The Project of Nicolas V for Rebuilding the Borgo Leonino," *Studies in Quattrocento Architecture*, (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1958), 65–97; Ricci, *Il Tempio Malatestiano*; Giovanni Battista Intra, "Mantova: La Basilica di San Sebastiano," *Arte e storia* 2 (1883); Intra, "La Basilica di Sant'Andrea in Mantova," *Arte e storia* 21 (1902).

good man (based on his moral writings) who also invented scientific instruments and had a keen sense of intellectual and artistic inquiry.

Twentieth-century Alberti studies have resumed a limited focus. While Italianists and Latinists view Alberti primarily as a proponent of one or the other language, there have also been studies of Alberti as sociologist, or as representative of any of the other fields in which he was engaged. Architectural history provides no exception to this modern trend. Franco Borsi's monograph uses Alberti's architectural production as a veil through which he views his work in other fields.¹⁹⁷ Objective treatments of Alberti's individual buildings by Johnson, Lamoureux, Preyer, Dezzi-Bardeschi, and Ricci are concerned primarily with issues of attribution, chronology, design, and iconography.¹⁹⁸ Certainly there have been innovative, if still exclusively architectural, approaches to Alberti's work. Wittkower's seminal analysis of the ideological sources and ramifications of harmonic proportions and rational composition (found in both Alberti's buildings and his treatise) as the theoretical basis of Renaissance architecture influenced nearly all subsequent studies, not only of Alberti, but of Renaissance architecture in general.¹⁹⁹

Architectural historians have not been the only proponents of such an exclusionary methodology. There are also those who have focused solely on Alberti's

¹⁹⁷ Borsi, Leon Battista Alberti. The Complete Works, 1973.

¹⁹⁸ Marco Dezzi-Bardeschi, "Nuove ricerche sul S. Sepolcro nella Capella Rucellai a Firenze," Marmo 2 (1963): 135–61; Dezzi-Bardeschi, "Il complesso monumentale di S. Pancrazio a Firenze e il suo restauro," Quaderno dell'Istituto di storia dell'architettura, 13, no. 73–78 (1966): 1–54; Dezzi-Bardeschi, La facciata di Santa Maria Novella a Firenze, (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1970); Eugene Johnson, Sant'Andrea in Mantua: The Building History, (University Park, PA and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975).; Richard E. Lamoureux, "Alberti's Church of San Sebastiano in Mantua," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan Ann Arbor, 1979).; Brenda Preyer, "The Rucellai Palace," in Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone, vol. 1 Studies of the Warburg Institute 24 (London, 1981), 155–255.; Ricci, Il Tempio Malatestiano.

¹⁹⁹ Rudolph Wittkower, Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co. 1971).

technical work, ranging from perspective and optics to cartography, statics, mathematics and geometry.²⁰⁰ Despite these scholars' acknowledgment of the significance of Alberti's scientific pursuits, there has been little effort made to evaluate the implications of this activity on the many other aspects of his career. This omission is most glaring with regard to Alberti's architecture, which by its very nature is a technical art.

Alberti scholars of the last half of the twentieth century started to bring the situation full circle. There remain studies that focus on one aspect or another of Alberti's career and character; yet others attempt to synthesize the various disjointed threads of modern scholarship.

Cecil Grayson, among the most prominent of Alberti scholars, has studied Alberti's writings in several fields, though bridging these gaps has not been his main goal. In addition to publishing definitive editions of works as diverse as the Ludi Matematici and De iciarchia,²⁰¹ Grayson has studied Alberti's literary works as well as his use of the vernacular, grammar, and his humanism in general. Grayson has also dealt

²⁰⁰ J. Andrews Aiken, "Truth in Images: From the Technical Drawings of Ibn Al-Razzaz Al-Jazari, Campanus of Novara, and Giovanni De' Dondi to the Perspective Projection of Leon Battista Alberti," Viator 25 (1994): 325–59; Salvatore di Pasquale, "Tracce di statica archimedeica in Leon Battista Alberti," Palladio 5, no. 9 (1992): 41–68; Samuel Edgerton, "Alberti's Optics" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1965); Otto Lehmann-Brockhaus, "Alberti's Descriptio Urbis Romae," Kunstchronik 13, (1960): 345–48; Naomi Miller, "Euclides Redivivus: A Hypothesis on a Proposition," Gazette des Beaux-Arts ser. 6, 121, May-June (1993): 213–26; Giovanni Orlandi, "Nota Sul Testo Della Descriptio Urbis Romae di L.B. Alberti," Quaderno 1 (1968): 81–90.; Giustina Scaglia, "Instruments Perfected for Measurements of Man and Statues Illustrated in Leon Battista Alberti's De Statua," Nuncius. Annali di storia della scienza 8, no. 2 (1993): 555–96; Pierre Souffrin, "La Geometria Practica Dans Le Ludi Rerum Mathematicarum," Albertiana 1 (1998): 87–104.; Guido Uccelli De Nemi, Le Navi Di Nemi (Rome, 1940); Luigi Vagnetti, "Considerazioni Sui Ludi Matematici," Studi e documenti di architettura 1 (1972): 175–259; Vagnetti, "La Descriptio Urbis Romae," Quaderno 1 (1968): 25–79; Constantin Winterberg, "Leon Battista Alberti's Technische Schriften," Repertorium fur Kunstwissenschaft 2/6 (1883): 326–56; Georg Wolff, "Leone Battista Alberti als Mathematiker," Scientia 60 (1936): 353–59.

²⁰¹ L. B. Alberti, Opere volgari di Leon Battista Alberti, ed. C. Grayson (Bari: Gius Laterza & Figli, 1960–73).

with Alberti's artistic endeavors, as art theorist and as architect in both practice and theory.²⁰²

The most wide-ranging effort to reverse the trend of fragmenting of Alberti studies is still Joan Gadol's study, Leon Battista Alberti: Universal Man of the Early Renaissance.²⁰³ Rather than analyzing any single work or group of works, Gadol's aim was to portray Alberti's intellectual character, to understand the "coherence of his thought, the ideas that led him from one set of problems to another."²⁰⁴ This approach takes into account the ramifications of Alberti's literary and philosophical ideas for his built works and highlights the connection between his scientific and technical experiences and the rest of his career.²⁰⁵ Gadol also rightly emphasizes the importance of Alberti's time in Rome to the development of these technical skills. While some literary work was carried out in the years 1443–52,²⁰⁶ Alberti's

energies were chiefly directed towards archaeological and architectural studies, and to mathematics, engineering and mechanics... The various projects Alberti planned and carried out in Rome gave him the architectural and engineering experience necessary for the comprehensive study of the art of building which he had decided to write, and for the first of his own buildings...²⁰⁷

²⁰² Grayson, "Leon Battista Alberti Architect," Architectural Design 21 (1979): 7–17.; Grayson, "The Composition of L.B. Alberti's 'Decem Libri De re aedificatoria,'" Grayson, "L.B. Alberti's 'Costruzione Legittima,'" Italian Studies 19 (1964): 14–27; Grayson, "The Text of Alberti's De pictura," Italian Studies 23 (1968): 71–92.

²⁰³ Joan Gadol, Leon Battista Alberti: Universal Man of the Early Renaissance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, xiii.

²⁰⁵ "Just as significant for the direction his career would take...are the mathematical studies Alberti pursued while he was at Bologna." *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁰⁶ Leon Battista Alberti, Momus, Trans. Sarah Knight, Latin Text edited by Virginia Brown and Sarah Knight (Cambridge, MA and London: The I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, 2003). For the relationship of this work to Alberti's architecture, see Manfredo Tafuri, "Cives esse non licere: Nicholas V and Leon Battista Alberti," Harvard Architectural Review 6 (1986): 61–75.

²⁰⁷ Gadol, Leon Battista Alberti: Universal Man of the Early Renaissance, 8–9.

This theme will be taken up in Chapter Four where I argue that the experience, some of which was technical, that Alberti gained in Rome was a direct recommendation for the Rimini commission.

As important as Gadol's study is in seeking to re-establish the significance of Alberti's technical activity, it stops short of exploring its implications for his architecture. Instead, her discussion of Alberti's architecture is another based on aesthetic theory and the relationship of Alberti's design to issues of natural and musical proportions, an approach similar to that of Wittkower's classic work.²⁰⁸

More recently, architectural historians have sought to expand the interpretation of Alberti by also considering his production in other fields, notably his literary works: Mark Jarzombek's On Leon Baptista Alberti. His Literary and Aesthetic Theories, and Christine Smith's Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism.

Jarzombek's controversial study²⁰⁹ attempts to reconstruct Alberti's "aesthetic philosophy" from an analysis of his literary and ethical writings. His main goal is to reunite Alberti's literary and aesthetic ideas, which he sees as having become distinct in both theory and practical scholarship. Indeed, Jarzombek rightly claims that to study Alberti's aesthetic treatises apart from his ethical writings "seriously distort(s)"²¹⁰ Alberti's philosophy. He therefore makes his goal "to move beyond the static image of Alberti as the paradigm of a particular point of view and see him as a thinker of merit and as a critic of the intellectual and cultural world around him."²¹¹ Jarzombek also calls for

²⁰⁸ Wittkower, Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism.

²⁰⁹ Joseph Rykwert review of Mark Jarzombek, On Leon Baptista Alberti. His Literary and Aesthetic Theories, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989). in Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 50/3 (1994): 311–13.

²¹⁰ Jarzombek, On Leon Baptista Alberti: His Literary and Aesthetic Theories, xi.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, xiv.

what I refer to as a “reintegration” of Alberti, claiming a “central scheme” around which “Alberti organized his entire oeuvre,”²¹² “to lay bare the internal consistencies of his thought.”²¹³

Jarzombek’s themes are diverse and complex: the autobiographical aspects of Alberti’s cultural theories, his theory of what Jarzombek terms the “arch-aesthetic” (based on Alberti’s view of the relationship between art and reality, the artist and human), and his “views on the function of humanism in the fundamentally flawed aesthetic world.”²¹⁴ Jarzombek challenges the traditional view of Alberti as a humanist.²¹⁵ While Alberti has primarily been viewed in terms of his classical influences, Jarzombek aims to redress the imbalance, bringing to the fore medieval components of his thought that Jarzombek sees as an indispensable factor in Alberti’s theory of aesthetics.²¹⁶

For Jarzombek, an architectural historian, however, the buildings themselves and their relationship to his “scheme” merit only a postscript. He insists that “investigations into Alberti’s architecture can only exist in the realm of speculation” and disputes connections made between the built works and passages in *De re aedificatoria*.²¹⁷ For Jarzombek, because Alberti never commented on his designs or buildings in his writings, such an approach is too simplistic and the relationship is “far from clear,” “undocumented,” and “too innocent.”²¹⁸ Jarzombek’s solution to reading the buildings is instead to apply Alberti’s “cultural and aesthetic theories” as he has elucidated them. Yet, this leads to excessively complicated interpretations of Alberti’s designs and the

²¹² Ibid., xiii.

²¹³ Ibid., xvi.

²¹⁴ In Jarzombek’s reading, Alberti differs from the Neoplatonists in his approach to the world, power, and the humanist’s role in it. Jarzombek, *On Leon Baptista Alberti: His Literary and Aesthetic Theories*, 125ff.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 126.

²¹⁶ Ibid., xvi.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 171.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 171.

buildings as constructed, namely the imparting of Alberti's literary theories and approaches in the form of "distancing, social masking, irony, dual languages, medieval and classical elements in a dialectic, fragmentation, biographical notations, covert and overt meanings, and ecclesiastically styled skepticism toward the classical past, and last but not least context displacement, that is, the personalization of given public elements."²¹⁹

To his credit, Jarzombek does address our central question of why Alberti came to Rimini and commendably does so in terms of Alberti's own perspective and motivations. Jarzombek curiously holds tight to the now-antiquated evil image of Sigismondo created by Pius. He claims that it is "very likely" that Alberti viewed Sigismondo in the same terms that his friend Pius II did and that "it might seem strange that Alberti, the paragon of morality, would accept a commission from such a man." Does Jarzombek genuinely believe this? Or does this characterization primarily serve to set up his own interpretation of Sigismondo as the "civitas perversa" that he finds to be prominent in Alberti's written works?²²⁰

As far as the building is concerned, Jarzombek's contention that the Franciscan component of Alberti's philosophy made the San Francesco commission attractive to him is tenuous at best. Even more questionable is Jarzombek's explanation of Alberti's façade design. In the application of an outer shell enveloping the existing church he finds Alberti's desire to not sully the original Franciscan structure with the new – for churches should not be "infected by the contamination of secular life."²²¹ Here Jarzombek is

²¹⁹ Ibid., 172.

²²⁰ Ibid., 172.

²²¹ Alberti, On the Art of Building, Book VII, 3; Jarzombek, On Leon Baptista Alberti: His Literary and Aesthetic Theories, 173.

clearly guilty of engaging in the unsophisticated and simplistic analysis for which he condemns previous scholars just one page earlier.

Finally, Manfredo Tafuri, in a complex approach that seeks to understand Alberti's architecture as a product of the rest of his life, thought, and work,²²² has come closest to acknowledging a result of his Roman engineering activity in Alberti's architecture. Tafuri assigns to architecture a restorative role for Alberti that is similar to the way in which Alberti described his dabblings in Archimedean mechanics and mathematics. The pursuit of architecture in Rome becomes a "medicine of the soul" which distracts him – as it did Agnolo Pandolfini in Alberti's moral essay, Profugiorum ab aerumma (On the Tranquility of the Soul) of 1441–42 – "from my bitter cares and unhappy concerns."²²³ Architecture is again seen as soothing to his spirit. While there is certainly a connection to be made here between engineering and Alberti's attitudes toward architecture, I will approach the issue of the influence of this activity in a more concrete way.

On a less abstract plane, but equally relevant to the theme of this study, Tafuri addresses the one known instance of Alberti's acting in the role of architect in Rome. He refers to Matteo Palmieri's report²²⁴ that construction on St. Peter's was stopped in 1452 on Alberti's recommendation as evidence that Alberti was viewed as an architectural expert at least at that time, if not before (for the construction would not have proceeded so far if he had been consulted earlier). According to Tafuri, at this point Alberti "comes

²²² Tafuri, "'Cives esse non licere': Nicholas V and Leon Battista Alberti," 61–75. An expanded version of this article is included in the collection of Tafuri's essays, *Ricerca del Rinascimento. Principi, città, architetti*. (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), published in English as *Interpreting the Renaissance: Princes, Cities, Architects* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 23–58.

²²³ Tafuri, "'Cives esse non licere': Nicholas V and Leon Battista Alberti," [1992], 70.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 72

onto the scene, in a city teeming with new building projects, as a repository of architectural sapientia.²²⁵ This “scene” will be presented and analyzed as a key component of Alberti’s engineering and architectural training.

Anthony Grafton’s book on Alberti as “master builder” concedes that Alberti’s façade of San Francesco was “an astonishing achievement for a novice who had not grown up in the craft”²²⁶ and that “many details remain obscure.” Grafton does not seek to settle any of the on-going debates regarding the date or Alberti’s specific role or contribution to the church beyond his authorship of the façade.²²⁷ He is more interested in Alberti’s overall artistic thought and working methods, for instance, his habit of not supervising the execution of his buildings on site but instead consulting from a distance with a builder, in this case Matteo de’Pasti. For all his intriguing insights, however, even Grafton does not directly explore the avenues by which Alberti appeared in Rimini. Yet many of his observations offer clues.

As far as the Tempio is concerned, Grafton takes up Burroughs’s reading of the relationship between ancient and modern as devised by Alberti in his design for the façade of San Francesco.²²⁸ Also focusing on the significance of Alberti’s incorporation of the triumphal arch motif taken from the nearby Arch of Augustus, Grafton makes a more direct personal connection to Sigismondo, who is thus likened to a “Christian emperor.”²²⁹ Whether or not this “connection was...far-fetched,”²³⁰ Alberti’s ability as an antiquarian to present Sigismondo in such an elevated position did make him a highly

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Grafton, Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance, 316.

²²⁷ Eg., whether or not he planned niches in the façade as well as on the flanks. *ibid.*, 317.

²²⁸ Specifically the motif of the classical triumphal arch’s “symbolic meaning” that he used here and in later designs. *Ibid.*, 326–29.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 329.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

qualified and attractive candidate, as we shall see. Furthermore, Grafton's discussion of the process of collaboration and emendation practiced by the Renaissance humanists – most prominently in literary endeavors, but as Grafton points out, employed by Alberti in his architecture as well – applies to the intriguing situation in Rimini. Alberti's approach to architecture involved his coming up with the original conception and design for a building, but he did not construct his architectural models or drawings. Instead he relied on others – a “community of critics” that included builders as well as other designers – each applying their unique perspective, training, and expertise to every aspect of a design in order to devise the optimal plan and details for the model and drawings.²³¹ Not only were the circumstances in Rimini, with various other artistic figures present, conducive to this ideal of creative process, but Alberti's advocacy of such a system gave Sigismondo, if not a controlling force, at least an avenue by which to influence the design. As we will see with Brunelleschi's contribution to Sigismondo's Castelsismondo, Alberti fit into Sigismondo's vision of his patronage and his own role in the commission.

The dis-integration of Alberti's character through modern scholarship is a phenomenon that is in some part attributable to the state of scholarship and knowledge itself in our modern age. As Gadol pointed out over four decades ago, fields of inquiry have become increasingly refined and narrower in focus, isolating one discipline from the next.²³² Practitioners of each field approach a given topic with their disciplines' accepted

²³¹ Ibid., 319–22.

²³² “Modern scholarship...because of its specialized nature, ... has treated them (his accomplishments) in isolation, examining each one separately and from the vantage point of the discipline to which it belongs.” This trend “...seems to have broken down his synthesis into a multitude of complex, jarring pieces.” Gadol, *Leon Battista Alberti: Universal Man of the Early Renaissance*, 15. We must remember, however, that this breakdown, this fragmentation of culture, is more characteristic of our age than of the Renaissance.

ideology and methodology. It is furthermore understandable that a figure such as Alberti, the subject of many of fields of study simultaneously, would be subject to such specialized treatment from scholars of diverse fields, all of whom are eager to claim him as their own.²³³ This makes it all the more necessary to attempt to reverse this trend in some way.

Missing in most of these accounts is any substantive discussion of Alberti's arrival at Rimini. While several studies have explored what his design intentions may have been and relate his activities to the dating of the building, all assume his authorship of the renovation as a matter of course. To my knowledge no one has explained why Alberti, a humanist and papal secretary without any architectural credentials, would have been enlisted as the primary designer for Sigismondo's major building project. Taking Ettlinger's study as a starting point, I shall argue that Alberti's presence at the court was at least as important to Sigismondo's overall agenda as was Alberti's novel design of San Francesco, and that he, too, played a critical role in the creation and promotion of Sigismondo's image. Furthermore, Alberti was able, as no one else of his time, to assist Sigismondo in the implementation of both practical and symbolic aspects of his program.

²³³ It should be noted that this phenomenon has not been manifested solely by architectural historians. For historians of painting deem his primary contribution to be the codification of the system of linear perspective in *Della Pittura*, while Italianists emphasize his defining role in the development of the vernacular, and Latinists focus upon his achievements in the use of that language. Indeed, Alberti's chameleon-like quality has had a profound effect on his legacy.

Chapter 3: Options

In 1447, when Sigismondo initiated his renovation campaign of San Francesco, there was no dearth of qualified architects and engineers whom he could enlist. Italian architecture was flourishing in this period, as the construction of some of the greatest churches and palaces of the Renaissance attest. Due to the work of Brunelleschi and his successors, by the middle of the century the all'antica style had firmly taken hold in Florence. Soon it was spreading across the courts of northern Italy and south to papal Rome. Michelozzo, Filarete, and Rossellino were just a few of the prominent architects who were certainly up to the task of restoring San Francesco, not to mention a cadre of builders already working within the Malatesta territories. Ever aware of the multi-faceted implications of artistic patronage, Sigismondo chose his projects and artists carefully, and the Tempio and Alberti were no exception. In order better to understand this choice, we would do well to look at Sigismondo's other building projects, as well as the artists Sigismondo passed over for the commission and those who actually executed the Tempio renovation.

The Architect

The task of defining an "architect" is not a simple one. Our modern notion of an architect as a designer of buildings carries creative and philosophical connotations. From Le Corbusier and Phillip Johnson to Frank Gehry, Renzo Piano, and Zaha Hadid, architects have not only executed buildings but have transformed our ideas about what a building is, how it should look, and in what way it can function. Today the architect is considered an artist and may engage in other visual arts as well: the Spaniard Santiago

Calatrava is accomplished in sculpture, drawing, and even ceramics. With his or her focus on the design and meaning of a building, the architect devises a concept, produces relevant drawings, and then passes it off to engineers and contractors who will attend to the practical task of physically implementing those ideas. This was not always the case.

Our knowledge of the classical architect comes almost exclusively from the Roman architect and theorist Vitruvius²³⁴ who inherited much from the Greek notion that the architect's concern was the planning aspect of a construction project.²³⁵ In his Ten Books On Architecture of the mid-first century B.C.,²³⁶ Vitruvius called for a properly educated architect.

“To be educated, he must be an experienced draftsman, well versed in geometry, familiar with history, a diligent student of philosophy, know music, have some acquaintance with medicine, understand the rulings of legal experts, and have a clear grasp of astronomy and the ways of Heaven.”²³⁷

Vitruvius's description also reflects his own education in the liberal arts, which was not the typical training of the ancient architect.²³⁸ In clear contrast to the builders and masons on the worksite, this ancient training instead would have focused more on the mechanical arts and might have been followed by apprenticeship or military or civil service. Beyond his academic education, the ancient architect also served in the military.

²³⁴ Some evidence also comes from reports by Pliny the Younger as he served as a provincial administrator. Nicholas Pevsner, “The Term ‘Architect’ in the Middle Ages,” Speculum XVII no. 4, (1942): 549–62, 549–50; W.L. MacDonald, “Roman Architects,” in The Architect. Chapters in the History of the Profession, ed. Spiro Kostof, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 33–6.

²³⁵ Pevsner, “The Term ‘Architect’ in the Middle Ages,” 549.

²³⁶ Vitruvius, The Ten Books on Architecture. Edited by Ingrid D. Rowland and Thomas Noble Howe, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5–8.

He therefore was expert in not only building and town planning, but in various engineering capacities as well, such as surveying and hydraulic engineering.²³⁹

In the Middle Ages, the term architectus fell into disuse as a practitioner's building skills rather than his theoretical understanding of the liberal arts became paramount. The patron who paid for the building and the master-mason who made it stand became primary as the medieval architect now "took part in the actual process of construction alongside the building crew as one of their own. What changed was not fundamental to the traditional task of the architect, the conception and supervision of buildings. The change was rather one of social standing."²⁴⁰ At the same time, we also see a change in the definition of the title architectus, which essentially is exchanged with that of the mechanicus, who in this period was the figure with a theoretical background in geometry and mathematics as well as a practical training in construction and carpentry. While the mechanicus now had both theoretical and practical training, along with a "higher academic discipline and a more prestigious standing," the architectus, with his practical experience but lack of theoretical education, assumed the role of master-builder.

Through extensive documentary study, Nicholas Pevsner traced the use of the term "architect" from Antiquity through the Middle Ages and determined that in the medieval period, the term applied to three groups of people: ordinary craftsmen working

²³⁹ For more on Vitruvius and the profession of the architect in antiquity, see MacDonald, "Roman Architects," 28–58.

²⁴⁰ Spiro Kostof, "The Architect in the Middle Ages" in *The Architect. Chapters in the History of the Profession*, 61.

on site; the chief craftsmen supervising projects; and patrons. Its use was often imprecise but as Mary Hollingsworth notes, it “clearly did not necessarily indicate designer.”²⁴¹

Half a century later, Hollingsworth’s own analysis clarified and refined our understanding of the role of the architect as he moved from his medieval world into the fifteenth century, specifically in Florence. Focusing on the process of design as gleaned from extant documents, Hollingsworth elucidated the various roles involved with the construction of building: these were skilled workers such as stonecutters, unskilled workers, independent masters, and the chief craftsmen who acted as supervisor of construction. Further, she highlighted the various ways and scenarios in which the term “architectus” was used in the fifteenth century: as supervisor and adviser, but clearly not as designer.²⁴² Hollingsworth astutely notes “the term was used to refer to the position and not the person.”²⁴³ Additionally, it seems that the term referred “collectively (to) the members of committees summoned to advise the Boards of Works (Opere) of public building programmes.” Thus “architects” were connected with the design but were not designers themselves.

Unlike goldsmiths and painters, or woodworkers and stonemasons, from whose ranks these builders often rose, architects had no guild affiliation of their own. Indeed expressly because of this lack of institutional structure, the role and duties of the architect appear to have been constantly in flux, without any clearly delineated requisite training, apprenticeships or hierarchy. The architect was often required to be a “jack of all trades:” while he was usually responsible for the design of a building, that is, the “intellectual”

²⁴¹ Mary Hollingsworth, “The Architect in Fifteenth-Century Florence.” *Art History* 7 (1984): 385–410, p. 386.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 395.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 398.

side of the process, he was also involved with the practical aspect of construction, working with, or sometimes as, the capomaestro on the building site.

Thus, in the traditional, often still medieval world of fifteenth-century Italy, with its requisite apprenticeships and guilds, Alberti was not an architect, even according to the contemporary understanding of the term. In this period, the definition of an “architect” was itself in transition, evolving from the tradition-bound multi-generational tradesman of the Middle Ages to the creative, educated artist that Alberti indeed helped create.²⁴⁴ In his treatise on architecture, Alberti begins by defining his subject:

“Before I go any further, however, I should explain exactly whom I mean by an architect; for it is no carpenter that I would have you compare to the greatest exponents of other disciplines: the carpenter is but an instrument in the hands of the architect. Him I consider the architect, who by sure and wonderful reason and method knows both how to devise through his own mind and energy, and to realize by construction, whatever can be most beautifully fitted out for the noble deeds of man, by the movement of weights and the joining of masses and bodies. To do this he must have an understanding of all the highest and most noble disciplines. This then is the architect.”²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ The literature on the definition of the architect through history is extensive. In addition to Pevsner’s classic “The Term ‘Architect’ in the Middle Ages,” see Kostof, ed., The Architect. Chapters in the History of the Profession; James Ackerman, “Architectural Practice in the Italian Renaissance,” Distance Points, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 361–84; Mary Hollingsworth, “The Architect in Fifteenth-Century Florence;” Lisa Kanerva, Defining the Architect in Fifteenth-Century Italy (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1998); .Kanerva, Between Science and Drawings: Renaissance Architects on Vitruvius’s Educational Ideas, (Vaajakoski: Gummerus Kirjapaino), 2006; Pamela Long, “Power, Patronage, and the Authorship of Ars. From Mechanical Know-How to Mechanical Knowledge in the Last Scribal Age.” Isis 88 (1997), 1–41; John Oppel, “The Priority of the Architect: Alberti on Architects and Patrons,” Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy, ed. By F.W. Kent and P. Simons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 251–67; Franklin Toker, “Alberti’s Ideal Architect: Renaissance – or Gothic?,” in Renaissance Studies in Honor of Craig Hugh Smythe, edited by A. Morrough et al., Vol. 2 (Florence: Giunti Barbera, 1985), 667–74.

²⁴⁵ Alberti, On the Art of Building, 3.

It has long been recognized that Alberti's definition was but one of many inspirations he took from his ancient predecessor, Vitruvius.²⁴⁶ In addition to clearly laying out the requirements for the "modern" architect – his education, his duties, and his relationship with other participants in the architectural process – he notably called for an understanding of the fine arts to complement the architect's requisite knowledge of the liberal arts.

Alberti was self-taught and gleaned all he could from the newly-discovered treatise and the remains of ancient architecture he found in Rome while serving in the papal curia. As he did in so many of his intellectual endeavors, in architecture Alberti was on the cutting edge of artistic culture, looking forward and helping to define a new system. In so doing, however, he also looked back to the past, reviving the ancient notion of the architect as an educated, multi-talented figure, not just an anonymous craftsman. Indeed, Alberti was himself skilled in various technical fields; this intellectual versatility was another more practical way in which Alberti emulated his ancient model.²⁴⁷ Like so much in the Renaissance, the new came from the old, and Alberti refigured the antique both stylistically and intellectually.

In short, Alberti began to bring the work of the architect back to what he saw as its rightful place as providing the intellectual element in the design of a building. For Alberti, as Franklin Toker noted, the architect was the central figure in the triad of patron/architect/builder: requiring the "absolute separation between architect and

²⁴⁶ Frances Choay, "Alberti and Vitruvius," *AD Profiles* 21 (1979), 26–35; R. Gavagna, "Cusano e Alberti a proposito del "De architectura" di Vitruvio," *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia* 34 (1979), 162–76; Grayson, "The Composition of L.B. Alberti's 'Decem Libri De Re Aedificatoria'"; Richard Krautheimer, "Alberti and Vitruvius," in *Studies in Early Christian, Medieval, and Renaissance Art* (New York and London, 1969), 323–44

²⁴⁷ Alberti undertook many engineering projects and composed theoretical writings before he ever tried his hand at architecture. On these activities, see Chapter 4.

builder...the only true architect was one who distanced himself from the execution of his buildings (Bk. IX, ii) – this was a natural product of the new intellectual position of the Albertian architect.”²⁴⁸ Further, this was not a subtle intimation or suggestion. Rather, Alberti did so consciously, intentionally and publicly, “effectively promot[ing] the Renaissance (and modern) concept of the architect as an intellectual creator rather than an actual builder of structures.”²⁴⁹ To be sure, this change in the notion of the architect was a part of the new humanist mindset of early and mid-fifteenth century Italy. Alberti was only one of many figures transforming the concept of man and his place in the world in this period, yet he can be said to have extended this outlook to the world of the artist, and by extension to that of the patron, if not single-handedly, then at least as much as anyone else could claim to have done.²⁵⁰ In his treatise, Alberti described and codified the professional circumstances he saw around him, but he also sought to establish a new standard. In fact, one may argue that on a certain level, discussions of the role and definition of the architect regarding Alberti are moot, as he single-handedly changed it. What came before him and after him were utterly different, precisely because of the impact of his ideas.

This transition was a dichotomous one, as much about Alberti is. In establishing this new role for the architect, Alberti was at once traditional, harkening back to the ancient precepts of Vitruvius, but at the same time bringing a novel element, allowing the architect to rise out of the obscurity of the medieval craftsman’s world. For this reason, Alberti’s contemporary Brunelleschi had earned his esteem and admiration. In the great

²⁴⁸ Toker, “Alberti’s Ideal Architect: Renaissance – or Gothic?,” 668.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Even before the novel status Alberti accorded to the architect in his treatise on architecture, he forged a new identity for all artists in his 1436 treatise on painting. L. B. Alberti, *On Painting*, translated by C. Grayson (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1991).

feat of constructing the vast dome for the Florentine Cathedral, the master embodied the qualities of Alberti's ideal architect: he was technically as well as intellectually adept, as we shall see in greater detail below.

At Rimini we see the first application of Alberti's theory of the architect as an intellectual, by the theorist himself. Indeed as we will see, this was the prime reason for which he was hired. Rimini thus becomes the locus for the implementation of Alberti's theories that would revolutionize architecture and the entire notion of the artist and his identity.

Patronage

Ideas about the role of the architectural patron also changed through the centuries, with the benefactor of a project always assuming some level of credit for authorship of the building.²⁵¹ Filarete codified this traditional concept when he described the patron as the father of a building and the architect as the mother who gives it life.²⁵² But modern studies of fifteenth-century Italian patronage challenge the traditional, dominant role of the patron.²⁵³ Tracy Cooper's proposal that we "rethink a focus on the hierarchy between patron and client, and supply a more dynamic, transactional model that concentrates on the mutuality of the relationship and on the process" makes a distinction between clientelismo and mecenatismo: one as a social system, the other related to the support of

²⁵¹ For a review of the history of art historical scholarship giving primacy to the patron, see Jill Burke, Changing Patrons. Social Identity and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Florence (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 3–8.

²⁵² Filarete, Treatise on Architecture. Being the Treatise by Antonio di Piero Averlino, Known as Filarete, trans. and ed. J.R. Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 1:15–16.

²⁵³ The list of publications on artistic patronage of the Italian Renaissance is too lengthy to recite here. But the proceedings of two conferences should be singled out: Guy Lytle and Stephen Orgel, eds., Patronage in the Renaissance (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), and F.W. Kent and P. Simons, eds., Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

the arts and artworks, though we use the term “patronage” to apply to both.²⁵⁴ Dale Kent has since analyzed the complex relationships among the patron, artist and audience within the context of artworks commissioned by Cosimo de’Medici, finding that “the recurrence of certain themes presupposes a relatively high degree of interaction and communication between the Medici and the artists who worked for them.”²⁵⁵ Jill Burke provided an understanding of the more subtle forces involved in artistic patronage of the period by exploring “the range of social personae open to the Florentine patrician at this time and how these could be created and expressed through the visual arts.”²⁵⁶ Bram Kempers’s study of painting, power, and patronage charted the course of the change in the status of the artist to that of a “professional,” the other side of the coin, so to speak, of

²⁵⁴ Tracy E. Cooper, “Mecenatismo or Clientelismo? The Character of Renaissance Patronage,” in David Wilkins and Rebecca Wilkins, eds., *The Search for a Patron in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 20. The constancy and loyalty that is indicated by the social type of patronage relationship was not as prevalent when it came to the relationships “patrons” had with their artists. While many artists did produce multiple works for the same patron, they also very commonly worked for several different, even competing patrons during the course of their careers. By the same token, a patron would without compunction employ several different artists for different commissions, without regard to any contractual or other obligations to one or the other. As Janson wrote: “the Renaissance gradually raised the artist to a new and higher status as a member of the community of the liberal arts, the equal of poets and philosophers. ... And their customers gradually turned into ‘patrons.’ The change of terms is significant in itself: customers are ‘steady,’ they keep going back to the same source because they know they will get what they got before, while patrons are by definition ‘fickle’... The artist-patron relationship is thus basically different from that of the craftsman and his customer.” H.W. Janson, “The Birth of ‘Artistic License’: the Dissatisfied Patron in the Early Renaissance,” in *Patronage in the Renaissance*, ed. Guy Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 344–45. In this study, the term “patron” is meant to refer to the one who paid for an object (a painting, sculpture, building or just as likely a literary work, a vase or chest) to be produced.

²⁵⁵ Dale Kent, *Cosimo de’Medici and the Florentine Renaissance. The Patron’s Oeuvre* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000). Burke, *Changing Patrons*, 331. The use of the word “between” implies a reciprocal relationship; was this in fact the case? If we are to see this body of work, as Kent argues, as Cosimo’s oeuvre, then it is more likely the result of a one-way influence. Although the artist had achieved a new, higher status by the mid-fifteenth century, he was still far from the creative genius who produced what he liked, or was inspired to, and the patron would be pleased merely to have an object from his hand. This was a phenomenon of the sixteenth century as the examples of Titian, Vasari, and Giambologna attest. See Charles Hope, “Artists, Patrons, and Advisers,” in *Patronage in the Renaissance*, ed. Guy Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 293–343, esp. 304–7.

²⁵⁶ Kent, *Cosimo de’Medici and the Florentine Renaissance. The Patron’s Oeuvre*, 1.

the evolution of the role of the patron.²⁵⁷ Many of the ideas suggested by these approaches can be brought to bear as well on the relationship between Alberti and Sigismondo.

The autobiography, or Zibaldone, of Giovanni Rucellai, who commissioned Alberti to design the façade of Santa Maria Novella and a new family palace in Florence, gives some rare glimpses of a Renaissance patron's intentions.²⁵⁸ Later in the fifteenth century patrons such as Lorenzo de' Medici and the lesser known Bartolommeo della Scala exerted a creative influence over many of their artistic commissions based on their own academic learning and practical experience with design.²⁵⁹ Not until well into the sixteenth century, however, do we find documents containing explicit instructions for artistic commissions that refer to detailed composition or iconography.²⁶⁰ At Rimini we have no such clear record of Sigismondo's intent. We must therefore by necessity resort to the traditional methods of reading between the lines and in the end speculate based on various types of gathered evidence about what he may have been thinking or intending when he sponsored the renovation of San Francesco.

²⁵⁷ Bram Kempers, Painting, Power and Patronage. The Rise of the Professional Artist in the Italian Renaissance, Translated from the Dutch by Beverley Jackson (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

²⁵⁸ Giovanni Rucellai, Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo zibaldone, 2 vols. (London: Warburg Institute, 1981); on the Palazzo Rucellai, see contributions by Preyer, Sanapoletti and Salvini in vol. 2.

²⁵⁹ "There is growing evidence, however, that Lorenzo's role as an architectural patron was not merely one of loosing the purse strings but that he took an active and vital part in the design of his buildings, and, further, that he was regarded as an arbiter of taste by his contemporaries, who often turned to him for advice and recommendations. ... Lorenzo emerges... as an enthusiastic amateur." Beverly Louise Brown, "An Enthusiastic Amateur: Lorenzo De' Medici as Architect." Renaissance Quarterly 46, no. 1 (1993), p. 1; Linda Pellechia, "The Patron's Role in the Production of Architecture: Bartolomeo Scala and the Scala Palace." Renaissance Quarterly XLII, no. 2 (1989): 258-91.

²⁶⁰ An famous example is Isabella d'Este's 1503 letter to Perugino regarding The Combat of Love and Chastity, discussed by Charles Hope, who questions the notion that patrons, artists and advisers devised complex programs replete with profound meaning beyond that inherent in the subject as a matter of course. In some cases rather, a pleasing composition was sufficient. Hope, "Artists, Patrons, and Advisers."

In the mid-fifteenth century, the patron was still viewed as the creator of the works he commissioned. Yet in Kent's words, "the artist's hoc fecit (he made this), together with his signature and the incorporation of his self-portrait in his work, had begun to push back strongly against the patron's claims."²⁶¹ Alberti was a key figure in this movement. The patron undoubtedly remained a central component in the process, initiating the project, and of course funding it, but he was nowhere without the architect, especially according to Alberti's conception, for the architect gave form and content to the patron's aspirations. As Oppel put it: "Alberti is concerned with defining the proper spheres of action of architect and patron and, I think, with subordinating the latter to the former, not in any formal hierarchical arrangement but in that of bringing him under the sway of a pervasive moral and social influence like that of teacher over student or, perhaps, master over disciple. The architect certainly sacrifices very little of his intellectual independence to the patron. He waits to be called upon, never calls first."²⁶²

To be sure, at Rimini the patron retains supremacy; Sigismondo's vision for the church dictated the final form it took, leading to his choice of artist, of medium, of content. But as a result of what I contend are a unique set of circumstances, Alberti's presence (if not that of the other artists involved in the commission) takes on a new significance as his employment is the product of his intellectual rather than just artistic abilities – proof positive of his new evaluation of the role and function of the architect as well as of Sigismondo's unusual agenda.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 6.

²⁶² Oppel, "The Priority of the Architect: Alberti on Architects and Patrons," 253.

Sigismondo's Architectural Patronage

The San Francesco renovation was not Sigismondo's first foray into architectural patronage. Throughout the Riminese territories, he had rebuilt towns as well as military fortifications and existing family structures, vastly improving the defenses of Malatesta lands and the security of his subjects. In Rimini, the seat of the family dominion, Sigismondo pursued more grandiose projects, most notably his fortified residence, the Castelsigismondo. Following general patronage trends of the period, Sigismondo focused his attention on making a personal statement with his building projects.

Best exemplified by Cosimo de' Medici and Federico da Montefeltro, the patronage of architecture in the mid-fifteenth century was viewed as a demonstration of the "virtue of magnificence." The medieval attitude that one should not lavish one's wealth on personal commissions became more relaxed in the first part of the fifteenth century. Florentine humanists like Poggio Bracciolini, Francesco Filelfo, Matteo Palmieri, and Leonardo Bruni debated the relative benefits of riches and the virtuous uses of them.²⁶³ Contemporaneous with Cosimo de' Medici's increasingly conspicuous patronage, and the growth of personal (rather than corporate or civic) sponsorship, Alberti condoned such expenditures in his Della Famiglia: "Puossi colle ricchezze conseguire fama e autorita adoperandole in cose amplissime e nobilissime con molta larghezza e magnificenza."²⁶⁴ Alberti of course later expanded upon this idea in his architectural manual, directed at patrons, De re aedificatoria, which outlined precise

²⁶³ Poggio Bracciolini, *De nobilitate*, 1440; Francesco Filelfo, *De paupertate*, c. 1445; Matteo Palmieri, *Della vita civile*, 1439; Leonardo Bruni, *Epistolae*, all quoted in A.D. Fraser Jenkins, "Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage of Architecture and the Theory of Magnificence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970), 162.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

building methods, styles, and principles of decorum. Following Aristotle and Aquinas , he maintained that vast expenditures on building were not ostentatious or merely tolerated; they were in fact the duty of the noble and wealthy, exemplifying the patron's virtue and "reflect(ing) his dignity,"²⁶⁵ as well as benefiting the city or God – as long of course as the scale of the project was appropriate to one's status.²⁶⁶ The degree to which a building was seen as an extension of the patron is revealed in the new conception of the patron as its author, as explained by Filarete in his later treatise on architecture.²⁶⁷ We shall see how Sigismondo's precarious position as ruler made paramount the concern to promote himself as virtuous and noble. This was a key motivation of his artistic patronage that served to glorify himself at least as much as his God and his city.

Sigismondo's early building projects, though less grand than the Tempio, were initial instances of his continuous use of architectural patronage to present himself as a good ruler. The renovation of walls, gates, and fortresses was the duty of a benevolent prince and simultaneously protected the welfare of his subjects as well as preserved his own rule against outside threats.²⁶⁸ The tactic was later advised by Alberti. Sigismondo fortified his territories extensively, building new fortresses and renovating existing ones. In addition to securing many small towns across the countryside, Sigismondo fortified the

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 168.

²⁶⁶ Alberti advises: "...it is your duty to consider all the above questions, the nature of your undertaking, and the relative positions of the elements, and to take into account your own social standing as the one who commissions the building: it is the sign of a well-informed and judicious mind to plan the whole undertaking in accordance with one's position in society and the requirements of use." Alberti, On the Art of Building, Bk. II, p. 37.

²⁶⁷ Filarete, Treatise on Architecture, 16. For further bibliography, see H-W. Kruft, A History of Architectural Theory From Vitruvius to the Present (London and New York: Zwemmer and Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), 461, note 2.

²⁶⁸ These were numerous in this period, and indeed throughout the Malatesta reign. See Chapter 3 and Jones, The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History.

seat of the vicariate and other major cities through the course of the 1430s and 1440s. He largely rebuilt the town of Senigallia, a venture on which Alberti and others advised. In Fano, he renovated various defensive structures such as the Porta Maggiore, the Rocca, the Torre della Sacca, and the city walls. His renovation of the Palazzo Malatesta in Fano was a precursor to his later efforts at his own castle in Rimini.²⁶⁹ On these commissions, Sigismondo employed many of the same craftsmen and builders repeatedly, but with his first-hand knowledge of battle strategies and weaponry and his consequent understanding of the requirements for such structures, his own involvement as technical consultant was fundamental.

In 1437, Sigismondo undertook a new building project in Rimini that continued his pattern of fortification, but had a personal dimension as well: the eponymous Castelsismondo which served as both fortress and castle (Fig. 28).²⁷⁰ The Castelsismondo was a primary step in Sigismondo's campaign to secure his legacy through built works and serves as an important model for Sigismondo's patterns at the Tempio. As innovative as was the Tempio in the realm of ecclesiastical architecture, so too was the Castelsismondo, whose state-of-the-art design took into consideration the latest advances in military technology and warfare tactics. Described by Pasini as "the first modern castle from the point of view of offensive and defensive considerations of artillery,"²⁷¹ the castello was designed with technological advances in artillery in mind. Though this

²⁶⁹ See Gianni Volpe, Matteo Nuti. Architetto dei Malatesta (Venice: Marsilio Editore, 1989), 34–60, on Nuti's involvement with these commissions, and on Sigismondo's strategic and defensive needs for building, see Ettlinger, "The Image of a Renaissance Prince," 109–19. For a wider discussion of Sigismondo's patronage, see Feruccio Canali, "Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta e la committenza d'architettura nel vicariato malatestiano, Prime riflessioni," in Il potere, le arti, la guerra. Lo splendore dei Malatesta, edited by Angela Donati, exh. cat. (Milan: Electa, 2001), 97–101.

²⁷⁰ For a discussion of the complex issue of the naming of Sigismondo and his castle see Ettlinger, "The Image of a Renaissance Prince," 92–95.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 86, n. 35

practice was not typical, it was not unexpected given Sigismondo's recognized expertise in military technology and fortification.²⁷² According to Sigismondo's humanist adviser, Roberto Valturio, who is supported by the analysis of later scholars, the innovative fortress design was formulated by Sigismondo himself.²⁷³ Pasini's observation that many of the fortresses built by Sigismondo in different periods in Romagna and the Marche have typological and formal characteristics in common among them and with the Riminese castle is telling.²⁷⁴ This extensive knowledge of military defenses and tactics resulted in one of the most innovative fortresses of the first half of the fifteenth century.

In the Castelsismondo, the keystone of his fortification campaign, Sigismondo departed from the traditional elevation of a quadrille block, punctuated at each of the four corners by a defensive crenellated tower. Instead, he created a polygonal assemblage of building masses. This novel design retained the traditional towers at the corners, but the use of more obtuse angles reduced the number of "dead" angles, thereby making the formidable castle less vulnerable to unseen attackers. Valturio tells us that the fortress was designed primarily from a defensive point of view: the placement of windows, the moat, the layout of weaponry rooms were all considered with an eye towards securing the

²⁷² On the innovations employed, see Ettlinger, "The Image of a Renaissance Prince," 87–89. 91: "Such subtle interweaving of strategic spaces and buildings can only have been designed by someone intimately involved with actual warfare. The researches of Pasini confirmed what contemporary sources tell us: the primary credit for the layout of the castello must go to Sigismondo himself." See Carla Tomasini Pietramellara and Angelo Turchini, eds., Castel Sismondo e Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta. Le signorie dei Malatesti, (Rimini: Ghigi, 1985), 21; P. G. Pasini, I Malatesta e l'arte (Milan: Silvana, 1983), 77. On the innovations of the Castelsismondo, see also Pietramellara and Turchini, Castel Sismondo e Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta. Le signorie dei Malatesti, 361–71. Valturio in Ettlinger, "The Image of a Renaissance Prince," 89–90. Roberto Valturio, De re militari (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg. Lat. 1946), Book X. See also below, Chapter 3.

²⁷³ Valturio, De re militari, Book X. See also below. Written in 1455, published in Latin 1472 and in Italian in 1483. Ettlinger, "The Image of a Renaissance Prince," 91, 126, note 44; Pietramellara and Turchini, Castel Sismondo e Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta. Le signorie dei Malatesti, 21, and Pasini, I Malatesta e l'arte, 77.

²⁷⁴ Pier Giorgio Pasini, "Castel Sismondo; i Malatesta." in Rocche e castelli di Romagna (Bologna: Edizioni ALFA, 1970), 56.

whole structure against attack by modern artillery.²⁷⁵ While Sigismondo's expertise was creatively applied to the defensive aspect of the fortress, the layout of the living spaces within the palace retained a traditional character.

In 1438, the year after construction on the Castelsismondo began, Sigismondo sought the advice of the by then well-known and respected architect and engineer Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446). The Florentine was trained as a goldsmith and had worked as a sculptor, but after his loss of the commission for the doors of the baptistery of his hometown to Lorenzo Ghiberti, he turned his focus to architecture. At the Ospedale degli Innocenti (1419) and at San Lorenzo (1421) in Florence, Brunelleschi developed his signature architectural style – the use of austere pietra serena and unfluted columns, pendentives and umbrella domes, applied within the strict logic of rationally proportioned spatial volumes.²⁷⁶

More important for Sigismondo's interests at the Castelsismondo, however, Brunelleschi was also an accomplished engineer. His crowning achievement had come in 1436 with the great engineering feat of spanning the crossing of the Cathedral of Florence with a brick ribbed vault, the largest unsupported dome since antiquity.²⁷⁷ For Alberti,

²⁷⁵ For a further description and analysis of the Castelsismondo's design, see Ettlinger, "The Image of a Renaissance Prince," 86–91.

²⁷⁶ Brunelleschi continued these themes and motives in the Pazzi Chapel at Santa Croce in 1429, and at Santo Spirito in 1436.

²⁷⁷ Lotz cites documents that reveal Brunelleschi's prior engineering experience: in 1404 in Florence and in 1412 in Prato. This explains his "sudden appearance in 1417 as an applicant for the task of constructing the cathedral dome, and thus makes his entrance into the centre of the artistic scene rather less surprising." Heinrich Lotz, Filippo Brunelleschi. The Early Works and the Medieval Tradition, (London: Academy Editions, 1990), p. 52, note 14. The bibliography on the cupola is beyond extensive. In addition to the standard studies by Piero Sanpaulesi, La cupola del Brunelleschi (Firenze: Sadea/Sansoni 1965) and Howard Saalman, Filippo Brunelleschi: The cupola of Santa Maria del Fiore (London: Zwemmer, 1980), see more recent contributions by Lando Bartoli, Il disegno della cupola del Brunelleschi (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1994); Lamberto Ippolito, La cupola di Santa Maria del Fiore (Rome: La Nuova Italia scientifica, 1997); Salvatore Di Pasquale, Brunelleschi: la costruzione della cupola di Santa Maria del Fiore (Venice: Marsilio, 2002); and Roberto Corazzi et. al., La cupola di Santa Maria del Fiore: tra ipotesi e realtà: studi e ricerche per un'indagine avanzata (Bologna: Pitagora, 2005).

this signaled the advent of a new generation of genius – one no less admirable than those of Antiquity, and even more so as the achievement was made without any precedent or model. Alberti so admired his compatriot that he dedicated the 1436 Italian edition of his treatise on painting to Brunelleschi. In it Alberti praised the architect's talent and ingenuity as proven by this great accomplishment, one that exceeds even those of the glorified ancients.²⁷⁸

In the course of his efforts at the Duomo, Brunelleschi invented many technical tools and mechanical devices. There are no extant drawings or descriptions of his machines by Brunelleschi himself, but other engineers – Mariano di Iacopo, called il Taccola (1382–1458?), Francesco di Giorgio Martini (1439–1501), Buonaccorso Ghiberti (1451–1516), Giuliano da Sangallo (1445–1516), and Leonardo da Vinci – did leave their own records of his inventions. In order to construct the dome without the traditional wooden centering, and to lighten the weight of the massive structure, Brunelleschi devised a novel herringbone pattern of brickwork and developed new types of cranes, pulley systems, screws, and hoists to execute it.²⁷⁹

Brunelleschi's additional expertise in military engineering, and especially in the field of hydraulics, would have served Sigismondo well. Details about his experience working with water and his hydraulic inventions come to us from an unusual source. Sometime in the 1440s, the Sienese engineer, Taccola, transcribed a speech Brunelleschi made when he passed through Siena en route to Rome around 1428.²⁸⁰ In it, Brunelleschi

²⁷⁸ Alberti, *On Painting*, 34–35.

²⁷⁹ Many of these survive and are housed today in the Museo di Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence. The main source on Brunelleschi's technical inventions is still Frank Prager and Giustina Scaglia, *Brunelleschi: Studies of His Technology and Inventions* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1970). Many are also illustrated in Paolo Galuzzi's more recent catalog for the exhibition *Renaissance Engineers from Brunelleschi to Leonardo da Vinci* (Florence: Giunti, 1996), esp. pp. 18–24 and 93–116.

²⁸⁰ Dating by Prager and Scaglia, *Brunelleschi: Studies of His Technology and Inventions*, 127–28.

discusses difficulties encountered when building on rivers and the precautions an astute engineer must take to address them so that, for example, the flow of water does not diminish the structural integrity of a bridge's ramparts or a wall's foundations. He also makes recommendations for the proper preparation and siting for a riverside worksite to ensure the procurement of appropriate building materials such as timber, lime, stone, and sand for beams, barrels, stone masonry, and cement.²⁸¹ Since the Castelsismondo was sited on alluvial soil and surrounded by a moat, surely Brunelleschi's input was valuable.

We should note also Brunelleschi's opening admonishment to Taccola: "Do not share your invention with many, share them only with the few who understand and love the sciences. ...the learned understands the work proposed... Those who know these things are much to be loved."²⁸² This makes for a plausible answer to the inevitable question of why Brunelleschi would deign to consult with Sigismondo so late in the design process of the Castelsismondo: he, too, recognized Sigismondo's interest and knowledge about the subject and therefore was happy to share his own insight.

In January, 1436, Sigismondo went to Florence to attend the inauguration festivities of the cupola construction, and it seems that he invited Brunelleschi to Rimini then or soon thereafter.²⁸³ If this timing is accurate, it may be that Sigismondo intended Brunelleschi to be more involved in the design of the Castelsismondo – for their meeting took place more than a year before construction began in March 1437. Whether or not this is the case, Brunelleschi certainly had little time to take on another project, especially one at a considerable distance from Florence. So Sigismondo proceeded without him, at

²⁸¹ Ibid., 130–31.

²⁸² Ibid., 129.

²⁸³ Eugenio Battisti, *Filippo Brunelleschi* (Milan: Electa Editrice, 1976), 234. Sorbelli also suggests that Alberti and Sigismondo met at that event. See Albano Sorbelli, *Storia dell'Università di Bologna, I: Il Medioevo (sec. XI-XV)*, (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1940), 237, and note 395 below.

least until 1438, when a contemporary document in the Archivio di Stato, Florence, tells us that Brunelleschi left Florence for Rimini in late August and stayed until October 22 to consult on several fortresses throughout the Riminese territories. While this led Fabriczy to attribute the whole of the Castelsismondo to him, it now seems that he only consulted on it.²⁸⁴ Further information on Brunelleschi's activities in Romagna and the Marche comes from his biographer, Antonio di Tuccio Manetti (1423–1497), who claims that he built “a castle, an admirable fortress for Sigismondo, Lord of Rimini.”²⁸⁵ Although Manetti does not identify the building by name or location, Turchini speculates that it was at Fano where construction began September 1, 1438, during the period Brunelleschi was there.²⁸⁶ During this time, Brunelleschi advised on rocche in Fano and Forlì, as well as hydraulic and wall fortifications in Cesena.²⁸⁷

By the time Brunelleschi arrived in Rimini, the plan for the Castelsismondo had been formulated and Brunelleschi served Sigismondo in an advisory role; the design of the structure itself remained Sigismondo's.²⁸⁸ As Volpe remarked, the fact that construction was well advanced before Brunelleschi's arrival:

“...makes us think that Sigismondo himself could have been the main author of the updating of the Riminese fortification, even having technically translated

²⁸⁴ Angelo Turchini, “Sigismondo, Matteo Nuti, Brunelleschi, e il Castello,” Le signorie dei Malatesti. Castel Sismondo e Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta (Rimini: Ghigi Editore, 1985), 194.

²⁸⁵ Peter Murray, “Art Historians and Art Critics – IV. XIV Uomini Singolari in Firenze,” Burlington Magazine XCIX/655 October, 1957, 336.

²⁸⁶ Turchini, “Sigismondo, Matteo Nuti, Brunelleschi, e il Castello,” 195–98, following Gastone Petrini in Filippo Brunelleschi. La sua opera e il suo tempo, II, (Florence: Centro Di, 1980), 973–985.

²⁸⁷ Murray, “Art Historians and Art Critics,” 336. For more on Brunelleschi's fortifications, see Battisti, Filippo Brunelleschi, 230–47 and 308–23.

²⁸⁸ Ettlinger makes the interesting observation that while many features of the Castelsismondo “are echoed in other fortresses the Sigismondo built or had altered to answer the requirements of modern warfare(,) they find no resonances in Brunelleschi's military work.” Ettlinger, The Image of a Renaissance Prince, 91. Giovanni Rimondini analyzes the layout and plan of the castello in terms of Brunelleschian linear perspective in an effort to determine exactly what Brunelleschi's contributions were. Giovanni Rimondini, “Frammenti di cultura prospettica brunelleschiana nel castello e nella Rimini di Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta,” in Castel Sismondo e Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta e l'arte militare del primo Rinascimento, ed. Angelo Turchini (Cesena: il Ponte Vecchio, 2003), 263–80.

ideas and opinions of local architects, committing them to a vast work of reorganization of the fabbriche, defensive or not, of the Malatesta state... Brunelleschi's visit doesn't have to be undervalued, but interpreted only as advice of the highest level and as a demonstration of the high political prestige of Sigismondo."²⁸⁹

More than mere gesture, however, I contend that this consultation provided Sigismondo with credibility and demonstrated his recognition of, and respect for, Brunelleschi's expertise, as well as his desire to gain the accomplished architect's seal of approval. This served Sigismondo's political aims as well, as there was evolving in this period "a newly perceived alliance between technology and military and political power...Military strength and political legitimacy came to be closely associated with construction, technology, and technique."²⁹⁰ While vain and cruel, Sigismondo was also recognized to be intelligent – that he consulted Brunelleschi on lesser fortifications in smaller cities as well as on his much more prominent commissions indicates that this move was not merely to demonstrate his prestige. Rather, Sigismondo enlisted one of the best military minds of the day on his most prominent commission to date, because he genuinely valued Brunelleschi's professional expertise and recognized the strategic and political advantage that this project would confer.

Brunelleschi has been described as the first of a new, modern, type of architect: the "artist-engineer." In contrast to the medieval architect and engineer who were accomplished but anonymous, "the artist-engineer of the height of the fifteenth century was a socially prominent and respected figure, commissioned by powerful and wealthy

²⁸⁹ Volpe, Matteo Nuti. *Architetto dei Malatesta*, 133.

²⁹⁰ Long, "Power Patronage, and the Authorship of Ars: From Mechanical Know-How to Mechanical Knowledge in the Last Scribal Age," 4.

patrons, well paid, and often regarded as one of the brightest ornaments in sovereign courts.”²⁹¹ Brunelleschi was a peer of the intellectual humanists of his world. As the son of a prominent notary, he was well-educated and well-read, and as Galuzzi has noted, he was known for consulting with court humanists as well.²⁹² One of the most notable examples is his collaboration with Paolo Toscanelli (1397–1482).²⁹³ In this respect as well, Brunelleschi fit well into the world Sigismondo was creating. The example of Brunelleschi at the Castelsismondo as advisor provides a salient precedent for the situation in which we find Alberti at San Francesco several years later.

Candidates

Certainly the patronage of Cosimo and other prominent clients were powerful models for Sigismondo. In emulating the practices of the Medici and the d’Este, he not only sought to construct buildings and artworks as magnificent as theirs, but he went so far as to use the same artists they had. Thus Pisanello and Matteo de’Pasti came to Rimini from Leonello d’Este in Ferrara, and Sigismondo wrote directly to Giovanni de’Medici

²⁹¹ Paolo Galuzzi, *Renaissance Engineers From Brunelleschi to Leonardo da Vinci*, 13.

²⁹² Galuzzi describes the fertile scenario in which artist-engineers and humanists cooperated and collaborated to translate and understand recently discovered classical texts on machinery and architecture, citing also the example of Ghiberti and his explorations into the field of optics as revealed in his *Commentaries*. Ibid., 15. On Toscanelli and Brunelleschi see Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr., “Florentine Interest in Ptolomaic Cartography as Background for Renaissance Painting, Architecture, and the Discovery of America,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 33/4 (1974): 276. Brunelleschi was also an active and respected citizen and was elected to public office in 1423. Howard Saalman, *Filippo Brunelleschi. The Buildings* (London: Zwemer, 1993), 30.

²⁹³ Giorgio De Santillana, “Paolo Toscanelli and his Friends,” *Reflections on Men and Ideas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968), 33–47. Eugenio Garin, “Ritratto Di Paolo Dal Pozzo Toscanelli.” *Ritratti di umanisti* (Florence: Sansoni, 1967), 41–67. Alberti also had a fruitful intellectual relationship with Toscanelli. James Beck, “Leon Battista Alberti and the ‘Night Sky’ at San Lorenzo,” *Artibus et Historiae*, 10/19 (1989): 9–35.

requesting “un buon pittore”²⁹⁴ for the Tempio project, resulting in the acquisition of Piero della Francesca for Sigismondo’s devotional portrait fresco in the sacristy.

There were also many obvious choices of architect available to Sigismondo. His growing reputation gave Sigismondo access to the most accomplished architects of the day, those who had established their reputations with buildings commissioned by Sigismondo’s peers. He also had available to him many builders who had served him in the construction and restoration of fortresses, bridges, towers, and city walls throughout the Malatesta territories, as well as others who worked locally in Rimini. Though he did take advantage of his access to well-known artists in other fields via his many connections to other patrons, Sigismondo did not use a prominent architect. Michelozzo, Filarete, and Rossellino had all proven themselves to princes and popes. Thereby, one would think, they might have become attractive to Sigismondo, whose primary method of portraying himself as the equal of these noble patrons was to imitate their patronage patterns. But with the exception of the brief visit in 1438 by Brunelleschi to consult on the new Castelsigismondo already under construction, Sigismondo opted for the untrained and inexperienced Alberti. We will see later the unique qualities Alberti had to offer. It is useful also to ask, however, what did these more obvious candidates lack?

That Sigismondo had previously availed himself of the expertise of one of the leading engineers of his day demonstrates that he valued experience and proven ability. When it came time to choose an architect for the San Francesco renovation, we would have expected him to choose someone with comparable qualifications, of whom there

²⁹⁴ April 7, 1449. ASFi, Mediceo Avanti il principato, filza VIII, c. 212, Pasini, *Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico*, 197.

were many. With the recent death of Brunelleschi, Sigismondo would have done well to consider his architectural follower, Michelozzo. Along with Brunelleschi, Michelozzo was one of the most active and important architects in Florence. Michelozzo's development of Brunelleschi's classical style brought him the patronage of the architecturally prolific Cosimo de' Medici and, upon the death of Brunelleschi in 1446, Michelozzo assumed the great master's post as capomaestro of the Duomo of Florence. That he was the favored architect of the Medici would appear to have given Michelozzo added credibility; we recall that Piero della Francesca came to Rimini on the recommendation of the Medici. We shall see that the Medici association had considerable bearing on his candidacy for the Tempio commission.

Judged by Vasari as the best architect after Brunelleschi, Michelozzo was also a highly successful sculptor responsible for some of the most important sculptural commissions of the period in collaboration with the master Donatello.²⁹⁵ Michelozzo's first Medici architectural commission, the monastery and library of San Marco, immediately impressed Cosimo de' Medici, securing his position as de facto Medici architect: the family in fact employed him exclusively for religious projects as well as for various family villas for nearly forty years. Michelozzo's library design with its characteristic spatial and chromatic simplicity – three aisles of equal width, arches set upon Ionic columns, barrel- and cross-vaulting, and contrasting grey and white coloration – was copied in later libraries including those commissioned by Cosimo in Venice, and

²⁹⁵ On Michelozzo's career in both sculpture and architecture see Harriet McNeal Caplow's dissertation, Michelozzo, 2 vols., Outstanding Dissertations in the Fine Arts, (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1977); and the somewhat more recent, Miranda Ferrara and Francesco Quinterio, Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, (Florence: Salimbeni, 1984). On his collaboration with Donatello, R.W. Lightbown, Donatello and Michelozzo: An Artistic Partnership and its Patrons in the Early Renaissance, (London: H. Miller, 1980). An extensive bibliography of Michelozzo is included in the conference proceedings, Gabriele Morolli, ed., Michelozzo. Scultore e Architetto (1396–1472) (Florence: Centro Di, 1998).

notably by Sigismondo's brother Malatesta Novello, at the Biblioteca Malatestiana in Cesena.²⁹⁶

Michelozzo's next project for Cosimo, the Medici Palace, was innovative and even more influential. While working within a traditional palace type, Michelozzo's three-story scheme with its diminishing rustication and clearly arranged bifora windows quickly became the model for future palace design in Florence and throughout Italy. From this time on, the Medici used Michelozzo for numerous building projects while at the same time he was busy at San Lorenzo as well as serving as capomaestro of the Duomo and SS. Annunziata.²⁹⁷

The fact that Michelozzo was continuously employed by the Medici should not be seen as necessarily excluding him from contention for the project in Rimini, however.

For as Harriet Caplow noted,

“Vasari emphasizes the fact that he made the disegno for many of his architectural commissions, which seems to indicate that he drew only the plan and was not involved in the execution, much like the practice of the modern architect. Significantly Michelozzo seems to have been an innovator in this method of operation.”²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ On the biblioteca, see Volpe, Matteo Nuti. Architetto dei Malatesta, 75–99; Lorenzo Baldacchini, ed., Biblioteca Malatestiana di Cesena, (Rome: Editalia, 1992); Giuseppe Ortalli, “La Biblioteca Malatestiana: il signore e la città,” in Pier Giorgio Pasini, ed., Malatesta Novello magnifico signore: arte e cultura di un principe del Rinscimento, (Bologna: Minerva, 2002); Also interesting are two articles by Canali that argue for Alberti's involvement in the design: Feruccio Canali, “Brunelleschi, Michelozzo, Alberti e le biblioteche umanistiche, tracce ‘michelozziane’ tra Firenze e Cesena,” Michelozzo scultore e architetto, 1396–1472, (Firenze: Centro Di, 1998), 191–202; and, Canali, “Piero de' Medici e Malatesta Novello: l'Alberti e la cultura architettonica e decorative della metà del XV secolo,” Romagna arte e storia 13 (1993), 57–70.

²⁹⁷ Michelozzo took over at the Duomo upon Brunelleschi's death in 1446 and directed the construction of its lantern, and served in the same capacity both designing and supervising construction at SS. Annunziata 1444–55.

²⁹⁸ Caplow, Michelozzo, 57.

This practice furthermore does not appear to have been a problem for Sigismondo since, as is well-known, Alberti directed work on the Tempio largely from Rome.²⁹⁹ In fact, the absence of the designer from the building site may have been an advantage for a patron like Sigismondo who would then have even greater authority to impose his own ideas as the construction progressed. Michelozzo would appear to have been very appealing to Sigismondo who, as we have seen, very much had his own ideas about his building. For according to Caplow's appraisal, Michelozzo was:

“more agreeable and accessible to the advice and desires of Cosimo than the turbulent Brunelleschi and was willing to follow the strong personal tastes of his patron ...[and] more adaptable to the desires of a private citizen than Brunelleschi and would allow his personality to be subsumed in Cosimo's.”³⁰⁰

Yet more telling for our study is Vasari's anecdote about how Michelozzo won the Medici Palace competition: “he [Cosimo] thought that the one [model] made by Filippo di Ser Brunellesco, as it has been said, was too sumptuous and magnificent, and more likely to stir up envy among his fellow-citizens than to confer grandeur or adornment on the city, or bring comfort to himself.”³⁰¹ Whether or not it was his own taste, or the accommodation to that of his patron, Michelozzo's more simple style, characterized by “dignity, simplicity and restraint”³⁰² may not have appealed to Sigismondo whose taste leaned more towards the magnificent. Furthermore,

²⁹⁹ We have direct evidence of this in a letter he wrote to Matteo de' Pasti regarding the design of the façade and references to potential visits to Rome by others involved with the building to consult with him there. See Grayson, *Alberti and the Tempio Malatestiano: An Autograph Letter from Alberti to Matteo de' Pasti*, and Delucca, *Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche*, 337. 337. Alberti's practice of vacating a worksite once he had provided the design was an intentional aspect of his approach: “should you propose to supervise and execute the work, you will hardly be able to avoid having sole responsibility for all the errors and mistakes committed by others, whether through inexperience or neglect.” Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, Bk. IX, xi. This implies that Alberti was not confident in the structural aspects of his designs, due to his obvious lack of building training.

³⁰⁰ Caplow, *Michelozzo*, 40, 546–547.

³⁰¹ Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, 379.

³⁰² Caplow, *Michelozzo*, 539.

Michelozzo's experience was primarily in the handling of volumes of space, as first expressed at San Marco. With the plan of the church fixed, the main task of the project at San Francesco was an overhaul of surfaces.³⁰³

In any case, two other qualifications provoke a final speculation about Michelozzo as a potential candidate for the San Francesco renovation. His engineering experience would have been an asset given that the need to retain the existing structure was so critical to the Tempio.³⁰⁴ Additionally, his fusion of and expertise in both sculpture and architecture were displayed in the pioneering Coscia, Brancacci, and Aragazzi tombs which do portray a facility with the monumental forms of classical architecture. This combination would become a defining feature of the Tempio.

Sigismondo must have at least considered Michelozzo. But as Caplow noted, Michelozzo had a very full plate in Florence: "The list of architectural commissions ascribed to him is so lengthy that it seems that he almost rebuilt Florence single-handed."³⁰⁵ Michelozzo would have been a capable option for Sigismondo, had he not been otherwise engaged.

Sigismondo could also have consulted Filarete, a Florentine artist also adept in both architecture and sculpture. Perhaps he did. In comparison with Brunelleschi, Filarete offered a different sort of advantage: his need for a patron and his limited architectural

³⁰³ On the other hand, with his magisterial sculptural skill Michelozzo would have been well-suited to the task. For though his architectural output was vast, Michelozzo was still considered above all to be a sculptor.

³⁰⁴ Michelozzo is known to have been involved with two hydraulic projects, the diverting of a river and flooding around Lucca in collaboration with Donatello and Brunelleschi, and the dam at Castiglione della Pescaia which he was enlisted to investigate. More interesting is his involvement with fortifications in Montepulciano in 1432 and later in 1448 the supervision of the construction of a moat around the walls of Castellina in Chianti. Caplow, *Michelozzo*, 44–49. At the same time, Michelozzo was also serving as *capomaestro* of the Duomo; he was certainly up to the complex task of the San Francesco renovation.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

experience would have allowed Sigismondo to exert greater control over the renovation of the Tempio. Filarete's Roman experience would also have been an asset for Sigismondo's goal of connecting the church, his buildings, his rule, indeed himself, to Rimini's Roman heritage. After spending several years in Rome, where he cast the bronze doors of St. Peter's (1433–45) and other classically inspired works,³⁰⁶ and began his architectural career, Filarete left Rome. After the death of Eugenius IV, and an accusation that he stole relics, Filarete found himself without a patron. He thus set out to attach himself to a new court and arrived in Rimini just as the San Francesco project was underway. In spite of his Florentine and Roman credentials, however, Filarete did not serve Sigismondo's needs, for his stay in Rimini was brief, and no artistic works appear to have resulted from it. By the following year, Filarete had found the patron who would make his architectural career. For the better part of the following two decades Filarete worked on various engineering and architectural projects in Milan for Francesco Sforza, contributing to the Castello and Cathedral there, as well as designing the influential Ospedale Maggiore and writing his architectural treatise on the ideal city, *Sforzinda*.

Was Filarete called to Rimini as a potential candidate for the San Francesco renovation? The circumstances described above certainly admit the possibility. Yet the fact that Filarete ended up working in a distinctively regional style in Milan, rather than importing the classical *romanità* that was spreading throughout the artistic courts of Italy, is telling. Despite his Roman experience, Filarete may not have met Sigismondo's expectations for designs or ideas that adequately reflected the ambitions of the court at

³⁰⁶ On Filarete's unique interpretation and adaptation of antique models see Charles Seymour, Jr., "Some Reflections on Filarete's Use of Antique Visual Sources," *Arte Lombarda* 38/39 (1973): 36–47; and John R. Spencer's subsequent study, "Filarete, the Medallist of the Roman Emperors," *Art Bulletin* LXI/4 (1979): 550–61. In Rome he was involved with Tomb of Cardinal Chaves of Portugal in the Lateran before stopping in Rimini 1449, and moving on to Venice.

Rimini. Furthermore, based on Filarete's anthropomorphic theory of architecture, later expounded in his treatise of 1461–64, the two personalities may not have been compatible. Filarete analogized the patron of a building to its father, and the architect was likened to the mother, developing the design and giving "free rein to his imagination." Even if this was how the process played out, Sigismondo likely would not have wanted it to seem that way. As with the Castelsismondo, and as indicated in the interior decorative program, the Tempio was to be the product of Sigismondo's own imagination.

One of the more intriguing possibilities for the San Francesco commission, Bernardo Rossellino, also came out of the fertile Florentine environment of the 1430s. Rossellino was born in 1409 in nearby Settignano where he trained as a stonemason and sculptor with his four brothers. His oeuvre indicates that he absorbed the cultural and artistic developments of his contemporaries like Donatello and Ghiberti who consciously incorporated classicizing architectural elements into their sculptural works.

Rossellino had worked as both architect and sculptor, as at the Misericordia in Arezzo where in the mid-1430s he incorporated modern, classicizing elements into a Gothic façade begun in the fourteenth century. After working again in Florence on various sculptural projects including the tomb of Leonardo Bruni, Rossellino was in Rome, this time as Nicholas V's "ingenere di palazzo," an indication that despite his extensive achievements in sculpture, he was valued as well for his architectural ability. While Alberti's role in Nicholas's extensive building program – the renovation of the Vatican Palace, Borgo, and St. Peter's as well as of the forty station churches and various infrastructural elements – is still unresolved, it is clear that Rossellino was directly

involved in several of the projects.³⁰⁷ These major architectural initiatives took place at exactly the time Sigismondo was moving forward with his own renovation. In addition, we know that Rossellino and Alberti were apparently familiar in Rome (as joint attributions and their later collaborations indicate),³⁰⁸ inviting further speculation about why one and not the other ended up in Rimini. We shall see that the key difference between the two had not to do with architecture but rather with other concerns of Sigismondo, namely his effort to become and be recognized as a cultured humanistic patron.

Thus there were practical circumstances that may have precluded some of these architects from becoming involved. Yet another factor may have played into Sigismondo's decisions as well. In his prior, military, projects, most notably the Castelsismondo, Sigismondo in effect acted as the designer. As an expert in the field of military architecture and engineering, his primary need was for workers to implement his own well-developed ideas. In the case of an ecclesiastical commission, however, Sigismondo was not as experienced or as confident. He therefore needed someone more knowledgeable about religious buildings where iconography and style rather than practical utility were paramount concerns. There were many good options, but it may be

³⁰⁷ According to Magnuson, the Pope had already begun to build in Rome with Rossellino's aid when Alberti arrived there. From that time on Nicholas consulted with Alberti who designed many buildings to be executed by Rossellino. Magnuson, "The Project of Nicolas V for Rebuilding the Borgo Leonino," 88. This will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

³⁰⁸ In 1452, work on the so-called Rossellino choir stopped after Alberti's recommendation that it was not structurally sound and it is generally accepted that Nicholas's restoration of the Early Christian Santo Stefano Rotondo was executed by Rossellino but devised by Alberti. On Santo Stefano Rotondo see Vincenzo Golzio and Giuseppe Zander, *L'Arte in Roma nel Secolo XV* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1969), 48; Piero Tomei, *L'Architettura a Roma nel Quattrocento*, (Rome: Palombi, 1942), 103–04; Charles Burroughs, *From Signs to Design*, 47–48; and especially Charles Mack, "Bernardo Rossellino, L.B. Alberti and the Rome of Nicholas V," and Mack, "Nicholas the Fifth and the Rebuilding of Rome: Reality and Legacy," 31–56, and 44 n. 26. Connections are also to be found in the design and execution of the Palazzo Rucellai in Florence and later at Pope Pius II's Pienza.

that Sigismondo was looking for someone less established so he could largely control the work. In light of these considerations, the more obvious, big-name, candidates would have been eliminated

Others Involved

Our effort to determine Alberti's role in Rimini and the reason for which he was chosen is amplified by a review of the other builders and their activity at San Francesco. Moreover, such an inquiry supports the hypothesis that Sigismondo chose his employees carefully, based on his own agenda of having substantial control over the design. The execution of the Tempio project was primarily entrusted to local workers, most of whom had served the Malatesta in a similar capacity before. More telling is that few of them possessed a creative pedigree. Oreste Delucca's research in the Riminese archives during the 1990s has brought to light the names and activities of several craftsmen and builders who played a major role in the realization of the Tempio Malatestiano.³⁰⁹

The most prominent builder in the Riminese territory, one who had a long pre-existing relationship with the Malatesta and their building projects was Matteo Nuti, a muratore from Umbria. The earliest documents relating to his professional activity date from 1423, at which time he was already involved with the Malatesta court at Fano, working on the cathedral and fortress there.³¹⁰ Though often working alongside other masters or builders, Nuti always seems to be in the mix of Malatesta and Franciscan commissions throughout the 1430s. In 1438, Nuti was working at the Castelsismondo with Cristoforo Rochi, and the following year he was involved in the fortification of the

³⁰⁹ Delucca, Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche.

³¹⁰ Volpe, Matteo Nuti. Architetto dei Malatesta, i, 12, 14.

castle at Pergola with another Tempio protagonist, Alvise.³¹¹ It also seems that once Brunelleschi arrived in Rimini, Nuti may have traveled with him, presumably gaining valuable knowledge that he could later apply to other Malatesta projects.³¹² In any case, Nuti's status was well established by 1440 when he served as the capofila among many experts who served Sigismondo in Fano and elsewhere. According to Volpe, Nuti's presence from 1438 until at least 1454 was fundamental in the history of Riminese fortifications in as much as he drafted and realized many of Sigismondo's ideas.³¹³

In the mid-1440s Nuti took a different sort of Malatesta project, the enlargement of a library for the Franciscan brothers in Cesena, a project promoted by Sigismondo's brother Malatesta Novello, the signore of Cesena (Fig. 29). In the Biblioteca project, begun in 1445 and modeled on the San Marco Library that Michelozzo had designed for Cosimo de' Medici in Florence, we find an early instance of the Malatesta forgoing the traditional Gothic style of the northern Italian courts in favor of the all'antica style gaining popularity in Florence.

Nuti is first documented at San Francesco in 1454. In December of that year he was sent to Senigallia with Francesco Cinquedenti to find suitable timber for the roof of the Tempio after inspecting the technical aspects of Alvise's roofing plan.³¹⁴ That Nuti became involved when construction was so far advanced indicates that his role was a limited one, dealing with a specific structural concern. Nuti's role as an engineer at San Francesco is further revealed by a letter he wrote to Sigismondo extoling the structural aspects of Alvise's new roofing design that would replace that conceived by Alberti. All

³¹¹ Delucca, Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche, 321.

³¹² Volpe, Matteo Nuti. Architetto dei Malatesta, 14.

³¹³ Ibid., 133.

³¹⁴ Delucca, Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche, 317.

of our information about Nuti's activity at the Tempio indicates that as he tended to be working elsewhere,³¹⁵ he was involved not as a designer, but rather as one of its many builders and advisors on structural and technical issues.

Cristoforo Foschi, also a mason from the area around Fano, was a close collaborator of Nuti's in several Malatesta projects. The two first worked together at the Castelsismondo in 1437. After a period in Cesena and Fano, both were in Senigallia, engaged on Sigismondo's rebuilding of the city.³¹⁶ Sigismondo refers to Foschi as one of the workers on "my chapels at Rimini," and in 1460 paid him in the form of a parcel land with a house.³¹⁷ Records show that Foschi received the same compensation as Nuti, indicating that they were equally accomplished and valued for their work. Indeed, we may surmise that Foschi, too, served in an engineering capacity.

One of the most important figures involved with the Tempio renovation was Luigi Muzarelli, a local, that is Riminese, worker, referred to as Alvise throughout extant documents. A carpentarius also identified as a lignamine, Alvise first appears in Pergola with Matteo Nuti in May, 1439. Delucca has noted that the description of Alvise as "ingignero del signore [Sigismondo]," denotes a "professional level that extended to the planning."³¹⁸ The fact that his structural expertise was later consulted to settle a controversy about building material indicates he may have served in a limited supervisory role as well. This is also borne out by his repeated appearance in the correspondence between various Riminese figures and Sigismondo while the condottiere was engaged in

³¹⁵ For Nuti's role in other projects in and around Rimini, see Volpe, Matteo Nuti. Architetto dei Malatesta.

³¹⁶ This restoration was largely carried out by a Iohannes Ingignerus (see *ibid.*, 362) who served as superintendent of works there which included the building of a city gate and later work on the rocca, city walls and the tower of San Giovanni. The simultaneity of these and other projects in the Malatesta lands attests to the virtual army of designers and builders Sigismondo had at his disposal; Sigismondo, however, had apparently determined them unsuitable for the San Francesco commission.

³¹⁷ Delucca, Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche, 322–23.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 295.

battle in Tuscany in 1454.³¹⁹ Among these letters is one of December 17, from Matteo de' Pasti, reporting to Sigismondo on the design of a new roofing plan by maestro Alvise which features an “externally unified structure” for the nave and chapels for which he is preparing a wooden model to be grafted upon Alberti’s.³²⁰ A letter from Alvise’s son, Giovanni, is also concerned with his father’s (never executed) roofing plan: it explains both verbally and with the aid of drawings that Alvise has altered Alberti’s model of the Tempio, inserting his plan for the roof, but has not “modified Alberti’s plan and structure.” According to Nuti, Alvise’s plan was commendable for three reasons: its “most great and ample volume;” its “unity,” (*unitarietà*) which avoids the roofs of the chapels from being damaged by those of the nave; and the “static imposition that allows for the walls of those chapels to be unburdened,” that is, the addition of walls to support it would be unnecessary.³²¹ The roofing issue was so significant that even those not involved with the construction were discussing it. Tracolo, one of Sigismondo’s court poets, also exalts Alvise’s idea and “invention” in a letter to his patron.³²² In Alvise, then, we find another valuable collaborator whose knowledge and experience were critical to the practical task of executing a grand renovation of an existing structure; he was another figure who made Sigismondo’s ambitions a reality.

As was typical of such professions in the Renaissance, Alvise’s son Giovanni followed his father in the carpentry trade, joining him at the Tempio worksite. His letters demonstrate that independent of his father, Giovanni’s status was high enough to be

³¹⁹ This was one of a cache of letters among Sigismondo’s possessions intercepted by the Siennese. We owe much of our knowledge of the work on the Tempio to its preservation in the Siennese archives. See Massera, *Cronache malatestiane dei secoli XIV e XV*, and Ricci, *Il Tempio Malatestiano*.

³²⁰ December 21, 1454, Delucca, *Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche*, 311.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 296.

³²² AS Siena, *Particolari Famiglie forestiere*, busta n. 8, Malatesta Rimini, in Delucca, *Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche*, 296.

corresponding with the patron himself regarding this important issue of the Tempio's roofing. This discussion further serves to demonstrate Sigismondo's level of ongoing personal involvement in the design and construction of the Tempio. He is also mentioned by Matteo de' Pasti with whom he had such a close working relationship that he (Giovanni) planned to accompany the capomaestro to Rome to illustrate personally the roofing solution to Alberti and hear his opinion about it.³²³ These episodes, along with a surviving account book, authorize the belief that Giovanni was also responsible for the administrative side of the Tempio worksite."³²⁴ While there are no sources relating to Giovanni's professional activity outside of the Tempio, in him we have another figure who, in terms of "authority and continuity of presence" had a role of the first level in the direction of the work at the Tempio. Giovanni is one of a few figures whose documented position impacts our reading of Alberti's role there.

These local workers – Nuti, Foschi, Alvise – formed a team upon which Sigismondo consistently relied for the realization of his architectural ideas. Their intervention, however, was limited to technical and structural issues rather than those related to design.

There was also active at the Tempio a more prominent artist whose role, like Alberti's, requires clarification. Matteo de' Pasti's high-ranking position in the Tempio commission is attested to by his correspondence with Alberti³²⁵ as he oversaw the construction of the Tempio after Alberti had returned to Rome, and with Sigismondo,

³²³ Ibid., 311. This trip, however, never appears to have taken place.

³²⁴ Ibid., 310.

³²⁵ The letter of November 18, 1454 is technically detailed, discussing critical issues such as the dome, roofing, windows, and external structure. Grayson, Alberti and the Tempio Malatestiano; Delucca, Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche, 337.

who was engaged in battle in Tuscany during much of the construction.³²⁶ The declaration in an inscription inside the church that Matteo was *architectus*³²⁷ makes evident his central role in the project. This also, however, casts further shadows on Alberti's activity. Matteo was a sculptor and medalist who, like Alberti, had no architectural training. If Matteo was the "architect," what function did Alberti serve?

Born in Verona around 1420, Matteo worked as a painter in Venice illustrating Petrarch's *Trionfi* in 1441. He then went to Ferrara where he served Leonello d'Este as a manuscript illuminator from 1444–46, and there met Pisanello from whom he learned the art of medal-making. That Matteo came to Rimini in 1449,³²⁸ when he appears at the Castelsismondo, comes as no surprise since Leonello d'Este provided Sigismondo with many artists. In addition to casting many medals for Sigismondo,³²⁹ Matteo quickly became involved with the San Francesco renovation. We first find him active at the Tempio as a sculptor with Agostino di Duccio and others, working on two funerary chapels. By the time Alberti became involved around 1450, Matteo had assumed the role of organizer and supervisor of the entire project; by 1454, he was in charge of all Malatesta architectural projects. He also led efforts in the construction of various military

³²⁶ Delucca, *Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche*, 338.

³²⁷ The inscription is on the cornice between the first and second chapels on the left, and was originally painted. See *Ibid.*, 326, n. 50 and Ricci, *Il Tempio Malatestiano*, 300.

³²⁸ Though Matteo's first Riminese medal is dated 1446 this cannot be taken as documentation of his presence there for dates on such celebratory medals do not necessarily refer to the actual date of manufacture. Furthermore, Matteo is documented as still being in Ferrara on March 6, 1446 and is first cited in Rimini on June 19, 1449, working at the Castelsismondo with Agostino di Duccio. Delucca, *Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche*, 325, 334.

³²⁹ For Matteo's activity as a medallist, see Pier Giorgio Pasini, "Matteo de' Pasti: Problems of Style and Chronology," in *Italian Medals*, edited by J. Graham Pollard, *Studies in History of Art*, vol. 21, (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1987), 143–59.

structures in Senigallia (where he investigated fortifications with Alberti), Fano, and other Malatesta towns.³³⁰

Though Middeldorf proposed Matteo as the author of the Tempio's sculptural program,³³¹ study of Matteo's correspondence with Sigismondo, Alberti, and other builders at the worksite reveals that he served in more of an administrative and advisory role than a creative one.

Evidence for Matteo's central role in the construction of the Tempio, as well as for the roles of others active there, comes from a group of letters he and Sigismondo exchanged, as well as correspondence between Sigismondo and various other workers on the Tempio site who repeatedly refer to Matteo. Among a cache of letters intercepted from Sigismondo and now preserved in Siena is a letter of December 17, 1454, in which Matteo tells Sigismondo of the contact he has had with Alberti and the drawings he has received from him for the new roofing system devised by Alvise. Matteo goes on to explain that these drawings were studied by all the *capicantieri*, evidence that the design of the Tempio, particularly in its structural aspects, was very much a collaborative effort.

³³⁰ These projects include the tower at Carignano and the *rocche* at Montalto and Senigallia. Delucca, *Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento*. *Rassegna di fonti archivistiche*, 326, 338. For Alberti's specific role in Senigallia, see Arturo Calzona, "Leon Battista Alberti e l'immagine di Roma fuori di Roma: Il Tempio Malatestiano," *Le Due Rome del Quattrocento. Melozzo, Antoniazio e la cultura artistica del '400 romano*, Sergio Rossi and Stefano Valeri, eds. (Rome: Lithos Editrice, 1997), 346–63; Anna Falconi, "Castelli e castellani malatesiani nel territorio di Fano (1434–1463)," and Marinella Bonvini Mazzanti, "La riedificazione di Senigallia," in *Castel Sismondo e Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta e l'arte militare del primo rinascimento*, 79–104 and 173–192.

³³¹ Middeldorf contended that Agostino, the traditionally-held author of the reliefs was not an artist of sufficiently high caliber to conceive of such a program. Instead, Matteo was the one who "furnished all the brilliant ideas," his background in drawing accounting for the linear quality of the reliefs, and Agostino is relegated to the role of "the marble worker who organized the execution of the scheme." Ulrich Middeldorf, "On the Dilettante Sculptor," *Apollo* 107 (1978), 316ff. Pasini on the other hand believes that "Matteo is a slow artist, meditative, with little imagination, with little quickness or facility of invention (and for this reason I cannot agree with Middeldorf in believing him to be the inventor of all the sculptural decoration in the Tempio Malatestiano." Pasini, "Matteo de' Pasti," 143–59.

Court descriptions of Matteo that extol his culture and professionalism³³² show that he was more than merely one among a corps of workers. He was capable of supervisory duties. Written accounts of his activity indicate that Matteo was the main mediator among the designer, patron, and other builders. Thus this architectus was not Alberti's type of the ideal architect, intellectual and theoretical. He rather served as the third figure in the "triad of patron/architect/builder."³³³ As builder, Matteo filled many roles from a technically astute manager to a skilled worker who could actually execute the project – activities that, we should note, were not within Alberti's repertoire, but made Matteo a perfect complement to the theoretical designer, Alberti.

Alberti's important letter to Matteo of November 18, 1454, includes one of only two architectural drawings by Alberti's own hand.³³⁴ The letter refers to a design detail of the façade that concerned Alberti greatly and demonstrates the close working relationship he and Matteo had.³³⁵ This letter is the only surviving evidence directly linked to Alberti of what appears to be an ongoing conversation about certain design details of the Tempio façade mediated by Alberti through Matteo. In addition to the stylistic issue of the use of a novel scroll element to mask the transition from side aisle roof to the height of the nave, Alberti also discusses the cupola, the external structure (whose harmony Alberti is concerned to preserve), and the use of wood for the roof. Combined with the many surviving documents and letters regarding the progress of the Tempio, we can begin to identify who served in which role at the site. It is clear that Alberti was responsible for

³³² Delucca, Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche, 327, n. 52.

³³³ Franklin Toker, "Alberti's Ideal Architect: Renaissance – or Gothic?," 667–75, 668.

³³⁴ The other is a plan, identified by Burns, for a Roman-style bathing house in Urbino. Howard Burns, "A Drawing by L.B. Alberti," Architectural Design, XLIX, no. 5–6, (1979), 45–56. On this drawing, see also Tavernor, On Alberti and the Art of Building, 194.

³³⁵ Grayson, Alberti and the Tempio Malatestiano, 17.

the design (based on Sigismondo's requirements) and that Matteo's job was to execute it. Though Matteo is described in the inscription as the "architect," he was in fact closer to our modern concept of a contractor or works supervisor.

This overview of the workers active at the Tempio site reveals that of those employed there in a technical capacity, many had worked for Sigismondo in a similar role on his earlier military projects in which the patron also acted as the "designer." By contrast, at Rimini, an ecclesiastical project in which Sigismondo did not have such expertise, Alberti served this purpose. Matteo served as capomaestro, that is the overseer or supervisor, also a critical role in such a monumental undertaking, justifying his attribution inside the building.

What can the presence of all these other workers and artisans who were and were not in Rimini tell us about Alberti's activity there? Above all, it seems that in terms of execution, he did not play as commanding a role as has historically been ascribed to him. Though Alberti certainly was responsible for a novel design for the façade, extant documents show that many others also had a decisive hand in the final outcome (as far as it was completed). This included not only the construction but also aspects of the structural design, such as the roof and windows, which resulted in the alteration of Alberti's model. Though care was taken to respect Alberti's design, it appears that Sigismondo's other builders were fully entrusted to make necessary changes. Once he provided the drawings and model to Sigismondo, Alberti was out of the loop, being consulted only occasionally about such concerns. Even then his input was in written

form; a proposed visit to him by the Tempio's builders never took place and we do not know of a single visit by Alberti to Rimini once he had returned to Rome.

Our survey tells us something equally important about Sigismondo: as a patron he apparently was not looking for an "architect" in Alberti. He clearly had accomplished builders already at his disposal. This allowed Sigismondo to enlist a designer who had less conventional but equally important qualities, namely a background as a classicist and reputation as a respected humanist whose writings lent him authority. Alina Payne has read as much into Alberti's view of the architect: "only the learned architect/orator can build/speak ornately, and architecture and culture thus come together."³³⁶ Sigismondo availed himself of expertise in various ways and just as he did with Brunelleschi at the Castelsigismondo, he was interested in Alberti's ideas as much as his designs.³³⁷ As we shall see presently, Alberti then played the role of adviser or consultant; he was the "idea man." That Alberti also had the ear of many of the illustrious figures Sigismondo hoped to emulate and impress, would have lent Sigismondo a certain degree of cachet and credibility as well.

³³⁶ Alina A. Payne, *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance. Architectural Invention, Ornament, and Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 76.

³³⁷ There were other examples of this tendency in Sigismondo's court. *De re militari*, the famous military treatise produced there, was authored by Roberto Valturio who was accomplished as an engineer and humanist, having also served as a secretary to Eugenius IV.

Chapter 4: Alberti's Place in Sigismondo's Court

Having established why many other architects may have been passed over for the commission of San Francesco, we still must determine exactly why Sigismondo commissioned Alberti. Alberti was accomplished in the diverse fields of linguistics, art theory, sociology, science and engineering, and by his own admission, athletics,³³⁸ yet he had never designed a building. Furthermore, Alberti had no architectural training and could not even claim a background in the arts or trades that were at the time the common preparation for an architectural career. Alberti was, above all, an intellectual. What, then, did he have to offer Sigismondo?

Sigismondo

As we have seen, through the course of the 1440s, the condottiere of illegitimate birth, Sigismondo, was embroiled in the politics of Milan, Ferrara, Venice, and Florence, and fought alternately as the ally and enemy of each, all the while trying to maintain control of his own territories. Despite his mutability and lack of foresight or prudence, he was able to curry the favor of Pope Nicholas V and became one of the most sought-after military captains in Italy.

Sigismondo's military prowess earned him the respect of his troops and subjects. By the time he was a teenager, he had already led troops against the pope, and his knowledge of military techniques and strategy, even engineering, was renowned. We know that Sigismondo took a commanding role in the defensive design of his new castle

³³⁸ Watkins, "The Authorship of the Vita Anonyma of Leon Battista Alberti."

and contributed much to Valturio's well-known military treatise, De re militari. He was apparently respected by several esteemed humanists as well.³³⁹

Sigismondo was also known, however, for his impatience and impulsiveness, and according to Cosimo de' Medici would "give free rein to his appetites."³⁴⁰ Sigismondo thus appears to have inherited much from his father, Pandolfo III, who "had patronized the humanists, while in private life he had the reputation of a libertine."³⁴¹ Sigismondo displayed these two traits as well, establishing a great humanist court at Rimini, while living such a reckless life as to earn himself excommunication from the Church.

While his position as papal vicar gave Sigismondo a great amount of power and prestige, for him it was not enough. Throughout his life, Sigismondo sought a title of nobility, similar to that of the d'Este or Visconti, which would legitimate his rule and release him from his subservience to the Pope and military employers.³⁴² Despite repeated meetings with emperors and popes, however, the closest he ever came to a princely title was being knighted as Lord of Rimini in 1433 by Emperor Sigismund of Hungary as he passed through Rimini on his way to Rome for his coronation by Pope Eugenius IV.³⁴³ Though this was the only title Sigismondo was ever to receive, it had enough significance for him that he was prompted to change his name in honor of the

³³⁹ In a letter to Leonello d'Este, Flavio Biondo noted that he was impressed with Sigismondo's knowledge of Roman history and antiquities and Poggio even dedicated a treatise to him. See Ettlinger, Image of a Renaissance Prince, 142–43, on praise for Sigismondo from Biondo, Poggio Bracciolini, and Guarino da Verona.

³⁴⁰ Cosimo de' Medici in letter of 25 May 1449, quoted in Tabanelli, Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta. Signore del Medioevo e Rinascimento, 198; Gaeta points out that such traits were characteristic of most condottieri in the Quattrocento and Cinquecento. Gaeta, "La 'Leggenda' di Sigismondo Malatesta," 175–6.

³⁴¹ Jones, The Malatesta of Rimini. A Political History, 178.

³⁴² On the issue of titles of nobility and Salutati's legitimacy of rule versus tyranny, that is, requiring the willful assent of the people and approval of the emperor, see Ettlinger, "The Image of a Renaissance Prince," 39–43.

³⁴³ He apparently attempted to acquire the title of Marquis, but to no avail. See Jones, "The Vicariate of the Malatesta of Rimini," p. 331, note 5.

event by adding his trademark “SI” to his birth name, Gismondo³⁴⁴ in an attempt to associate himself with the emperor and thereby prove himself worthy of the title.

His frequent associations with rulers of nobility amplified Sigismondo’s lack of title. Though he was a very successful military campaigner, Sigismondo never considered himself the equal of his peers because he could not claim the coveted title of Duke or Marquis, an essential trait for a worthy ruler. Sigismondo’s inferiority complex was corroborated by common attitudes in the fifteenth century that condottieri such as Sigismondo were “mere hirelings totally lacking in civic virtue, pride, and loyalty.”³⁴⁵

This context of an insecure leader, forever trying to solidify and justify his rule, must be kept in mind when considering Sigismondo’s cultural activities, especially the artistic program undertaken at San Francesco. As we have seen, from the fifteenth through the twentieth centuries many scholars followed Pius’s lead in ascribing evil intentions to Sigismondo and to his remodeling of San Francesco. In her dissertation on Sigismondo, however, Helen Ettlinger challenges the tradition of Malatesta scholarship that characterizes Sigismondo as a cruel heathen who should be condemned. She argues that Sigismondo’s goal of legitimizing his rule and preserving his name for posterity was the motivation for his every calculated action, particularly his patronage activities at Rimini.³⁴⁶ This chapter takes Ettlinger’s thesis as a starting point from which we can

³⁴⁴ Jean Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods. The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art, Bollingen Series XXXVIII, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 135, also suggested that the “SI” signifies Sigismondo and Isotta. This theory has become an element of the “tempio erotico” interpretation of the building. See Kokole, “Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style,” 127ff, on this reading as one the three main trends of scholarship regarding the Tempio, the other two being the “tempio eroico” and “tempio eretico.”

³⁴⁵ This view was voiced by Leonardo Bruni, in his De militia of c. 1420. Cited by Ettlinger, Image of a Renaissance Prince, 50.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 47–60. Anthony d’Elia recent presentation of Sigismondo as a serious admirer of antiquity also underlies his traditional reputation as merely vainglorious. D’Elia argues that the literature produced at

better elucidate Alberti's purpose in Rimini. For Sigismondo's "pattern of intention"³⁴⁷ applied not only to the products of his patronage but to its process as well. The choice of Alberti to design the new San Francesco, I contend, was neither a casual nor obvious one. Instead, as a well-respected humanist, Alberti served a specific function within Sigismondo's well-considered agenda.

Artistic patronage: building as virtue

By the mid-fifteenth century, the patronage of architecture had become a standard method of displaying one's social status and personal virtue of magnificence. With the building activities of Cosimo de' Medici in the 1430s and 1440s, the traditional stigma attached to personal expenditures on lavish artistic and architectural projects began to give way, and it became the "natural behavior of a nobleman to patronize architecture."³⁴⁸ The building – directly linked to its patron by the imprese and inscriptions emblazoned on its façade for all passers-by to see – was a concrete embodiment of its commissioner's virtue. Though Cosimo was a private individual, princes throughout Italy, such as Ludovico Gonzaga and Federico da Montefeltro, began to follow his example, commissioning grand architectural projects as a duty of their noble status. Furthermore, Filarete's concept that the patron of a building was its creator, or

Sigismondo's court extols Sigismondo as the contemporary ruler who comes closest to equaling the glory and valor of ancient soldiers and rulers but stops short of the hubristic claim that he actually equals their glory which is evidence of his genuine and profound respect for the ancients. Anthony Francis d'Elia, "The Limits of Biography, or Why No Biography of Sigismondo Malatesta was Written," presented at the Renaissance Society of America Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, March 22, 2012.

³⁴⁷ Ettlinger applies Baxandall's concept to Sigismondo's "wide-spread and diverse projects." Ettlinger, *Image of a Renaissance Prince*, 2.

³⁴⁸ Jenkins, "Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage of Architecture and the Theory of Magnificence," 162. This change in fact had begun by the fourteenth century in Milan. See Louis Green, "Galvanno Fiamma, Azzone Vosconti and the Revival of the Classical Theory of Magnificence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 53 (1990): 98–113.

“father,” and that the magnificence of the building was a reflection of its patron’s inherent virtue served Sigismondo as well. His intention was that the magnificent building he was creating at Rimini would serve as proof of his personal virtue and nobility, regardless of his title, or lack thereof.³⁴⁹ Alberti, too, was directly involved in the growing discourse on the virtue and value of architectural patronage. In Della famiglia, of 1433–34 he connected the act of building to family honor,³⁵⁰ and later in On the Art of Building, he reasons, “We all agree that we should endeavor to leave a reputation behind us, not only for our wisdom but our power too; for this reason, as Thucydides observes, we erect great structures, that our posterity may suppose us to have been great persons.”³⁵¹

Sigismondo’s Court

Sigismondo regularly dealt on both a personal and professional basis with the most prominent political and cultural figures of fifteenth-century Italy, all of whom effectively used art for political advantage. Though a formal title and sovereignty always eluded him, in one respect Sigismondo could emulate and possibly even surpass his contemporary rulers. In every ducal court that Sigismondo frequented, he found leaders surrounded by circles of learned humanists, scholars, and artists who helped to reinforce their patrons’ images as benevolent and just rulers. Not only was the presence of such a court a sign of a good ruler, but the courtiers’ activities created that image as well.

³⁴⁹ Aristotle, Aristotle: Nichomachean Ethics, 2nd ed., trans. Thomas Irwin, (Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1999), Bk. IV, Chap. 2, SS 20, 1122b, 5, 16–17), cited by Jenkins, “Cosimo de’ Medici’s Patronage of Architecture and the Theory of Magnificence,” 166, note 22. Alberti elaborates on this Aristotelian idea when he explains that a building must be related in type and appearance to its use and to the social status of its patron. Alberti, On the Art of Building, V, i; V, vi.

³⁵⁰ Jenkins, “Cosimo de’ Medici’s Patronage of Architecture and the Theory of Magnificence,” 163.

³⁵¹ Alberti, On the Art of Building, IX, I, 292

Following the ancient tenet that only well-educated men were fit to rule, Renaissance humanists promoted culture and education as requisite characteristics of nobility. And since Sigismondo had not inherited nobility, he believed that he could acquire it by cultivating these universally recognized qualifications. Alternatively, if he failed to secure a formal title, he could fashion the image of a learned and just ruler to perpetuate his name through history. The most effective method of constructing such an image was the creation of permanent memorials to his rule that would substitute for a noble title as a means to eternal fame. As Alberti rhetorically asks in On the Art of Building, “Has there been one among the greatest and wisest of princes who did not consider building one of the principal means of preserving his name for posterity?”³⁵²

In his mania to achieve this image – described by Kokole as “Malatesta’s thirst for the elevated status that comes with higher culture”³⁵³ – Sigismondo brought together some of the most creative and influential intellectuals and artists of the fifteenth century. For, to quote Kokole again,

“Though driven by his inborn curiosity, natural intelligence and the passion for novelty, Sigismondo showed a keen interest in the humanist revival of letters, he may not have been in a position to make a truly creative contribution to its cause. It would seem more likely that he asserted his claim to learning by proxy – rather than being himself a learned patron he therefore did all that was in his power to become a patron of the learned.”³⁵⁴

By way of his relationships with other prominent humanist patrons, particularly Leonello,³⁵⁵ Sigismondo was able to procure the services of some of the most successful

³⁵² Alberti, On the Art of Building, Prologue, 5.

³⁵³ Kokole, “Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style,” 149.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 151. It is tempting to speculate that Sigismondo’s eagerness provided Alberti with a willing partner or even subject, who would allow him to largely take control of the project.

³⁵⁵ In addition to Sigismondo’s professional relationships with (and against) contemporary rulers, a marital alliance had been established between the Malatesta and d’Este houses when Leonello’s father, Niccolò III, married Sigismondo’s cousin, Parasina Malatesta in 1418. The fact that Leonello, like Sigismondo, had

writers and artists of the period, all of whom helped him transmit a positive image to Rimini and the rest of Italy. As has been noted, none of the many monuments to his life and rule that Sigismondo left in Rimini is a traditional equestrian monument to proclaim his military accomplishments, even though his role as triumphant commander was acknowledged and above reproach.³⁵⁶ Instead, Sigismondo focused his energies and finances on the promotion of another identity, that of the cultured prince.

As discussed in Chapter One, in spite of the damage done to his later reputation by Pius, Sigismondo was held in high esteem by his contemporaries for his learning as well as for his military prowess. These supporters included Flavio Biondo, the great educator Guarino da Verona,³⁵⁷ and Poggio Bracciolini, who deemed him “worthy of every praise.”³⁵⁸ Even Pius admitted admiration for Sigismondo’s “noble family,” his “vigorous” body and mind, his eloquence and “great military ability.”³⁵⁹ But while Sigismondo showed an interest in antique culture, he was not an active contributor to it. Inventories of Sigismondo’s library reveal little evidence of an interest in either contemporary or classical literature;³⁶⁰ and Biondo tells of a discussion about Roman coins at the home of Prospero Colonna in 1446 in which Sigismondo was interested but unable to recall the imprese on the reverses of some of Leonello d’Este’s contemporary medals. Kokole remarks that “this is not to say that his agile and highly impressionable

been legitimated by papal order may have created a further kinship between the two, at least in Sigismondo’s eyes. Rosenberg, *The Este Monuments and Urban Development*, 50–51.

³⁵⁶ Ettlinger, “The Image of a Renaissance Prince,” 7.

³⁵⁷ Kokole, “Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style,” 150, n. 65; Remigio Sabbadini, ed., *Epistolario di Guarino Veronese*, (Venice: A spese della Società, 1915–19), 2:459–460.

³⁵⁸ Poggio Bracciolini, *Epistolae*, ed. T. Tonelli, Vol. III, (Florence, 1861), Letters XXIV, 221–222 and XII, 200–201, cited in Ettlinger, “The Image of a Renaissance Prince,” 143.

³⁵⁹ Pius II, *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope. The Commentaries of Pius II*, Book II, 110.

³⁶⁰ This is according to Kokole’s research; but Plutarch’s *Lives* does appear to have been in the collections of the Malatesta Library. See Mariani Canova, in *Le Muse e il principe. Arte di corte nel Rinascimento padano*, ed. Alessandra Mottoloa Molino and Mauro Natale (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 1991), cat. no. 29, pp. 121–29.

mind was insensitive to the potential the literary and artistic ‘revival of antiquity’ offered for his own self-aggrandizement.”³⁶¹ On the contrary, Sigismondo was greatly attuned to the propagandistic value of cultural patronage as demonstrated by the great efforts he made to assemble a distinguished humanist court.

Among the numerous courtiers serving Sigismondo, one of the most valuable was Roberto Valturio (1405–1475), whose family had served the Malatesta in several capacities. After taking a degree and teaching at the University of Bologna, Valturio entered the service of Eugenius IV as a papal abbreviator from 1438–1446. From 1446 until his death in 1475 he served Sigismondo, and then Sigismondo’s son, as councilor and ambassador. Valturio’s credentials appear to have been well established given his association with the leading humanists of the period: Poggio, Biondo, Bruni and Manetti.³⁶² That he encountered Alberti during his time in the Curia, or later when he served as Sigismondo’s envoy to Pope Nicholas V, is also certainly plausible. The breadth of Valturio’s learning is exhibited in De re militari, a military manual peppered with references to ancient culture, including history, rhetoric, poetry, astronomy, geometry, law, medicine, gymnastics, and the technical aspects of warfare, as well as the requisite tribute to his patron. Ultimately the learning and erudition that characterized De re militari were meant to reflect the same traits in Sigismondo; it served as “a handy encyclopedia of worthwhile knowledge that should characterize an ideal Renaissance military commander and a highly cultured ruler. (emphasis added)”³⁶³ With his patronage of Valturio, I would argue, Sigismondo began to pursue his goal of surrounding himself

³⁶¹ Kokole, “Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style,” 149–150.

³⁶² On Valturio, see *ibid.*, 153–159, and note 71 for bibliography on Valturio.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 157.

with learned, rather than merely artistically talented, courtiers. In Valturio's varied knowledge and experience – which remarkably parallels Alberti's own – Sigismondo began a pattern of reliance on those with training that would complement his own qualifications as a good ruler. His peers, such as Leonello d'Este, Ludovico Gonzaga, and Federico da Montefeltro were well-read in their own right, but Sigismondo needed to import that credential to Rimini.

The poet Basinio da Parma (1425–1457) had pursued the studia humanitatis with Vittorino da Feltre and Greek with Theodore Gaza in Mantua. When Vittorino died in 1446, Basinio went with Gaza to Ferrara where he studied with Guarino da Verona. He soon gained the attention of Leonello d'Este and became a teacher of grammar at a communal school there. Basinio arrived in Rimini in 1449 to teach grammar but soon became court poet.³⁶⁴ Unlike the polymath Valturio, Basinio had a single strength: a literary talent steeped in both the Latin and Greek traditions. His work in the service of Sigismondo “represents the most comprehensive and the most ambitious attempt to create by means of highly classicizing literary fictions the idealized image Sigismondo Malatesta wished to present of himself to his contemporaries as well as to posterity.”³⁶⁵ Basinio's two main works extol quite different aspects of Sigismondo's character. On the

³⁶⁴ Basinio also served in the Curia of Nicholas V, yet another potential crossover between Alberti and the other Riminese courtiers. For biography and bibliography of Basinio, see Kokole, “Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style,” 159–68.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 161; also Ettlinger, “The Image of a Renaissance Prince,” 161–70.

one hand, the Liber Isottaus³⁶⁶ (1449–51) recounts and glorifies Sigismondo's undying love for his mistress and later wife, Isotta, revealing the main focus of his personal life.³⁶⁷

Basinio's Hesperis, on the other hand, celebrates Sigismondo's professional glory. The encomium is composed of thirteen books written in the tradition of Homeric epic. It portrays Sigismondo as a strong and valiant hero and celebrates in particular his recent military campaigns against Alfonso of Aragon.³⁶⁸ Another of Basinio's works, Astronomica, does not involve the character of Sigismondo but reveals the intellectual interests of Sigismondo's court, for it was the "first Renaissance didactic poem on astronomy conceived independently from medieval traditions, and based almost exclusively on classical literary sources."³⁶⁹ As such it provides a thought-provoking parallel to the content of the Tempio's decorative program.

The first artist to join Sigismondo's court was the painter and medalist Pisanello. Although we know that Pisanello was born in Pisa and raised in Verona, other facts about his early life and career are obscure. He is associated with a fresco project by Gentile da Fabriano in the Palazzo Ducale, Venice in the late 1410s, but his first securely attributable work is from later in his life: an Annunciation fresco in Verona from around

³⁶⁶ Basinio was largely responsible for mining the works of Porcellio and Trebiano, the other court poets, to compose the Liber Isottaus.

³⁶⁷ For the literary structure of and influences on the Liber Isottaus, see Kokole, "Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style," 164–65.

³⁶⁸ Helen Ettlinger gives a concise summary of the tale in her discussion of Galeotto Roberto: Ettlinger, "Sepulchre on the Façade: A Re-Evaluation of Sigismondo Malatesta's Rebuilding of San Francesco in Rimini," 139–40.

³⁶⁹ Kokole, "Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style," 166.

1426.³⁷⁰ By the late 1420s he was moving among the various courts of Northern Italy, particularly Mantua and Ferrara. Pisanello was also a prolific draftsman,³⁷¹ but his signature, even on medals, of PISANI PICTORIS, indicates that by this time his reputation as a painter was well-established. There is some evidence that Pisanello may have studied with Guarino da Verona, who later served as Leonello d'Este's tutor and trained other members of Sigismondo's court as well, among them Basinio da Parma.³⁷² In 1431, Pisanello was in Rome where he completed another of Gentile da Fabriano's fresco cycles, this time the life of St. John the Baptist in St. John Lateran.³⁷³ More important, however, is that as a member of the papal retinue of Eugenius IV, he may well have first encountered Alberti, one of many potential strands in the intertwined web of fifteenth-century Italian humanist courts.³⁷⁴

Pisanello had been serving Leonello d'Este in Ferrara as a portrait painter in the courtly International Style since the early 1430s. He likely came to Sigismondo's attention there during the Council to reunite the Eastern and Western churches that took place in Florence and Ferrara in 1438. To commemorate this momentous occasion, Pisanello cast the first personal commemorative medal with an image of Emperor John VIII Paleologus, a guest at the Council (Fig. 30).³⁷⁵ With this medium, Pisanello revived

³⁷⁰ Joanna Woods-Marsden, *The Gonzaga of Mantua and Pisanello's Arthurian Frescoes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 32.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁷² A 1416 letter by Guarino da Verona who ran a humanist school in Padua reveals a relationship between the painter and educator. *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁷⁴ As a result of a convoluted series of dynastic marriages (see the family trees in Woods-Marsden, *The Gonzaga of Mantua and Pisanello's Arthurian Frescoes*, 164–165), Sigismondo and Leonello were cousins. Sigismondo was also married to Leonello's sister Ginevra d'Este until her death in 1440.

³⁷⁵ Grafton posits Alberti as the inspiration for this first medal: "A great deal of evidence supports the view that Alberti helped to inspire the creation both of this medal (Paleologus) and of the many others that Pisanello and others wrought in the 1440s." As evidence he cites Pisanello's signature on the medal as a "painter" which accords with role Alberti gave the painter in *De pictura* of preserving the model for posterity. He also claims that Alberti's self-portrait medal preceded that of Pisanello's, and, interestingly,

the tradition of ancient coins depicting contemporary rulers in a small size that facilitated their exchange. Pasini connects the development of the Renaissance portrait medal to the “passion for small precious objects, gems and jewels,” but notes that those later commissioned by Sigismondo were the product of the unique cultural climate of the Malatesta humanist court which appreciated not only the novelty of this unique medium but also their “classical and archeological implications.”³⁷⁶

Throughout the 1440s Pisanello “interpreted to perfection the role of court artist”³⁷⁷ as he traveled among the various Italian courts – especially Ferrara of the d’Este and Mantua of the Gonzaga – where he cast these portable coins that gave “eternal life to princes”³⁷⁸ who were among the foremost rulers of Italy. His first medals created a standard formula of the court medal portrait in the 1440s: the face of sitter is presented in profile on the obverse, coupled with an allegorical image and/or emblems that celebrate the virtue of the subject on the reverse. The antique precedent of the medals validated them, and in these precious objects the image of the prince or signore would endure forever: “the antico, then, was synonymous with perfection. In the view of the humanist prince, the first model was the emperor...and as emperors, the signori of Rimini, of Mantua, of Ferrara appeared in Pisanello’s medals, idealized in their physical features suspended in time, and outside of history.”³⁷⁹ That Sigismondo was aware of this potential power of the coins to place him “outside history,” is demonstrated by his

that it was probably produced “as part of his approach to the Ferrarese court.” Grafton, Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance, 220–21.

³⁷⁶ “...che queste fossero proprio le caratteristiche anche dell’ambiente rimanesi, come di pochi altri centri italiani di questo tempo.” Pasini, “Note su Matteo de’ Pasti e la medaglistica Malatestiana,” La medaglia d’arte: atti del primo convegno internazionale di studio, Udine, 10–12 ottobre, 1970 (Udine: Ciac Libri, 1973), 42.

³⁷⁷ Paolo Carpeggiani, “Il ritratto di corte: Evoluzione di un modello di rappresentazione (1440–1480),” in “Familia” del principe e famiglia aristocratica, ed. Cesare Mozzarelli (Rome: Bulzoni, 1988), 682.

³⁷⁸ Woods-Marsden, The Gonzaga of Mantua and Pisanello’s Arthurian Frescoes, 3.

³⁷⁹ Carpeggiani, “Il ritratto di corte: Evoluzione di un modello di rappresentazione (1440–1480),” 684.

placement of several of them within the foundations of both the Castelsismondo and San Francesco. As we will see, the buildings thereby would be even more closely associated with his name and image as represented by the images and messages of the medals that would be forever preserved for posterity.

With the two portrait medals he commissioned from Pisanello in 1445, Sigismondo began to cultivate a visual image that served as a counterpart to Valturio's literary presentation of him as able soldier. Both portray him in a military role. The reverse of the first³⁸⁰ (Fig. 31) depicts Sigismondo as a full-length armored soldier flanked by his various personal devices: the elephant atop a crown and helmet and a shield emblazoned with Sigismondo's coat of arms marked by the intertwined S and I monogram. In this guise, Sigismondo is clearly presenting himself in the role of successful soldier. Pisanello's second medal (Fig. 32) for Sigismondo takes this representation further, explicitly asserting his claim to his territories. On the obverse he again wears a coat of armor and is surrounded by an inscription proclaiming his role as Captain of the Church,³⁸¹ a title bestowed upon him by Eugenius IV in the same year. The combination of his image as soldier and proclamation of title simultaneously asserts his claim to and defense of his territories and the legitimacy of his rule. On the reverse, the more literal image of Sigismondo on horseback boldly riding into battle in front of a formidable fortress identified by his personal coat of arms as the Castelsismondo reinforces his message.³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Angela Donati, ed., *Il potere, le arti, la guerra. Lo splendore dei Malatesta* (Milan: Electa, 2001), cat. no. 104, pp. 278–79.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, cat. no. 105, pp. 280–81. The inscription reads SIGISMVNVS DE MALATESTI ARIMINI ETC. ROMANE ECCLESIE CAPITANEVS GENERALIS. This title, as bestowed by the Pope, asserted the legitimacy of Sigismondo's claims to his lands.

³⁸² The building exhibits Sigismondo's coat of arms, but does not appear to represent the Castelsismondo whose construction was advanced enough at this date as to allow for a more accurate rendering. See the

The trend for portrait medals spread quickly and soon other artists were engaged in numismatics as well.³⁸³ One of the most accomplished was Matteo de' Pasti who also cast several medals for Sigismondo in the 1440s and 1450s alongside his supervisory duties at the Tempio.³⁸⁴ Two medals cast by Matteo rely on allegorical themes more than Pisanello's do, but they convey a similar message. The first, dated by inscription to 1446 (Fig. 33),³⁸⁵ clearly identifies Sigismondo as a Captain of the Church. The image on the reverse is still martial, albeit less overtly, a personification of the virtue Strength. On the second (Fig. 34), dated the following year, the inscription again celebrates Sigismondo's role as Church Captain, but the imagery has become more understated, pared down to the simple image of an outstretched hand offering the palm of victory to Sigismondo.

It is useful to compare Sigismondo's early medals with those of his peer and role model, Leonello. At this point, Sigismondo does not appear to have fully grasped the humanist potential of the medium: most of his medals feature direct references to his secular profession rather than the more abstract allusions to learning and erudition found on those of Leonello (Fig. 35).

Or maybe he had other priorities. In this early period Sigismondo's primary concern would have been the practical legitimacy of his rule, particularly in light of his ongoing struggles with the Papacy and so many of his fellow rulers. Unlike Leonello, whose dynastic title was long-established and rule unquestioned, Sigismondo instead

image of it on Matteo de' Pasti's medal of Sigismondo of the following year, which includes a detailed impression. (Ibid., cat. no. 110).

³⁸³ Portrait medals became popular among other artists active in Rimini, as Matteo also struck one of Alberti with his personal impresa of the winged eye and his motto "Quid tum," (presently in the British Museum, dated 1446–50). Mattola Molfino and Natale, *Le muse e il principe*, cat. no. 39, p. 166. Alberti in turn made a self-portrait medal (Kress Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington). See note 41.

³⁸⁴ On Matteo's activity as a medalist, see Pier Giorgio Pasini, "Matteo de' Pasti: Problems of Style and Chronology," 143–159; and Pasini's more recent observations in *Il tesoro di Sigismondo e le medaglie di Matteo de' Pasti* (Bologna: Minerva Edizioni, 2009).

³⁸⁵ Donati, *Il potere, le arti, la guerra. Lo splendore dei Malatesta*, Cat. No. 107, 282–83.

needed to promote his rule and his claim to it. Thus the repeated instances of his battle stance and clear statement of his military title were paramount. Pasini's reading of the imagery of Sigismondo's medals by Matteo corroborates this view. Pasini notes that these medals served as "public and official 'monuments'."³⁸⁶ As such they featured the image of Sigismondo in armor and on horseback that primarily refer to his professional role and "celebrate the glory of the victor."³⁸⁷ Secondary were the antique allusions to strength and royalty in the form of the elephant and in the laurel wreath of the victor that recur throughout his medals and in the Tempio itself.

In the following decade, his reputation as accomplished soldier assured, Sigismondo began to realize the more subtle power of portrait medals. He now began to use them to promote a new image of himself, less the valiant ruler than the cultured and enlightened one who promoted the fine arts. Matteo de' Pasti produced two medals that portray him in exactly this guise. The first (Fig. 36), dated 1450–51, pairs the profile portrait with a distant but quite detailed image of the Castelsismondo. Here the fortress is clearly identified in the encircling inscription but it is no longer in the forefront of the medal's composition, or apparently, Sigismondo's propagandistic priorities. In the second (Fig. 37), dated to 1453–54, Sigismondo is no longer presented as merely the soldier. Instead, he is crowned with a laurel wreath, signifying both his many military victories and his new role as artistic patron. Further, in the tradition of the iconography of the immortal Roman emperor, the laurel wreath symbolizes Sigismondo's eventual victory over death. Paired with this novel image of Sigismondo, the projected façade of San

³⁸⁶ Pasini, "Matteo de' Pasti: Problems of Style and Chronology," 147.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

Francesco famously rendered on the reverse, is now presented as Sigismondo's commemorative triumphal arch³⁸⁸ and his mausoleum.

By producing the small-scale medals and using them to disseminate his constructed image outside Rimini, Sigismondo hoped to emulate as well as to influence other rulers. Along with the humanist writings of Valturio and Basinio, Pisanello's and Matteo's medals with their carefully crafted images and imprese helped to create Sigismondo's image as legitimate ruler.³⁸⁹ Equally important, his use of the medium of the antique portrait medal showed that he was an enlightened and cultured ruler following the tradition of the ancients. In the period before he had undertaken the much larger project at San Francesco, these literary and small-scale artistic products formed the early stages of Sigismondo's patronage agenda.³⁹⁰

Just as ancient coins preserved the memory of the rulers depicted in them, fifteenth-century patrons' portrait medals would preserve their image for posterity. But Sigismondo discovered a way to enhance the power of the portrait medal to preserve his name and fame. He literally built upon the notion that though small, these medals projected and preserved his constructed image by connecting them to another aspect of his patronage: architecture. Like many of his peers, Sigismondo sought to connect his buildings directly to his persona and image. We have seen this in the inclusion of the

³⁸⁸ See Chapter 5.

³⁸⁹ It appears that Pisanello himself was often involved in the invention of imprese, not merely the production of the medals. Woods-Marsden has remarked upon his association with the humanist intellectual milieu of the courts he served. Woods-Marsden, The Gonzaga of Mantua and Pisanello's Arthurian Frescoes, 33.

³⁹⁰ His time in Rome and Florence may have been the source of his knowledge of and interest in ancient medals; see also Woods-Marsden, The Gonzaga of Mantua and Pisanello's Arthurian Frescoes, 33. Pisanello's painting style retained the more Gothic flavor of his northern Italian background. It may be that this aspect of his work therefore was of little interest to Sigismondo who favored the antique. But the portrait medal, with its classical pedigree and potential to invent and easily circulate a calculated image and message, was immensely appealing to Sigismondo.

Castelsismondo and the Tempio on the reverses of some of his medals. On the surface of the Tempio, he also included his personal emblems throughout the decoration on both the façade and interior to proclaim his association and patronage to all visitors. But Sigismondo took this association further by literally embedding his image in the form of medals within the fabric of the structure.

At the Castelsismondo, Sigismondo initiated a practice that later became commonplace: the placement of commemorative portrait medals throughout the foundations of the castle so that his name would be preserved for posterity.³⁹¹ He continued this practice in the foundations of the Tempio. Forty-one medals with reverses of the Castelsismondo and the allegorical figure of Fortitude have been unearthed; not surprisingly some of these were found in Sigismondo's tomb. An excavation and discovery of 1624 documented by Clementini included portrait medals with various reverses: images of the Castelsismondo, of Isotta, and of Sigismondo's various imprese.³⁹² Twenty-four such medals have been discovered in the foundations of the Castelsismondo. Similar medals were placed in fortresses and city gates in Rimini and other sites, including Senigallia: subsequent excavation of buildings throughout Sigismondo's territories have uncovered more than 175 such foundation medals, and these are thought to be but a fraction of the original number deposited.³⁹³

³⁹¹ The burial of foundation medals in fortifications had been practiced since late fourteenth century in Padua with the so-called Carrara medals of Francesco I of Carrara (George Francis Hill, Corpus of Italian Medals of the Renaissance before Cellini [London: British Museum, 1930], cat. nos. 1–9), but Sigismondo was the first to include his portrait on such medals. See Pasini: "Matteo de' Pasti: Problems of Style and Chronology."

³⁹² Angelo Turchini, "Medaglie malatestiane rinvenute in castel Sismondo, con una relazione sul ritrovamento di Giovanna Giuccioli Menghi," Le Signore dei Malatesti, a cura di Carla Tomasini Pietramellara e Angelo Turchini (Rimini: Ghigi, 1985), 131. Turchini's analysis includes discussion of attribution and dating of the various medals.

³⁹³ Woods-Marsden, "How Quattrocento Princes Used Art: Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta of Rimini and cose militari," 400; these are illustrated in Hill, Corpus of Italian Medals of the Renaissance before Cellini.

Sigismondo's practice of embedding portrait medals that include the image of the Castelsismondo within the structure of the Tempio Malatestiano was a deliberate, systematic campaign that served several functions. Sigismondo's practice of fusing the smallest and the largest of his creations reinforces the notion of programmatic patronage: they literally work together to convey the same message. More important, he thereby forged a connection between the two structures as Sigismondo's creations and as elements of his overall program of patronage that included both secular and religious components. I further suggest that the linking of the two buildings in this way simultaneously promoted various facets of Sigismondo's image and character: soldier, pious Christian, and patron. In each of these cases – medal, castle, church, and fortress – the goal was the same: to forever link the structure to his name.³⁹⁴ Just as contemporary humanists were learning about ancient Roman culture by the excavation of its remains, so too would later generations learn of Sigismondo's reign and great deeds when they discovered medals bearing his imprese and architectural undertakings.

Alberti

Undoubtedly one of the brightest lights in Sigismondo's court was the well-respected humanist, Leon Battista Alberti. In him, Sigismondo could claim not only an artist and architect, but also a scholar well-versed in law, philosophy, politics, society, ethics, engineering, and art theory.

Alberti was born in Florence but spent much of his early life in Genoa where his father was in exile. Thus, by his own admission, Alberti was never truly a Florentine;

³⁹⁴ See also Ettlinger, *The Image of a Renaissance Prince*, 120, and Angelo Turchini, "Medaglie malatestiane rinvenute in castel Sismondo, con una relazione sul ritrovamento di Giovanna Guiccioli Menghi," 129–42.

instead he felt “like a foreigner there, I went there too rarely and lived there too little.”³⁹⁵

When Alberti was eleven years old, his father once again moved with his two sons to pursue business affairs, this time to Venice. Following common practice among scions of noble families, in 1415 he enrolled his sons in the best school in the Veneto, that of the humanist scholar, Gasparino da Barzizza in Padua.

Barzizza (1360–1430) studied in Pavia and went on to teach there and in Bergamo before serving as tutor to the children of various Venetian patricians. He soon opened his own school – or, as he called it according to ancient custom, gymnasium – in Padua.

Alberti’s fellow pupils at Barzizza’s school included the children of the most prominent fifteenth-century Venetians such as the Barbaro and Corner, who were to be groomed for government duties. Others among Barzizza students, most notably Francesco Filelfo and George Trebizond, like Alberti, went on to become leading humanists of the age. The intellectual foundation of Barzizza’s school was the studia humanitatis, with particular emphasis placed on grammar and rhetoric. With Barzizza’s fervent borrowing and copying of books, the school also functioned as a virtual scriptorium, creating a vast library of classical literary works in Latin or Latin translation. In addition, Barzizza’s household, where his students lived as well as studied, served as a meeting place for many of the teacher’s friends and colleagues from the nearby University of Padua.³⁹⁶

Thus Alberti was immersed in classical traditions and ideas from an early age, in part contributing to the development of his own humanist career.

³⁹⁵ Alberti, On the Art of Building, xv. This initial visit was made possible by Martin V’s papal bull lifting the exile of the Albertis in 1428.

³⁹⁶ For more on Barzizza’s career and teaching, see R.G.G. Mercer, The Teaching of Gasparino Barzizza with Special Reference to His Place in Paduan Humanism, (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1979); and Paul F. Grendler, Schooling in Renaissance Italy. Literacy and Learning 1300–1600, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

By 1421, Alberti was living in Bologna, studying for a degree in canon law. His father's death in that year led to financial difficulty for the young Battista.³⁹⁷ Yet he persisted with his prescribed course load of legal studies. In addition, he independently pursued le lettere: painting, plastic arts, music, mathematics, and sciences.³⁹⁸ References to Alberti's studying Greek with his contemporaries Francesco Filelfo and Lapo di Castiglione also exist. This must have been undertaken independently of the prescribed curriculum, as it was only in 1455 that the teaching of Greek language and literature was instituted at the University of Bologna.³⁹⁹ In this period, Alberti produced several literary works including Philodoxeus (Lover of Glory), of 1424, a comedy that he passed off as an ancient Roman work, an indication of his already well-developed expertise in classical literature.⁴⁰⁰

Alberti first arrived in Florence in 1429, after Martin V had lifted the exile of his family. Sigismondo and Alberti may in fact have first met in Florence, at the dedication of the new cathedral there in 1436 where Sigismondo also became acquainted with Brunelleschi.⁴⁰¹ In any case, as Alberti later reports in Della Pittura, he was impressed by

³⁹⁷ Leon Battista Alberti, The Family in Renaissance Florence. Book Three. Translation and Introduction by Renée Neu Watkins, (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1994), 3.

³⁹⁸ Carlo Calcaterra, Alma mater studiorum. L'Univerista di Bologna nella storia della cultura e della citta, (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1948), 147.

³⁹⁹ Albano Sorbelli, Storia dell'Universita di Bologna, I: Il Medioevo (sec. XI-XV), (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1940), 237.

⁴⁰⁰ These years of the mid-1420s are typically seen as the root of Alberti's literary career, but it was also in Bologna that Alberti first actively engaged in the problems of mathematics and physics. In the Vita (and Profugiorum), he tells of the distraction from the travails of the scholar that mathematics and physics provides. This interest was born and fostered in Padua. The University of Padua had long been renowned for its medical school whose curriculum focused on geometry, astrology, and natural science. Besides having the opportunity to attend these lectures, Alberti would have become familiar with some of the professors there, as Barzizza's household served as a meeting place for many of his colleagues and friends from the University. (Mercer, The Teaching of Gasparino Barzizza with Special Reference to His Place in Paduan Humanism, 122). These technical subjects would also occupy Alberti later in Florence and Rome and lead to equally important works such as Ludi matematici and Descriptio urbis romae.

⁴⁰¹ "On this most significant day in the history of Florence (and of Western architecture), ... It is reasonable to assume that Alberti would have been among the party of clergy and laymen, which certainly included at least one of his future patrons, Sigismondo Malatesta." Tavernor, On Alberti and the Art of Buidling, 5.

the novel artistic approaches of figures like Donatello, Masaccio, and Brunelleschi.

Alberti was particularly impressed with their motivation to emulate and in certain cases exceed the achievements of their ancient models. His admiration for the unprecedented accomplishments of his peers – particularly Brunelleschi’s dome of the Florentine cathedral – inspired Alberti to extoll them in his treatise on painting.

Alberti also found inspiration in the work of the Florentine literati whose scholarly activity focused on the rediscovery and circulation in the West, and particularly in Florence, of both Greek and Roman works. The leaders of the humanist movement promoted the new spirit by implementing programs of classical studies in the University, as well as independently reproducing manuscripts, and compiling vast libraries for the study of the rediscovered ancient texts. This activity was encouraged by the presence in the city of Greek scholars and prelates who represented the Eastern Church as part of the Eastern delegation to the Council of Florence of 1438 and brought with them numerous Greek manuscripts.⁴⁰² Yet their influence extended beyond the mere importation and translation of texts. As Christine Smith has argued, these scholars introduced a new way

There were, of course, many other connections between the two. The Alberti and Malatesta families had a relationship from the early Quattrocento. In the Malatesta codici from Fano in the time of Pandolfo III, we find a registered account, Zoane de I Alberti che fo podesta de Fano e po’ de Bressia, dated 6 novembre, 1401. There is also evidence that “miser Alberto figliolo de dito Zoane (or Alberto di Giovanni de I Alberti da Fiorenza)” rented Malatesta property of Montalboddo a year later, November 1, 1407. Delucca, Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche, 355. In Leon Battista’s own time, they certainly moved in the same circles and had many opportunities to cross paths. Besides the well-known connection of the Este, the poet Basinio da Parma left Rimini for a time to serve Sigismondo in Rome at the court of Nicholas V. Finally, if they had not done so before, it is likely that Sigismondo and Alberti had the opportunity to meet in Fabriano in the summer of 1450, when Nicholas was there escaping the plague in Rome. Burroughs, From Signs to Design, 212.

⁴⁰² On the Council, see Joseph Gill, The Council of Florence, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959); and on Greek knowledge in the West, Deno John Geanakoplos, Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

of thinking and writing about the built environment.⁴⁰³ Primary among these was Manuel Chrysoloras (1350–1415), the pioneering Byzantine scholar who first came to Italy in the late fourteenth century to enlist aid against the Turks. He spent several years traveling in Italy and beyond, serving at courts in Milan, Venice, Genoa, Bologna as well as in Paris and Barcelona and in the process introduced the West to the Byzantines’ literary heritage. Towards the end of his life, Chrysoloras spent time in Rome and visited Florence with Pope John XXIII, returning there shortly before his death at the Council of Constance in 1415. In addition to teaching Greek and circulating classical Greek literature, Chrysoloras composed his Comparison of Old and New Rome while in Rome in 1411. This “letter” relied on rhetoric rather than a mere enumeration or description of their physical attributes. Chrysoloras instead extolled the virtues of each city (Constantinople and Rome) in terms of their respective experiential impressions on the viewer.⁴⁰⁴ We see the influence of this approach in Alberti’s work: his Profugiorum ab aerumma explores the spiritual effects – not absolute aesthetic values – that structures and spaces have on the visitor.⁴⁰⁵ Poggio Bracciolini later incorporated this rhetorical trope in his Historiae de variatate fortunae about Rome in 1448.⁴⁰⁶

Several other Florentine scholars also absorbed this new knowledge and created an unparalleled scholarly environment into which Alberti easily assimilated himself. Among them were the monk Ambrogio Traversari, who served as leader of the circle from his cell at Santa Maria degli Angeli; Niccolò Niccoli, one of the most important

⁴⁰³ Christine Smith, Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism. Ethics, Aesthetics, and Eloquence, 1400–1470, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992),

⁴⁰⁴ Christine Smith, Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism, 150–170. Michael Baxandall also addressed Chrysoloras’s influence on fifteenth-century Italian humanism in “Guarino, Pisanello, and Manuel Chrysoloras,” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, 28 (1965): 183–204.

⁴⁰⁵ On this 1447–48 work, see Christine Smith, Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism, Chapter 1, 3–18.

⁴⁰⁶ On Poggio and Chrysoloras, see *ibid.*, 184–86.

book collectors of the period; Paolo Toscanelli, a leading astronomer and scientist in Florence who had also worked with Brunelleschi;⁴⁰⁷ Ser Filippo di Ser Ugolino Pieruzzi; and the Florentine Chancellor Carlo Marsuppini. In Florence, too, Alberti first became acquainted with Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini, and Flavio Biondo, all of whom he would work with much more closely in succeeding years. In this fertile intellectual milieu, Alberti was certainly talking, studying, and reading with figures who defined and advanced the most important ideas of the age.

Alberti left Florence for Rome in 1432 as a member of the papal curia of Eugenius IV. There he served as an apostolic abbreviator, a position that afforded him the opportunity to associate with some of the most learned men of the period as well as to travel both within and beyond Italy. He served his post, composing papal bulls and other papal documents, along with several other renowned humanists, including Poggio Bracciolini, Antonio Loschi, and Flavio Biondo. Even as he traveled among various courts and artistic centers throughout his career, Rome always served as Alberti's base, if not his home, furnishing him with varied relationships and experiences that furthered his development as a humanist and courtier. The practical experience he found there was a complement to the theoretical background he had acquired in Padua, Bologna, and Florence.

⁴⁰⁷ On Toscanelli, see Giovanni Celoria, Sulle osservazioni di comete fatte da Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli, (Milan: Hoepli, 1921); Giuseppe Fumagalli, Bibliografia delle opere concernenti Toscanelli e Amerigo Vespucci, (Florence: Auspice il Comune, 1898); Eugenio Garin, Ritratti di umanisti, (Florence: Sansoni, 1967), 41–66; Gustavo Uzielli, La vita e i tempi di Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli, (Rome, n.p., 1894); Henry Vignaud, The Columbian Tradition of the Discovery of America and of the Part Played Therein by the Astronomer Toscanelli, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921); Francesco Ammannati, et. al., La carta perduta. Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli e la cartografia delle grandi scoperte (Florence: Alinari, 1992). On his relationship with Brunelleschi, Giorgio de Santillana, Reflections on Men and Ideas, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968), 33–47.

Rome in the 1430s and '40s was a vestige of its former self. Humanists serving as apostolic secretaries in the Papal chancery were fascinated by ancient culture. They lamented its loss and sought to recover and restore it. Alberti was a member of this circle, and the time he spent in Rome serving as papal secretary to Popes Eugenius IV and particularly Nicholas V made him, along with another Florentine humanist, archaeologist, and antiquarian, Poggio Bracciolini, one of the foremost authorities on the fabric of Italy's classical heritage.⁴⁰⁸ By investigating both physical and literary remains of the ancient city, Poggio, and later Biondo,⁴⁰⁹ attempted written reconstructions, rather than mere descriptions in the tradition of the medieval *Mirabilia*, of the glory of ancient Rome. As a colleague of these accomplished antiquarians, Alberti was at least witness to, and in some cases participant in, the implementation of new rigorous methods and research, and in Rome, he began to apply them to his own projects. The fruits of his archeological endeavors would be found throughout his career as he emerged as a leading expert not only on ancient architecture but also classical epigraphy, sculpture, and artistic theory:

“Alberti drew a parallel between the humanist, who kept a notebook filled with quotations from reputable authors, and the architect, who diligently studied all buildings that had attained any reputation. He thus equated the architect with the humanist....By codifying the principles of ‘good’ architecture and raising the architect to the level of the humanist, Alberti had created an artistic climate in which it became mandatory for the architect to turn to Rome for inspiration.”⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁸ Philip Jacks distinguishes between the interests of the two: while Poggio was keenly capable of deciphering the history of the city from the remnants of its built form, Alberti was more concerned with the surviving monuments in and of themselves. Philip Joshua Jacks, *The Antiquarian and the Myth of Antiquity: The Origins of Rome in Renaissance Thought*, (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 100.

⁴⁰⁹ Poggio's *De varietate fortunae* of 1431–48, and Biondo's *Roma instaurata*, 1444–46, both published in Cesare d'Onofrio, ed., *Visitiamo Roma nel Quattrocento. La città degli Umanisti*, (Roma: Romana Società Editrice, 1989). On Poggio as a “pioneer” in these activities, see Charles Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers. Ambrogio Traversari (1386–1439) and Christian Antiquity in the Italian Renaissance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 62.

⁴¹⁰ Beverly Louise Brown and Diana E. Kleiner, “Giuliano da Sangallo's Drawings after Ciriaco d'Ancona,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 62/4 (1983): 334.

In the process, Alberti established himself as an expert on the unearthing of the treasure trove that was Rome in the mid-fifteenth century. His experience there would come to bear on his later design projects, starting with San Francesco.

In 1446, Alberti undertook one of his own engineering projects, the raising of an ancient Roman barge from the bottom of Lake Nemi in Rome for the humanist patron Cardinal Prospero Colonna. Alberti also built upon the practices of Poggio and Biondo in his Descriptio Urbis Romae of 1450. Although now lost, this was reputed to be the most accurate topographical map of contemporary Rome complete with its surviving ancient monuments up to that time, derived from the use of precise mathematical surveying techniques and tools.⁴¹¹ Based on techniques of Ptolemy's Geography, Alberti's map led to the traditional elliptical or circular images of the city being supplanted in the late fifteenth-century by naturalistic and perspective views.

Thus throughout his time in Rome, Alberti was gradually moving out of the world of theory and ideas and into the more practical realm by applying scientific methods to his antiquarian endeavors. This redirection would soon lead to a successful architectural career. His humanist colleagues had merely written about the glory of ancient Rome that had been lost to time, but Alberti would be able to re-create it, in part, at Rimini.

Alberti arrived in Ferrara – and to his first experience as a courtier – in 1438, while traveling in the retinue of Eugenius IV for the Council of Ferrara-Florence.

⁴¹¹ On the Descriptio, see Mario Carpo, “Descriptio urbis romae: Ekfrasis geografica e cultura visuale all'alba della rivoluzione tipografica.” Albertiana 1 (1998): 121–141; Otto Lehmann-Brockhaus, “Albertis ‘Descriptio Urbis Romae’.” Kunstchronik 13 (1960): 345–48; Giovanni Orlandi, “‘Nota sul testo della ‘Descriptio Urbis Romae’ di L.B. Alberti’.” Quaderno (Universita degli studi di Genova. Istituto di elementi di architettura e rilievo dei monumenti) 1 (1968): 81–90; Luigi Vagnetti, “‘La ‘Descriptio Urbis Romae,’” Quaderno: Universita degli studi di Genova. Istituto di elementi di architettura e rilievo dei monumenti 1 (1968): 25–79. A succinct description in English of the methods used in the Descriptio can be found in Tavernor, On Alberti and the Art of Building, 13.

Discouraged with service to the Church,⁴¹² he soon became an active and valued member of Leonello d'Este's humanist court. Some of Alberti's most notable literary works – Theogenius, Philodoxeus, along with the scientific treatise Ludi matematici – were dedicated to Leonello and his brother, Meliaduso, in these years. Alberti also served as an artistic advisor to Leonello d'Este on an ambitious equestrian monument commemorating Leonello's father Niccolò d'Este (Fig. 38).⁴¹³ The first life-sized, freestanding bronze equestrian monument since antiquity, the horse and rider would be prominently placed in front of the Este palace and look towards the cathedral.⁴¹⁴ In his De equo animante, a product of his involvement in the competition, Alberti tells us he was asked to judge the competition while in Ferrara on business for Leonello. In 1443, he was called upon to select the winner when the Savi of Ferrara had narrowed the choices to two: Antonio di Cristoforo and Niccolo Baroncelli, both students of Brunelleschi.⁴¹⁵ Because of the type of artistic expertise demonstrated in his treatises, Alberti was deemed to be more of an astute critic, rather than a practitioner, of the visual arts. Demonstrating the characteristic diplomacy and interpersonal skill that would win him so many influential patrons, Alberti tactfully chose one artist to execute the horse, and the other the rider.

⁴¹² Grafton cites Alberti's experience particularly in Bologna in 1437, as an impetus to find a new patron, and that he early on established Leonello as his goal. Grafton, Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance, 207–208. Following his own advice to approach a potential patron through intermediaries rather than directly (Della famiglia), Alberti dedicated his Ludi matematici to the duke's brother, Meliaduso, and established a relationship with the well-respected educator Guarino da Verona.

⁴¹³ On the monument to Niccolò, see Charles Rosenberg, The Este Monuments and Urban Development in Renaissance Ferrara, 50–82, esp. 54–61 for the competition and Alberti's role in it; and Giuseppe Agnelli, "I monumenti di Niccolò III e Borso d'Este in Ferrara," Arte e memoria della deputazione ferrarese di storia patria 23 (1918): 1–32.

⁴¹⁴ Grafton connects the siting of the ensemble to the discussion of public statues in De re aedificatoria. Grafton, Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance, 217.

⁴¹⁵ For biography and bibliography on these two artists, see Rosenberg, The Este Monuments and Urban Development in Renaissance Ferrara, 54, note 32.

As with much of his early artistic activity, controversy surrounds Alberti's role in the design of the Niccolò monument, particularly suggestions regarding his authorship of its triumphal arch base.⁴¹⁶ Grafton sees Alberti as having at least inspired the entire monument and cites the similarity of its details to certain features of the Tempio. He refrains from outright attributing it to Alberti but claims that the "project design as a whole reflected Alberti's thinking."⁴¹⁷ Rykwert, however, doubts Alberti's authorship because of the degree to which they "differ from successive Albertian works."⁴¹⁸ Rosenberg instead suggests that Matteo de'Pasti was as likely a candidate for the arch's design as Alberti, because the "decorative quality of the arch...makes it as likely that the base reflects the style of an artist best known as an illuminator and designer of medals." Rosenberg also concedes, however, that Alberti "played an active role in planning the project."⁴¹⁹

Many features of the base – a round arch atop fluted Corinthian columns with roundels in the spandrels, surmounted by a full classical entablature – do resemble those of the later San Francesco façade. To whatever degree Alberti did contribute to the monument's design, his involvement may have been the result of Leonello's desire to give Alberti, by now a valued member of his court, an opportunity to explore the

⁴¹⁶ Much has been made of Alberti's role in the project, especially the design of its triumphal arch base. Grafton sees Alberti as having at least inspired the entire monument, and cites the similarity of its details to certain features of the Tempio, if not outright attributing it to him, at least claiming that the "project design as a whole reflected Alberti's thinking." Grafton, Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance, 217. Rykwert, however, doubts Alberti's authorship because of the degree to which they "differ from successive Albertian works." Joseph Rykwert, "Alberti a Ferrara," in Leon Battista Alberti, exh. cat. (Mantua: Olivetti, 1994), 158–61. Rosenberg instead suggests that Matteo de'Pasti was as likely a candidate for the arch's design as Alberti, because the "decorative quality of the arch...makes it as likely that the base reflects the style of an artist best known as an illuminator and designer of medals." He concedes, however, that Alberti "played an active role in planning the project." Rosenberg, The Este Monuments and Urban Development in Renaissance Ferrara, 59, 61.

⁴¹⁷ Grafton, Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance, 217.

⁴¹⁸ Joseph Rykwert, "Alberti a Ferrara," 158–61.

⁴¹⁹ Rosenberg, The Este Monuments and Urban Development in Renaissance Ferrara, 59, 61.

developing architectural interests that the d'Este had supported and promoted with their patronage of his architectural treatise and the Ludi matematici (Fig. 39). But this support had been limited to the theoretical realm, and it seems doubtful, particularly given the careful deliberation that went into the choice of artist for the statue itself, that Leonello would have entrusted the entirety of such an important monument to anyone of such limited experience in architectural design. In his own words, Alberti takes pride in serving as an “adviser to the judges,” but nowhere does he take credit for any aspect of the design. Indeed, being charged with such a solemn duty appears to have motivated Alberti to further engage not in the artistic aspect of the project, but rather the theoretical one: “I thought I should write a work of some seriousness both about the beauty and form of horses, and about their nature and habits more generally.”⁴²⁰

To be sure, a connection is to be made between the style of the base of Niccolò's monument and that of the Tempio façade. Moreover, it is certainly tempting to look to Ferrara for a precedent for Alberti's later activity at Rimini. But rather than seeing Alberti as the author of both works, we must be content to find in Ferrara one of many sources and inspirations for what we know he did later at Rimini. Alberti was an active and essential member of Leonello's court regardless of his lack of architectural design background. Such would be the case for him at Sigismondo's court in Rimini as well.

Alberti was primarily an intellectual. But as we have seen, he had another side, one that was interested in the practical application of ideas. From early in his professional career, Alberti suffered a personal conflict between the virtues of study and of action, the

⁴²⁰ Alberti, De equo animante, ed. Grayson et al., 202–203. Quoted by Grafton, Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance, 218.

classic debate over the vita contemplativa and the vita activa. Time spent under the tutelage of Gasparino Barzizza as a youth had cultivated in Alberti a love of the classics. But after many more years of study and having taken a law degree, he became disillusioned. He felt the need to live and work beyond the world of books and mere theory, for the academic life was oppressive. In his book On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Letters, penned in 1428, Alberti lamented the life of the dour and sedentary scholar, who had little hope of fame or fortune. He introduces the topic by telling of the “utter folly of those who plunge into the immense labors required by scholarship because they want wealth, social recognition, or similar vain and transitory rewards. For the life men of learning live is necessarily hard and harsh.”⁴²¹

As we have seen, Alberti had undertaken many engineering projects before he ever tried his hand at architecture. The salvage project at Lake Nemi, the treatise on physics and mechanics, Ludi Matematici, and the charting of contemporary Rome in Descriptio urbis romae all served as a testing ground for the concepts he had been exploring over the course of years of study. His affiliation with the grand building project of Pope Nicholas V in the late 1440s also played a part in this development, as we shall see.

By the 1440s in Ferrara and Rome Alberti appears to have found in his own career a balance between the two worlds of the mind. As a technologist with a very firm academic foundation, he was able both to study and implement; as Gadol so aptly

⁴²¹ Alberti, The Use and Abuse of Books. De commodis litterarum atque incommodis, trans. Renee Neu Watkins (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1999), 18.

described him, Alberti was “a man of genius as well as application, a man of judgment as well as experience.”⁴²²

Alberti’s attributes as both an intellectual and an experienced engineer would have been attractive to Sigismondo. In addition to his general reputation for being skilled on the field and in the tools of battle,⁴²³ Sigismondo was a skilled engineer himself and had a personal interest in engineering, as demonstrated by his role in the design of the Castelsigismondo. Just as he had consulted with Brunelleschi on his castle design, he looked to Alberti for assistance at San Francesco, recognizing that the technical capability required to encase the existing structure would require someone with Alberti’s technical and engineering proficiency. As Grafton has noted, “Alberti the scholar turned himself into Alberti the engineer. His most original early writings would arise from an ambitious effort to fuse two originally distinct occupations and cultures.”⁴²⁴ It was precisely this fusion that qualified him for the San Francesco commission.

Yet despite Alberti’s growing accomplishments in the engineering realm, Sigismondo appears to have used him in a limited technical capacity. De’ Pasti is clearly the one credited with the construction, and documents show that Alberti did not contribute to the main structural aspects of the building. The roof and wall systems were devised by Alvise Muzarelli and grafted upon Alberti’s wooden model.⁴²⁵ Alberti’s use of architectural models was integral to his design process and also made possible his habit of designing from a distance. As Grafton notes, Alberti “provided unofficial advice

⁴²² Gadol, *Leon Battista Alberti: Universal Man of the Early Renaissance*, 134–35.

⁴²³ Valturio, *De re militari*, and various contemporary evaluations of him.

⁴²⁴ Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance*, 70.

⁴²⁵ Delucca, *Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche*, 355–60, and *passim*.

rather than working always on a fixed contract and to a clear rhythm.”⁴²⁶ Accordingly, Alberti’s detailed drawings and models were critical components of the building process. They served as the main guide used by those working on site in his absence but were only a starting point. He required the involvement of those actually constructing the fabric as well; thus the builders had to interpret the drawings and models into effective working tools. This method fully accorded with Alberti’s own approach to working and creating, the process described by Grafton as one of criticism and emendation by “a community of critics.”⁴²⁷ Furthermore, as outlined in Chapter 3, Sigismondo had the building expertise of Matteo de’ Pasti and several local builders at his disposal. If he was going to be viewed as a member of the same class of patron as, for instance, Leonello d’Este, what Sigismondo really needed was a respected humanist among his courtiers, and Alberti had proven himself an able one.⁴²⁸ Like his contemporaries whom he admired and emulated, Sigismondo sought to proclaim his legitimacy by not only the structures but also the people with whom he surrounded himself.

In this general regard, and in the case of Alberti in particular, the influence of Leonello as a model and a source should not be discounted. Ferrara was one of the more active humanist courts of the mid-fifteenth century, and Leonello’s passionate interest in classical studies and his activity as antiquarian were well-known, as we learn from Angelo Decembrio’s dialogue, *De politia litteraria*, which paints a vivid picture of the

⁴²⁶ Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance*, 319. This was due in part, to his working for patrons “whose power rested on their personal abilities as statesmen and commanders,” and in fact may have made him attractive to them, as I will show was the case for Sigismondo. See also Felice Ragazzo, “I modelli lignei delle opera di Leon Battista Alberti al mostra di Palazzo Te,” in *Leon Battista Alberti*, a cura di Joseph Rykwert e Anne Engel, (Milan: Olivetti/Electa, 1994), 408–11. For more on the general use of architectural models in the Renaissance, see Henry A. Millon, “Models in Renaissance Architecture,” *The Renaissance From Brunelleschi to Michelangelo. The Representation of Architecture*. Edited by Henry A. Millon and Vittorio Magnano Lampugnani (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 19–72.

⁴²⁷ Grafton *Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance*, 319.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, esp. Chap. IV, “The Artists at Court: Alberti in Ferrara.”

humanist activities and proclivities of the court and its patron.⁴²⁹ Leonello was educated by the great Guarino and became “one of the first truly cultivated princes of the Italian Renaissance.”⁴³⁰ His erudition was respected, as evidenced by his friendship (not just patronage) with some of the most important humanists of the day, such as Francesco Filelfo and Ciriaco d’Ancona. In Ferrara, under Leonello’s patronage, important classical types were revived: the equestrian monument and triumphal arch of the Niccoló monument, and the portrait medal of Pisanello, ancient exemplars of which Leonello was known to collect and study. Given his own antiquarian and humanist background, Alberti fit well and played his own part in the intellectual activities pursued at Leonello’s court. We know that Alberti judged (if not helped design) the Niccoló equestrian monument, and some of Alberti’s most important written works – Philodoxeus, Teogenius, De equo animante, Ludi rerum mathematicarum, and of course De re aedificatoria – were inspired by or dedicated to Leonello and his brother, Meliaduso.

Sigismondo sought to emulate Leonello’s patronage pursuits and even went so far as to employ many of the same minds that had served Leonello. Sigismondo’s poet Basinio had studied in Ferrara with Gasparino in 1446, and we have seen that Pisanello and de’ Pasti had made their name in Ferrara before he was dispatched to Rimini to do the same. There has been speculation that Piero also served Leonello before his arrival in

⁴²⁹ Though not written until after Leonello’s death in 1450, this work reflects the humanist environment of his court of the 1440s, in particular the influence of the artistic theory of Alberti and Leonello’s response to his De pictura. From around 1432 until 1438, Decembrio was in Ferrara where he studied with Guarino. De politia was complete by 1462 when he dedicated it to Pope Pius II. See Michael Baxandall, “A Dialogue on Art from the Court of Leonello d’Este,” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes XXVI (1963): 304–26; Albano Biondi, “Angelo Decembrio e la cultura del Principe,” La corte e lo spazio: Ferrara estense. A cura di Giuseppe Papagno e Amedeo Quondam (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1982), 637–59; and Charles Rosenberg, “Arte e politica alle corti di Leonello e Bosso d’Este,” Le muse e il Principe. Arte di corte nel rinascimento padano. Vol. 2 (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 1991), 39–48.

⁴³⁰ Rosenberg, The Este Monuments and Urban Development in Renaissance Ferrara, 53.

Rimini.⁴³¹ Therefore, his multitude of other qualifications notwithstanding, Alberti's activities in Ferrara and his friendship with Leonello must have served as powerful references when being considered by his next patron.

Moreover, the Ferrarese influence was felt beyond the artists' mere presence at Sigismondo's court. In fact, the work produced in Rimini was artistically reminiscent of that at Ferrara, as Sigismondo's imitation of Leonello's patronage extended also to his stylistic taste. This connection can be drawn from Baxandall's description of Leonello's artistic outlook, an observation that until now has been overlooked in evaluations of the Tempio decoration. Baxandall notes: "Leonello's advice on figure painting...has in mind not so much Masaccio as Pisanello and Jacopo Bellini... For Decembrio's Leonello is still moving between International Gothic and Florentine Renaissance; the text is transitional, and this makes for both inconsistency and for an air of discovery."⁴³² We have no such indication that Sigismondo was as astute or reflective about the theory motivating the work produced at his court, but an echo of these themes can certainly be found in the dichotomous decoration that has been so often cited at the Tempio.

Furthermore, Alberti's fluency in classical ideas – acquired in Florence and Rome by collecting and translating rediscovered Latin and Greek texts brought to Italy by Greek scholars and prelates present at the Council of the churches and by émigrés escaping the Turks – may have also made him an attractive advisor for the content of San Francesco's decorative program. For this commission was designed to demonstrate that Sigismondo was an enlightened patron, above all, by epitomizing classical learning as it

⁴³¹ See note 370, below.

⁴³² Baxandall, "A Dialogue on Art from the Court of Leonello d'Este," 308. This trend is also found in the tapestries produced for Leonello that promoted a chivalric culture in emulation of the northern European courts. See Nello Forti Grazzini, "Leonello d'Este nell'autunno del Medioevo. Gli arazzi delle 'Storie di Ercole,'" in *Le muse e il principe. Arte di corte nel rinascimento padano*, 53–62.

applied to architecture. We will see how Alberti achieved this goal in the façade of San Francesco by drawing on Roman visual and conceptual antecedents in both the Eternal City and in Rimini.

Alberti's resume would also have been enriched by the architectural treatise he was working on in exactly this period. His Ten Books on Architecture was not presented to Nicholas V until 1452, but Grayson showed that it was most likely begun much earlier, in 1443 in Ferrara at the suggestion of Leonello d'Este, and was composed over the course of the next several years.⁴³³ Alberti's treatise simultaneously demonstrated his knowledge of ancient buildings and architectural theory and building techniques. Sigismondo's employment of a prominent intellectual would have elevated his own status and lent him prestige. As Pamela Long observes, "Artisanal authorship came about through the patronage of oligarchs and rulers who supported the technological authorship of learned humanists as well. ...technical books attracted the patronage of elites because in the fifteenth century the practice and representation of rulership came to be closely associated in particular ways with technological power and the mechanical arts."⁴³⁴

Alberti might even have mentioned his effort as evidence of his expertise when trying to secure the commission, as he did Nicholas.⁴³⁵ Pamela Long suggests that such a "preview" of one's work may have been a tool in securing patronage: "Some authors candidly explained and illustrated aspects of their subject while suggesting that further secrets might be revealed if employment or patronage were forthcoming."⁴³⁶

⁴³³ Grayson, "The Composition of L.B. Alberti's 'Decem libri de re aedificatoria.'" On the publication history of the treatise, see Alina A. Payne, The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance. Architectural Invention, Ornament, and Literary Culture, 71.

⁴³⁴ Long, Pamela. "Power, Patronage, and the Authorship of Ars," 3.

⁴³⁵ Tafuri, "'Cives esse non licere:' Nicholas V and Leon Battista Alberti" [2006], 54.

⁴³⁶ Long, "Power, Patronage and the Authorship of Ars," 5.

But what was in it for Alberti? Jarzombek claims that Alberti was conflicted in accepting the position and that in the end he justified it on abstract philosophical grounds.

Jarzombek's argument is worth quoting here in full:

“Whereas it is often held that Alberti was attracted to the court of Sigismondo because the vivacious and energetic ruler of Rimini had numerous humanists in his employ, it appears very likely that Alberti, as friend of Pius II, viewed Sigismondo with reservations similar to those of the pope, who openly denounced Sigismondo for his cruelty, sadism, greed, and sexual perversion. It might seem strange that Alberti, the paragon of morality would accept a commission from such a man. However, did Sigismondo, a sort of Megalophos, not epitomize the civitas perversa that figures so greatly in Alberti's writings, and would that not offer an opportunity to make manifest the dialectic between the humanist program and the frenzied world?”⁴³⁷

This line of reasoning echoes Tafuri's reading of Alberti's opinion of Nicholas V and his grand building program and might be defensible were it not for the fact that Pius was not elected Pope until long after Alberti was involved with Sigismondo. He was elected to the throne of St. Peter in 1458, and the culmination of their feud, the excommunication of Sigismondo and the burning of his effigy, did not occur until 1461, not long before Pius's death. Alberti may have been associated with Piccolomini while they both traveled north in the service of Cardinal Albergati, in the early 1430s. But while Alberti went on to serve in the Curia of Eugenius IV, Pius remained in Basel where he supported and served the antipope Felix V against Eugenius, whom Alberti served as apostolic abbreviator at the Council of Basel and later of Florence. They do not appear to have crossed paths afterwards. We cannot therefore accept that Pius's opinion had any bearing on Alberti's attitude or his relationship with Sigismondo.

Jarzombek goes on to cite the Franciscan association of the project as the most important factor in Alberti's accepting the commission since “Franciscan thought was an

⁴³⁷ Jarzombek, *On Leon Baptista Alberti: His Literary and Aesthetic Theories*, 172.

important component of his philosophy.” To be sure, the dynamics of Alberti’s arrival in Rimini were more complex than this simplistic rationale.

On a basic level, Alberti certainly felt the mundane, but critical, need to make a living, and a successful prince provided that in a way that the pope could not, or would not. In 1434 Alberti had joined the papal court, which allowed him an opportunity for literary study and writing but provided only a modest stipend. Additional revenue came from his appointment in 1432 as prior of San Martino a Gangalandi, near Florence, and later as canon of Florence Cathedral. Still, he must have felt the need to re-acquire in some measure the wealth that had been taken from him, if not the life of privilege he had experienced as a youth.⁴³⁸ We do not know how much Alberti was paid for the commission, but his circumstances and awareness of his precarious financial position indicate that he felt a need to secure a source of revenue. Alberti was all too familiar with the lack of income the pursuits of a scholar provided. The topic of wealth and how it eludes the scholar comprises the bulk of *De commodis litterarum atque incommodis*’s fourth chapter. In it he makes “perfectly clear how little wisdom there is in dedicating oneself to learning in expectation of riches.”⁴³⁹ Alberti even alludes to this being a possible motivation for his venturing out beyond the world of ideas: “all other arts or skills will bring in money more easily than the study of books.”⁴⁴⁰

Above all, however, Alberti would have seen in Rimini the chance to build upon his Roman experience and to expand his activities by implementing his theoretical expertise acquired through years spent in libraries reading ancient texts, discussing ideas,

⁴³⁸ These themes are discussed by Grafton in Leon Battista Alberti. *Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance*, Chapter II, “Humanism: The Advantages and Disadvantages of Scholarship,” pp. 31–70.

⁴³⁹ Alberti, *The Use and Abuse of Books. De commodis litterarum atque incommodis*, 27.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

and writing treatises. Rimini, far from Rome, was a sort of tabula rasa, ripe for a modern interpretation of its ancient Roman tradition. Alberti must have seen there an opportunity to pursue his varied interests further by putting into practice the ideas he had been formulating for his treatise on architecture, just as he had implemented his theories of painting, sculpture, the camera obscura, and cartography in Rome and in northern Italy.

Even had there not been an opportunity for him in Rimini, Alberti may also have felt that he had to leave Rome to have a chance to build. Although there were many building projects underway there, Alberti was not in contention to be the architect of any of them. Aside from the dominance of the capable Rossellino, there were political issues that may have removed Alberti from consideration. Particularly in comparison to that of Eugenius IV, Nicholas's Curia was a "dangerous place for humanists,"⁴⁴¹ a complex environment in which one's position seems never to have been assured. Burroughs has suggested that Alberti's association with certain humanists and other Romans who were out of favor with the pope, in particular Alberti's humanist colleagues, Leonardo Dati and Flavio Biondo, affected his fortunes with Nicholas.⁴⁴² Additionally, Alberti's support of the Porcari conspiracy would have found little favor in papal circles;⁴⁴³ and his activities in the service of Prospero Colonna, a papal rival, may also have been a factor.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴¹ Grafton, Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance, 311. Particularly in comparison to that of Eugenius IV, Nichols's Curia was a "dangerous place for humanists," especially as Flavio Biondo fell out of favor with the pope.

⁴⁴² Yet he neglects to go into any further detail about this intriguing circumstance. Burroughs, "Conditions of Building in Rome and the Papal States in the Mid-fifteenth Century" (PhD diss. University of London, 1978), xv, xxviii.

⁴⁴³ Tafuri also paints him as an outsider in his interpretation of Alberti's work on the Porcari conspiracy as support for the rebel against the tyrannical rule of the pope; this takes up the theme of Tafuri's reading of Momus as Alberti's criticism of the pope as well. Tafuri, "'Cives esse non licere:' Nicholas V and Leon Battista Alberti" [2006], 35.

⁴⁴⁴ See p. 133 above.

The answer, however, may be simpler: I suggest that Nicholas was not willing to take a chance on an inexperienced builder when not just a single building but an entire program that would affect the character of the city as a whole and determine his own legacy was at stake – particularly when he had the experienced Rossellino at his disposal.⁴⁴⁵

This is not the place to recount in detail the historical debate about Alberti's role in Nicholas's planned renovations of Rome. But a brief review of the scholarship and a few points are pertinent to our discussion of Alberti in Rimini. Occasioned by the Jubilee of 1450 and the Pope's grand desire to transform the city into an impressive stage worthy of the pilgrimages and celebrations that would take place there, as well as a visual statement of papal supremacy over the nobility and communalists in Rome⁴⁴⁶ and Conciliarists throughout Christendom,⁴⁴⁷ the plan included interventions in the Capitol and the Borgo area (between the Castel Sant'Angelo and St. Peter's) and Vatican.

Precious few early sources link Alberti to Nicholas's project. The starting point for modern evaluations of Alberti's role is Gianozzo Manetti's biography of Nicholas V, written just after the Pope's death in 1455, which clearly identifies Bernardo Rossellino as the Pope's architect.⁴⁴⁸ Vasari also acknowledged Rossellino's key role, stating that he was "much esteemed for his knowledge of architecture by Pope Nicholas V, who...made

⁴⁴⁵ Indeed, Manetti gives credit to Rossellino for "execution" of the "unified and coherent programme." Burroughs, "Conditions," iii.

⁴⁴⁶ See Carroll William Westfall, *In This Most Perfect Paradise. Alberti, Nicholas V, and the Invention of Conscious Urban Planning in Rome, 1447–55* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974); Burroughs, "Below the Angel: An Urbanisic Project in the Rome of Pope Nicholas V," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 45 (1982) 94–124."

⁴⁴⁷ Tafuri, "'Cives esse non licere:' Nicholas V and Leon Battista Alberti" [2006], 25.

⁴⁴⁸ Gianozzo Manetti, *Vita di Niccolò V. Traduzione italiana, introduzione e commento a cura di Anna Modigliani; con una premessa di Massimo Miglio* (Rome: Roma nel Rinascimento, 1999).

use of him in very many works that he carried out in his pontificate.”⁴⁴⁹ Although these works are not named, the implication is that Rossellino was the Pope’s main architect, on whose advice he depended heavily. Until, that is, Alberti became an “intimate” of the pope through the agency of Biondo, and Rossellino, “according to the will of the Pope, ever sought the advice of Leon Battista.”⁴⁵⁰ Vasari goes on to distinguish between the two architects, “one as adviser and the other as executor,” for Nicholas V.⁴⁵¹ However, among the dozens of projects entailed in the plans described by Manetti, Vasari cites only one project that was carried out by Alberti, the Acqua Vergine.

Due to its underground siting, the Acqua Vergine was the only surviving ancient aqueduct in Rome.⁴⁵² Inscriptions tell us it was renovated by Nicholas in 1453, and Vasari claims that Alberti, “assisted by Rossellino was responsible for alterations made to the Trevi.” According to Antonio Tempesta’s 1593 print of the site before it was cleared for Bernini’s fountain in 1643, the design consisted of a bare wall above three openings through which water flowed into a single basin. While John Pinto admits that this design accords little with the architectural style and precepts we have come to associate with Alberti, the accurate Latin lettering of the fountain’s inscription “may well have constituted Alberti’s primary concern.”⁴⁵³ Links can also be drawn between the Acqua Vergine project and Alberti’s references to aqueducts in *De re aedificatoria*.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁴⁹ Vasari, *Lives*, Vol. I, 478–79.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 415.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵² On the history of the aqueduct as the source for the Trevi Fountain, see John Pinto, *The Trevi Fountain*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 5–27 and Katherine Rinne, *The Waters of Rome: Aqueducts, Fountains, and the Birth of the Baroque City*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 38–55.

⁴⁵³ Pinto, *The Trevi Fountain*, 28.

⁴⁵⁴ Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, Book X, 7.

The last, but perhaps most unequivocal contemporary source is Matteo Palmieri's account of Alberti's intervention at the construction site of the tribune of St. Peter's in 1452. Palmieri tells us that when Alberti arrived on the building site where construction was well underway, he recommended to Nicholas that the work cease, for he found the design unacceptable.

Working with this scant evidence, Georg Dehio was the first modern scholar to identify Alberti as Nicholas's principal architectural advisor (with Rossellino as the executor), based on his position in the papal Curia.⁴⁵⁵ Torgil Magnuson's 1958 publication and analysis of the description of the Pope's unrealized urban plan in Gianozzo Manetti's biography of Nicholas provided a more concrete starting point for efforts to securely attribute the plan to Alberti.⁴⁵⁶ Yet, because Manetti's description was not an actual account of events but rather a projection of "an ideal completed state,"⁴⁵⁷ the field has been ripe for interpretation.

In 1974, Carroll William Westfall devoted an entire volume to the "Nicholine plan" in which he dated the urbanistic endeavor to very early in Nicholas's papacy and argued that the Pope was familiar with Alberti's ideas long before the architect presented his architectural treatise to him in 1452.⁴⁵⁸ Westfall paints a picture of Alberti working behind the scenes, providing designs whose implementation was assigned to others, such as Rossellino.⁴⁵⁹ Westfall's study is largely one of the Papacy, the city of Rome, and the

⁴⁵⁵ Georg Dehio, "Die Bauprojekte Nikolaus des Fünften und L.B. Alberti." [Nicole: need rest of publication info for this article/chapter. Not in bib.]

⁴⁵⁶ Torgil Magnuson, *Studies in Quattrocento Architecture*.

⁴⁵⁷ Burroughs, "Conditions," ii.

⁴⁵⁸ Westfall, *In This Most Perfect Paradise. Alberti, Nicholas V, and the Invention of Conscious Urban Planning in Rome*, 1447–55.

⁴⁵⁹ Reviewer S. Lang makes the valid point that just as Matteo de' Pasti was Alberti's representative in Rimini, Luca Fancelli served the same role in Mantua, and Rossellino did in Florence, so too could have Rossellino served in this capacity in Rome. It remains curious that no contemporaries would mention

relationship between the two. This serves as background for the pope's Borgo renovation whose main theme is that of the implementation of architecture as the manifestation and assertion of Catholic doctrine. Indeed, the issue of the "the designer and the date" occupy merely an epilogue, in which Nicholas is presented as a modern-day Solomon, and Bernardo Rossellino, the only architect we know was involved with the project, as his Hiram of Tyre.⁴⁶⁰

Westfall is certainly correct to note that "neither Palmieri nor anyone else during the Quattrocento looked at buildings the way post-Dehio historians have."⁴⁶¹ To be sure, in the Quattrocento, observers focused on the city and the project as a whole, not who the designer of individual buildings may have been. In any case as we have seen, the most important personality attached to a commission was the patron, not the designer or the builder: "Nicholas claimed that he had conceived the buildings himself, and Manetti stated that the pope had designed them."⁴⁶² Regardless of Alberti's role in the design, Manetti would not have been able to name him as such, for as patron, Nicholas had to be credited with the design.

Thus Westfall finds "little room for doubt that Alberti was its inventor," particularly when the project is understood in its Quattrocento context, and echoes Dehio's claim that indeed no one else could have been.⁴⁶³ Alberti had developed his understanding and approach to buildings and the city from 1447, and he and the pope had a long relationship during which at the very least, Nicholas would have absorbed these

Alberti even in light of this arrangement, however. S. Lang, review of *In This Most Perfect Paradise*, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 36/2 (1977), 126.

⁴⁶⁰ Westfall, *In This Most Perfect Paradise*, 167–84.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 180.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 183.

ideas. While Alberti's involvement in "what resulted from the design should not be exaggerated," Westfall assures us that "the urban project, completed in some details but truncated in others due to the pope's death, must have existed, and Alberti's must have been the intellect behind the Solomonic Nicholas in Manetti's description."⁴⁶⁴

Charles Burroughs's extensive archival research for his study of fifteenth-century building in Rome unearthed a new name critical to all that was undertaken by Nicholas: Nello da Bologna.⁴⁶⁵ Nowhere, however, did even Burroughs find documentary evidence of Alberti's role. Yet while Burroughs set out to discount the role of Alberti, he, too, ended up seeing Alberti's hand and mind in not only the more securely attributable San Celso and Acqua Vergine, but in the Borgo plan as well.⁴⁶⁶ Indeed, Grafton focuses on only these endeavors (and adds the rebuilding of the Ponte Sant' Angelo after its collapse during the Jubilee pilgrimages) in his discussions of Alberti's role in Nicholas's enterprise.

Manfredo Tafuri, instead, did manage to minimize Alberti's role in the Nicholine plan. His "Cives esse non licere: Nicholas V and Leon Battista Alberti,"⁴⁶⁷ is a complex, direct response and counter-argument to traditional theories, especially those of Westfall, and an attempt to connect Alberti to Nicholas's plan. Tafuri re-defines the goals of the papal undertaking: "the aim of the 'plan' was to reorganize, to add new functions to old

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 184.

⁴⁶⁵ Burroughs presents Nello as a dominant figure in building in mid-fifteenth century Rome. His role was of a practical nature: controlled expenses, collected revenues, and supervised the Jubilee of 1450. He also executed and maintained public works such as bridges, gates and roads and hired and supervised all the builders and workers who carried out these projects. Burroughs, "Conditions," xx, xxx.

⁴⁶⁶ Burroughs, "Conditions," xxxii. Burroughs provides an interesting analysis of the S. Celso renovation, linking Alberti to it via Tommaso Spinelli and the Florentine banking community affiliated with the area in "Below the Angel."

⁴⁶⁷ Tafuri, "Cives esse non licere: Nicholas V and Leon Battista Alberti" [2006].

forms, and to activate specific urban potentials; it did not impose an order ex novo.”⁴⁶⁸

Following Burroughs, Tafuri sees the entire enterprise of replanning Rome as a political strategy more than an organized urbanistic concept.⁴⁶⁹

Moreover, Tafuri is the most vocal detractor of the traditional interpretations of Alberti as the genius behind the plan and Alberti as the like-minded humanist friend of Nicholas. Tafuri claims that it is not possible that Alberti was even involved, much less the author of such a grandiose plan, for Nicholas’s goal of extending “Curial control over the municipal government”⁴⁷⁰ would not have sat well with Alberti’s republican tendencies, as evidenced by his sympathy for Porcari’s anti-papal rebellion.⁴⁷¹

Furthermore, in Tafuri’s reading of Alberti’s 1440s satire, Momus, in which the Greek god of mockery is banished from Mt. Olympus by Jupiter for Momus’s contempt for the gods’ creations, Nicholas is Jupiter and Alberti the finger-pointing Momus. Given Alberti’s criticism of the Pope’s “political policies of magnificence” described there (and in his earlier Pontifex⁴⁷²), as well as his disapproval of architectural magnificence in De re aedificatoria,⁴⁷³ Tafuri contends that Alberti must not have even supported the Pope’s plan.⁴⁷⁴

Based on purely documentary and stylistic evidence, Tafuri argues against the hand of Alberti in the Acqua Vergine restoration, the Capitoline renovation, or the

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁴⁶⁹ Here, and elsewhere, Tafuri supports Burroughs’s reading of the Ponte Sant’Angelo restoration and San Celso organization in “Below the Angel.”

⁴⁷⁰ Shown by Burroughs in “Below the Angel.”

⁴⁷¹ Tafuri, “Cives esse non licere: Nicholas V and Leon Battista Alberti” [2006], 35, as noted by Grayson; for more on the rebellion, see p. 51 and 145 above.

⁴⁷² Alberti, Leonis Baptistae Alberti, Opera inedita et pauca separatim impressa, ed. Girolamo Mancini (Florence: Sansoni, 1890): 69–121. In Grayson, “Composition,” 154; Tafuri “Cives esse non licere: Nicholas V and Leon Battista Alberti” [2006], 56.

⁴⁷³ Alberti, On the Art of Building, Book IX, 2

⁴⁷⁴ “The relationship between Alberti and Nicholas thus seems to be more complex than it is usually taken to be.” Tafuri, “Cives esse non licere: Nicholas V and Leon Battista Alberti” [2006], 35.

various fortifications Nicholas had altered.⁴⁷⁵ When it comes to the St. Peter's tribune incident reported by Palmieri, Tafuri yet again contradicts long-held presumptions. Tafuri concedes that here we do have one piece of clear documentary proof of Alberti's involvement in a part of the project. Yet for Tafuri, this anecdote reveals that the Pope did trust Alberti's architectural sense but not enough to have him actually involved with the design: "his advice was not sought before the laying of deep foundations and the construction of the wall."⁴⁷⁶ "All we have, then, is a negative intervention that rules out a role for Alberti in designing the choir of St. Peter's."⁴⁷⁷ I suggest, however, that this late intervention is in part due to Alberti's recent experience and legitimacy on the heels of his triumph at the Tempio Malatestiano.

In the end, all of his progressive and avant-garde interpretations notwithstanding, even Tafuri concedes that this problem may in fact be unresolvable: "We would therefore be well advised to leave open the problem of the relations between Nicholas V and Alberti."⁴⁷⁸

For our purposes, a few notes on this contentious topic are sufficient. First, Manetti's biography of Nicholas, on which most arguments are based, nowhere mentions Alberti. Moreover, as noted above, he clearly credits Bernardo Rossellino for the execution of the Borgo plan: "Con lui solo il pontefice discuteva di tutto ciò che riguardava la fabbrica."⁴⁷⁹ Regardless of the specifics of this attribution, the fact remains that Rossellino is mentioned by name; Alberti is not. There is no doubt that Alberti was

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 30, 36, 38.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁷⁹ Manetti, *Vita di Niccolò V*, 153.

active in the Curia before Rimini, and his ideas must have infused those of the Pope and his compatriot Rossellino as plans for the Borgo were in the development stage, but there is no documentary evidence of such.

The second and more significant fact is that the architectural projects in Rome with which Alberti is more securely associated – the renovation and planning of the site of San Celso of 1451–53,⁴⁸⁰ his intervention at St. Peter's in 1452,⁴⁸¹ and the restoration of the Acqua Vergine and construction of the Trevi Fountain in 1453– all date from after the commission at Rimini.

I propose that one motivation for the ongoing and thus far unresolvable debate about Alberti's role in Nicholas's renovation plan of the Borgo stems from a need to find a precedent for his activity at Rimini. A distinct paucity of documentation for his involvement and even Manetti's explicit attribution to Rossellino of the plan has not discouraged those for whom some building activity must precede Alberti's accomplishment at the Tempio Malatestiano. I contend that the reverse is true: the Tempio should be seen as the precedent for his building portfolio in Rome, as the chronology outlined above indicates. It is difficult to believe that the derelict Sigismondo recognized Alberti's talent when the enlightened Nicholas did not. Yet, it is absolutely

⁴⁸⁰ "There is excellent if circumstantial evidence for the involvement of Alberti in the conception of the project, which can be regarded as...foreshadowing in some ways the more ideal, less complex Borgo-plan." Burroughs, "Conditions," xxvi. "...the S. Celso project can be interpreted in such a way that such an involvement seems possible, if not probable." Burroughs, "Conditions," 274. For further on S. Celso, see Burroughs, "Conditions," Chapter VII, as well his "Below the Angel: An Urbanistic Project in the Rome of Pope Nicholas V."

⁴⁸¹ Palmieri recounts that Alberti evaluated the foundations dug for the new piers of the choir of St. Peter's as structurally unsound and that on this advice, presented to him in Alberti's *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, Nicholas put a halt to the project. See Matteo Palmieri, "De temporibus suis," *Rerum italicarum scriptores* ed. G.M. Tartini (Florence, 1748), 1: 241; transl. in Westfall, *In This Most Perfect Paradise*, 169. Doubt has legitimately been cast on Palmieri's claim that the Pope immediately abandoned work at St. Peter's after receiving Alberti's treatise. But the recommendation indicates that he did at least by this time (1452; it also uncertain when this may have occurred as Palmieri's account was written several years later and is hampered by inconsistent dating) have a more thorough understanding of architectural issues.

plausible that once Alberti had proven himself with a less illustrious patron like Sigismondo, he would have gained the necessary experience and credibility to interest the most prominent patron of the time. Once his qualifications had been established at Rimini, Alberti almost immediately became active in the papal building projects.

Sigismondo and Alberti had a mutual need for each other. Sigismondo was willing to overlook Alberti's lack of architectural experience in favor of his myriad other qualifications. Sigismondo's patronage was multifaceted and relied upon various methods: poetry, treatises, medals, architecture, and the more monumental figural arts. Alberti was one of the few people who could contribute to all of these activities. For his part, Alberti was eager to break free from the restrictions of life in the curia and above all, pursue the opportunity to apply his theories and by designing his own building. We will see presently how their goals and approaches came together in the Tempio Malatestiano.

Chapter 5: Alberti as Artistic Adviser

For the past five centuries, the Tempio Malatestiano has presented historians and art historians attempting to understand its meaning with a multitude of problems. The combination of the mystifying character of Sigismondo Malatesta, the genius of Alberti and Piero, and the atypical presence of a cycle of antique Greek and Roman imagery in a Franciscan church, has been a conundrum. The complex iconographic program of the Tempio, as well as the numerous hands and minds involved in the project, have contributed to this confusion. This chapter will break down, or deconstruct, San Francesco's decorative program into its constituent parts – Alberti's façade, Agostino di Duccio's sculptural reliefs, and Piero della Francesca's fresco – so that we can look at its individual components and find links that will reconnect them, thus making better sense of the building's seemingly disjointed program. It will also survey the main decorative components of the program at the Tempio and the degree to which they conform to prevailing artistic trends and theory, specifically those articulated and practiced by Alberti.

This process will serve to define the role of Alberti and his collaborators in the conception of this most perplexing of Renaissance projects and show that only with Alberti could Sigismondo have produced this distinct monument. Many evaluations of the Tempio have largely focused on Sigismondo and have pushed Alberti to the background, casting him in the role of mere staff member, one of many employees working to implement Sigismondo's ideas. Sigismondo was an involved and astute patron, but this characterization gives him too much credit for his architectural

contributions. The subtleties of his achievements could only have been the result of a mind as agile, developed, and complex as Alberti's.

We saw that since the late thirteenth century when the Franciscans arrived in Rimini and constructed San Francesco, the Malatesta had enjoyed good relations with them.⁴⁸² The Gothic church soon became their family burial site. In the mid-1440s Sigismondo continued this tradition by remodeling some of the chapels for his own and his mistress's burials. These were built in the local Adriatic architectural style characterized by pointed arches and groin vaults with profuse decoration that incorporated Neo-Attic relief sculpture of the Tuscan Agostino di Duccio. Having just completed his new castle, Sigismondo initiated the renovation of San Francesco in a rather piecemeal fashion. The first documentation that survives regarding this phase of the project is a papal bull issued by Nicholas V in 1447 allowing Sigismondo's mistress, Isotta degli Atti, to endow a personal chapel. Over the next few years, Sigismondo also founded the Chapel of the Relics and the Chapel of St. Sigismund, his patron saint.

Around 1450, however, Sigismondo's plans became more ambitious. In 1447, at Piombino, fighting on the side of the Florentines, Venetians, and Milanese in the Italic War, Sigismondo shared in a victory over Alfonso of Aragon, who was defending the Visconti and the Pope.⁴⁸³ After this decisive military triumph Sigismondo made a vow to "set up this temple with due magnificence and expense to God immortal, and to the city... a monument both notable and holy."⁴⁸⁴ At this point, Sigismondo's project evolved into a transformation of the entire church, and he engaged Alberti to work on it. While

⁴⁸² See Chapter 1. For more on the history of the mendicant orders in Rimini, see Pier Giorgio Pasini, *Arte e storia della chiesa riminese* (Milan: Skira, 1999).

⁴⁸³ On the battle see Jones, "The Vicariate of the Malatesta of Rimini," 200.

⁴⁸⁴ Francesco Gaetano Battaglini, *Della vita di Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta* (Rimini: Arimini, 1794). The inscription is quoted in full below.

renovations continued on the chapels inside, Alberti formulated a design that would encase the existing building in a new, modern, monumental shell while preserving the two hundred-year-old Gothic structure that had been so important to the Malatesta family and the city of Rimini. In so doing, he realized Sigismondo's goal of establishing the legitimacy of rule, his place within the Malatesta dynasty, and his bond with the city of Rimini.

The Façade

The exterior of San Francesco, Alberti's first certain architectural commission, features what has been called "the first Renaissance façade" in its intentional use of explicitly classical references and vocabulary. Here Alberti introduces many of the concepts and components he would incorporate into his later buildings and theoretically codify in his De re aedificatoria. The lower story of the façade (Fig. 4) features a central arch and two side bays defined by four engaged, fluted Composite columns. The capitals include a more prominent volute than that of the straightforward Corinthian capital found on the Arch of Augustus and add the element of a crowned head. It has been noted that the capitals are the only aspect of the ornamentation that differs from the local ancient model and that they correspond to Alberti's description of the Italic type.⁴⁸⁵ An inscription in the entablature features the classical lettering style Alberti had studied in Rome, unites the three lower sections and declares Sigismondo as patron and creator: SIGISMVNDVS PANDVLFVS MALATESTA PANDVLFV FECIT ANNO GRATIAE MCCCCL (Fig. 40).⁴⁸⁶ The blind side arches appear distinct from the central one by virtue of their

⁴⁸⁵ Tavernor *On Alberti and the Art of Building*, 52.

⁴⁸⁶ See discussion of the inscription in note 16, above.

placement atop a podium that is broken by the central arch and its ground level portal. The tripartite division continues in the unfinished upper story with fluted pilasters. As Alberti told the building supervisor, Matteo de' Pasti, in a letter of 1454, there was also to have been a scroll element on either side of the upper central bay (Fig. 41).⁴⁸⁷ According to Matteo's famous commemorative medal of the Tempio façade dated 1450 (Fig. 3), the crossing was to have been crowned by a hemispherical dome. The entire façade is a swath of plain white Istrian marble, punctuated by porphyry roundels in each of the six spandrels and an assemblage of various colored marble slabs surrounding the portal (Fig. 6). Further decorative motives are few: garlands with Sigismondo's emblematic elephants, the Malatesta coat of arms, and intertwined S and I monograms, all in relief and placed in the intrados of the podium and the central arch (Fig. 42).

The flanks of the church are each graced with a series of seven arches supported by piers, behind which one can see the brick walls of the older building (Fig. 8). The podium of the facade continues here and raises the arcade above the ground. Above each pier is a roundel similar to those of the façade, and under the arches are the sarcophagi of six of Sigismondo's courtiers. On the pier forming a corner with the façade, a plaque proclaims, in Greek, the building's dedication to God and the commune of Rimini.⁴⁸⁸

The façade of the Tempio Malatestiano is recognized as the first architectural façade of the Renaissance due to Alberti's use of forms and themes derived from the remnants of antiquity that he had come to know in Rome and especially in the model he found nearby in Rimini's Arch of Augustus (Fig. 5). Alberti's specific quotation of the triumphal arch scheme and details such as the Italic capitals, which are used here for the

⁴⁸⁷ Grayson, *Alberti and the Tempio Malatestiano*, 17.

⁴⁸⁸ See Fig. 9 and note 18 above.

first time since Antiquity, were innovative. This composition, along with Alberti's revival of the ancient practice of placing dedicatory inscriptions on buildings, made it the "first modern temple."⁴⁸⁹

The Arch of Augustus, located in the southeastern part of Rimini, was the primary inspiration for Alberti's façade design. This monument was erected in 27 BC to commemorate the emperor's improvements on the section of the via Flaminia, the main thoroughfare connecting Rome to Lazio and Romagna to the Marches.⁴⁹⁰ Alberti incorporated many motifs he found here as well as those he had seen in Rome, into his design. His temple front of three round arches set upon a podium, and the inclusion of a dedicatory inscription in the entablature supported by engaged columns and Composite capitals, were all novel at the time but became common motifs in ecclesiastical entrance fronts of the Quattro- and Cinquecento.⁴⁹¹

The Tempio façade is typical of Alberti's practice also by virtue of his incorporation of local and preexisting architectural styles and techniques of various historical periods into his own designs. Beyond the overt references to the potent image of the local Arch of Augustus was Alberti's padanità, the influence, in terms of both style and material, of the Po Valley with which Alberti was familiar from his time spent in Padua and in Bologna.⁴⁹² This plays out in the Tempio façade in several ways.

⁴⁸⁹ Peter Murray, *The Architecture of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), 54; Ludwig Heydenreich, *Architecture in Italy 1400–1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 35; Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building*, 52, 58. For more on Alberti and classical inscriptions, see Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance*, 235–39, and Christine M. Sperling, "Leon Battista Alberti's Inscriptions on the Holy Sepulchre in the Capella Rucellai, San Pancrazio, Florence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 52 (1989): 221–28.

⁴⁹⁰ Fred Kleiner, *The Arch of Nero in Rome: A Study of the Roman Honorary Arch Before and Under Nero* (Rome: G. Bretschneider, 1985), 29–30.

⁴⁹¹ These themes and their implications will be discussed greater detail below.

⁴⁹² Alberti's padana period in fact was of greater duration than his experience in Renaissance Florence.

Alberti's straightforward use of classical vocabulary in the façade is lightened by a portal of white Istrian stone and polychrome marble veneers, local materials, on which Alberti remarks in *De re aedificatoria*.⁴⁹³ This feature was found not in ancient sources that Alberti had seen in Rome, but in the local building tradition of the Adriatic coast and Byzantine-inspired artistic styles. The clearest source of these techniques was to be found among the various Byzantine buildings in Ravenna, such as the Orthodox Baptistry (Fig. 43), whose distinctive patterned marbles were echoed in the polychrome slabs of San Francesco's portal. Sigismondo made this conceptual connection a literal one by taking the actual marble building materials for the construction of San Francesco from the sixth-century San Apollinare in Classe.⁴⁹⁴ Stylistically and symbolically, Alberti connected San Francesco to its surroundings through the clear allusions in his design to various historical monuments: besides the triumphal arch motif of the nearby Arch of Augustus, Alberti found examples of the use of arches on piers in the Tomb of Theodoric (Fig. 44) and blind arcades in the brick Mausoleum of Galla Placidia (Fig. 45), both in Ravenna, which were thought to have been occupied by the ancient founders of Romagna.⁴⁹⁵

Alberti incorporated architectural traditions from nearby Venice as well: the wider central and upper arches recall those of San Marco's façade, as does the rounded quality

⁴⁹³ Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, 49.

⁴⁹⁴ A contemporary chronicle by Giovanni di maestro Pedrino of Forlì recounts the transport of the marble from Ravenna and Forlimpopoli. Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano," 94. Christine Smith has further argued that the scheme of a stone dado (composed of the slabs taken from San Apollinare in Classe) with paired fluted pilasters, surmounted by the painted decoration in the Chapel of Saint Sigismund, comes directly from the apse of San Vitale also in Ravenna, a model chosen, Smith continues, by Filarete and Ciriaco d'Ancona while in Rimini in 1449. The use of a stone rather than painted dado below the fresco was unusual in chapel decoration of the period. Christine Smith, "Piero's Painted Architecture," *Piero della Francesca and His Legacy*, (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art; Hanover, N.H.: Distributed by the University Press of New England, 1995), 234f. Charles Burroughs also notes Alberti's ideas about the incorporation of existing materials into new creations. Charles Burroughs, *The Italian Renaissance Palace Façade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 19.

⁴⁹⁵ Both of these are in fact Romanesque, but in the fifteenth century were believed to be ancient. Tavernor also cites the Tomb of Theodoric as "possibly another source for the design of the unfinished dome of the Tempio Malatestiano." Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building*, 69–72.

of the hemispherical dome (Fig. 46).⁴⁹⁶ The composition of the façade – specifically the use of a semicircular “pediment” in the top of the central bay flanked by rounded segments for the “volute” – also derives from the neighboring Veneto. This arrangement of forms became increasingly popular after Codussi’s application of it in San Michele in Isola around 1470.⁴⁹⁷

This practice was consistent with Alberti’s exhortation to Matteo de’ Pasti to “improve what is already built and not to spoil what has already been done.”⁴⁹⁸ As was the case with some of Alberti’s later commissions, the Tempio project required working with an existing structure and fusing its style with that of the region. At Rimini his use of local materials and vocabulary furthered this goal just as at Santa Maria Novella in Florence this “conflation” of local and antiquarian inspirations led him to use the characteristic Tuscan Romanesque green and white striped marble in the classically-inspired upper story of the façade in order to accord with the existing medieval pointed arches of the lower level (Fig. 47).⁴⁹⁹

As a result, Alberti’s design for San Francesco’s exterior blends traditional Byzantine and Gothic architectural styles of the Adriatic region with the emerging

⁴⁹⁶ Borsi sees this specifically in the round arched aedicola containing an arch with an architraved tripartite window, which would have been more Paduan and Venetian than Renaissance.” Borsi, Leon Battista Alberti, 106. Borsi further compares this to the classical triangular pediment he later used at Sant’Andrea and San Sebastiano, and finds that this source of the dome especially, while hemispherical, “had nothing to do with the Pantheon.” Ibid., 123.

⁴⁹⁷ John McAndrew cites the de’Pasti medal as a direct source of Codussi’s façade. John McAndrew, Venetian Architecture of the Early Renaissance (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1980), 239. Further echoes could be found in the 1475 facades of the existing Gothic churches of San Giovanni in Bragora and Sant’Andrea della Zirada.

⁴⁹⁸ Grayson, Alberti and the Tempio Malatestiano, 19.

⁴⁹⁹ The façade of Santa Maria Novella was commissioned by Giovanni Rucellai in 1458. The lower portion of façade had survived from the Middle Ages. G. Kiesow, “Die gotische fassade von S. Maria Novella von Florenz,” Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte, XXV (1962), cited by P.W. Lehmann, “Alberti and Antiquity: Additional Observations,” Art Bulletin 70, no. 3 (1988): 388–400. The green and white marble was however also a salient feature of the Florentine Baptistery, which in Alberti’s time was believed to have been an ancient Roman temple of Mars. His use of these materials thus imbued Santa Maria Novella with multivalent meanings.

all'antica Renaissance style. This adoption of indigenous architectural elements while forging a new classicizing style would become a hallmark of Alberti's style.

The Dome

The unexecuted ribbed dome that towers over San Francesco in the de'Pasti medal was a central component of Alberti's overall design.⁵⁰⁰ It has been often noted that in its hemispherical aspect the schematic rendering of the dome we see rising behind the façade recalls the Pantheon and is thus consistent with the many antique references of Alberti's facade. In its ribbed articulation (in the medal we see six of the twelve ribs), however, the dome differs from this ancient model. Here Alberti instead evokes a closer antecedent (both historically and geographically): the already famous cupola that Brunelleschi had recently completed for the Duomo in Florence (Fig. 48). This was a conscious choice that speaks to Alberti's respect for more than solely classical models.⁵⁰¹ We know that Sigismondo had attended the consecration of the Florence Cathedral, and he likely would have supported the decision to use a dome that would have recalled the ribbed cupola that had made such an impression on all those present in Florence in 1436. We have seen that Alberti himself was so awed by Brunelleschi's accomplishment in Florence, which "covered the countryside with its shadow," that he expressed his

⁵⁰⁰ The Alberti Group in Bath and Edinburgh has created a series of computer renderings of the Tempio according to the medal and the existing portions of the building for the Alberti exhibition held in Mantua, 1994. They are published by Tavernor, On Alberti and the Art of Building and by Centre for Advanced Students of Architecture, (Bath: University of Bath), available from the World Wide Web: <http://www.bath.ac.uk/casa/alberti/index.html>.

⁵⁰¹ There had been several concerns raised about the weight of the roof and the ability of the existing walls to support it. ASS, Particolari, Famiglie forestiere, busta n. 8, Malatesta Rimini (in Delucca, Artisti a Rimini fra Gotico e Rinascimento. Rassegna di fonti archivistiche, 311, 338–9). Alberti expressly recommends the use of vaulting for the rooves of temples, "for the sake of dignity and also durability." On the Art of Building, 126.

admiration by dedicating his De pictura to the architect a decade and a half earlier. In Rimini, Alberti was able to pay tribute to the master in more “concrete” terms with his own dome.

These profound examples notwithstanding, Alberti would have found several models for the dome closer to Rimini as well, particularly in the area around Padua and Bologna where he had spent much time. The previously acknowledged Tomb of Theodoric in Ravenna serves as a source for the rotunda as well: Alberti specifically mentions the Tomb of Theodoric in his architectural treatise, describing it as a “noble relic.”⁵⁰² Here we find Alberti’s awareness of historical models, but this is not limited to ancient ones. With the connection of Alberti’s projected hemispherical dome for the Tempio to this important Romanesque source, Alberti’s geographical padanità acquires an historical element as well.

Finally, the use of this type of dome is consistent with Alberti’s approach as explained with reference to the façade of Santa Maria Novella. By fusing the classical and contemporary styles in the use of a hemispherical shape articulated by Gothic ribs, Alberti unites the all’antica character of his façade with the International Gothic flavor of the interior’s structural elements that were to be retained.⁵⁰³ On many levels then, Alberti was putting his theories into practice.

The eclecticism that simultaneously draws from classical Rome, Byzantine Venice, Romanesque Ravenna, medieval Rimini, and modern Florence may at first glance seem to lack coherence. In fact, the synthesis of these elements makes the Tempio

⁵⁰² Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, 21.

⁵⁰³ For a discussion of the dedication and Alberti’s admiration of Brunelleschi in the context of early fifteenth century architecture, see Christine Smith, *Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism*, Chapter 2: “Originality and Cultural Progress: Brunelleschi’s Dome and a Letter by Alberti,” 19–39.

Malatestiano characteristically Albertian, and equally important, characteristically Malatesta – for hereby, Alberti helped Sigismondo to achieve his goal of cementing his connection to the Malatesta dynasty and to the city.

The Interior Decoration

The façade of San Francesco has traditionally been attributed to Alberti without question, but his influence on the design of the rest of church has scarcely been addressed. Sigismondo certainly had a hand in devising the elaborate decorative program of the Tempio Malatestiano, as he had a history of being an involved, if not domineering patron.⁵⁰⁴ We know Valturio and Basinio made important contributions to the subjects and iconography. But we can connect much of the church's visual program to Alberti's artistic theories and solutions as well. Moreover, Alberti was well-versed in astronomy and astrology himself. Padua was a center of astrological studies in the years Alberti was studying there in Barzizza's humanist school. In this period, the legacy of Pietro d'Abano still held sway in Padua, and Alberti formed a life-long friendship there with Paolo Toscanelli, who would become a prominent figure in fifteenth-century science and technology. Alberti then went on to serve the astrological enthusiast Leonello d'Este in Ferrara. Alberti was focused on his mathematical interests and duties as a judge for the Niccoló monument during this period; we do not know of any astrological activity on his part while there. Yet the astrological tradition of this court was strong and later culminated in the fresco cycle depicting the Labors of the Months in the d'Este's Palazzo

⁵⁰⁴ See Chapter 2 above on the Castelsigismondo.

Schifanoia.⁵⁰⁵ Florence, too, became an important locus of astrology and astronomy while Alberti was there as a member of the retinue of Pope Eugenius IV. In Florence, Alberti aided his friend Toscanelli in astrological investigations and it is possible that he was responsible for the highly accurate nocturnal celestial representation painted in the cupola of San Lorenzo's Old Sacristy for Cosimo de' Medici.⁵⁰⁶ When the Greeks attending the Council of Florence in 1439 brought with them many ancient texts, Alberti took part in the intellectual exchange.

Inside the Tempio, where the original Gothic character of the church is retained, the simplicity that informs the façade appears to break down. Both physically and stylistically, the interior and exterior decorative schemes are quite independent of one another. In physical terms, Alberti's design formed a shell that encased the existing church; and in its conceptual design, this dichotomy continues: the interior chapels were given a northern International Gothic flavor while Alberti's façade heralded the arrival of the all'antica style in the region.

The decorative program begun in 1449 was devised by Sigismondo's court scholars and executed by Agostino di Duccio and Piero della Francesca under the direction of Matteo de' Pasti. In the classical references in the reliefs of Triumphs of Minerva and of Scipio, the legendary Malatesta ancestor, critics have described a theoretical dichotomy. The inclusion of antique Greek and Roman imagery in a Franciscan church has occasioned the most negative reactions. We have seen that Pius

⁵⁰⁵ On this cycle, see Warburg's classic 1912 article, republished as "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara," The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: contributions to the cultural History of the European Renaissance. Introduction by Kurt W. Forster, Trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 563–592, 732–57.

⁵⁰⁶ On Alberti and astrology, see Marco Dezzi-Bardeschi, "Sole in Leone: Leon Battista Alberti: astrologia, cosmologia e tradizione ermetica nella facciata di Santa Maria Novella," Psicon (1974): 33–67; Beck, "Leon Battista Alberti and the Night Sky at San Lorenzo."

II's castigation of the building and allegations against Sigismondo were picked up later by the likes of Burckhardt, Pastor, Mitchell, and Lavin who continued to portray him as a pagan.

At this point the exceedingly complex issue of Sigismondo's alleged paganism must be addressed in a brief discussion of the iconography of the Tempio's sculptures.⁵⁰⁷ In choosing images of the Muses, Planets, Signs of the Zodiac, and Liberal Arts, Sigismondo, abetted by Agostino, and, I contend, by Alberti, was furthering the creation of his image as a worthy ruler. I contend he did so without renouncing his Christian upbringing. Through his choice of iconographic program, Sigismondo was displaying his humanist education and understanding of the value of antiquity, as so many of his contemporaries had. The images in San Francesco, therefore, should be seen as a justification and validation of his rule.

Pius criticized Sigismondo and San Francesco for its inclusion of so-called "pagan" images. In fact, the use of astrological and pagan images in this period, even in a Christian setting, was far from unusual.⁵⁰⁸ The Middle Ages and Renaissance had inherited from Antiquity a firmly entrenched belief system based on planetary and zodiacal configurations, which were ultimately connected to the rule of the gods. It was long ago recognized that Christianity adopted and adapted many aspects of classical thinking in an effort to grow and attract converts. Certainly by the Middle Ages, centuries

⁵⁰⁷ For a thorough analysis of the conception and imagery of the interior sculptural program, I refer the reader to Kokole, "Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style."

⁵⁰⁸ With his own humanist background, Pius could not have simply failed to recognize such a tradition. Instead, his refusal to acknowledge it is further evidence of his overriding political motivations against Sigismondo, as outlined in Chapter 1 above. The reference to the Arch of Constantine and its "potential as a symbol of the triumph of Christianity" (See Wendy Steadman Sheard, "Tullio Lombardo in Rome? Arch of Constantine, Vendramin Tomb...", *Artibus et historiae* 18 [1997]: 161), particularly in the façade, could also be employed as a rebuttal to Pius's allegations that San Francesco was devoid of any Christian meaning.

of Christian thinking had overturned the polytheistic aspect of the classical belief system. Yet the role of these gods and their planetary attributes in Christianity's understanding of the world as well as of individuals persisted. As Seznec noted, antiquity "had set up a system of concordances in which the planets and zodiacal signs served as the basis of classification for the elements, seasons and humors,"⁵⁰⁹ which was followed by Scholastics and Dante alike. Indeed, astrology formed the basis of a "fundamentally important system of thought that...described the accepted structure of the universe..."⁵¹⁰ Saxl described the eras of the Middle Ages and Renaissance as "two ages in which there was no distinction between astrology and astronomy, and in which the best men devoted their energy in the study of the stars not towards an abstract science, but for a practical goal, or the forecast of the future."⁵¹¹

The survival of classical astrology is partially attributable to the Arabs, who had kept the ancient astrological tradition alive after the advent of Christianity. The ideas returned to the West with the Arab conquest of Spain in the eighth century. During the Middle Ages the compatibility of classical and Christian ideas was seen as a matter of course.⁵¹² As early as the twelfth century, there was a Chair in astrology at the University of Bologna, and departments in astrology soon appeared also at the universities of Padua and Pavia, establishing it as a legitimate "science." By the peak of astrology's cultural

⁵⁰⁹ Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods. The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art, 49.

⁵¹⁰ Claudia Rousseau on Eugenio Garin, Lo zodiaco della vita (Rome: Laterza, 1976), in the preface to her dissertation: Claudia Rousseau, "Cosimo I de Medici and Astrology: The Symbolism of Prophecy" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1983), xi.

⁵¹¹ "Medioevo e del Rinascimento: due eta in cui fra astronomia e astrologia non vi era alcuna distinzione, e i cui uomini migliori impiegavano le proprie energie nello studio delle stelle non in vista di una scienza astratta, ma per uno scopo pratico, ossia la previsione del futuro." Fritz Saxl, La fede negli astri. Dall'antichita al Rinascimento, 163.

⁵¹² Panofsky and Saxl make a distinction between the differing attitudes towards antiquity of the medieval and Renaissance periods. Panofsky and Saxl, "Classical Mythology in Medieval Art," Metropolitan Museum Studies IV (1933): 274–75.

popularity in the fifteenth century, the majority of philosophers, scientists, and doctors were also astrologers, and astrology formed the foundation of their professional training and methodology.⁵¹³ On a more mundane level, the accepted astrological system dictated everything from the most auspicious time to go into battle to which colors to wear and what to eat on certain days of the week.

Astrology was also actively promoted by various Renaissance princes who retained astrologers as members of their courts and housed numerous volumes on astrology in their private libraries. These included the Visconti and Sforza in Milan, the Gonzaga in Mantua, and especially the d'Este in Ferrara. Astrology may have had critics; nevertheless in the fifteenth century it continued to exert a powerful influence alongside that of Christianity.

Such ideas did not remain solely in the philosophical realm. Along with the more common Christian imagery, we find astrological images in the art of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, establishing a precedent for those at San Francesco. Images of the planets and muses adorned the walls of many secular spaces such as the studioli and public reception rooms of Renaissance rulers. One of the earliest examples is the Salone in the Palazzo della Ragione in Padua (Fig. 49). Associated with Giotto,⁵¹⁴ the fresco cycle dates from 1306–09 and is comprised of two tiers: the upper represents the astronomic sky, with thirty-six constellations, each of the twelve months and corresponding Zodiacal signs; the lower section represents the influence of the stars on human life. A painted inscription states that the subject matter of the frescoes was “inspired” by theories of

⁵¹³ The degree to which astrology infused medieval and Renaissance culture is described in *Astrologia. Arte e cultura in eta rinascimentale*, ed. Daniele Bini, (Modena: Bulino, 1996).

⁵¹⁴ *L'uomo, la terra e gli astri. Gli affreschi del Palazzo della Ragione a Padova*, (Padua: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1989).

local famed astrologer Pietro d'Abano, whose Astrolabium appears on the walls here in monumental form, "interpreting the civic and social life of the Middle Ages according to the physical influence of the stars."⁵¹⁵

More contemporary instances of astrologically-inspired decorative programs were also available as models to Sigismondo and Alberti. Leonello d'Este, such an avid student of astrology that he is said to have dressed in colors that accorded with daily planetary positions, decorated his studiolo at Belfiore with painted images of the Muses to both inspire him and serve as evidence of his personal virtues.⁵¹⁶

This tradition also continued beyond the decoration of the Tempio. In the 1460s, again in Ferrara, Borso d'Este decorated the walls of the audience chamber in his country house, the Palazzo Schifanoia, with a complex cycle of the months of year and their labors as connected to civic life in Borso's Ferrara.⁵¹⁷ These scenes include also the procession of the various gods and goddesses through the signs of the zodiac, images that were drawn from contemporary translations of Arabic treatises (Fig. 50).

To be sure, astrological themes were most typically found in secular settings of the Renaissance. But their inclusion in a Christian context was far from unprecedented. Soon after the advent of Christianity, efforts were made to reconcile its beliefs with the Classical tradition that still informed western culture. In particular, many of paganism's astrological tenets were appropriated by Christianity and incorporated into its new belief

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., 7.

⁵¹⁶ Anna Eorsi, "Lo studiolo di Lionello d'Este e il programma di Guarino da Verona," Warburg, "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara," 581.

⁵¹⁷ Kristin Lippincott, "The Frescoes of the Salone dei Mesi and the Study of Latin Grammar in Fifteenth-Century Ferrara," in *La Corte di Ferrara e il suo mecenatismo, 1441–1598*, ed. M. Pade, L. Waage Petersen and D. Quarta (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag; Modena: Panini, 1990), 93–109; Aby Warburg, "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara," Marco Bertozzi, *La tirannia degli astri. Aby Warburg e l'astrologia di Palazzo Schifanoia*, (Bologna: Cappelli, 1985).

system by investing pagan figures with Christian virtues.⁵¹⁸ Thus the pursuit of the Liberal Arts became an intellectual means of gaining Divine Wisdom, and ancient astrological imagery was read as representative of a Christian celestial order. This theme soon appeared in various genres of Christian art. The famed Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry was heir to a legacy of illuminated manuscripts that adorned liturgical calendars and personal prayer books. These volumes produced for private devotion included images of each month accompanied by its illustrations of its corresponding “Labor” (as at the Palazzo della Ragione) and an image of Apollo on a chariot riding through the appropriate Zodiac sign represented by a stellar constellation. The Late Antique notion of the passing of the seasons, as symbolized by the Labors of the Months, was picked up in manuscripts of the Carolingian period. Here, however, were added the Christian connotations of the passage of time as related to the Second Coming and Last Judgment.

By the twelfth century, this Christianized planetary and zodiacal imagery had also found a more public and monumental place in the portal sculpture of numerous Romanesque and Gothic cathedrals. The elaborate west portal at Chartres, of the mid-twelfth century, includes the signs of the Zodiac and Labors of the Months along with an image of the Creation. We also find here personifications of the seven female Liberal Arts and their male counterparts, the Trivium and Quadrivium, in addition to typical representations of the Lives of Christ and the Virgin, and Old Testament figures. The image of the Virgin enthroned “signified her role as the sedes sapientiae (‘throne of wisdom’), hence the appropriateness of the Seven Liberal Arts and their personifications

⁵¹⁸ For examples of this phenomenon, see Panofsky and Saxl, “Classical Mythology in Medieval Art,” 253–54.

on the archivolts around them.”⁵¹⁹ Other quite prominent cathedrals display similar decorative elements. Besides images of the Zodiac and Labors of the Months (which are also found at the contemporary Autun), the late twelfth-century sculpture of the west portal at Vézelay illustrates episodes of such classical figures as Ganymede, Achilles, and Odysseus (Fig. 51). Again at Laon we see the Liberal Arts accompanied by personifications of Philosophy, Medicine, and Architecture.

In medieval Italy, the Labors of the Months are included in relief sculpture decorating the east portal of the Pisa Baptistery and the West portal of cathedral at Lucca (Fig. 52). The latter includes signs of the zodiac as well. Geographically closer examples include similar imagery in the main portal lintel at San Zeno in Verona and in the west portal of San Marco in Venice (Figs. 53, 54).⁵²⁰ In these instances, such imagery is notably placed on the exterior of the church and may be read as part of the secular world, distinct from the sacred space of the interior. Such is not the case at Rimini. But the execution of these subjects in sculpture, and their placement in the arches and columns leading into the side chapels of San Francesco, indicate that Sigismondo and Alberti were working well within tradition.

The inclusion of such “pagan” subjects in Christian contexts was also to be found inside churches. As was the case with medieval exterior sculpture, interior astrological imagery emphasized the Labors of the Months. A well-preserved mid-twelfth century polychrome mosaic floor in the cathedral of Otranto presents the signs of the zodiac in its crossing and the Labors of the Months alongside Old Testament imagery in the nave

⁵¹⁹ M.F. Hearn, *Romanesque Sculpture. The Revival of Monumental Stone Sculpture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries.*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 197.

⁵²⁰ On the San Marco sculpture, see Mark Rosen, “The Republic at Work: S. Marco’s Reliefs of the Venetian Trades,” *Art Bulletin* XC/1 (2008): 54–75.

(Figs. 55, 56). A century later, an ornate mosaic disc of green and white marble on the floor of San Miniato al Monte in Florence also displayed the symbols of the zodiac. Here they are clearly arranged in twelve sections, thereby establishing a Christian association with the Twelve Apostles (Fig. 57). There are instances of the Liberal Arts as well. An interesting example is the thirteenth-century pulpit in the Siena Cathedral (Fig. 58). Here Nicola Pisano surrounds the central supporting column of the octagonal structure with figures of the Liberal Arts and Philosophy, thus establishing them as a literal foundation of the Life of Christ and the Last Judgment.

By the later fifteenth century, due to the activity of Neoplatonists like Marsilio Ficino who sought to reconcile the ideals of pagan and Christian religions⁵²¹ – a synthesis analogous to what Alberti was trying to achieve stylistically in the design of San Francesco – these iconographic themes and images had become quite popular. Examples include Botticelli's Birth of Venus⁵²² and Francesco del Cossa's fresco cycle of the months at the Palazzo Schifanoia whose images of the divine, celestial, and earthly realms illustrate Borso's benevolent rule. For his part, Sigismondo actively integrated astrology into his court activities. Between 1453 and 1455, Basinio da Parma, Sigismondo's most prominent court poet, authored the Astronomica, a "didactic poem on astronomy conceived independently of medieval traditions, and based almost exclusively on classical literary sources."⁵²³ These themes became increasingly popular in the

⁵²¹ For an interesting discussion of the issue of paganism versus Christianity in the context of humanism, see John Monfasani, "Platonic Paganism in the Fifteenth Century," Reconsidering the Renaissance. Papers from the Twenty-first Annual Conference (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992), 45–61.

⁵²² Warburg read Botticelli's Birth of Venus and Primavera as "attempts to emancipate the goddess from her twofold medieval bondage – mythographic and astrological – and to restore her to her Olympian freedom." Warburg, "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara," 585.

⁵²³ Kokole, "Agostino Di Duccio in the Tempio Malatestiano 1449–1457: Challenges of Poetic Invention and Fantasies of Personal Style," 164.

sixteenth century, as seen in programs commissioned by various Medici rulers.⁵²⁴ As would be the case throughout his life and career, in Rimini Alberti was in the forefront of intellectual currents.

In his ability to bridge these hermeneutic and visual components of the Tempio program, Alberti was unique. This synthesis was Sigismondo's goal, but it was Alberti's achievement. And no one else could have accomplished it so sublimely.

In Alberti's Own Words

Regrettably few drawings by Alberti's hand (for any of his projects) survive, but we are fortunate that another explicit source of his ideas has come down to us. Among the many written works Alberti produced during his long and illustrious career, two prove quite useful and enlightening when applied to the decoration of the Tempio Malatestiano.

Alberti's De re aedificatoria was dedicated to Pope Nicholas V in 1452 and is therefore a direct reflection of his architectural ideas in precisely the period he was working at Rimini.⁵²⁵ Written in Latin and modeled on the ancient architect Vitruvius's De architectura, De re aedificatoria was highly theoretical and was intended as much as a guide for prospective architectural patrons as a technical manual for actual builders. As in all of his intellectual endeavors, the example of the ancients was supreme in Alberti's mind: all'antica architectural style was discussed in the ancient Latin tongue in prose

⁵²⁴ See Janet Cox-Rearick, Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art: Pontormo, Leo X, and the Two Cosimos (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁵²⁵ While the dedication of De re aedificatoria to Nicholas V in 1452 is certain, there has been some debate surrounding the question of when Alberti actually wrote it. The idea of writing on the topic was suggested to him around 1440 by Leonello d'Este. Richard Krautheimer, "Alberti and Vitruvius," in Studies in Early Christian, Medieval, and Renaissance Art, 323–32 (New York: NYU Press, 1969), 328. and Grayson contends that Alberti began it in 1444 (Grayson, "The Composition of L.B. Alberti's 'Decem Libri De re Aedificatoria,'" which also reviews most of the theories on the date up to that point). After its presentation to Nicholas, he may have worked on it continuously until his death in 1472. John Onians, Bearers of Meaning, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 147.

intended to rival Cicero's.⁵²⁶ As we have seen, Alberti may have been peripherally involved in a few building projects before he finished his treatise,⁵²⁷ but when he wrote De re aedificatoria, he had yet to design a building. At Rimini Sigismondo gave him his first opportunity to do so, and in the Tempio we find many demonstrations of the ideas developed in De re aedificatoria.

In addition to defining the role of an architect, the basic issues of siting a building properly, using appropriate construction materials, and employing the various types of columns and wall structures, Alberti makes specific recommendations for the decoration of churches, or as he repeatedly refers to them, "temples." Two of these prescriptions are particularly instructive for the understanding of San Francesco. Because "a well-maintained and well-adorned temple is obviously the greatest and most important ornament of a city,"⁵²⁸ Alberti maintains that "a temple that delights the mind wonderfully, captivates it with grace and admiration, will greatly encourage piety. .. [He thus] ...would deck it out in every part so that anyone who entered it would start with awe for his admiration at all the noble things,"⁵²⁹ for "provided it in no way diminishes their solemnity it is thoroughly commendable to execute wall, roof and flooring skillfully and elegantly."⁵³⁰ Here, then, we have a source for the one of the most distinctive features of the Tempio, its profuse interior decoration, which does undoubtedly "captivate" the visitor. Alberti further, as Jonathan Riess pointed out, claims sculpture's "highest

⁵²⁶ Alberti, On the Art of Building, x.

⁵²⁷ Though none of these early projects are adequately documented, in Rome he also may have been involved with Nicholas's renovation of Sto. Stefano Rotondo and of the choir of St. Peter's which was under the direction of Bernardo Rossellino.

⁵²⁸ Alberti, On the Art of Building, Bk. VII 3, p. 194.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., Bk. VII, 10, p. 220

function is to celebrate and commemorate.”⁵³¹ This central goal of the Tempio is accomplished through sculptural references to Malatesta and Riminese history in the reliefs depicting the solar imagery associated with Sigismondo and the Triumph of Scipio which asserts the ancient Malatesta lineage (Figs. 21, 27).⁵³² It can be debated whether the decoration “diminishes the solemnity” of the space. Rather than condemn Sigismondo for this feature, as history has done, we should instead look to Alberti. Although the patron has the final word on every aspect of a commission, in this case Sigismondo appears to have been following the advice of his learned advisor who also articulated as much in writing.

But Alberti’s text is contradictory. Not long after this exhortation to delight, Alberti admonishes: “purity and simplicity would be most pleasing to the gods above, nor should the temple contain anything to divert the mind away from religious meditation toward sensual attraction and pleasure.” For this reason, “I would have nothing on the walls or floor of the temple that did not have some quality of philosophy.”⁵³³ This indeed echoes Valturio’s prescription for the decoration: that it was only to be understood by those well-versed in philosophy.⁵³⁴ This passage helps us to decipher the unconventional choice of subject matter and medium in the Tempio. The choice of Neoplatonic subject matter in the reliefs’ imagery can be said to lift the mind and spirit to an otherworldly level, towards “religious meditation.” The astrological and allegorical subjects are distinctive for precisely this otherworldly effect. The narratives commonly found in church decoration of the period that put religious content into familiar images of daily

⁵³¹ Jonathan B. Riess, “The Civic View of Sculpture in Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria*,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, 32 (1979), 8.

⁵³² For more on these themes see Mitchell, “The Imagery of the Tempio Maltestiano.”

⁵³³ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁴ *De re militari*, xii, 13, cited by Mitchell, “The Imagery of the Tempio Maltestiano,” 77.

life, for instance fresco cycles recounting the life of Virgin or various saints, are deliberately eschewed at the Tempio. Such abstract subject matter also fulfills the prescription for “some quality of philosophy,” in a temple and contrasts sharply with more conventional decorative schemes of Biblical themes that emphasize didactic narrative.

In the same passage, Alberti states, “within the temple I favor detached painted panels rather than pictures applied directly to the walls, although I would prefer reliefs to paintings...”⁵³⁵ Here Alberti, reputed to have been both a painter and sculptor himself, and an acclaimed theorist of both techniques, begins to struggle with what a few decades later would become a heated debate on the paragone, that is, the hierarchy of the visual arts, specifically painting and sculpture. Alberti’s thoughts on the relative merits of painting and sculpture in temple decoration as espoused in De re aedificatoria and his application of them in the Tempio are an early instance of the paragone that Leonardo would explore at the end of the century.⁵³⁶

For his part, however, Alberti elevates the medium of sculpture above painting, at least in the context of the “temple.” Alberti does not explain himself, but aside from the greater material expense of sculpture, his preference for things spiritual may again be accountable. Sculpture’s monochromatic and less lifelike appearance can also serve to elevate the mind beyond mundane experience to the contemplation of the spiritual. This otherworldly effect is amplified through the ethereal quality of Agostino’s limestone

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Yet whereas in *De pictura*, Alberti offered an expository exploration of the issue, Clare Fargo notes that Leonardo turned it into a “polemical defense of painting.” Clare Fargo, *Leonardo da Vinci’s Paragone: a critical interpretation with a new edition of the text in the Codex Urbinas*. E.J. Brill, 1992, 42.

panels carved in unusually low relief. Though Agostino's training remains a mystery,⁵³⁷ his early years in Florence, while the masters Donatello and Luca della Robbia were at work there, had a substantial impact on his sculptural style. The Neo-Attic features of Agostino's festive angels in the reliefs at Rimini attest to this influence (Figs. 59, 60).

Just as a closer look at Alberti's writings clarifies puzzling aspects of the interior decorative program, the claim made by some scholars that the Tempio's interior and exterior are incongruous can be rebutted. Stylistically, the classical references of the façade do contrast stylistically with the Gothic interior,⁵³⁸ but thematically the two facets of the building are closely related. This is particularly evident in terms of the themes of triumph, immortality, and the city of Rimini. Moreover, the allusion to this ancient triumphal type of monument places it within a long tradition of commemorative funerary monuments, which was of course one of the Tempio's functions.

The earliest honorary arches dated from the Roman Republican period and were simple arcuated passageways dedicated to the gods. By the first century BC, figural relief sculpture began to adorn public arches that celebrated leaders and their great deeds. Thus what had been "originally a votive monument bearing statues of divinities had become a monument for the personal aggrandizement of a living magistrate, set up in a civic context, devoid of any religious overtones whatsoever."⁵³⁹ Roman honorary arches, typically commissioned by individuals rather than the state, were characterized by "one bay framed by an applied order and bearing a dedicatory inscription, usually on the attic

⁵³⁷ Rufus Graves Mather, "Documents Mostly New Relating to Florentine Painters and Sculptors of the Fifteenth Century," *Art Bulletin* 30 (1948): 22–26.

⁵³⁸ As described in Chapter 1.

⁵³⁹ Kleiner, *The Arch of Nero in Rome*, 18.

or the frieze.”⁵⁴⁰ One of the most prominent examples of this early type was the Arch of Titus, erected around 81 AD (Fig. 61). This monument featured a single arch surmounted by an attic and a statue of the emperor on his quadriga, as Pliny explained “to elevate statues above ordinary men.”⁵⁴¹

The standard architectural scheme had evolved, however, by the early third century, when the Arch of Septimius Severus was erected in the Roman Forum in 203 AD (Fig. 62). It was deliberately situated near Augustus’ Parthian arch “in order to establish an obvious link between the victories of the later emperors and that of the founder of the Empire.”⁵⁴² This arch, whose panels relate the events of the emperor’s Parthian campaigns, 195–199 AD, is the earliest surviving instance of the change from a single to triple bay articulation. The Arch of Septimius Severus was well known to Alberti and was probably a source for his next building, Santa Maria Novella in Florence, whose façade he designed in 1458 for Giovanni Rucellai.⁵⁴³ A century after the Arch of Septimius Severus, Constantine followed its tripartite model of a large central arch flanked by two smaller ones in the arch commemorating his famous victory over Maxentius in 312 AD (Fig. 63).

Alberti was well aware of this tradition. In De re aedificatoria he explains the development of the triumphal arch and its evolution from the practice of displaying “spoils and victory standards captured from the enemy,” which led to the decoration of arches with inscriptions, statues and histories.”⁵⁴⁴ His account of the tripartite scheme – “An arch, not unlike a bridge, contains three lanes, a central one for soldiers and one on

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 65.

⁵⁴¹ The Elder Pliny, Natural History, XXX, trans. Alfred Ernout, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1963), 27.

⁵⁴² Kleiner, The Arch of Nero in Rome, 71.

⁵⁴³ P.W. Lehmann makes this connection in “Alberti and Antiquity: Additional Observations,” 388–400.

⁵⁴⁴ Alberti, On the Art of Building, Bk. VIII 6, 265.

either side for the mothers and families accompanying the victorious army as it returns to pay homage to the gods of the fatherland, while cheering and celebrating the heroes”⁵⁴⁵ – demonstrates its suitability for the new San Francesco. But here Alberti ran into a problem: because the existing nave plan of the church had only one entrance, it was not possible to make three openings on the façade. So Alberti retained the tripartite configuration but made the two lateral arches blind ones. This allowed Alberti to remain faithful to his explicit model, the Arch of Augustus, which, as a purely commemorative rather than processional arch, also only has a single opening.⁵⁴⁶ At the same time, by necessity of working with the existing fabric and its function, he was able to reveal the interior plan and function on the exterior.

Alberti’s scheme echoes another unusual feature of the Arch of Augustus, which is atypical in its being set within the city walls, rather than freestanding. Just as the city walls of Rimini enclose the Arch of Augustus, so, too, the blind arches of the Tempio façade effectively “hem in” the central open arch of the portal.⁵⁴⁷

Finally, in addition to the visual cues taken from the Arch of Augustus, Tavernor has identified “strong evidence to suggest that the numbers Alberti used to determine his design for the Tempio Malatestiano are multiples of the ancient measure used by the Romans in the design of the nearby Arch of Augustus.”⁵⁴⁸ This then was another of many ways Alberti helped Sigismondo accomplish his goal of connecting himself, his rule, and

⁵⁴⁵ The analogy of arch to bridge is a curious one in that similarities have been found also between the façade of the Tempio and the ancient bridge of Tiberius in Rimini. Ibid., Bk. VIII, 6, 265–66.

⁵⁴⁶ Erected to honor Augustus’s road repairs on this section of via Flaminia, the gate didn’t close so served no defensive purpose as others traditionally did. Kleiner, *The Arch of Nero in Rome*, 29–30.

⁵⁴⁷ Kleiner, *The Arch of Nero in Rome*, 30, notes that the fact that the Arch of Augustus is not freestanding makes it unusual.

⁵⁴⁸ Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building*, 75. This is shown in Alberti Group’s computer modeled reconstruction of the Tempio. Ibid., 69.

his monument to the city. Thus we have a salient example of Alberti's genius of applying his Roman expertise and classical style to a specific, modern circumstance.

Clearly, many of the features that motivated the ancient emperors – commemoration of the leader and his achievements, connection to past rulers, and dedication to gods – were understood by Sigismondo and Alberti and propelled them to connect the façade of San Francesco to the specific example of the Arch of Augustus and the larger model of the ancient Roman triumphal arch.

As we saw in the last chapter, one of Sigismondo's primary goals in his artistic patronage was to establish his legitimacy by connecting himself to and emulating other great rulers, both historical and modern. While the literary members of his court articulated this allusion verbally, Alberti did so visually. His use of antique architectural vocabulary and forms directly associated with the most conspicuous monuments of Rome's emperors made these references explicit. As Margaret Ann Zaho has observed, many Quattrocento rulers used triumphal imagery not generically, but instead interpreted and adapted it to suit their own iconographic needs, engaging in a monumental form of self-fashioning.⁵⁴⁹

Alberti's understanding of the imperial arch, as described in De re aedificatoria, could almost be a description of the façade of San Francesco. Beyond the description of the classical triumphal arch, he further requires that the orders applied to the arch should be the Composite type, and more specifically that "the columns...should be constructed so that the top of the shaft is level with the highest point of the opening...Below the

⁵⁴⁹ Margaret Ann Zaho, Imago Triumphalis: the Function and Significance of Triumphal Imagery for Italian Renaissance Rulers.

column should sit base, dado, and socle; above it the capital,”⁵⁵⁰ just as is the case at San Francesco.

Another layer of meaning inherent in Alberti’s use of the triumphal arch motif was connected to San Francesco’s function as the Malatesta and Sigismondo’s burial site. The Roman triumphal arch had previously been appropriated in prominent funerary monuments. Early fifteenth-century tombs such as the Coscia and Bruni monuments in Florence include architectural forms that are clearly reminiscent, if not direct imitations, of a classical triumphal arch (Fig. 64, 65). We do not, however, find the wholesale replication of a classical triumphal arch in a funerary context until the end of the century, in the Vendramin tomb in Venice (Fig. 66).⁵⁵¹ Alberti’s use of the triumphal arch motif on the façade of the Tempio serves both the military and funerary functions of San Francesco: it perpetuates the honoree’s memory in monumental form and makes the more traditional reference to the military victory that the building now commemorates.

The conception of San Francesco’s façade as a tripartite arch evokes the general theme of Roman triumphal arches; more specifically the addition of roundels in the spandrels recalls the Arch of Constantine and its theme of the triumph of Christianity over paganism, a direct rebuttal to Pius’s charge of the absence of Christianity in the renovated church (Figs. 67, 68).

The intentionality of this reference and to the imperial arch type is corroborated by the plan for a tomb on the façade for Sigismondo’s brother Galeotto Roberto, a

⁵⁵⁰ He does however recommend that “the columns applied to the center of the face of each pier should be standard and disengaged,” while those of San Francesco are engaged. Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, VIII, 6, 266.

⁵⁵¹ See Sheard, “Tullio Lombardo in Rome? Arch of Constantine, Vendramin Tomb...,” 161–79.

Franciscan friar who died at an early age.⁵⁵² Despite the long history of using San Francesco as a family mausoleum, Galeotto had been buried outside the church in front of the main portal. As a humble friar, Galeotto had thought himself unworthy of burial in a house of God and requested to be buried outside the walls of the church. Giovanni da Fano's illustration for Basinio da Parma's epic *Hesperis* clearly shows the sarcophagus lying on the ground, which by the time construction had begun on Alberti's façade had to be secured by a metal grille to protect it and Galeotto from relic-seekers and the renovations that proceeded around it (Fig. 69). That Alberti intended to move the tomb to a niche on the façade is revealed by a series of letters from Matteo de' Pasti to Sigismondo referring to discussions by the engineers on the worksite regarding the shape and location of the niche. Yet exactly where on the façade the tomb was to be placed is uncertain. Ettlinger has refuted earlier scholars' scheme of two tombs, Sigismondo's and Isotta's, on the lateral blind arches of the façade. Rather, she shows that the documents only mention one tomb, and Ettlinger argues convincingly that this must have been the tomb of Galeotto Roberto.⁵⁵³ In Alberti's plan, as Ettlinger outlines it from the extant documents, this tomb was intended for the arch above the main portal rather than one of the side arches. This feature further linked Alberti's façade to the ancient Roman practice of placing images of gods on triumphal arches: "Such a site corresponded to placing

⁵⁵² In the letter, dated December 17, 1454, he writes: "where the tomb was to go was square, according to the model of messer Battista, in wood, and this design is round, that is to say in the manner of a niche..." Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building*, 63; Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano," 137, 151, doc. 3. In a letter to Sigismondo dated December 22, 1454, Matteo Nuti also discussed the shape of the niches and how the tombs would fit into them. In the case of either a round semicircular or rectangular niche, the tombs would project out beyond and thus be partly uncovered. Ibid., 153–54, Doc. 7.

⁵⁵³ Ettlinger also makes clear that the traditional assumption that two tombs were intended for the façade and then abandoned is unfounded. Nowhere is more than one tomb ever mentioned and there is no evidence to support a sudden change in plans. Helen Ettlinger, "The Sepulchre on the Façade," 137. Tavernor still subscribes to the two-tomb rendering as shown by his reconstruction. Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building*, 65, Fig. 45.

representations of the city gods on Roman triumphal arches. Elevating Galeotto Roberto's body to the niche over the door would have put him in the traditional classical location for the protector of the city."⁵⁵⁴ As a revered holy figure in the city and a member of Sigismondo's family, Galeotto Roberto served in death to consolidate the connections among antiquity, the modern city of Rimini, and Sigismondo's virtue and piety.

These conjunctions not only continued the idea of integrating sarcophagi with the structure that we see on the sides of the Tempio, but true to Albertian form, maintained a medieval tradition of embedding tombs in the walls of churches and under arches. Alberti would have known this practice which is common throughout Italy, such as in Florence at Santa Maria Novella; in Venice, where dogal tombs were placed on church facades;⁵⁵⁵ and in Ferrara where a fourteenth-century monk, Alberto d'Este, had been commemorated with a life-sized effigy on the façade of the cathedral (Fig. 70).⁵⁵⁶ In this way, Alberti also emphatically maintained the traditional function of this church as the Malatesta family mausoleum. Finally, the placement of Galeotto Roberto's tomb at the top of the Tempio's triumphal arch would have echoed the placement of the statue of Augustus which once stood on the attic, placing the revered Malatesta in the position of city protector, now, given his reputation, with the added layer of Christian divine protection.⁵⁵⁷ There was clearly a tradition of these associations, but who besides Alberti would have been so aware of them, and moreover able to insert these multivalent

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 141.

⁵⁵⁵ Also as at Venice, Sigismondo here promotes the relationship, developed in the thirteenth century, between the Mendicant order and the local rulers, Debra Pincus, *The Tombs of the Doges of Venice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17–18.

⁵⁵⁶ Rosenberg, *The Este Monuments and Urban Development in Renaissance Ferrara*, 25–45.

⁵⁵⁷ The form and composition of this statue is unknown if he was alone, in a group, on horseback or standing simple comp and details. Kleiner, *The Arch of Nero in Rome*, 30. Nevertheless, the association of Galeotto Roberto in the place of city protector is clear.

associations into the monument that was conceived from the start as a monument to the immortality of the patron and his connection to the city?

Alberti and Sigismondo's intent to recall the imperial triumphal arch is further evidenced by the monumental inscription on the façade of San Francesco,⁵⁵⁸ which consciously evokes antique building inscriptions for the first time in the Quattrocento. Alberti was a leading expert on classical inscriptions and lettering, and as Tavernor notes, he "had contributed to the revival of placing dedications on sacred and private buildings."⁵⁵⁹ His inscriptions on the Tempio, Santa Maria Novella, and in the Rucellai Chapel, were not yet exact replicas of their classical models,⁵⁶⁰ but Alberti's investigation of ancient epigraphy and particularly his use of inscriptions in the Roman style on his buildings is significant. As Anthony Grafton remarked:

"Alberti's capital letters imitated ancient ones directly, by virtue of their placement on works of architecture. These enormous inscriptions ... placed prominently on entablatures, were the first ones of the Renaissance that visually challenged comparison with such prominent ancient inscriptions as the one commemorating Agrippa on the Pantheon."⁵⁶¹

This connection is particularly apposite because Alberti, in a 1454 letter to Matteo de'Pasti, cites the Pantheon as his premier architectural model. Furthermore, San Francesco in Rimini marks the first instance in Alberti's career of his adoption of Roman-style inscriptions appropriately placed in the frieze of entablatures as they were in

⁵⁵⁸ See p. 8 above.

⁵⁵⁹ Tavernor further notes that Alberti recommends the application of dedicatory inscriptions on buildings in *De re aedificatoria*. Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building*, 58; Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, Book VIII, 4, 256.

⁵⁶⁰ Giovanni Mardersteig, "Leon Battista Alberti e la rinascita del carattere lapidario romano nel Quattrocento," *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, II (1959): 285–307.

⁵⁶¹ Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti. Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance*, 237. Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, Bk. VII, 15, 237.

antiquity. Previous scholars have cited his later commissions, such as the façade of Santa Maria Novella, as the site of this innovation.⁵⁶²

Further, in the Greek inscription on the side of the Tempio, the glorification of Sigismondo as a great warrior, the commemoration of a specific military victory, and the clear dedication of the building to God, all clearly emulate the imperial triumphal arch. Here again, Alberti adapts his ancient model to the specific needs of this project – making it distinctly Riminese. Moreover, the use of Greek in the inscription highlights a unique feature of Sigismondo’s court as one of the few courts that continued the early fifteenth-century Florentine pursuit of Greek studies.⁵⁶³ Rimini’s location on the Adriatic surely oriented it east, but Sigismondo also had a personal affinity for the Greek intellectual world. In addition to Guarino who shared his experience in Constantinople with Chrysoloras,⁵⁶⁴ Sigismondo invited a number of scholars from Greece and harbored them in Rimini when they escaped the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

A notable divergence, however, between the façade of San Francesco and the triumphal arch model appears in the relative absence of narrative relief sculpture on Alberti’s façade. While imperial triumphal arches served as a virtual history lesson teeming with images of the ruler and his deeds, the façade of San Francesco bears only Sigismondo’s intertwined “S” and “I” monogram with elephants and floral motifs. One need only walk inside the church, however, to find that this critical component has not been neglected. As discussed above, the interior sculptural program fulfills Alberti’s

⁵⁶² “...the form of the attic is surely dependent on the attic of the arch (of Septimius Severus)...wide, undivided attic that tops the entire monument, and the inscription that tops the entire monument, not being confined to the area above the main opening, as it is on another triple arch, the Arch of Constantine...” Lehmann, “Alberti and Antiquity: Additional Observations,” 391.

⁵⁶³ Lavin, “Piero Della Francesca’s Fresco of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta Before St. Sigismund,” 345. Basinio was likely responsible the author of the inscription, and the influence of Ciriaco is also likely.

⁵⁶⁴ Baxandall, “Guarino, Pisanello, and Mauel Chrysoloras.”

artistic theories and Sigismondo's agenda in terms of its medium, style, and iconography. But in another original way, Alberti manages to adapt the ancient model to his modern project. The choice to include profuse sculptural decoration in an architectural context dedicated to God, while simultaneously commemorating the ruler and his military victory, serves to link this modern temple to the ancient triumphal arch.

To sum up, San Francesco embodies many of the same themes as the Roman triumphal arch, which helps to elucidate some of its most important features: the novelty of its façade design and the unusual proliferation of sculpture on the interior, both of which are inspired by a source well-known to Alberti. Applying the model of the triumphal arch to the building as a whole fuses established references to the city, Sigismondo's domain, the Malatesta dynasty, and the glory to God. Thus decorative components that had been considered disparate and a program that seemed anomalous within the context of mid-fifteenth century ecclesiastical building design and decoration are elucidated. Once again Alberti was at the forefront of the major cultural trends of his time.

Piero and Alberti

The final element of the Tempio's program to be considered, Piero della Francesca's 1451 fresco of Sigismondo Malatesta Before St. Sigismund, initially appears to be yet another incompatible piece of the puzzle that is the Tempio Malatestiano (Fig. 2). We shall see, however, that although it is artistically quite distinct from the rest of the decoration of the Tempio Malatestiano – indeed from much of contemporary art of the

period – it, too, is a carefully conceived component of the ideological agenda of the building as a whole.

Piero was born around 1413 to a merchant family in the Tuscan village of Borgo Sansepolcro on the Umbrian border, which had prospered under Malatesta rule.⁵⁶⁵ There is little documentation about Piero's early life or training, and the Rimini fresco is one of only two works in Piero's oeuvre that is dated.⁵⁶⁶ As the son of a successful merchant, Piero likely attended an abacus school that would prepare him to follow his father into business. There he would have learned the tools of mathematics and calculations, weights and measures, proportion.

Piero's first recorded artistic activity relates to an altarpiece in Sansepolcro in 1432, which indicates that he came to the profession relatively late in life. After possible visits to Urbino and Perugia, Piero is known to have gone to Florence in 1439, where he executed a now-destroyed fresco cycle in the hospital of Sant' Egidio with Domenico Veneziano.⁵⁶⁷ There he was immersed in the intellectual culture spawned by the activities of humanists like Leonardo Bruni and Lorenzo Valla in the court of Eugenius IV and the Council of Florence, and saw the work of Brunelleschi, Masaccio, and Donatello for the

⁵⁶⁵ In 1367, the Pope had given control of the town to Galeotto Malatesta. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *Piero della Francesca* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 14.

⁵⁶⁶ Lavin, *Piero della Francesca*, 8, 16–17. Lavin's volume includes a fairly up to date bibliography that includes the many studies produced on the occasion of the five hundredth anniversary of the painter's death. Modern publications of the few records related to Piero are Eugenio Battisti, *Piero della Francesca* (Milan: Electa, 1992) and James Banker's numerous studies. James R. Banker, "Piero della Francesca's S. Agostino Altarpiece: Some New Documents," *The Burlington Magazine* Vol. 129, No. 1015 (October, 1987), 645–651. Banker, "The Program for the Sassetta Altarpiece in the Church of S. Francesco in Borgo S. Sepolcro," *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* Vol. 4, (1991), 11–58; Banker, "A Manuscript of the Works of Archimedes in the Hand of Piero della Francesca," *The Burlington Magazine* Vol. 147, No. 1224, Drawings, Prints, Manuscripts, Letters (Mar., 2005), 165–69; Banker, *The Culture of San Sepolcro during the Youth of Piero della Francesca* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

⁵⁶⁷ Lavin, *Piero della Francesca*, 19.

first time.⁵⁶⁸ We can further imagine that among many other artists and scientists, he encountered Alberti. Piero's exposure to the "new theory of depicting pictorial space...sweeping through the Italian artistic community" in the 1430s,⁵⁶⁹ as practiced by these artists and codified by Alberti, likely sparked his own study of mathematics. This culminated in Piero's writing three mathematical treatises of his own, including one on perspective, De prospectiva pingendi (c. 1474), and developing a rigorous use of linear perspective in the depiction of space, for which he is now revered.⁵⁷⁰

By 1445, Piero had returned to Sansepolcro where he received the commission for the Misericordia Altarpiece, executed in two distinct phases: 1445–48 and 1450–c.1462.⁵⁷¹ The chronology is explained by the fact that during this time, Piero's career took on a peripatetic quality as he moved through the Italian peninsula serving various rulers, including Sigismondo's mortal enemy, Federico da Montefeltro in Urbino. According to Vasari, Piero spent the two years between the two phases of Misericordia Altarpiece travelling and working in the Marche and Emilia-Romagna, executing destroyed frescoes in Ancona and Pesaro. From there Piero was invited to the Ferrarese

⁵⁶⁸ Lavin notes that "While a young man in Piero's position could not have gained entry to humanist circles, the intellectual excitement they generated would have fuelled an interest in classical learning." Lavin, Piero della Francesca, 23. We find the impact of the presence of the many Greeks in Florence later in Piero's work in the many figured clothed in Byzantine costume, for instance the Exaltation of the Cross from the Legend of the True Cross cycle in Arezzo.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 26. On the development of linear perspective in Florence see Samuel Y. Edgerton, The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) and James Elkins, "Piero della Francesca and the Renaissance Proof of Linear Perspective," The Art Bulletin, Vol. 69, No. 2 (June, 1987), 220–23.

⁵⁷⁰ Indeed, Vasari mentions this aspect of his career before his paintings. This is perhaps best demonstrated in his Flagellation of Christ of 1458–60, now in Urbino. Massimo Mussini, De prospectiva pingendi, saggio critico (Sansepolcro: Aboca, 2008). The treatise on perspective was written between his treatises on algebra, Trattato d'abaco, (early 1450s) and on geometry, Libellus de quinque corporibus regularibus (c. 1482–92). On these, see Margaret Daly Davis, Piero della Francesca's Mathematical Treatises: The "Trattato d'abaco" and "Libellus de quinque corporibus regularibus." (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 1977).

⁵⁷¹ Lavin, Piero della Francesca, 37.

court of Borso d'Este, where he painted (again destroyed) battle scenes in the ducal private apartments.⁵⁷²

The 1449 letter that Sigismondo wrote to Giovanni de' Medici seeking a painter for the Tempio indicates that he initially intended for much more of the decoration to be in that medium.⁵⁷³ It is generally accepted that the letter referred to Gentile da Fabriano or Filippino Lippi, but the exchange resulted in the arrival of Piero in Rimini. Marilyn Lavin also suggests the influence of Jacopo degli Anastagi from Sansepolcro, a member of Sigismondo's court and a relation of Piero's brother.⁵⁷⁴ These connections notwithstanding, Leonello d'Este may have also played a role, given his and Sigismondo's relationship, as well as Piero's tendency to secure commissions through social contacts.⁵⁷⁵

Originally housed on the entrance wall of the sacristy, the Chapel of the Relics,⁵⁷⁶ the fresco depicts Sigismondo in profile kneeling in front of an older, majestic bearded man who is enthroned and holds a scepter and an orb. The classicizing architectural setting is sparse: Sigismondo and his patron saint are set within a frame painted with stucco reliefs and the Malatesta coat of arms at each of the top two corners (Fig. 71). Behind them stands what appears to be a plain wall (though the paint is badly damaged)

⁵⁷² Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, I, 398. Lavin dates this commission to 1449 and thinks that these may have been intended to emulate or rival those of Pisanello for the Gonzage in Mantua. Lavin, *Piero della Francesca*, 337, 349. It is uncertain, however, who Piero's patron was. Vasari claims it was Borso, but according to Rosenberg, Salmi and Battisti, "assumed" that Piero was in the employ of Leonello. Rosenberg, *The Este Monuments and Urban Development in Renaissance Ferrara* 53 and note, 26. Lavin leaves it open to interpretation whether it was Borso or Leonello.

⁵⁷³ Writing on April 7, Sigismondo refers to "these chapels," and that he wants the artist to paint many "other things" as well. Borsi, *Leon Battista Alberti*, 92.

⁵⁷⁴ Lavin, *Piero della Francesca*, 54–55.

⁵⁷⁵ "Once again it seems Piero received a commission as a result of social contacts. He would therefore not have been treated as a mere hired artisan at the court, as was usual for a painter, but surely could have conversed directly with the patron, discussing the objectives of the project..." Ibid., 55. As we have seen, this type of relationship was typical of Sigismondo, ever the active and involved patron.

⁵⁷⁶ The fresco was recently relocated to a more visible position on the altar wall of the last chapel on the right, between the Chapel of St. Jerome and the apse.

articulated by fluted pilasters from which hang green garlands decorated with fruit and flowers. Suspended from a lintel, directly above the figure of Sigismondo in armor, is a larger Malatesta coat of arms. Except for the painted image of the Castelsismondo⁵⁷⁷ in an oculus in the lower right hand portion of the composition, there is no landscape or architecture to carry the viewer's eye throughout the composition. Nothing aside from the black and white greyhounds seated behind Sigismondo and facing in opposite directions distracts us from the donor and his patron saint. In fact, Piero's use of mathematical linear perspective in the marble slab floor leads the viewer's eye directly to them.

What message is this image meant to convey? There are references to the ancient world in the greyhounds as symbols of fidelity and in the classical architecture and garlands. Yet this is also very pious image: Sigismondo assumes a devout position, with hands in prayer, showing great respect for his patron saint.

Within this image of humble piety, however, the more dominant themes concern Sigismondo as a secular ruler and the glorification of his state. As Marilyn Lavin described it, the fresco serves a dual dedication to God and to the State of Rimini.⁵⁷⁸ This is most notable in the depiction of the newly built Castelsismondo in the oculus, which forges a somewhat incongruous connection between Sigismondo's rule and the sanctity of the church (Fig. 72). The coupling of this image with Sigismondo's portrait is neither incidental nor typical, for rarely had such a clearly secular image been included in a votive painting. In Joanna Woods-Marsden's reading, Sigismondo envisioned his castle as a virtual extension of his personality, as revealed by the fact that he named it not after

⁵⁷⁷ So noted with its name and date.

⁵⁷⁸ Lavin, "Piero Della Francesca's a Fresco of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta Before St. Sigismund," 345.

a patron saint or some landmark in the city, but for himself, Castelsismondo.⁵⁷⁹ We have seen how Sigismondo further concretized this association by placing medals bearing his image throughout the foundations of his castle and other buildings.

Marilyn Lavin noted that the saint in Piero's fresco bears a striking similarity to the Emperor Sigismund who had bestowed upon Sigismondo his knightly title eighteen years earlier, as depicted in Pisanello's painted portrait of him of around 1433, now in Vienna (Fig. 73). St. Sigismund was also highly venerated in the nearby regions of Emilia and Romagna, where two cities, Imola and Forlì, claimed his relics.⁵⁸⁰ Thus the image can be read in two ways: Sigismondo reveres St. Sigismund while he simultaneously implores the Emperor Sigismund to bestow the knightly title he so passionately desired.

The Malatesta coat of arms hanging above Sigismondo reminds us that this is the Malatesta family's church and burial place, and more importantly, that Sigismondo will perpetuate the family name. The two greyhounds in the lower right corner are also an ancient symbol – derived from Pliny's Natural History – of vigilance, wisdom, and fidelity that in the Middle Ages also assumed references to virtuous rulership (Fig. 74).⁵⁸¹ Though this theme had long ceased to possess any subtlety in Sigismondo's commissions,⁵⁸² Woods-Marsden reminds us that it was nevertheless a common goal of portraiture: "the painted alter ego...had to be sufficiently lifelike to be instantly recognizable on the palace wall but also imbued with 'grace' sufficient to enhance the

⁵⁷⁹ Joanna Woods-Marsden, "Images of Castles in the Renaissance: Symbols of 'Signoria'/Symbols of Tyranny," 131–32.

⁵⁸⁰ R.W. Lightbown, Piero della Francesca, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1992), 91.

⁵⁸¹ Lavin also connects the presence of the dogs to part of Sigismondo's name, Pandolfo. Lavin, "Piero della Francesca's Fresco of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta before St. Sigismund: Theoi Athanatoi Kai Tei Polei," 363–4.

⁵⁸² See Chapter 3 above.

prince's reputation, and display pictorially those 'glorious and divine virtues that allow (one) such height of dominion' ..⁵⁸³

Comparison to other rulers' devotional portraits makes clear the unconventional nature of Piero's fresco. Jacopo Bellini's portrait of a single donor figure with saint in his Leonello d'Este with the Madonna and Child of 1450, notwithstanding, in most cases donors are depicted with their patron saints, and other figures, typically the Virgin and Child, so that the donor is one among many figures, rather than the central figure. Examples include Masaccio's Trinity and Piero's Brera Altarpiece, commissioned by Sigismondo's archrival Federico da Montefeltro (Fig. 75, 76).

Moreover, in this image no figure engages the viewer, drawing him into the scene, as John the Baptist does in Domenico Veneziano's St. Lucy Altarpiece of 1445–47, a noted model for Piero, as he assisted with this Florentine commission (Fig. 77). Sigismondo is presented alone in the honored presence of the St. Sigismund, indicating that this is Sigismondo's domain and that he alone is graced with the Saint's blessing. While there is no eye contact between the two figures, as is typical in a sacra conversazione, Sigismondo as donor appears to have a closer than usual relationship with the sacred figure.⁵⁸⁴ By virtue of both his being the only other figure in the composition and his proximity to and placement within the same space as the Saint we get the sense that he is not a witness to, but a participant in the scene. This decidedly contrasts to the typical role of the patron in such a composition, such as Piero's Brera Altarpiece of c.

⁵⁸³ Joanna Woods-Marsden, "'Ritratto al Naturale': Questions of realism and Idealism in Early Renaissance Portraits," *Art Journal* 46 (1987): 213.

⁵⁸⁴ On the sacra conversazione genre, see Rona Goffen, "'Nostra conversatio in Caelis est': observations on the Sacra conversazione' in the trecento," *Art Bulletin* 61 (1979): 198–222.

1472–74, in which Federico da Montefeltro, technically occupies the same space but remains physically and emotionally disconnected from the sacred figures assembled.

While other patrons' donor portraits seem predominantly pious, the absence of any other religious figures and of proper distance between the sacred and profane figures diminishes the similarity to a devotional painting and reinforces the secular impression conveyed by the presence of the Castello and coat of arms. This is a votive portrait, but it seems much less so than other fifteenth-century donor portraits of rulers in religious paintings.

But to what degree can these anomalies be attributed to Piero, Sigismondo, or even to Alberti? In certain respects this portrait exhibits traits that are typical of Piero. In his only other donor portraits, the Brera altarpiece and Girolamo Amadi Kneeling Before St. Jerome of around 1450, now in the Accademia, Venice (Fig. 78), Piero brings the donor into the space occupied by the sacred figure(s), while maintaining an emotional distance through lack of expression and of eye contact. In fact, Lavin has suggested that this panel was a preliminary study for the Tempio fresco in which “equality of scale, an atmosphere of devotion and a sense of place – all important here – would be brought together in a life-size format.”⁵⁸⁵

These qualities serve to heighten the effect Sigismondo sought, for he maintains a pious image while actively pursuing his title from the Saint/Emperor. The use of a distinctly classical architectural setting, as in Piero's Flagellation and The Legend of the True Cross fresco cycle in Arezzo (Figs. 79, 80), furthers Sigismondo's agenda of linking himself to Rimini's antique heritage and to the fabric of the city. Later, in the Montefeltro Diptych, Piero would use distant landscapes as reference to a ruler's domain (Fig. 81).

⁵⁸⁵ Lavin, Piero della Francesca, 54.

Sigismondo's land holdings were not in dispute, but his stature as an enlightened ruler was. He therefore needed to promote his virtuous acts through representing the structures he had commissioned in the territories he controlled. For as Alberti rhetorically asks in *De re aedificatoria*, "Has there been one among the greatest and wisest of princes who did not consider building one of the principal means of preserving his name for posterity?"

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Marilyn Lavin has also noted that this fresco lacks many features characteristic of conventional donor portraits and representations of historical events. For instance, the format is horizontal, rather than vertical; the scale of figures is constant, rather than varying according to their hierarchical rank; and the background is an identifiable space, rather than flat or abstract. For these reasons, Lavin claims that "Piero made radical modifications in the formula,"⁵⁸⁷ and that by "exploiting the forms of both the donor portrait and the ceremonial scene but doing violence to neither, Piero fused them in a way that goes far beyond the earlier scope of either tradition, thereby elevating Sigismondo to a lofty position in the world of art that has outlasted any title he might have borne in life."⁵⁸⁸

I propose, however, that these modifications should be attributed to Sigismondo, rather than to Piero, who lacked such control when working for a domineering patron. Just as he did with the medals commissioned from Pisanello in the 1440s, which for the first time feature heraldic and military imagery,⁵⁸⁹ Sigismondo altered the traditional

⁵⁸⁶ Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, 5.

⁵⁸⁷ Lavin, "Piero Della Francesca's Fresco of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta Before St. Sigismund...", 350.

⁵⁸⁸ Lavin, *Piero della Francesca*, 76.

⁵⁸⁹ Woods-Marsden, "How Quattrocento Princes Used Art: Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta of Rimini and Cose Militari," 388.

format. Lavin rightly states that Piero's "painting defies categorization" and furthermore that this characteristic is "an essential part of its meaning."⁵⁹⁰ I take this meaning to be what Sigismondo required: a fusion of political and religious meaning, to join his political aspirations with his Christian piety. In order to understand this fresco we must see it above all as the product of Sigismondo's agenda.

Furthermore, the horizontal composition, while anomalous to the donor and saint tradition, was characteristic of imperial ceremonial scenes, for instance, two panels from Filarete's bronze doors of St. Peter's: The Meeting of Pope Eugenius IV and Sigismund of Hungary, and Pope Eugenius IV Crowning Sigismund of Hungary Holy Roman Emperor of 1433–45 (Figs. 82, 83). In establishing this further connection with the emperor and the bestowing of his title, Sigismondo is attempting to prove himself as worthy of a similar honor. In fact, the use of the horizontal format traditionally reserved for such historical (narrative) scenes can be read as a prediction of this anticipated historical event, rather than a purely devotional image. This simultaneous representation of Sigismondo's devotion to his patron saint and of his knighting is an effective union of his secular rule, political aspirations and Christian piety, compatible with what Marilyn Lavin has aptly described as "his dual preoccupation with devotion and dominion."⁵⁹¹

This notion is indeed reinforced by another remarkable feature of Piero's fresco: the composition of the painted architecture appears to be integrated with the built architecture of the new Chapel of St. Sigismund next door. Lavin observed that this allowed one in the space of the sacristy to also participate in the mass being performed in the chapel, which also extended to the painted effigies as well and therefore must have

⁵⁹⁰ Lavin, "Piero Della Francesca's Fresco of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta Before St. Sigismund," 348.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 345.

been “meant to be part of the same ecclesiastical environment.”⁵⁹² For Sigismondo, this meant that while perpetually participating in a defining event of his secular rule, he would also exercise his devotion; his painted presence is a constant act of piety. Thus, in the fresco, “all elements in the composition thus proclaim some aspect of Sigismondo’s persona: his political ambition, his territorial power and above all his religious devotion.”⁵⁹³

Referring to the remarkable integration of space in the painted space of the fresco and the actual space of the Chapel of St. Sigismund, Lavin asserts, “Whether the author of the design was Matteo de’Pasti or Piero himself, this deliberate consonance is beyond doubt.”⁵⁹⁴ I propose that we should add Alberti’s name to the list of possible authors or consultants.

Piero’s fresco at first appears incongruous with the rest of the decoration of the Tempio, in that it is the only painted element among the profuse sculpted decoration.⁵⁹⁵ Once we place it into the context of Alberti’s theory, as projected in his treatise on painting, *De pictura*, however, the image emerges as another integrated element of the comprehensive program. Here again we must to a certain degree read between the lines for as in much of Alberti’s thought, dichotomy runs throughout *De pictura*. If sculpture’s highest function is glorification, painting, as *historia*, can be said to serve a much more private function. This indeed was the intent of the image.

⁵⁹² Lavin, *Piero della Francesca*, 69.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 68–9.

⁵⁹⁵ These many anomalous features of the fresco may account for Pasini’s claim that “La breve presenza di Piero...sembra non aver avuto grandi conseguenze per la sorti della cultura artistica malatestiana; la sua opera...venne presto dimenticata.” Pier Giorgio Pasini, “Piero della Francesca e Leon Battista Alberti,” *Il Tempio Malatestiano. Splendore cortese e classicismo umanistico*, 36.

As discussed above, in *De re aedificatoria*, Alberti placed relief sculpture above painting as most appropriate for temple decoration.⁵⁹⁶ Yet, in *De pictura*, Alberti enters into the *paragone* debate by elevating painting above sculpture: “Painting and sculpture are cognate arts, nurtured by the same genius. But I shall always prefer the genius of the painter, as it attempts by far the most difficult task.”⁵⁹⁷ How do we reconcile this contradiction?

After dealing with some of the technical aspects of seeing and of creating a painted image in Book I of *De pictura*, Alberti moves on in Book II to the more abstract qualities and virtues of a worthy painting. In contrast to the requirement that sculpture have an element of philosophy, Alberti proclaims, “the great work of the painter is not a colossus but a ‘historia,’ for there is more merit in a ‘historia’ than in a colossus.”⁵⁹⁸ Alberti nowhere defines his term *historia* in the treatise, but historians have translated it roughly as a narrative image. More specifically, in addition to a minimum of seven different movements of the figures a *historia* must also have a moral content, achieved through proper “circumscription,” “composition” of “bodies” and “members,” and “surfaces,”⁵⁹⁹ that “hold(s) the eye of the learned and unlearned spectator for a long while with a certain sense of pleasure and emotion.”⁶⁰⁰ Throughout his discussions of the *historia*, Alberti leads us to interpret the term as “narrative,” an image recounting an event, one of action. But does Piero’s fresco satisfy this definition? A narrative it is not.

⁵⁹⁶ This recommendation explains what seems to be the curious placement of the fresco, in the Chapel of Relics. Though this chapel was originally the Chapel of St. Sigismund, it seems unusual that such an important image by such a prominent artist would be hidden away. If, however, Alberti, as artistic advisor felt that because of its medium it was somewhat incompatible with the rest of the church’s décor, he may have recommended that it be kept from public view so as to not interfere with the consistency or cohesiveness of the rest of the program.

⁵⁹⁷ Alberti, *On Painting*, Book II, 27 and 60–62.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

There is no action here, no movement. It is a strictly devotional image of a donor venerating his patron saint. Yet, read in terms of Alberti's specific recommendations for the worthy painted historia, it does nevertheless qualify. For despite the lack of narrative, many other components of the historia are included, notably "variety" and "dignity."

In much the same way Alberti ambivalently promotes first sculpture, and then painting, he also encourages two different types of painting: that with variety and that without. He first counsels the painter to create a scene with a great variety: "the first thing that gives pleasure in a historia is a plentiful variety,"⁶⁰¹ variety of figures, movements, clothing, and setting. Piero's painting depicts various types of figures – a youth, an older man, and dogs – and each is set in a different pose: seated, kneeling, and in the case of the dogs, recumbent and facing in opposite directions. Contrary to the seven different movements Alberti also advises, however,⁶⁰² all of the figures appear to be virtually frozen in time. But this satisfies another of Alberti's prescriptions, for he also expresses admiration for a more abstract quality of the composition:

"I would have this abundance not only furnished with variety, but restrained and full of dignity and modesty. ... Perhaps the artist who seeks dignity above all in his historia ought to represent very few figures; for as paucity of words imparts majesty to a prince, provided his thoughts and orders are understood, so the presence of only the strictly necessary numbers of bodies confers dignity on a picture."⁶⁰³

The union of variety and consequent dignity that Alberti requires is perfectly represented here and imparts to the image a certain solemnity and spirituality.

This goal also accounts for another typical element missing from the composition. Alberti advises the painter: "I like there to be someone in the historia who tells the

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 37.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 43.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 40.

spectators what is going on, and...beckons them.”⁶⁰⁴ Indeed this was, as noted earlier, a standard feature of the multi-figure devotional image. Without this figure, however, the image immediately becomes indeed more spiritual but also less accessible because of our inability as viewers to participate in the event. The omission of this common intermediary figure makes the scene one that takes place in a world beyond our own, a theme, as we have seen, that pervades Alberti’s theories and the decoration of the Tempio.

I contend that this compositional omission is intentional and is another device Piero used to achieve the ulterior function of the painting. The scene is meant to involve not the viewer, but the painted image of Sigismondo; it is solely for his benefit. Nor is it intended to function in the space in which we see it. As Lavin compellingly suggests, it exists in and as part of the space of the adjacent chapel. I would add that this also accounts for the painting’s unusual placement, its essentially hidden location in the sacristy, which is not immediately visible when one enters the space.⁶⁰⁵ It surely was not conceived in terms of the viewer’s experience. But here the painting is better able, through Piero’s precise use of linear perspective, to achieve the effective integration of the sacristy and chapel spaces and their respective activities. This may also explain the fresco’s unusual location, for upon entering, one must turn around and look up to see it. Could this be the reason that Piero, with his established understanding of mathematics and perspective, was chosen for this aspect of the commission? This scenario is quite possible and likely attributable to the role of Alberti in the choice of artist, composition, and style, as well as the architecture of the Tempio Malatestiano.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁰⁵ Recall that upon entering the space, one must turn around a full 180 degrees and look up above the door to see the fresco.

Alberti, if not the sole creator of the program as Warburg claimed,⁶⁰⁶ certainly exercised some degree of creative input on the project as a whole, contrary to his snubbing by Hope.⁶⁰⁷ Sigismondo's agenda was certainly paramount, and the surviving documents attest to his ongoing involvement in the development of the project. The large corps of artists and workers also had an imprint on what we see in Rimini today. Yet viewing the decorative program of the Tempio in light of Alberti's own artistic theory as expounded in his writings makes clear his role as an adviser of the highest level. This study has shown that Alberti not only helped his patron to achieve his goals at the Tempio, he made that accomplishment possible. Without him, Sigismondo's architectural vision would have never come to fruition.

⁶⁰⁶ "Alberti was the architect of the whole church, whose construction he supervised in every detail; there is nothing to bar the assumption that he was the inspirer of these figures, with their agitated motion, which is entirely in keeping with his ideas." Warburg, "Italian Art and International Astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara," 97.

⁶⁰⁷ "...his influence on the architecture of the interior seems at best to have been very slight indeed." Hope, "The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano," 89.

Conclusion

The Tempio Malatestiano endures as a unique, unconventional product of fifteenth-century art that does not fit neatly into the arc of what we have come to know as the Italian Renaissance. Yet given the personalities that created it, this is not surprising. Both Alberti and Sigismondo are two of the more curious personalities of their age. As such they have fascinated students of the Renaissance for centuries, but much about them remains inconclusive.

Sigismondo's choice of Alberti for his flagship artistic commission was a peculiar one. It is clear that his primary patronage goal – the need to put himself on par with his peers in terms of his humanist court – was a key factor. Alberti was untrained and untested as an architect. Yet with his well-established humanist pedigree, Alberti was, as Gundersheimer said of Erasmus, “what might be called the cultural ‘superstar’. . . . an identification with him produced greater benefits for his patrons than he could derive from prolonged attachment to them.”⁶⁰⁸ He must have seen in Alberti not an untrained architect but an established and respected scholar who imparted a degree of cachet to the Malatesta court and by extension to Sigismondo himself. This, rather than his way with bricks and mortar, was above all what made Alberti so valuable to Sigismondo.

Sigismondo was an informed and involved patron. His desire to exert some degree of control or at least have substantial input on the project, as he did at the Castelsismondo, also must have made Alberti, who arrived without reputation or ego but eager for the chance to design, amenable to his project. In this way, Sigismondo was one of the more astute patrons of his age and may have also seen a practical opportunity in

⁶⁰⁸ Gundersheimer, “Patronage in the Renaissance,” in *Patronage in the Renaissance*, ed. Guy Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 3–23, 5–6.

much the same way that Bartolommeo Scala did when was seeking a designer for his new Florentine palace a few decades later: “Giuliano da Sangallo was one of the first Renaissance architects to spend his formative years studying the ancient monuments of Rome and associating with its humanist community. Yet Giuliano was basically untried when he returned from Rome, allowing Bartolommeo to get the most up-to-date style probably at a bargain price.”⁶⁰⁹ In this regard Alberti was just as appealing.

Sigismondo needed more than an illustrious court, and more than a building. He needed a permanent statement to establish his connection to his family and his city. Here again, with his years of study and writing, Alberti excelled. Alberti was not only well-suited to the job, he was the only one suited to the many aspects of the job.

And he welcomed the opportunity to design buildings. He was eager to put his long-developed theories into action. If he couldn’t do that in Rome, he would gladly do it in Rimini. Sigismondo helped him achieve this goal.

Despite Jarzombek’s analogies between Sigismondo and the “Dead Humanist” in Momus, Alberti’s allegorical fable of the 1440s about the prince who affects the virtues of learning and wisdom throughout his life only to be ridiculed in death for his failure to truly fulfill these ideals, Alberti accepted the commission. He may have had personal or philosophical issues with Sigismondo, but Alberti accepted his patronage.⁶¹⁰ For again like Erasmus, he “lived on patronage, but he always appreciated its dangers.”⁶¹¹

Furthermore, Alberti was also shrewd and astute. In the position in Rimini he found not only a creative opportunity but a practical professional one as well that accorded

⁶⁰⁹ Linda Pelletchia, “The Patron’s Role in the Production of Architecture: Bartolomeo Scala and the Scala Palace, *Renaissance Quarterly* Vol. 42, No. 2 (1989): 258–291, 260.

⁶¹⁰ Christof Thoenes interprets Alberti’s architect as one who notably “is assumed to choose his patrons or clients himself.” Kanerva, *Defining the Architect in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 23.

⁶¹¹ Gundersheimer, “Patronage in the Renaissance,” 5.

perfectly with his (re)new(ed) conception of the architect. For in addition to reviving the standard of the humanistic, educated architect, Alberti also, as John Oppel has observed:

“looked to a past when, especially in the Italian cities, master builders had enjoyed special privileges and a high degree of social visibility....they had been a sort of aristocracy among the practitioners of the manual arts. ...If as I have suggested, Alberti aims for a complete fusion of the social and intellectual elites – at least in his own person – then the architectural profession has for him an extraordinary attraction.”⁶¹²

Beyond their specific, complex motives and the mutual professional benefits each derived from their association, Alberti and Sigismondo shared something else. They found a kinship in a context that we find not in the court literature, in the archives, or in the fabric of the Tempio, but rather in the personalities themselves. In Sigismondo’s lack of noble title and Alberti’s illegitimacy and exile, each held the status of “the outsider.” In this they both found the need to forge their own, new identities to compensate for their respective deficiencies. John Oppel and David Marsh have both noted as much.⁶¹³ For Alberti this consisted of establishing himself in the world of ideas and finding a place in the high status world of the Italian courts, both ecclesiastical and secular:

“Alberti...compensating for the decline of his family and his own relative loss of status by the intellectual authority which he came to enjoy and which he did think of as just that – as a real form of authority.”⁶¹⁴ Alberti’s pursuit of architecture was another step in this evolution, as he, too, as Zaho said of Sigismondo, was engaging in self-fashioning.⁶¹⁵ For both of them, the Tempio was the site of this larger project.

⁶¹² Oppel, “The Priority of the Architect: Alberti on Architects and Patrons,” 254.

⁶¹³ “The stigma of illegitimacy thus made Alberti an outsider who would constantly seek to shape and define his own identity.” Marsh, “Leon Battista Alberti at the Millennium,” 1029–30.

⁶¹⁴ Oppel, “The Priority of the Architect: Alberti on Architects and Patrons,” 251.

⁶¹⁵ Zaho, *Imago Triumphalis: the Function and Significance of Triumphal Imagery for Italian Renaissance Rulers*, 123.

As patron, Sigismondo may not have been typical of his courtly peers, but he was successful in his own way. Despite his decline in fortunes and damage to his reputation by his enemies, the mere fact that his life, rule, and patronage still holds such fascination for scholars, is evidence.

The seemingly constant stream of volumes on Alberti has not yet satisfied our understanding of his work, his thought, or his world. There remains more to be done, and this holds true even for this single commission. Further elucidation of the connections between Ferrara and Rimini would yield greater understanding of all that went on in both cities – politically, artistically, and personally. Not only the d’Este and Malatesta families, but those that served them both, Guarino, Pisanello, and of course Alberti, all appear to be key figures.

Our study has demonstrated that Alberti’s stylistic choices and general themes in the Tempio’s façade and interior decoration are clearly related to his theories as stated in his painting and architectural treatises. Yet it could be illuminating to extend this approach, to investigate whether any of the specific iconographic or stylistic aspects of the Tempio resonate with any of his other, non-artistic, writings. This would expand the interpretation of Alberti’s written oeuvre to his built works, thus building upon Christine Smith’s approach, whose work analyzes humanist writings on architecture but maintains focus on the social role of architecture and architectural imagery in a philosophical and rhetorical sense, not as it pertained to specific buildings.⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁶ Christine Smith, *Architecure in the Age of Early Humanism. Ethics, Aesthetics, and Eloquence, 1400–1470*.

In this study, the Tempio Malatestiano has provided a fruitful arena for the consideration of the dynamics of patronage beyond the object itself. The focus on the two central protagonists and their respective motives, unique circumstances, and the ways in which they helped each other accomplish specific goals – artistic and otherwise – shows that diverse motives were often at work and that patronage was mutual.

Beyond the larger issue of artistic patronage in the Renaissance, this study serves as a contribution to Alberti studies in establishing a clearer and more comprehensive picture of his first architectural commission. In the process it has added to our understanding of how the various facets of Alberti's multi-faceted career and personality worked together.

Moreover, our reading of Alberti's motives at the Tempio reaches past the confines of Rimini in 1450 to shed light on a very controversial aspect of his career, his activity in Rome. My interpretation of the relationship between Alberti's activity in Rome and his gaining the Tempio commission proposes a new reading of this critical period and of our understanding of it. In my view, the intense scholarly efforts to discern Alberti's hand and mind in the great urban project of Nicholas V have been motivated in part by the need to find an artistic precedent for the Tempio commission. This is mitigated by our new understanding of Alberti's arrival in Rimini. No longer do we need an architectural portfolio to explain why he was hired for the Tempio commission. Instead we should look not in the designs for the Nicholine plan but in the non-artistic circumstances of his time there.

We began by asking "Why Alberti?" This study has expanded the inquiry to include, "Why Sigismondo?" In this building and this relationship, patronage was

reciprocal. The patron needed the artist, indeed needed the right artist, not merely to create a monument, but to accomplish his larger patronage goals effectively. Equally important, the artist had his own goals, and an inquiry into this side of the equation may yield new insight into the lives and careers of the Renaissance artist.

Illustrations



1. Tempio Malatestiano, Rimini



2. Piero della Francesca, Sigismondo Malatesta Kneeling Before Saint Sigismund,
Chapel of Relics, Tempio Malatestiano, c. 1450



3. Matteo de'Pasti, Medal for Sigismundo Maletesta with façade of Tempio Malatestiano,
1453. Rimini Museo della Città



4. Alberti, Tempio Malatestiano, Rimini, façade. 1450



5. Arch of Augustus, Rimini, c. 27 B.C.



6. Tempio Malatestiano, portal



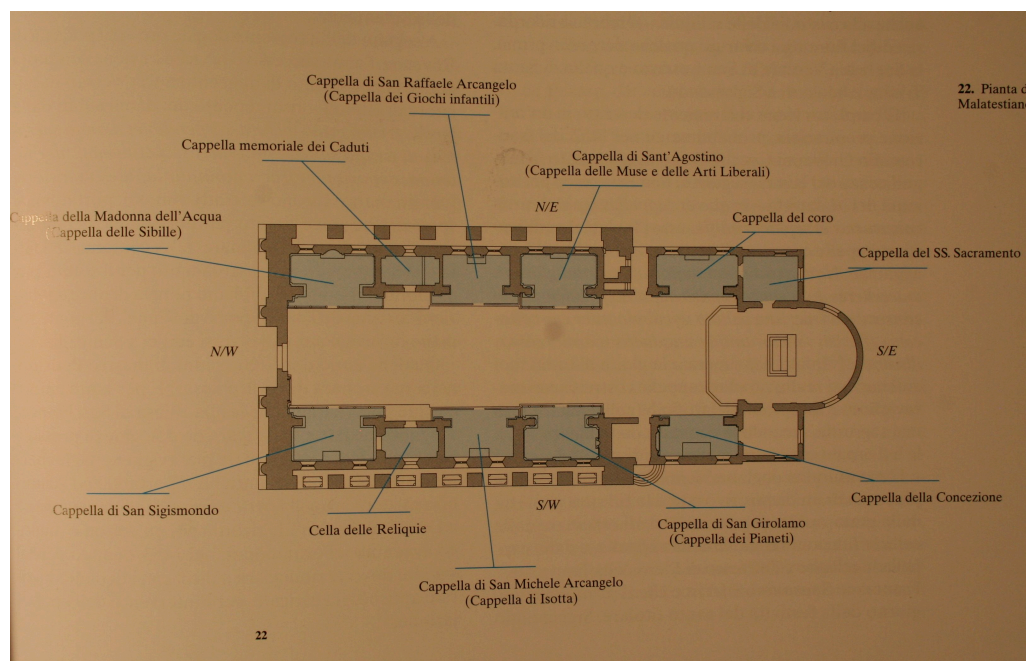
7. Tempio Malatestiano, façade, podium



8. Tempio Malatestiano, arcade



9. Tempio Malatestiano, right flank, Greek dedicatory inscription



10. Tempio Malatestiano, plan



11. Tempio Malatestiano, interior



12. Pointed arch and inscription



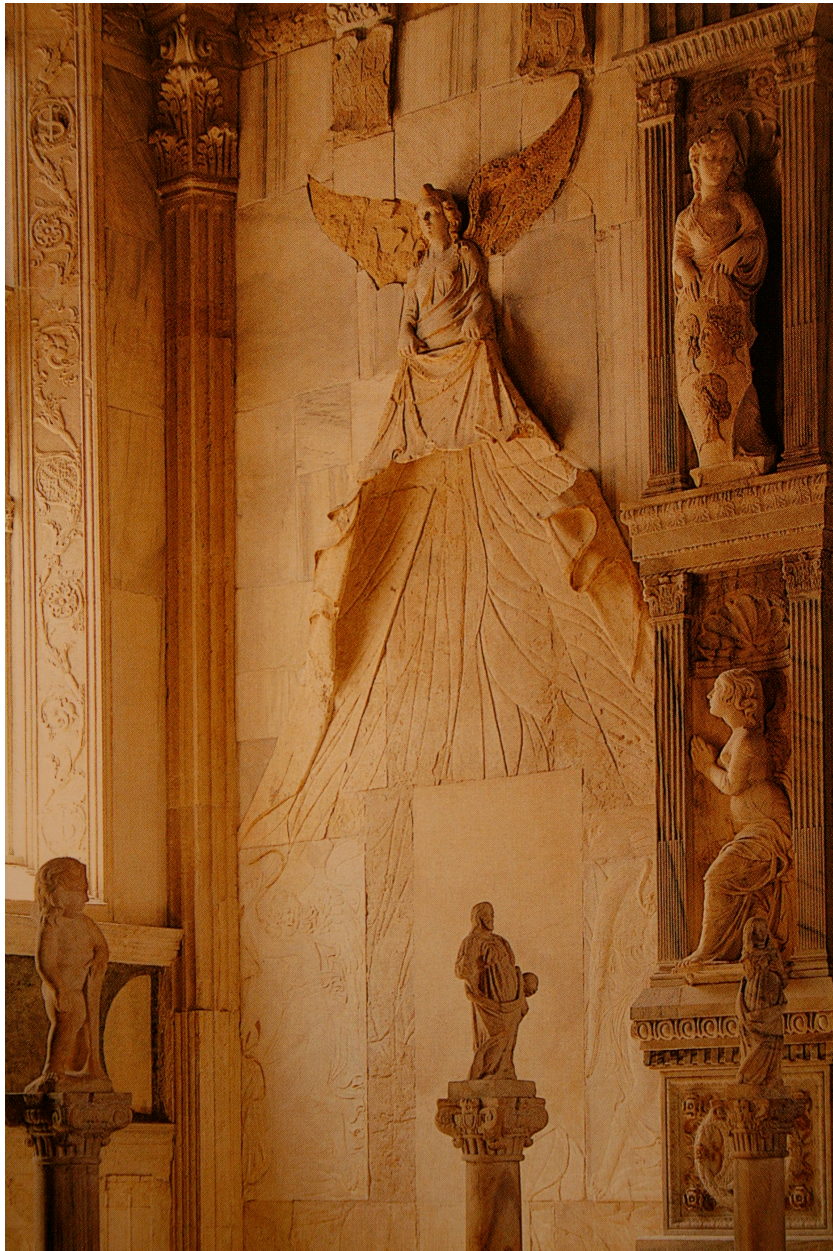
13. Tomb of Sigismondo



14. Chapel of St. Sigismund



15. Chapel of St. Sigismund, tabernacle



16. Chapel of St. Sigismund, right wall



17. Cell of the Relics.



18. Chapel St. Raphael/Isotta



19. Chapel of St. Jerome/Planets



20. Sign of Cancer Rising Above Rimini, Chapel of the Planets



21. Chapel of St. Jerome: Mercury and Venus



22. Chapel of the Ancestors



23. Chapel of the Ancestors, outer pilaster



24. Tomb of the Ancestors



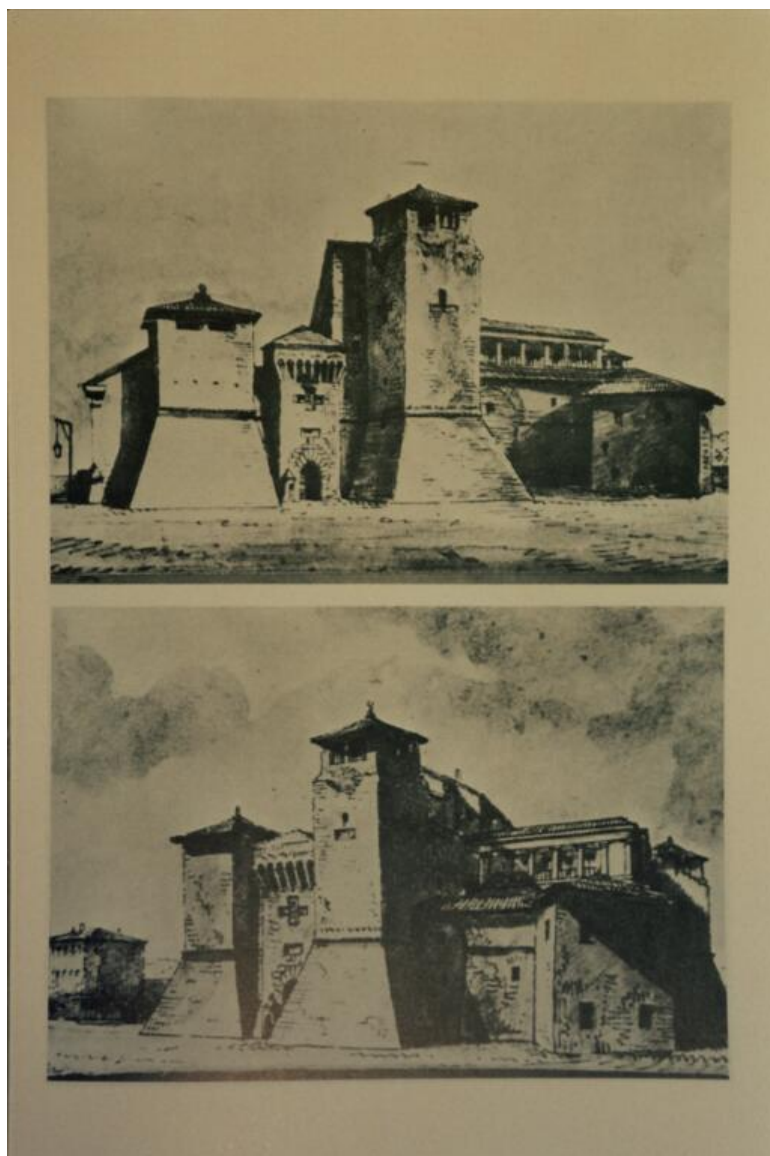
25. Chapel of St. Raphael/Children's Games



26. Chapel of St. Augustine/Liberal Arts



27. Piero della Francesca, Portrait of Sigismondo Malatesta, 1451
Tempera on Panel, 44.5 x 34.5 cm
Paris, Musee du Louvre



28. Castel Sismondo, Rimini



29. Biblioteca Malatestiana, Cesena



30. Pisanello, Paleologus Medal, 1438
Bronze, 10.3 cm
The British Museum, London



31. Pisanello, Medal of Sigismondo Malatesta with Sigismondo in Armor, c. 1445
Bronze, 9cm
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence



32. Pisanello, Medal of Sigismondo Malatesta with Sigismondo on Horseback, 1445
Bronze, 10 cm
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence



33. Matteo de' Pasti, Sigismondo Malatesta with Personification of Strength, 1446

Bronze, 8 cm

Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello.



34. Matteo de' Pasti, Medal of Sigsimondo Malatesta, 1447

Bronze, 3.2 cm

Brescia, Musei Civici



35. Pisanello, Portrait Medal of Leonello d'Este, 1444
Cast copper alloy, 10 cm



36. Matteo de' Pasti, Portrait Medal of Sigismondo Malatesta with Castelsismondo, 1446

Bronze, 8.3 cm

Rimini, Museo della Città

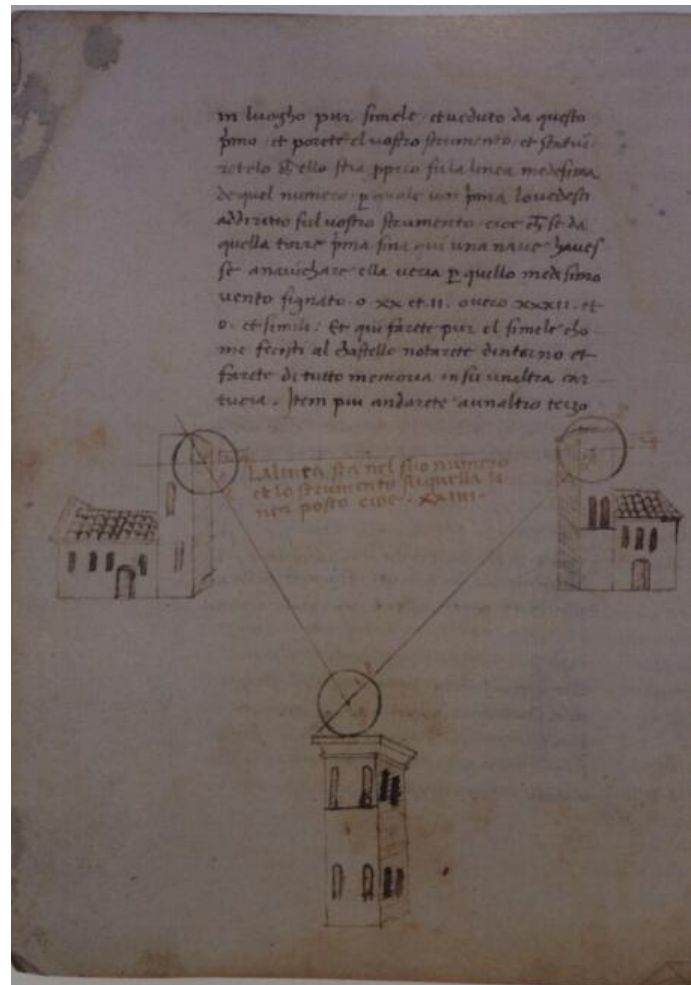


37. Matteo de' Pasti, Portrait medal of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini, 1450; Obverse
Chazen collection



38. Antonio di Cristoforo and Niccolò di Giovanni Baroncelli, Monument of Niccolò III d'Este, c. 1442

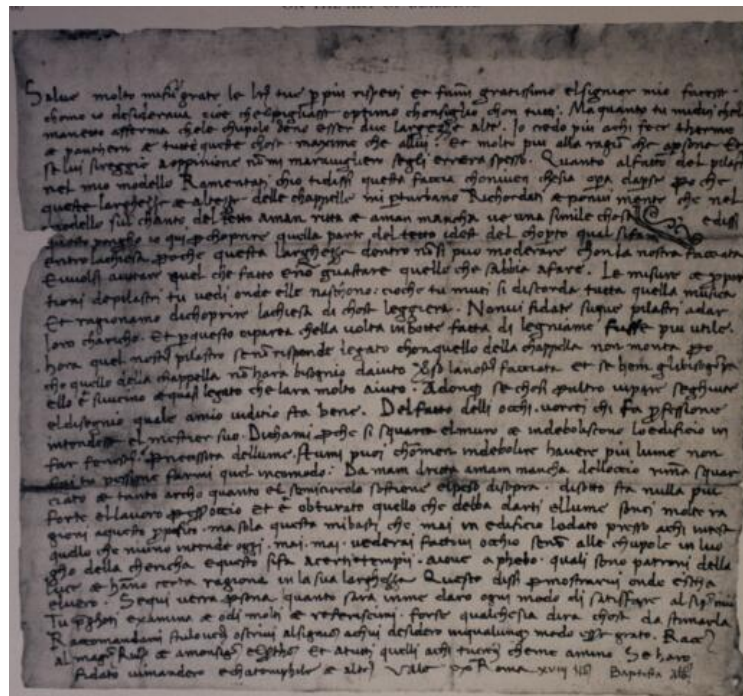
Palazzo del Comune, Ferrara



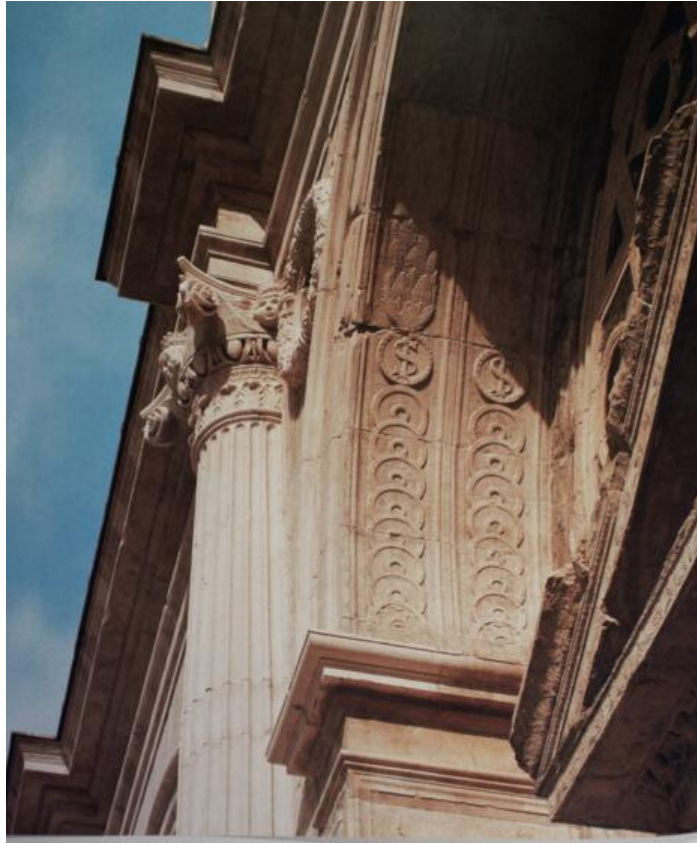
39. Leon Battista Alberti, Folio from Ludi matematici
 Genoa, Biblioteca Universitaria



40. Inscription, façade of Tempio Malatestiano



41. Letter from Alberti to Matteo de' Pasti, Nov. 18, 1454
New York, Pierpont Morgan Library



42. Tempio Malatestiano, portal



43. Orthodox Baptistery, Ravenna



44. Tomb of Theodoric, Ravenna



45. Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, Ravenna



46. San Marco, Venice, façade, c. 1050



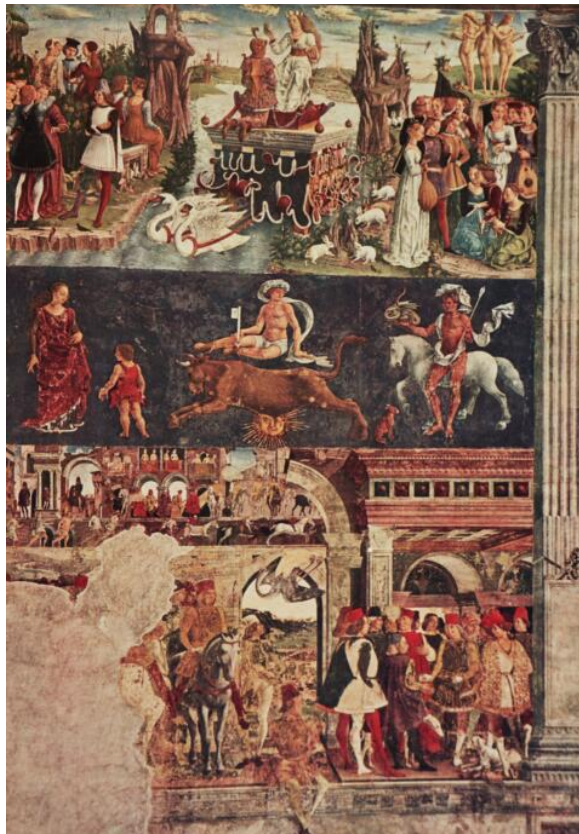
47. Alberti, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, façade, 1458



48. Brunelleschi, Cupola of Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence, 1420-36



49. Salone, Palazzo della Ragione, Padua, 1306–09



50. Francesco Cossa, Allegory of April: Triumph of Venus
Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara, 1476–84



51. The Abduction of Ganymede, Capital, Ste. Madeleine, Vezelay, 1120–32



52. Labors of the Months, October. West Portal, Duomo, Lucca, early 13th century



53. Labors of the Months, Main portal, San Zeno, Verona, 12th century



54. Labors of the Months, West Portal, San Marco, Venice, c. 1235–50



55. Nave Mosaic, Duomo, Otranto, mid-12th century



56. Nave Mosaic: September, Duomo, Otranto, mid 12th century



57. Zodiac, Floor Mosaic, san Miniato al Monte, Florence, 13th Century



58. Nicola Pisano, The Liberal Arts, Pulpit, Siena Cathedral, 1265–8



59, 60. Agostino di Duccio, Putti Playing in the Water, Chapel of San Raphael Archangel, Tempio Malatestiano



63. Arch of Constantine, Rome, 312–15



64. Donatello and Michelozzo, Tomb of (Anti) Pope John XXIII (Baldassare Coscia), Baptistery, Florence, 1410–15,



65. Bernardo Rossellino, Tomb of Leonardo Bruni, Santa Croce, Florence, 1445–49



66. Tullio Lombardo, Tomb of Doge Andrea Vendramin
SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Venice, c.1489



67. Roundel, Arch of Augustus, Rimini



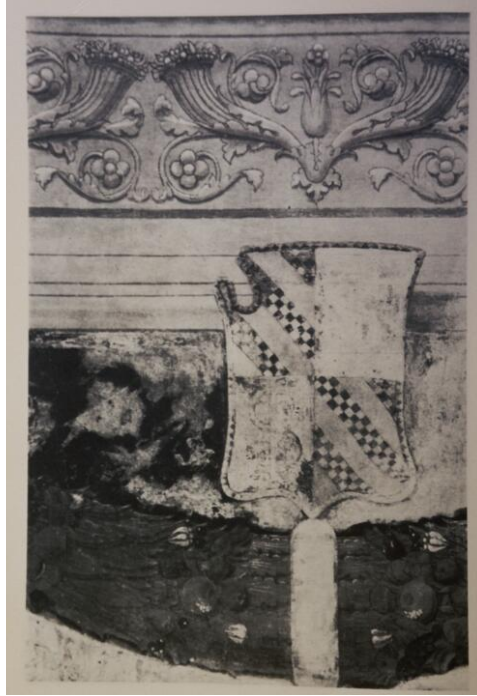
68. Roundel, Tempio Malatestiano, façade



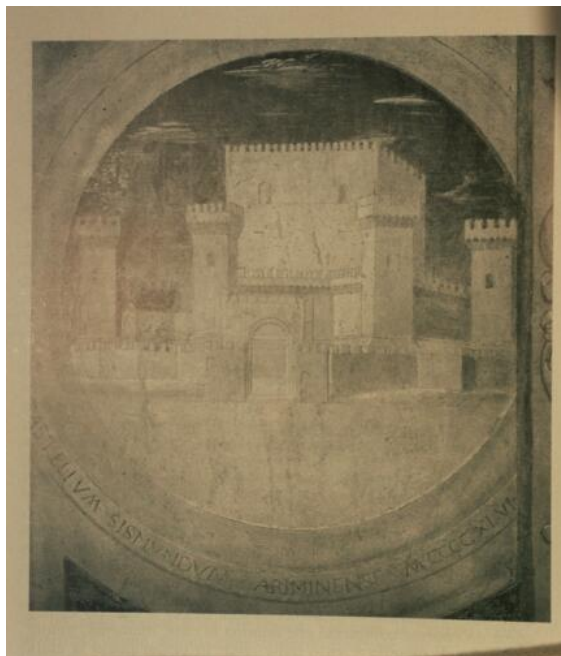
69. Giovanni da Fano, illustration for Basinio da Parma's Hesperis, 1462–64
Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal



70. Monument to Alberto V d'Este, San Giorgio, Ferrara, 1393–94



71. Piero della Francesca, Sigismondo Malatesta Kneeling Before Saint Sigismund
 detail: Malatesta coat of arms



72. Piero della Francesca, Sigismondo Malatesta Kneeling Before Saint Sigismund,
 detail: oculus with image of Castelsigismondo



73. Pisanello, Emperor Sigismund,
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna



74. Piero della Francesca, Sigismondo Malatesta Kneeling Before Saint Sigismund
detail: greyhounds



75. Masaccio, Trinity, Fresco, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, 1425–6



76. Piero della Francesca, Madonna and Child with Federico da Montefeltro, 1472–74
Pinocoteca di Brera, Milan



77. Domenico Veneziano, St. Lucy Altarpiece, 1445–47, Uffizi Gallery, Florence



78. Piero della Francesca, Girolamo Amadi Kneeling Before St. Jerome, 1451
Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice



79. Piero della Francesca, Flagellation, 1455
Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino



80. Piero della Francesca, Discovery and Proof of the True Cross, 1455
Capella Maggiore, San Francesco, Arezzo



Fig. 81. Piero della Francesca, Federico da Montefeltro, 1455–56
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence



82. Filarete, The Meeting of Pope Eugenius IV and Sigismund of Hungary, 1433–45
St. Peter's, Rome



83. Pope Eugenius IV Crowning Sigismund of Hungary Holy Roman Emperor, 1433–45,
St. Peter's, Rome

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