

CRISTOFORO SORTE AND THE DUCAL PALACE OF VENICE*

by Juergen Schulz

The recent republication of Cristoforo Sorte's *Osservazioni nella Pittura* of 1580 emphasizes once again how neglected a figure its author is. His other writings are generally unknown, his career has been studied only by a historian of geography, and a knowledge of his surviving works seems to be confined to a few specialists conversant with late sixteenth century Venetian art.¹ The information and bibliographies supplied in the standard reference works are correspondingly inadequate and the curious student who asks what kind of an artist the author of the well known treatise was will find that he has laboriously to construct the answer for himself.

Sorte was a minor artist to be sure, and not even primarily an artist at that. His best years were given instead to civil engineering and cartography. Hence it would be tedious and largely irrelevant to the interests of the art historian to rehearse in full the many events of Sorte's whole, long life. A summary of the known facts and sources however does seem desirable. Even more useful would be some account of the works which he contributed to the restoration of the Ducal Palace in Venice after the fire of 1577. These still survive and give a clear impression of Sorte's art. They are amply documented besides and their history supplies some valuable fixed points in the generally uncertain progress of the work of restoration in that building during the later 1570's and early 1580's.

Sorte was born between 1506 and 1510 at Verona² and his work for the Ducal Palace is thus one of the last chapters of his life. Trained it would seem as a painter, he worked under Giulio Romano at Mantua during the 1530's and as such he returned to Verona at the beginning of the 1540's.³ He was for several years in the service of

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¹ Sorte's, *Osservazioni* were published twice in his own lifetime: Venice, G. Zenaro, 1580; and Venice, G. A. Rampazetto, 1594. The two editions are cited here as *Osservazioni*¹ and². The first edition has been twice reprinted in modern times: *Giornale di Erudizione Artistica*, V, 1876; *Scrittori d'Italia*, CCXIX (Trattati d'arte del cinquecento, a cura di P. Barocchi, vol. I), Bari 1960.

He was also author of two treatises on the irrigation of the Veronese, published 1593 and 1594. A full bibliographical description is given in note 11 below, elsewhere I have cited them as respectively: *Modo*, and *Magnifica Città*.

Modern recognition of Sorte's importance as a cartographer is owed chiefly to the many studies of R. Almagià the most recent of which is: „C. Sorte, il primo grande cartografo... d. Repub. di Venezia,“ *Kartographische Studien-Haackfestschrift*, besorgt von H. Lautensach und H. R. Fischer, Gotha, 1957, p. 7 f. Other studies of his are cited throughout the notes, esp. note 39 below.

² In 1544 Sorte gave his age as 34, see Document No. 1. In 1594 he gave his age as 88: see *Osservazioni*², p. 3. He frequently calls Verona his birthplace: e.g. *Modo*, p. 17. His father was a certain Giovanni Antonio of the parish of S. Stefano, Verona, of unknown occupation: see Venice, Arch. di Stato, Confini, Generali No. 1/260, pezzo 2, f. 63 v.

³ A. Glisenti, *Replica...* (a)... C. Sorte, p. 10 v., says of his antagonist: „fin da vostri teneri anni vsoto adopperare il pennello.“ (For the full title of *Glisenti's* tract see note 11 below). It is the artist himself who speaks of having worked at Mantua: *Sorte*, *Osservazioni*¹, p. 16; ², p. 20. The reasons for supposing that he was working under Giulio Romano are set forth in: J. Schulz, „The fratelli Rosa”,

that art-loving prelate, Cardinal Bernardo Cles of Trent (died 1539).⁴ However by 1556 he had settled in Brescia and changed his occupation to that of a surveyor and irrigation engineer. This we know from his account of how in that year he was summoned from Brescia by the Venetian government to make recommendations for the draining of the marshes of Monselice and Este. Shortly after that he was appointed staff engineer (*perito ordinario*) to the *Magistrato ai Beni Inculti*, then newly established to oversee the reclamation of uncultivated lands.⁵ He held this position until the end of the next decade, although already by 1565 he had left Venice and settled again in his native Verona.⁶ In 1569 however the *Magistrato* adopted residence in the capital as a prerequisite to the post and Sorte was demoted to the rank of consulting engineer (*perito straordinario*).⁷ There is no record that he was actually ever consulted in the years which followed. Instead he worked freelance from Verona as a surveyor, irrigation engineer and cartographer for various local authorities and private parties in the Venetian state. He also seems to have done some minor architectural work; in 1572 in fact he registered in the Veronese *estimi* as an architect.⁸ It was only in 1578 that he was able to reestablish a foothold in the capital, with his employment by the authorities in charge of the restoration of the Ducal Palace, the *Provveditori sopra la restauration del palazzo*. He now settled in Venice and in 1583 was able to have himself reappointed to his old post of *perito ordinario* at the *Beni Inculti*.⁹ In 1587 and 1588 he was one of the architects and engineers who were consulted by the authorities constructing a stone bridge over the Grand Canal at the Rialto.¹⁰ In 1593 he was still brimming with energy, making field trips for his employers and embarking on a heated exchange of

Burlington Magazine, CIII, 1961, p. 92. He was back in Verona by the night of 22nd January 1541 when he witnessed the fire in the Palazzo della Ragione: Sorte, Osservazioni¹, p. 11 f., ², p. 14 f.; cf. also, G. Sandri, „Un incendio nel Pal. d. Ragione...“, Atti dell'Accad. di Agric., Scienze e Lettere di Verona, Ser. 5^a, XXII, 1943/44, p. 139 f. In 1544 he registered in the parish of S. Paolo, Verona, as a „dipentor“; see Document No. 1.

⁴ Sorte, Modo, p. 11: „essendo io stato molti anni con l'Illustrissimo Monsignor Bernardo Cles Cardinale di Trento...“ Sorte does not say in what capacity he worked for Cles. Since he always figures as a painter in records of the years just before and after the Cardinal's death, it seems likely that it was also as a painter that he worked for Cles. However his name does not appear in the documents of Cles's artistic patronage: cf. C. Aussever, Jr. and G. Gerola, I documenti clesiani del Buonconsiglio (R. Deputaz. veneto-tridentina di storia patria, Miscellanea, vol. II), Venice, 1925, which indexes all publications of documents up to 1925, and G. B. Emert, Fonti manoscritti... per la storia dell'arte nel Trentino, Firenze, 1939.

⁵ Sorte, Magnifica Città, p. 21 f.; Modo, p. 16 f. A later product of Sorte's stay at Brescia as a surveyor was the woodcut map of the Bresciano which was published at Venice in 1560. A unique copy survives at the Bibl. Naz. Marciana: Libro di carte stampate, No. 138, c. 4, tav. 41 (R. Almagià, Monumenta Italiae Cartographica, Florence, 1929, p. 37 f., illus.).

⁶ It is at Verona that the commission reached Sorte on 9th April 1565 for what he considered one of his major works as a cartographer, the map of the Tyrol for Emperor Ferdinand II: see Sorte, Modo, p. 1; Magnifica Città, p. 23 v. The map is now lost but the commission was transcribed by Sorte into a volume of miscellaneous records, now at the Bibl. Naz. Marciana: MS. Ital., Cl. IV, No. 169, p. 36 f. Most of the documents copied out in this volume regard Sorte's career as a surveyor and irrigation engineer and were reprinted by himself in his two tracts of 1593 and 1594. A few concern his work in the Ducal Palace of Venice, for which see below.

⁷ A. Glisenti, Risposta al modo... di C. Sorte, p. 2 f., esp. pp. 3 v.-4 (full title given in note 11 below); Venice, Bibl. Marciana, MS cit., p. 86 f.

⁸ Notices of Sorte during these years are rare. Some of the recorded works are: 1. a map of the Veronese made for the city in 1569 and now lost (Modo, p. 18 f.); 2. arbitration of a property dispute between the University of Verona and Teodoro da Monte in 1574 (G. Marinelli, Saggio di cartografia d. regione veneta, Venice, 1881, No. 76); and 3. minor alterations of a Veronese building for the Podestà of the city in the early 1570's (Venice, A. d. S., Confini, Generali, No. 3/262, fasc. iv, f. 10 v.). The Veronese „estimi“ of 1572 list Sorte as an architect: R. Brenzoni, „M. Sanmicheli e la sua sepoltura“, Archivio Veneto, Ser. 5^a, XVII, 1935, p. 276 (the proper collocation of this document is: Verona, A. d. S., Comune, No. 267 (Estimi di S. Vitale) f. 460 v.).

⁹ Sorte, Magnifica Città, p. 22 v.; see further the references given in note 7 above.

¹⁰ R. Cessi and A. Alberti, Rialto, Bologna, 1934, pp. 213, 370 f., 397 and 427.

polemical pamphlets on the irrigation of the Veronese and control of the Adige.¹¹ But by the next year, 1594, he was infirm and was forced to nominate a successor to his post at the *Beni Inculti*.¹² There is no further mention of him after that year; perhaps he did not outlive it.

How in 1578 the absent Sorte came to the attention of the *Provveditori sopra la restaurazione del palazzo* is unknown. He suddenly reappears on the Venetian scene in January or February of that year as one of the fifteen experts engaged by the *Provveditori* to inspect the damaged palace and make recommendations for its repair.

Sorte's report has been published twice before and needs little comment here.¹³ He makes a similar analysis of the building's structural defects and the fire damage as does Palladio in the famous report of the same time — only his language is less clear, his presentation less systematic and he does not make the appeal to the twin authorities of nature and antiquity that is so remarkable in Palladio's document. He shows, however, a thorough conversance with contemporary principles of architectural statics, which suggests that he did have practical experience of architecture in the years before. He notes (as did Palladio and several other of the experts) that the outside walls of the Palace were wider than the columns on which they rest and concluded that the structure was therefore unsound and in need of reconstruction rather than simple repair. Despite the similar conclusions of several other architects the plan finally adopted was that of Giovanni Antonio Ruscone and Antonio da Ponte which proposed to replace every damaged member but to leave the fabric unchanged in its basic design.

Although his report fared no better than Palladio's, like the latter, Sorte was retained by the *Provveditori* to contribute to the interior redecoration of the Palace. Sometime before 27th July 1578 he was commissioned to design new ceilings for the Sala del Senato and the Sala del Gran Consiglio. Then, on that particular day, he was in addition commissioned to paint

¹¹ He made at least seven surveys in that year according to the annual lists of surveys and the index of maps of the Magistrato: Venice, A. d. S., Beni Inculti, No. 263 (*Relazioni periti*, 1589-95), fasc. v, passim; Indice disegni dei... Beni Inculti, No. 50, passim.

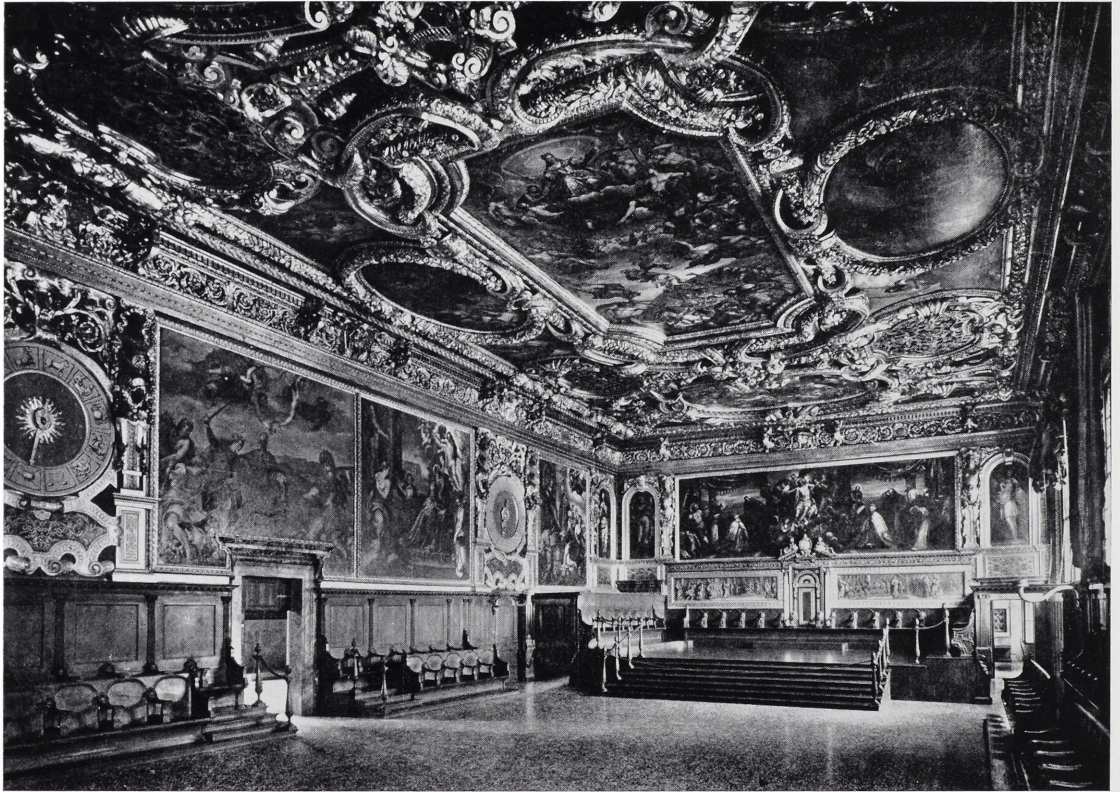
The exchange of pamphlets, to which belong the two repeatedly-cited tracts by Sorte, began in 1592 and continued to the end of the decade. The various works, in chronological order, are:

1. *T. da Monte*, Discorso generale sopra la regulatione dell'Adige, Verona (G. Discepolo), 1592.
2. *C. Sorte*, Modo d'irrigare la campagna di Verona e d'introdvr piv navigationi per lo corpo del felicissimo stato di Venetia, Verona (G. Discepolo), 1593.
3. *T. da Monte*, Compendio di tutti li raccordi et suppliche presentate da diversi... in proposito d'irrigare la campagna di Verona, Verona (G. Discepolo), 1594.
4. *A. Glisenti*, Risposta al Modo d'irrigare la campagna di Verona di M. C. Sorte, Venice (without imprint), n.d. (= 1594).
5. *C. Sorte*, Per la Magnifica Città di Verona, sopra il trattato vltimo del Magnifico Signor Theodoro da Monte, Venice (G. A. Rampazetto), 1594.
6. *A. Glisenti*, Replica in proposito della risposta de M. C. Sorte, n. p., 1594.
7. *B. Venier*, L'vnica maniera d'irrigare campagne veronesi da due parti dell'Adige, Verona (G. Discepolo), 1594 (the date of the latest documents reprinted by Venier is however 1597).

¹² *Sorte*, Osservationi², p. 3.

¹³ *G. Cadorin*, Pareri di XV architetti e notizie storiche intorno al Palazzo Ducale, Venice, 1838, p. 100 f.; *G. B. Lorenzi*, Monumenti per servire alla storia del Pal. Ducale, Venice, 1868, vol. I (all published), Appendix No. 25 B. Both reprint the reports of Palladio and the other architects as well.

For the fire of 1577 and the previous fire of 1574 and the restorations which followed both, see: *F. Zanotto*, Il Pal. Ducale di Venezia illustrato, Venice, 1842-61, vol. I, pp. 119 f., 128 f.; *D. v. Hadeln*, „Neue Beiträge zur Gesch. des Dogenpalast“, Jahrbuch d. K. preuss. Kunstmmlgn., XXXII, 1911, Beiheft, p. 1 f.; *G. Zorzi*, „Nuove rivelazioni sulla ricostruzione del Pal. Ducale...“, Arte Veneta, VII, 1953, p. 123 f.; and *idem*, „Il contributo di A. Palladio... al restauro del Pal. Ducale“, Atti dell'Ist. veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, CXV, 1957, p. 68 f.



1 Venice, Ducal Palace. Sala del Senato.

a large map of the entire Venetian mainland state for the inside long wall of the former room.¹⁴ From later documents we learn that also a new wall articulation for the Sala del Senato was included in the commissions.¹⁵

The Sala del Senato had been burnt out in the earlier fire of 1574 which had destroyed most of the northeastern state rooms of the building. It was not yet restored in 1577 when the second fire swept through the Palace's western and southern wings and consumed among others the decorations of the Sala del Gran Consiglio. Nothing is known of the original ceiling decoration of the Sala del Senato. The Sala del Gran Consiglio on the other hand had been decorated with an early fifteenth century coffered and gilded ceiling.¹⁶ Sorte was now to design for these rooms new ceilings of richly carved frames and friezes, to be filled out by illusionistic paintings, such as had become the norm at Venice in the middle of the century.

In July 1578 the final design for the Sala del Senato ceiling was ready and a contract for its execution was signed by the carvers who one year before had completed the new ceiling

¹⁴ Lorenzi, op. cit., No. 1012 A.

¹⁵ See Documents Nos. 2-3.

¹⁶ F. Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima...*, Venice, 1581, pp. 123 v., 242 v. See also Zanotto, op. cit., vol. I, p. 65.



2 Venice, Ducal Palace. Ceiling of the Sala del Gran Consiglio.

in the neighboring Sala del Collegio.¹⁷ Not long afterward the designs for the wall articulation of the same room and for the ceiling of the Sala del Gran Consiglio were also completed and their execution put in hand by an otherwise unknown carver, Hieronimo Vicentino. The date is uncertain but cannot have been much later since by the Summer of the following year, 1579, Hieronimo had already for some time been involved in a quarrel with Sorte over the correctness of his execution of these carvings.

In fact the execution of Sorte's designs led to altercations and intrigues of the kind that seem to have pursued the artist all through his career. Hieronimo was not following the drawings and although several times reproved by both Sorte and the *Provveditori* he was persisting in his independence. When on 10th August 1579 a new group of *Provveditori* took office, Sorte hastened to bring the issue to their attention. On the very next day he addressed a written complaint to Hieronimo and forwarded a copy of it together with a covering petition to the new *Provveditori*.¹⁸

We do not hear what the carver's answer was, but from further documents we learn that he made no move to satisfy Sorte but instead organized an intrigue against him. The quarrel

¹⁷ The contract does not survive but is referred to in the inscription on Sorte's drawing for the ceiling; see note 20 below.

¹⁸ See Document No. 2.

came to a head in 1582 when Sorte petitioned for redress directly to the Doge and Signoria. On 24th April a hearing was called by the *Provveditori* at which Sorte spelled out the omissions of Hieronimo and his abettors. In the Sala del Senato eight figures set in shields on the frieze had been omitted. The frieze's foliage ornament and cornice coping had been altered, the wall compartments differed too and the vents on the sides of the ceiling itself had assumed, Sorte claimed, the appearance of wine funnels. In the Sala del Gran Consiglio the cornice was lacking its cartouches on the underside and forward breaks over the brackets of the frieze. Sorte charged that the Proto (Antonio da Ponte) and the secretary of the *Provveditori* were in league with the carver and had together given out the ceilings as finished in order to obtain his own discharge from the work. The alteration of the vents in the Senato ceiling Sorte attributed directly to the Proto himself. The three men, he claimed furthermore, had occulted his drawings so that the deviations from the original design might not be revealed.¹⁹

There is no record of how Sorte's case fared but the monuments themselves give some answer. In fact both ceilings still survive (Figs. 1-2) and so does Sorte's design for that of the Sala del Senato.²⁰ In the Sala del Senato the major changes and omissions were all made good as far as one can tell (Fig. 1). There are now figures in all the shields of the frieze. The cornice coping is not pierced by senseless holes. The terms on the walls below are homogenous in style with the figural motives of the frieze and ceiling and therefore presumably Sorte's own. Finally, the vents do not resemble funnels either in plan or in section.²¹ In the Sala del Gran Consiglio, however, the omissions were only partially repaired (Fig. 2). The cornice on the tribunal wall continues to lack any forward breaks and any carvings on its underside. Now lacking as well is the frieze beneath it, the place of which has been taken by the topmost zone of Tintoretto's *Paradise*. On the other three walls the cornice does break forward and is decorated with cartouches; the forward breaks moreover can be seen to be palpable additions.²²

The records of this quarrel teach us that in the Summer of 1579 both ceilings were well

¹⁹ See Document No. 3.

²⁰ London, Victoria and Albert Museum, No. E 509-1937. The measurements inscribed on it are written in Sorte's own hand while the reference to the contract scribbled into the central field was written by the carvers, Andrea da Faenza and Francesco da San Moisè. The drawing has been fully published just now by *W. Wolters*, „Ein wenig bekannter Entwurf des C. Sorte“, *Mitteil. d. kunsthistor. Instituts in Florenz*, X, 1961, p. 137 f., illus.

²¹ I differ in this matter from *Wolters*, *op. cit.*, who regards the vents and the frieze's cornice coping as due in their present form to Hieronimo and Antonio da Ponte. However I do not see any holes („forami“) in the cornice — the widely-spaced, oval recesses on its underside are unlikely I think to be what Sorte meant. Nor do I see any resemblance to funnels in the vents („sboratori“). Admittedly the grilles which today cover the vents are not indicated on the drawing. But it cannot have been the grilles which suggested to Sorte the metaphor of a wine funnel. The alteration resented by the artist must have been in the shape of the opening itself, either in plan or in section. Extension of the vents toward the middle of the ceiling for instance does produce an opening with a funnel-like outline. The grilles, in any case, I consider homogeneous with the ornamental vocabulary of the rest of the ceiling. They must have been designed by Sorte at a later moment, in the same fashion as the frieze which does not appear on the London drawing, but for which Sorte had delivered a design by August 1579 (see Document No. 2).

²² Removal of the bracket frieze over the tribunal, which obviated the necessity of recasting its cornice, must have been decided partially with a view toward creating more space for the planned *Paradise* mural. The decision can have been reached only after April 1582, at which time Sorte was complaining of a lack of correspondance between an existing cornice and frieze. This fact helps to date the competition held for the *Paradise* mural. The compositions of the four oil sketches which still survive are calculated to occupy the entire height of the wall, from the tribunal right up to the cornice. Thus they cannot have been conceived before April 1582. For illustrations see: *D. v. Hadeln*, „Die Vorgeschichte von Tintoretts Paradies“, *Jahrbuch d. preuss. Kunstmmlgn.*, XL, 1919, p. 119 f.; and *W. Suida*, „Il Paradiso di Jac. Palma il Giovane“, *Rivista d'Arte*, XX, 1938, pp. 77 f. (the sketch published by Suida was last in the Contini-Bonacossi collection at Florence).

in hand, and that by the Spring of 1582 they were sufficiently complete for the *Provveditori* to believe the claim that they were entirely finished. The repairs carried out in the Sala del Gran Consiglio were relatively minor and confined to the frieze; they cannot have delayed final completion of the ceiling for long. In the Sala del Senato on the other hand serious alterations were required on the ceiling itself and it would seem that they retarded its completion by several years. In July 1587 it was still not entirely gilded and only in October of that year was it said to be complete.²³ The portions gilded in the interval were very possibly the vents which had needed rebuilding in 1582.

Sorte's *soffitti* mark the highpoint of the mannerist phase of ceiling design in Venice. This phase begins as far back as the mid 1560's when the classical system of a grid of interconnected, raised frames was first abandoned. An early example of the new taste is the ceiling of 1564 in the Albergo of the Scuola di S. Rocco (Fig. 3).²⁴ It lacks any architectonic links between the compartments or between them and the walls. Instead the ceiling is unified by decorative means alone: by the concentric inward and upward movement of its many layers (a movement emphasized by threefold repetition of the gilded cornice) and by the uniform application of a busy painted ornament to all the flat surfaces. The rich decoration and movement of the framework not only make the ceiling as a whole more sumptuous but also confer on the framework itself a greater importance in the total composition of carvings and paintings than was thought proper in the 1550's.

A decorative order similarly underlies the ceiling of 1575 in the Upper Hall of the same Scuola (Fig. 4).²⁵ Here we do find raised frames, physically linked to one another, but neither the highly decorated frames nor the scrolls and rams' heads which connect them are able, or indeed are meant, to create the impression of a structural order. The composition is drawn together instead by a rhythmic repetition of compartment shapes and framing motives and by a uniform surface cover of painted ornament. The framing motives themselves have gained again in importance and they introduce to the Venetian *soffitto* a new vocabulary of forms, that of strapwork. While the model for the classical grid system used in the 1550's had been the Roman stucco vault, the model for such a ceiling as this was contemporary, mannerist stucco decoration. In later sixteenth century stucco ceilings of the Veneto one does find in fact very similar compositions with an equal lack of compositional structure, an equal emphasis on framing motives at the expense of the object framed, and an identical vocabulary of ornamental forms.²⁶

Sorte's ceilings carry the development to its end. His designs ignore structural logic and exalt the frame to an extravagant degree. In the Sala del Gran Consiglio for instance (Fig. 2)

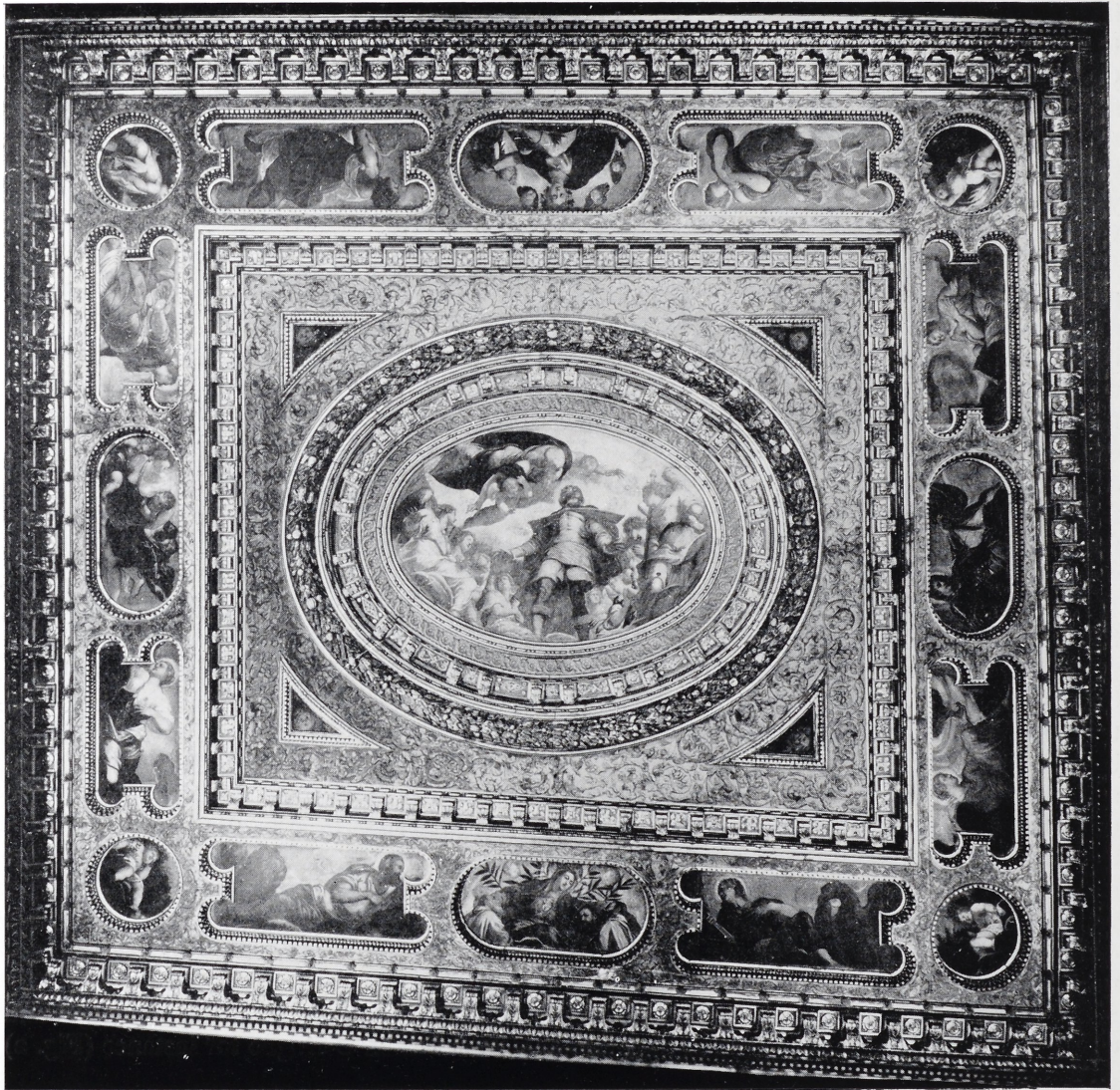
²³ Lorenzi, op. cit., Nos. 976 and 979.

²⁴ The circumstances of the competition in 1564 for the ceiling's central painting make it clear that the ceiling proper was then complete. See *G. Vasari, Vite...*, ed. G. Milanesi, Florence, 1906, vol. VI, p. 593; and *R. Berliner, „Die Tätigkeit Tintoretto's in der Scuola di S. Rocco“*, I, *Kunstchronik und Kunstmarkt*, N.F. XXXI, 1919/20, p. 469 f.

Representative examples of ceilings of the 1550's are illustrated by, *A. Colasanti, Volte e soffitti italiani*, Milan, 1923, pls. 144-7.

²⁵ Also this ceiling was complete in 1575 when its pictorial decoration was begun; see *Berliner*, op. cit., p. 472 f.

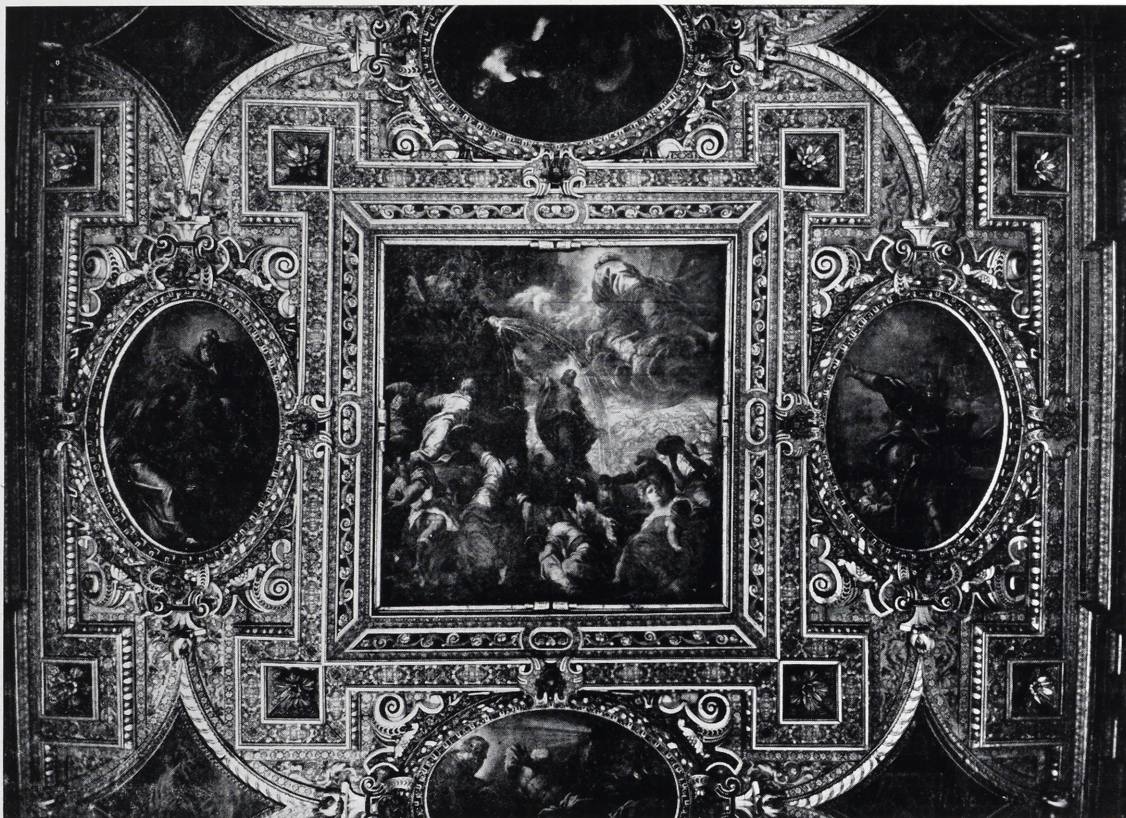
²⁶ Representative examples are A. Vittoria's ceiling of 1552-53 in the octagonal room of the Pal. Thiene, Vicenza, and L. Rubini's ceiling of the early 1570's in the first ground-floor room of the Pal. Porto-Barbarano, also at Vicenza. For illustrations see *G. Zorzi, „A. Vittoria a Vicenza...“*, *Arte Veneta*, V, 1951, p. 141 f., resp. figs. 148 and 161. Slightly later examples in Venice itself are the elaborate stucco ceilings of 1576-77 in the Anticollegio and Sala delle Quattro Porte of the Ducal Palace, executed respectively by Marco del Moro and Bombarda. They are illustrated by *G. Zorzi, „Nuove rivelazioni...“*, *Arte Veneta*, VII, 1953, p. 123 f., resp. figs. 120, 126-7 and 122-4.



3 Venice, Scuola di S. Rocco. Ceiling of the Albergo.

the basic pattern is one of two rows of extremely heavy oval compartments which move across the ceiling at right angles to each other. In the corners left vacant by this system two scalloped compartments are seemingly wedged between the large ovals and the walls. However these rows of ovals are unsupported. They are truncated by the walls and wherever they touch the cornice their frames curl back upon themselves. Furthermore, where the two rows meet in the middle of the ceiling a gigantic rectangle is laid across them and forces them apart. The system in fact simply cannot be read as a structural metaphor.

Everywhere there are extra frames and mouldings interpolated into the scheme. They enrich the ceiling as a whole but confuse its basic pattern. Rectangular frames are slipped beneath



4 Venice, Scuola di S. Rocco. Detail of Ceiling of the Upper Hall.

the outside ovals of the long axis. Each of the waste spaces left between major units — between the scalloped and oval compartments — is treated as a picture field of its own, being framed by a separate set of decorative mouldings. The distinction between compartment and neutral ground is in this way deliberately blurred and the final effect of the ceiling is one of a mass of heavy carvings floating in a sea of canvas. Only the central compartment is clear, dominating by its sheer size, and the remainder of the ceiling has become a framing blur of color and gold.

The Sala del Senato ceiling is somewhat less confusing (Fig. 1). Here too the system is unattached to the walls and in places even cut by them. The frames are, if anything, even heavier than those of the other ceiling. But the major compartments are rather more regular in shape and are placed on their long axis in a pattern that corresponds to the articulation of the wall below. The vents fall always over the zones of decorative carving on the long wall and also the placing of the brackets in the frieze obeys the same rhythm. Within the ceiling there are no doubled frames of conflicting shapes and the waste spaces, although here too filled with painted representations, are not enclosed by separate frames all of their own. The changes Sorte made in the final design show moreover that his planning moved from more to less excited shapes for the individual fields. At the same time he increased the plasticity of the carved mouldings. Despite these differences however the ceiling is no easier to survey than that of the Sala del Gran Consiglio. Again it is the central compartment which dominates the impression by virtue of its sheer expanse of uncluttered, level canvas.

The almost baroque subordination of the periphery to the centre in Sorte's *soffitti* seems to point forward to the seventeenth century. In actual fact, however, these designs had no real succession at Venice. Only the ceiling of the Sala dello Scrutinio in the same building is similar. Elsewhere in Venice one sees simpler patterns coming back into favor.²⁷ Sorte's ceilings in a very real sense are the end of a development.

Sorte's other contribution to the interior redecoration of the Palace has a history which reaches further back in time, to the decade preceding the fires. His duties as an irrigation engineer had involved a good deal of surveying and map making, and in the course of time he had procured himself a considerable reputation as a cartographer both at home and abroad. Thus in 1565 he had been commissioned by the Emperor Ferdinand II to make a map of the Tyrol, now lost. Three years later the Venetian government had approached Sorte for a copy of this map. Sorte had answered with the proposal to make a map of the entire Venetian state on the Italian mainland. The project fell through at the time for want of an appropriation of funds.²⁸ In 1578 however it was revived and incorporated into the program for the restoration of the Palace.

From a long petition which Sorte submitted to the *Provveditori* at the end of 1585 we learn that the official commission for the map was given him on 27th July 1578 and that it called for one huge representation, some 13½ by 35 feet, to be hung on the inside long wall of the Sala del Senato. The petition furthermore relates that in 1582 the project was severely reduced in size, to a map only some 5½ by 8 feet, to be kept under lock and key in an especially constructed cupboard in the Antichiesetta. However the monies which he had received in the past, Sorte said, had covered no more than the cost of the surveying expeditions required for this map and had not been sufficient to allow him to proceed with the map itself. He now offered against a further payment of 300 ducats to execute the desired map and to execute as well four detail maps which would show the territories of the mainland state on a larger scale. On 8th January of the following year the petition resulted in a new contract which accepted these proposals but raised the number of detail maps from four to five.²⁹

The term set in the new contract was one year, yet in 1587 the maps were only just begun. In that year Sorte asked permission to include Istria on the detail map of the Friuli because the latter district by itself would not fill out the available space.³⁰ In 1589 they were still not finished; they are mentioned in one of the Senate's regular votes of funds for the *Provveditori*.³¹ In 1590 finally the map of the Friuli was completed. Taken by the Austrians in the nineteenth century it is now at Vienna. Istria, for some reason, does not appear on it after all.³² In 1591 the map of the Veronese and Vicentino was finished; it is now in the Museo Correr at Venice (Fig. 5).³³ Three years later that of the Padovano and Trevigiano, now also at Vienna, was completed (Fig. 6).³⁴ Also the large map of the entire Venetian mainland state was finished

²⁷ All the relevant examples remain unpublished; e.g. the ceilings in S. Francesco di Paola (after 1586) and S. Teresa (after 1603).

²⁸ Sorte, *Modo*, p. 1 f.

²⁹ Lorenzi, *op. cit.*, Nos. 1012 A-B.

³⁰ Lorenzi, *op. cit.*, No. 1012 C.

³¹ Lorenzi, *op. cit.*, No. 995.

³² Vienna, Osterreichisches Staatsarchiv, Kriegsarchiv, Kartensmmlg. No. B VII a 167; 295 × 158 cm.; signed and dated 15th November 1590. The long inscription which explains the content of the map is reprinted by G. Marinelli, *Saggio di cartografia... veneta*, Venice, 1881, No. 102.

³³ Venice, Biblioteca d'Arte del Museo Civico Correr, Carte Geografiche, Manoscritti No. P. D. C 864/3; 280 × 135 cm.; signed and dated 2nd June 1591. For the inscription see Document No. 4.

³⁴ Vienna, Osterreichisches Staatsarchiv, Kriegsarchiv, Kartensmmlg. No. B VII a 154; 286 × 160 cm.; signed and dated 10th July 1594. The inscription is reprinted by R. Almagià, *Monumenta Italiae Cartographica*, Florence, 1929, p. 38 b.

The Viennese maps have been illustrated and their geographical importance discussed by Almagià,



5 Venice, Museo Correr. Map of the Veronese and Vicentino, by C. Sorte.



6 Vienna, Staatsarchiv. Detail from map of the Padovano and Trevigiano, by C. Sorte.

by Sorte before his death. Although today it has disappeared, it is mentioned in 1603 as hanging in the Antichiesetta.³⁵ Whether the other two detail maps of the intended set of five, representing the Bergamasco and the Bresciano, were ever made is unknown. The guide books never mention them nor any of these detail maps; presumably they were indeed kept under lock and key while the large map by virtue of its scale had in the end not needed such precautions.

The use of maps as mural decoration in the Ducal Palace dates back to the fifteenth century and perhaps even earlier. There is a tradition that the Sala dello Scudo in the Doge's apartment was decorated with maps as early as the reign of Francesco Dandolo (1329-39). From the later fifteenth century onwards, in any case, such decorations are amply documented. Between 1479 and 1553 a series of different cartographers provided the Chiesola and various rooms of the Doge's apartment with maps of subjects as diverse as Italy, the Venetian State, Asia and even America.³⁶ Sorte's proposed mural for the Sala del Senato thus was traditional in kind, although certainly novel in its colossal dimensions.

The change of location and size decided in 1582 was dictated by reasons of state: it was thought imprudent publicly to display a map which indicated all roads, passes and fortifications of the Republic. In a way the decision was a recognition of the increasing accuracy achieved by cartographers in the second half of the century, and especially of Sorte's qualities as a map maker. His whole production in fact is remarkable for the faithfulness of its topography and geography.³⁷

The three surviving maps from the Ducal Palace combine two different projections in traditional fashion: orthographic for the geography of the given area, perspectival for its topographical features. Also the portions of territory shown on each follow traditional patterns.³⁸ But the detail supplied within each territory — distances, orientations, contours — shows repeated divergences from earlier maps, divergences in the direction of greater accuracy. It is much of it the fruit of personal observations and field measurements made in part expressly for these maps and in part during the many surveys Sorte conducted throughout the *terraferma* for the *Beni Inculti* and other employers.³⁹

Also the topographical features — mountains and towns — are reported with much greater accuracy than on earlier maps. The buildings of towns are more consistent in scale, mountains do not rise as abruptly from the plains, and they are now supplied with foothills. In the case of the mountains one is struck also by the unusual character of their forms. They are softly painted crags and earthen hills, quite different from the stereotyped, monotonously repeated mounds and cones which commonly dot the maps of the sixteenth century.⁴⁰ Sorte's source in this case seems to have been not nature but art.

loc. cit., and „Le carte geografiche dei territori veneziano, padovano e trevigiano e del Friuli di C. Sorte“, Pubblicazioni dell'Ist. di Geografia dell'Univ. di Roma, Ser. B, III, 1954.

³⁵ F. Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima...*, ed. G. Stringa, Venice, 1604 (dated 1603 in the dedication), p. 232.

³⁶ See the fully documented study of R. Gallo, „Le mappe geografiche del Pal. Ducale“, *Archivio Veneto*, Ser. 5^a, XXXII/XXXIII, 1943, p. 47 f.

³⁷ *Almagià*, loc. cit.

³⁸ E.g. the confines of the Veronese and Vicentino as shown in Sorte's map of 1591 are exactly the same as in B. Brognolo's map of 1574; illus. *Almagià*, op. cit., p. 37 b, and pl. LI.

³⁹ See *Almagià*, the studies cited in note 34 above, and furthermore: „C. Sorte e i primi rilievi topografici d. Venezia Tridentina“, *Rivista geografica italiana*, XXXVIII, 1930, p. 117 f.; „Il litorale del Friuli... in un'importante documento cartografico del... sec. XVI“, *Atti del XIII. Congresso Geografico Italiano*, Udine, 1938, vol. II, p. 224 f.; *Carte geografiche a stampa... nella Bibl. Apos. Vaticana*, Vatican City, 1948, p. 86 f.; „Una pianta di Trento del sec. XVI“, *L'universo*, XXXV, 1955, p. 256-A f.

⁴⁰ Compare the printed maps illustrated by *Almagià*, *Mon. Ital. Cartographica*, passim, or the mural maps of the second half of the century in the Vatican, illustrated by *idem*, *La galleria delle carte geografiche*, Vatican City, 1952, and *idem*, *Le pitture geografiche... della terza loggia*, Vatican City, 1955.

Such pinnacles and rolling hills were standard conventions in Netherlandish representations of landscape. Imitated from the fifteenth century onwards in Italy, they had become a commonplace of easel painting in Sorte's time. In cartography however they were an innovation.

Although a knowledge of and a taste for these wild forms was international by the late sixteenth century, there is reason nonetheless to think that Sorte's mountains owe something to the direct vision of Netherlandish paintings. The highly fantastical shapes of the peaks and the particularized detail with which they are rendered (cf. Fig. 6) are truly Northern in character and not to be found in *cinquecento* derivations from these motives. Netherlandish pictures of course were easily accessible in Northern Italy where they had been collected in large numbers since the beginning of the century. The taste for Northern landscape in Venice itself was so well established that several Netherlanders had been able to settle in the capital during the second half of the century and make a living there as landscape specialists.⁴¹

Sorte could have learned to admire Netherlandish works already as a student at Verona, or later as a young man at Mantua.⁴² By 1541 in any case he was familiar with them. In that year he recorded in a painting the night-time fire of the Palazzo della Ragione, at Verona, and the description he gives in the *Osservazioni* of both the scene and his painting could be that of an early sixteenth century Antwerp painting of *Hell*. As has been shrewdly observed by a recent writer, without a knowledge of such a picture Sorte could neither have seen nor been able to record in paint the picturesque qualities of the fire.⁴³ His ability to see and to record in his maps „l'horridezza de' monti" — as a contemporary put it — seems to have been another instance of this formative influence of Northern art.⁴⁴

DOCUMENTS

1 *Verona, Archivio di Stato, Commune, No. 895 (Anagrafi, S. Paolo, 1544), f. 11 v. :*

7. Christ. ^o dipentor di sorti	—	34
Cassandra mugier	—	24
Medoro	} fioli	9
Isabella		2
Cornelia	} sorela d Cassadra	1
Laura		18
Pasqua massara	—	14

The same entry, with minor variants in spelling, reappears in : *ibid.*, *Commune, No. 896, f. 14 v.*; *Commune, No. 897, f. 12 v.*

⁴¹ For the strength with which Netherlanders were represented in early sixteenth century Venetian collections see, e.g., the lists of *M. A. Michiel*, *Der Anonimo Morelliano*, ed. *T. Frimmel* (Quellenschriften zur Kunstgesch., N.F. I), Vienna, 1896. Cf. further *J. Burckhardt*, „Die Sammler“, in *Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte von Italien*, Berlin, 1911, p. 360 f. For Netherlandish painters in Venice see *R. Peltzer*, „Die Niederländisch-Venezianische Landschaftsmalerei“, *Münchener Jahrbuch für bildende Kunst*, N.F. I, 1924, p. 126 f.

⁴² Netherlandish paintings were collected and artists employed in the Mantua of Federico Gonzaga. Among the Duke's purchases of works of art were 120 Flemish paintings acquired in 1535 : see *R. Buscaroli*, *La pittura del paesaggio in Italia*, Bologna, 1935, p. 56. Among the many assistants of Giulio Romano at Mantua was a Luca Fiammingo : see *F. Hartt*, *Giulio Romano*, New Haven, 1958, vol. I, p. 79.

⁴³ *E. H. Gombrich*, „Renaissance artistic theory and the development of landscape painting“, *Gazette d. Beaux Arts*, 6^e Ser., XLI, 1953, p. 353 f.

⁴⁴ The words are B. Vitali's, from the letter of 1573 which was the pretext to *Sorte's Osservazioni*, and which is printed *ibid.*¹, p. 3, ², p. 5.

- 2 Venice, *Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. Ital., Cl. IV, No. 169, p. 77 bis-78 v.*

Clar.mi & Eccell.mi Sig.ri Prou.ri sopra la Restauratione del Palazzo

Hauendo io Christoforo Sorte hauuto il carico di condur li Soffittadi cosi del gran Consiglio, come quello del Pregadi, secondo li miei disegni, ... & hauendo dato l'opera à m.ro Hieronimo Vesentino di far gli intagli del Gran Consiglio, & quello del Friso, et partimenti del Pregadi; ma io uedendo detto m.ro Hieronimo nō eseguir tal carico, giusto l'obbligo suo, & miei disegni; delche hauendone detto più uolte alli Eccell.mi suoi precessori; ... ho uoluto con questa scrittura per più rispetti, & ad ogni buon fine presentarla alle Sig.rie V. Eccell.me pregandole à farla registrare al suo Secretario, et sopra ciò prendergli quella prouisione che alla molta loro prudentia parerà conueniente;...

(the date of registration appears at the end)

Die xj. mensis Augusti. 1579.

(Published in a modernized text by *F. Zanotto*, *Il Palazzo Ducale di Venezia illustrato*, Venice, 1842-61, vol. I, p. 47, n. 8).

- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 74 v.-76 :

Essendo io Christoforo Sorte questa mattina, ch'è alli 24. Aprile 1582, comparso auanti gli Ecc.mi Sig.ri Proueditori sopra la restauratione del Palazzo con la supp.ne utsupra; & ben uista, & considerata, sue Cl.me Sig.rie m'hanno commesso, ch'io gli dichiarì distintamente quāto ho supplicato, ... riuerentemente dico, che hauendo hauuto contra ms. Lauro Zordan Secretario, uolendo lui sempre fauorire ms. Hieronimo Intagliatore suo Compadre; & similmente ms. Ant.o dal Ponte Protto, contrarijssimi alle operationi mie: ... per far contra all'honor mio, come le V. S. Cl.me farò chiarire sul fatto. (Nel Pregadi) esso Intagliatore hauendo mancato dell'obbligo suo di far nel friso fra li Termeti una Cartella con una figura dentro, secōdo che ha dato principio, la quātità che mancano sono n.o 8. che è di qualche importanza; & i fogliami del Friso non gli ha fatti secondo li disegni, et l'obbligo suo, ... et li partimenti di sotto di esso friso sù li banchi, non sono fatti secōdo li disegni, et è opera uergognosa in quel luoco. Però ms. Lauro l'ha fauorito, et fatto pagar... Appresso à ciò, li Ecc.mi Sig.ri di Pregadi, molto mi hanno ricercato ch'io facessi sboratori nel Soffittado; & gli ho fatto far quattro forami, quali furono molto laudati, & mai esso Proto non gli ha fatti metter in opera per esser cosa honorata, co' tutto che molte uolte gli è stato cōmesso, ... ma di più ha messo una inuentione, *p* uergognar' à fatto, di certi sboratori in foza di Pirie, come si fanno nelle Caneue da trauasar uino; cosa molto uergognosa. Et appresso di ciò ha rouinato il gozzolatoi del cornison del friso, con fargli forami senza consideratione...

Quanto poi alle cose del gran Consiglio, io dico, che mancano à far' il soffittado del Cornison del Friso, ch'è sopra alli Dosi, partādo dalla parte sopra il Tribunale, quale uà cō le medesime Cartelle. Et nel loco, doue sono l'arme de' Dosi col nome, et cognome, et col millesimo; uanno fatto nel luoco di dette Arme, Anzelini con il misterio della Passione del Nro Sig.re in mano, che saranno sopra al Paradiso; & poi ho fatto, che l'Architraue, doue è posto sopra li modiglioni, sia più fuori del muro oncie cinque; acciò sia fatto li suoi ornamenti alli Quadri, che uanno da detto Architraue fino sopra li banchi. Appresso di ciò mancano à far gli ornamenti della Madonna del Sansouino, cioè disegni & sagome; & non uoglio star' à dir' altro del strappazzo del soffittado maltirato. Et tutto questo è uenuto da questi galanti huomini soprannominati...

Pero uedendo l'Ecc.me Sig.rie V.re l'ingāno fatto à quei Cl.mi suoi precessori cosi manifestiss.o da questi due soprannominati, come loro hanno dato da intendere alle sue Clar.me Sig.rie che 'l Gran Consiglio era fornito; & similmente il Pregadi, cosa che non è stata uera...; & che à parole sue quei Sig.ri Cl.mi mi habbino casso del carico à me dato auanti che sia finita l'opera...; & parendo alla sua prudentia far che sia nullata la mia cassatione, per esser stati ingānati quei Cl.mi Sig.ri..., acciò si possi dar bonissimo fine all'impresa imperfetta; altramente restando l'opera mia nelle mani di questi miei emuli, le cose hauerāo cattiuo fine..., & resteranno l'opere uergognate; ma io criderò sempre fino al Cielo, perche io non uoglio uergogna.

(Published in a modernized text by *Zanotto*, op. cit., vol. I, p. 47, n. 9, together with the „supp.ne ut supra“ referred to in the opening sentence. This is Sorte's petition to the Doge and Signoria, on the basis of which the hearing of 24th April 1582 was called. It contains no specific information and hence has been omitted here.

(The „Madonna del Sansovino“ referred to in the second paragraph is the marble group now in the Chiesetta; cf. *G. Vasari, Vita di Jac. Tatti detto il Sansovino*, ed. G. Lorenzetti, Florence, 1913, pp. 70, 127 f.).

4 *Venice, Biblioteca del Museo Civico Correr, Carte Geografiche, Manoscritti P.D. C 864/3 :*

Hauendo comeso gli Ill.mi Sig.ri Pro.ri sopra la fabrica del Palazzo della Ser.ma Sig.ra de Venetia a me Christoforo Sorte primo perito ordinario di beni inculti che faccia li presentj disegnj del Terretorio Veronese, et Vicentino, Posi ogni pensiero che tutte le partj, et qualita di essi con giuste misure, et distanze perfetamente si conossero. in Venetia il di ij Giugno 1591. Questa sono unna delle cinque parte dil dessegno Gienerale qual sono il terrio Veronese, et Vicentino.

RIASSUNTO

Vengono illustrate notizie biografiche intorno a Cristoforo Sorte da Verona (1506/10 - dopo 1594) e notizie storiche intorno ai suoi lavori nel Palazzo Ducale di Venezia. Questi — parecchie carte geografiche del territorio veneziano, e due soffitti i disegni dei quali spettano a lui — vengono sottoposti ad un attento esame per fissare il loro posto nello sviluppo dell'arte veneta del tardo cinquecento e per localizzare le fonti artistiche del Sorte.