

FRANCESCO BARBARO

The Wealth of Wives:
A Fifteenth-Century Marriage Manual



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Introduction

The Other Voice

In 1415, the young and still unmarried Francesco Barbaro (1390–1454) wrote the revolutionary treatise *The Wealth of Wives* (*De re uxoria*) that posits the value a wife contributes to a marriage as the mother of offspring.¹ It is revolutionary because it identifies the mother—a woman, not a man; an interloper in the household, not its patriarch—as the critical figure for the rearing of the young and, consequently, for the social and cultural reproduction of the noble family. It is the mother, not the father, Barbaro argues, who transmits her own mental and moral characteristics to her offspring in the processes of gestation and lactation,

1. Barbaro would be married in 1419 to the noblewoman Maria, daughter of the eminent Pietro Loredan, procurator of San Marco, and would father one son, the humanist Zaccaria Barbaro, and four daughters. For Barbaro, see especially Margaret L. King, *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 323–25, and studies there cited; and Francesco Barbaro, *Epistolario*, ed. Claudio Griggio, 2 vols. (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1991, 1999). For the *De re uxoria*, see Attilio Gnesotto, ed., *De re uxoria liber, in partes duas*, in *Atti e Memorie della R. Accademia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti in Padova*, n.s. 32 (1915–1916), 6–105 (offprint, Padua: Randi, 1915), Introduction, vii–xx; Percy Gothein, ed. and trans., *Das Buch von der Ehe: De re uxoria* (Berlin: Verlag die Runde, 1933), Vorrede, 9–10, and Nachwort, 85–88; and Benjamin G. Kohl, “Introduction” to “On Wifely Duties,” a partial translation of *De re uxoria*, in Kohl and Ronald G. Witt, eds., *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 177–228, at 177–88. See also studies of the *De re uxoria* by Carole Collier Frick, “The Downcast Eyes of the Women of the Upper Class in Francesco Barbaro’s *De re uxoria*,” *UCLA Historical Journal* 9 (1989), online at <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/8cm5t90d>; Frick, “Francesco Barbaro’s *De re uxoria*: A Silent Dialogue for a Young Medici Bride,” in *Printed Voices: The Renaissance Culture of Dialogue*, ed. Dorothea B. Heitsch and Jean-François Vallée (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 193–205; Percy Gothein, *Francesco Barbaro: Früh-Humanismus und Staatskunst in Venedig* (Berlin: Verlag die Runde, 1932), chapter 4: “De re uxoria und ihr Verfasser: Ideen- und literargeschichtliche Zusammenhänge,” 61–99; King, “Caldiera and the Barbaros on Marriage and the Family: Humanist Reflections of Venetian Realities,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 6, no. 1 (1976): 19–50, rpt. in King, *Humanism, Venice, and Women: Essays on the Italian Renaissance* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), V; Manfred Lentzen, “Frühhumanistische Auffassungen über Ehe und Familie (Francesco Barbaro—Matteo Palmieri—Leon Battista Alberti),” in *Saeculum tamquam aureum: Internationales Symposium zur italienischen Renaissance des 14.–16. Jahrhunderts (am 17./18. September 1996 in Mainz)*, ed. Ute Ecker and Clemens Zintzen (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1997), 379–94; Alberto Tenenti, “La *res uxoria* tra Francesco Barbaro e Leon Battista Alberti,” in *Una famiglia veneziana nella storia: i Barbaro: Atti del convegno di studi in occasione del quinto centenario della morte dell’umanista Ermolao, Venezia, 4–6 novembre 1993*, ed. Michela Marangoni and Manlio Pastore Stocchi (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 1996), 43–66; and the chapter on Barbaro in Sister Prudence Allen’s *The Concept of Woman*, vol. 2: *The Early Humanist Reformation, 1250–1500* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 712–31.

2 Introduction

and who further guides her child's religious and intellectual development during the first years of life. Barbaro's elevation of the role of women in the formation of future generations is unprecedented in the classical or Christian traditions. Ironically, it is a man of the highest social rank in the imperial city of Venice, who will during his career exercise enormous political power, and who makes no apology for his position of social and political privilege, who becomes the first champion of maternal capacity in the domain of the family, and an advocate of the other voice.

Barbaro: Humanist and Statesman

Francesco Barbaro was twenty-five years old when he wrote *The Wealth of Wives*, having just finished his studies: Latin, Greek, philosophical, and legal. Unmarried and, as was typical of elite men in their mid-twenties during the Italian Renaissance, with as yet no political or professional role, he would soon embark on marriage and career, and enter the vortex at the center of Venetian public life. But for the moment, he was poised on the verge of that future, and engaged above all in a season of cultural exhilaration, as the intellectual movement of humanism gained full force and, in Venice, converged with a new political mission.

In Venice, humanism begins with the great Italian poet and Latin scholar Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca, 1304–1374).² In 1351, some four decades before Barbaro's birth, Petrarch came to Venice as an emissary of Milan, and bonded with the Doge of Venice Andrea Dandolo (1306–1354), a prodigy of learning as well as of politics. Petrarch returned to his wanderings and Dandolo soon died. But Petrarch had planted the seed of humanism in Dandolo's coterie of bureaucrats and secretaries, who subsequently invited him back to Venice to take up permanent residence. He came in 1361, and there resided until 1367, the lodestone of Venetian intellectual life at a critical juncture. Three years later, he left in a huff over an academic squabble.³ At about that time, Zaccaria Trevisan (c. 1370–1414) was born, the inheritor of the Petrarchan legacy in Venice and the prototypical figure of Venetian humanism.⁴

Like most of the Venetian humanists who followed him, Trevisan was a nobleman. He had not been born noble, however. His family was one of thirty

2. Humanism has earlier origins in the northern Italian communes, as has been exhaustively demonstrated by Ronald G. Witt: *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); *The Two Latin Cultures and the Foundation of Renaissance Humanism in Medieval Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

3. One of immense significance, as documented fully in Petrarch's *De sui ipsius et multorum aliorum ignorantia*, trans. and ed. Hans Nachod as *On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others*, in Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr., eds., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man: Selections in Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 47–133.

4. For Zaccaria Trevisan, see King, *Venetian Humanism*, 436–37, and sources there cited.

wealthy commoner families granted nobility—the last time noble status would be granted to anyone before the seventeenth century—in recognition of their sacrificial service. That service was performed in 1381 during the epochal Chioggian war, in which Venice was nearly destroyed but rallied to defeat Genoa, its long-time commercial rival. It is likely that the prize of noble status, so rare and so valuable, was one that Trevisan cherished profoundly. It is certain that he developed important contacts with older patrician families, including the Marcellos and the Barbaros. In 1395, he married the noblewoman Caterina di Giovanni Marcello, and he would in 1413 deliver a celebratory oration in honor of the doctorate at the University of Padua of her kinsman Pietro Marcello, that city's bishop—one whom Francesco Barbaro, then a student, no doubt heard *viva voce*. In the 1390s, even as he pursued his university studies in canon and civil law, Trevisan likely visited the Barbaro household, when Francesco was a boy. In 1412 and 1413, when he held the position of Captain of Padua (one of the two executive positions held by Venetian noblemen in their mainland subject cities), the two were close. Barbaro records that intimacy in the dedicatory preface of *The Wealth of Wives*, and again in its culminating paragraph when he recalls Trevisan as “a man worthy of the highest praise—whose memory I celebrate.”⁵

Zaccaria Trevisan embodied the tendencies of Venetian intellectual culture that would come to typify that majority (about two-thirds) of the Venetian humanists who were of noble origin. His humanism was passionate and genuine—but it was infused by the disciplines of philosophy and law taught at the university of Padua, a neighboring city that became subject to Venice in 1405; and it was enlisted in the service of Venetian political interests. Francesco Barbaro would follow Trevisan's example. His treatise *The Wealth of Wives* is an early manifestation of that complex and distinctively Venetian form of humanism, and is the first major work of the Venetian humanist tradition.

Prior to 1407, Barbaro studied with the humanist Giovanni Conversini da Ravenna, resident in Padua from 1392 to 1405 and in Venice in 1405–1406,⁶ who numbered among his pupils Pier Paolo Vergerio the Elder (1370–1444/1445) and Guarino Veronese, later Barbaro's instructor in Greek, of whom more below. From 1405 to 1408, under Conversini's tutelage, Barbaro began his formal education in the *studia humanitatis*—those disciplines that formed the core of the humanist program, including grammar (Latin and, sometimes, Greek), rhetoric, poetry, moral philosophy, and history. He then continued his studies under Gasparino Barzizza (1360–1431), who, after a sojourn in Venice in 1407, when he made

5. See below, 124. Subsequent citations of Barbaro's *Wealth of Wives* will be given within parentheses in the text.

6. Conversini has been extensively studied by Benjamin G. Kohl; see the convenient collection of his studies in *Culture and Politics in Early Renaissance Padua* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001).

contact with the Barbaro family, moved to Padua in 1408.⁷ There Barzizza taught at the university until 1421, while at the same time maintaining in his home a school with a resident group of adolescents, Francesco Barbaro among them.⁸ In Padua, Barbaro mastered Latin prose on the Ciceronian model, in which Barzizza was the leading expert, and read the essential Latin classics—including Cicero’s *De officiis* (On Duties), a humanist favorite, whose pages richly inform Barbaro’s own work. Through Barzizza, as well, Barbaro likely came to know Pier Paolo Vergerio’s *De ingenuis moribus et liberalibus studiis adolescentiae* (The Character and Studies Befitting a Free-Born Youth, 1402/1403),⁹ to which he would allude in his *The Wealth of Wives*, written not long afterward. Vergerio’s prescriptions, indeed, for the education of the heir apparent of the Carrara dynasty then ruling Padua very likely approximated that which Barbaro was receiving at that time and not far away, in Venice.

Remaining in Padua, Barbaro pursued the university program of studies in philosophy and law, and received on October 1, 1412, at the age of twenty-two, his doctorate in civil and canon law, the degree most commonly sought by the Venetian noble humanists. By this time, Zaccaria Trevisan had taken up his office as Captain of Padua, making possible the discussions between Barbaro and Trevisan that are fundamental to Barbaro’s conceptualization of marriage.

There remained, to prepare Barbaro for the intellectual labors evidenced in *The Wealth of Wives*, the acquisition of Greek. Barbaro began his study of Greek with Guarino Veronese (1374–1460) in July 1414, when—after a four-year stint in Florence—Guarino had returned to Venice and resided in the Barbaro

7. For Barzizza, see Guido Martellotti’s profile in the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 7 (1970), online at http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gasperino-barzizza_%28Dizionario_Biografico%29/, as well as Lucia Gualdo Rosa, ed., *Gasparino Barzizza e la Rinascita degli studi classici: fra continuità e rinnovamento: Atti del seminario di studi, Napoli, Palazzo Sforza, 11 Aprile 1997* (Naples: Istituto universitario orientale, 1999).

8. For the lively household school Barzizza maintained while carrying on his university 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).

9. *Petri Pauli Vergerii De ingenuis moribus et liberalibus studiis adolescentiae*, ed. Attilio Gnesotto, *Atti e memorie della R. Accademia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti in Padova*, n.s. 34, no. 2 (1917–1918): 75–157 (offprint, Padua: Randi, 1918); see also the bilingual edition and translation by Craig Kallendorf in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, ed. Kallendorf (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 2–91. For Vergerio, see the introduction of Michael Katchmer to his *Pier Paolo Vergerio and the Paulus, a Latin Comedy* (New York: P. Lang, 1998), 1–88; John M. McManamon, *Pierpaolo Vergerio the Elder: The Humanist as Orator* (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996); David Robey, “Humanism and Education in the Early Quattrocento: The *De ingenuis moribus* of Pier Paolo Vergerio,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 42, no. 1 (1980): 27–58; Robey, “Pier Paolo Vergerio the Elder: Republicanism and Civic Values in the Work of an Early Humanist,” *Past and Present* 58 (1973): 3–37; and the critical edition of Vergerio’s letters by Leonardo Smith: *Epistolario di Pier Paolo Vergerio* (Rome: Tipografia del Senato, 1934).

household.¹⁰ Guarino's prior acquaintance with Barbaro is documented by his 1408 letter from Constantinople—one of the earliest extant of his correspondence—to his “dearly loved brother” Francesco, then an adolescent enthusiast of classical studies.¹¹ In Constantinople from 1403 to 1408, Guarino studied Greek with the great scholar and statesman Manuel Chrysoloras, becoming one of the first Italian masters of that language and literature. Now in 1414–1415, he in turn instructed Francesco Barbaro. In a single year (his “anno del greco,” as Attilio Gnesotto writes in some stupefaction at the speed of his progress¹²), Barbaro digested a huge corpus of Greek classics, including the many that he cites in *The Wealth of Wives*, as he declares in the final paragraph of the work:

Having been immersed in these Greek studies for only a few months, yet I have managed already to extract from them rich and delightful fruit. In this task I have been empowered by the mind and soul of the eminent and erudite Guarino Veronese, my teacher and most devoted of friends. (Barbaro, 125)

Guarino's tutelage provided Barbaro with a rich harvest of insights and anecdotes that illustrate every turn of his argument. Plutarch reigns supreme in Barbaro's repertoire: the *Lives*, naturally—one of Barbaro's first literary ventures was a translation of Plutarch's life of Marcus Porcius Cato the Elder—but also, and principally, the essays of the *Moralia*, especially the *Conjugalium praecepta* (Advice to Married Couples), *De amore proliis* (On the Love for Offspring), and the *De liberis educandis* (On the Education of Children). He was demonstrably familiar, as well, with works of Homer, Herodotus, Xenophon, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Plato, and Aristotle, among other Greek authors. This Greek library augmented his already solid Latin one, which included Cicero, above all, the anthologies of

10. Guarino Guarini da Verona, or Guarino Veronese, as he is referred to here to distinguish him from the later architect Guarino Guarini (1624–1683). For Guarino, see the many works of Remigio Sabbadini, of which two, *La vita di Guarino Veronese* (orig. 1891) and *La scuola e gli studi di Guarino Veronese* (1896), are reprinted in the single volume *Guariniana*, ed. Mario Sancipriano (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1964); Sabbadini, ed., *Epistolario di Guarino Veronese*, 3 vols. (Venice: A spese della Società di storia veneta, 1915–1919); and the bibliography by Craig Kallendorf, “Guarino da Verona,” in *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Renaissance and Reformation*, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0084.xml>.

11. In Sabbadini, *Epistolario*, 1:7–11, letter 4, “to my dearly loved brother Francesco Barbaro, glorious in literature as in nobility” (*fratri meo amantissimo Francisci Barbari literatura pariter ac nobilitate*), 1:11. For Barbaro's relations with Guarino, see also Claudio Griggio, “Senofonte, Guarino, Francesco e Ermolao Barbaro, Alberti,” *Filologia e critica* 31 (2006): 161–76, and Antonio Rollo, “Dalla biblioteca di Guarino a quella di Francesco Barbaro,” *Studi medievali e umanistici* 3 (2005): 9–40.

12. Gnesotto, ed., *De re uxoria*, Introduction, x.

Aulus Gellius and Valerius Maximus, and works of law and theology (as his familiarity with Saint Augustine attests).

Saturated with this new Greek learning, Barbaro journeyed in the summer of 1415 to Florence, where he spent some time as a guest of the Medici family.¹³ The two brothers Cosimo (1389–1464) and Lorenzo (c. 1395–1440),¹⁴ sons of the great banker Giovanni di Bicci (c. 1360–1429), were roughly his contemporaries, and products, like Barbaro, of a humanist education. Both, but especially Cosimo, the first Medici ruler of Florence, later became proponents and patrons of humanism and the arts.

Barbaro was close at hand, therefore, for the engagement in 1415 of Lorenzo de' Medici to Ginevra Cavalcanti (to whom he would be married in early 1416), the triggering event for the composition of *The Wealth of Wives*. Fresh from the study of Greek, and shortly before that, the study of law, and in between these two experiences, protracted discussions on the topic with Zaccaria Trevisan, Barbaro needed only the prospect of the marriage of a contemporary to launch him on the project of a humanist treatise on marriage. Written by the scion of one of the wealthiest and most powerful noble clans of Venice to the scion of one of the wealthiest families of Florence, one destined soon to reach the apex of political power in that city, it identifies marriage as the pivotal social institution for the Renaissance patriciate, requiring a discussion of its philosophical, legal, moral, and historical ramifications.

Barbaro likely finished *The Wealth of Wives* by the end of 1415, and dispatched it as a wedding gift to Lorenzo—Barbaro opining that Lorenzo would prefer a gift “from his Francesco” to one from his “fortune”: “I see that a gift would be more welcome and pleasing to you if it came not from Francesco’s fortune, but from your friend Francesco.” (Barbaro, 65) Now twenty-five, he was still, in the thinking of the day, an adolescent: for patrician youths did not enter upon careers until they were almost thirty, and many did not marry until that time, allowing them a long span of years during which to acquire an education and pursue an array of amusements. Barbaro remained in contact with humanist friends during this time, which was, coincidentally, the moment when several of them were gathered in the Swiss Alps at the Council of Constance (Konstanz, modern Germany). That ecclesiastical convention met from 1414 to 1418, with the mission of ending

13. For this venture, see Remigio Sabbadini, “La gita di Francesco Barbaro a Firenze,” in *Miscellanea di studi in onore di Attilio Hortis*, 2 vols. (Trieste: Stabilimento artistico tipografico G. Caprin, 1910), 2:615–27, reprinted in Sabbadini, *Storia e critica di testi latini*, 2nd ed., ed. Eugene and Myriam Billanovich (Padua: Antenore, 1971), 25–35.

14. This Lorenzo is designated “the Elder” to distinguish him from Cosimo’s grandson Lorenzo (1449–1492), the third Medici ruler of Florence, known as “the Magnificent.” For the Medici family, see the annotated bibliography of Stella Fletcher in *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Renaissance and Reformation*, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0260.xml>.

the schism of the church (the papal see at this point having three claimants) and, collaterally, the settlement of the Wycliffite and Hussite heresies. Among the throng of bureaucrats and secretaries who accompanied the dignitaries were humanists whose eyes were set on a prize: the books said to be found in the nearby abbey of St. Gallen, an early medieval foundation whose monks, over the years, had copied a multitude of manuscripts and stored them in a long-neglected library. In the last months of 1416, a group of papal secretaries went on an outing to investigate this treasure trove. It proved, in fact, to be full of fine copies of Latin books, including a few priceless titles that had been lost to view—notably Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*, a rhetorical handbook of first importance, known to have existed but not prior to this moment recovered.

The jubilant book-hunters announced their finds to the humanists back home in a flurry of letters, including one by Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459) to Guarino Veronese, from whom Barbaro learned of the find.¹⁵ Barbaro responded with a letter of his own to Poggio, congratulating him on his triumph.¹⁶

... I have thought it proper, on account of the bond of literature which ties us particularly together, to thank you and not to pass over in silence the tremendous service you did for mankind, by sending us a list of those books which by your effort and diligence you have recovered for us and for posterity For no news could have been brought us that was more joyful and welcome than that which relates both to your glory ... and to the expansion of culture in the highest degree.¹⁷

And in the same letter, in commenting on the great contribution the Constance discoveries had made to the world of learning, Barbaro coined a phrase that would become universal currency over the next three centuries, used to describe the international community of the learned: the *respublica litterarum*, the “republic of letters.”¹⁸ How fitting that a man about to enter upon a career as leading figure in the *respublica venetorum*, the “Venetian Republic,” would have republics on his mind, and define as a “republic” a group of men bounded by no geographical or political frontiers, sharing only their commitment to the life of the mind.

15. See Phyllis W.G. Gordan, ed. and trans., *Two Renaissance Book Hunters: The Letters of Poggius Bracciolini to Nicolaus de Niccolis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), Appendix, 187–206, for the eight letters related to the Constance discoveries, including the letter to Guarino (dated December 15, 1416) at 193–96.

16. Gordan, *Two Renaissance Book Hunters*, 196–203, letter dated July 6, 1417.

17. Gordan, *Two Renaissance Book Hunters*, 196.

18. Gordan, *Two Renaissance Book Hunters*, 199.

The moment at which he penned those words, in 1417, is the last time that Barbaro will be seen as a humanist among humanists. He would become a patron of humanists¹⁹ more than an active participant in their circles—their *respublica*—although he continued his classical studies throughout his life and wrote in a fine humanist Latin, besides some orations, an enormous quantity of letters. But now in his late twenties, he assumed the responsibilities of a Venetian nobleman. He married the noblewoman Maria Loredan in 1419, and named his eldest son, born 1422, Zaccaria—a commemoration not only of his elder brother of that name, but also of the mentor of his youth, Zaccaria Trevisan. In that year, as well, he assumed his first major political office, that of podestà, or governor, of Treviso. That position was followed by an unbroken series of high-level appointments as, repeatedly, provincial governor (*rettore*) or captain (*capitano*), “great sage” (*savio grande*) or “sage of the terraferma” (*savio di terraferma*), ducal councilor or member of the Council of Ten, and eventually, in 1452, the highest office short of the dogeship itself, Procurator of San Marco.

For Barbaro belonged to that set of about 100 patricians who, at any time, dominated the political machinery of Venice. Moreover, the arc of his career, from 1422 until his death in 1454, corresponds almost precisely to the *dogado* of Francesco Foscari, from 1423 to 1457, the architect of Venice’s imperial expansion onto the Italian mainland—the *terraferma*.²⁰ It was a venture in which Barbaro was fully engaged, as is witnessed by, among other documents, his nearly 100 letters written from Brescia during the period 1437–1440, when, as captain of that provincial city and protector of its population, he withstood a desperate three-year siege.²¹ Barbaro lived not quite a year after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the consequences of which would strain the political fortunes of his beloved city. The humanist Filippo Morandi da Rimini (c. 1407–1497) had written from nearby Corfù, where he was stationed as Venetian chancellor, and dedicated to Barbaro, his patron, an account of that tragedy soon after it occurred; in 1454, Morandi delivered Barbaro’s funeral oration.²²

Wives and the Venetian Nobility

Barbaro was evidently a committed and engaged member of the Venetian nobility, in origin and by definition the city’s ruling class. And it is as a nobleman, fully

19. Notably of the historian Flavio Biondo, and the Greek immigrant rhetorician George of Trebizond.

20. For Foscari, see Dennis Romano, *The Likeness of Venice: A Life of Doge Francesco Foscari, 1373–1457* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

21. Francesco Barbaro, *Epistolario*, 2:167–360, letters 70–164, which span the period of Barbaro’s captaincy in Brescia; most of these are by Barbaro, written from Brescia, with a few by correspondents elsewhere addressed to him.

22. King, *Venetian Humanism*, 75–76.

conscious of looming demographic challenges, that he writes *The Wealth of Wives*. The work addresses a critical issue: that to continue its sovereignty, the Venetian nobility must reproduce itself, and worthily; and that to do so, it must rely on the women who would bear and rear their offspring. These nobles were dependent upon the fertility, the fortitude, the character, and the intelligence of their wives.

This context requires, it follows, that the Venetian nobleman who writes a treatise on marriage be himself unmarried—however much he otherwise had participated in the vibrant sexual underworld of Renaissance Italy, along with others of his contemporaries who boasted of their Christian or humanist virtue. It was urgently important to reach these young men, so as to convince them not only to marry, but to choose as a wife a woman who would be the best mother for their offspring.

Barbaro targets this audience of young nobles, his contemporaries and his peers, in two ways: first, by dedicating the work to a young man of equivalent status, although a Florentine and not a Venetian, who was himself imminently to marry a woman who was a paragon of desired qualities; and second, by addressing through this intermediary others of their acquaintance and set. In the dedication, Barbaro writes that he did not compose his treatise to instruct Lorenzo in particular, “but so that through you I might reach many of our generation.” (Barbaro, 66) Later, he chides those young men who seek either beauty or wealth in a wife, rather than all-important moral and intellectual qualities. Of the former, he asks: “What kind of a wife will she be, if she who should be joined to us by dignity and friendliness is tied to us only by beauty?” (Barbaro, 84) As for those seeking wealth, he grumbles that they “have been from their childhood so infused and imbued with the love of gain that they will perform any labor and expend any effort to acquire and achieve it, not neglecting any path by which they think they may satisfy their avarice.” (Barbaro, 86) In closing his treatise, Barbaro calls on the young to follow the example of Lorenzo de’ Medici in choosing a wife worthy of their noble status: “Your peers, therefore, my Lorenzo, should be inspired to imitate you and eagerly follow your path, who have chosen as your wife Ginevra, who ... is the most splendid young woman anywhere to be found.” (Barbaro, 124)

At first sight, the critical importance that Barbaro ascribes to wives seems to contradict what we have learned over recent decades about the real situation of women in Renaissance Italy. Even women who were members of respectable households suffered constraints—setting aside for the moment the misery of prostitutes or the vulnerability of young servant girls or the differential death by infanticide or neglect of female infants. Before marriage, girls were held to a stern requirement of virginity, since even the appearance of impropriety threatened their status and dishonored their family. That family determined the marital destinies of these young women, and their non-marital destinies as well: for parents often determined that their daughters would not marry, but live out their lives in a

convent, whether or not they had embraced a religious vocation. Married women brought to their husbands a dowry, constituting that portion of their father's wealth they were to inherit—but control of dowry wealth was exercised entirely by their husbands, on whose death it reverted, in most cases, to a woman's natal family, or that of her subsequent spouse. While wives could own private property, they could not normally engage in financial or legal agreements; and, naturally, unless they were as consorts or regents the surrogates of rulers, they could not exercise political power. Widows, perhaps, suffered the fewest constraints. But their actions, too, were circumscribed, and in the absence of protection by other family members, they often descended into irremediable poverty.

In Venice, the condition of women was better than in some other settings, and certainly better than in Florence.²³ Prostitutes reportedly numbering in the thousands—working women even if compelled by circumstances—certainly had ample opportunities to earn an income in the thriving and cosmopolitan port city of Venice. Of loftier rank were the courtesans, famous throughout Europe, of whom those denoted as “honest courtesans” were proficient conversationalists, musicians, and poets. Beyond the sex trades, married and lone women worked at a variety of skilled and unskilled trades, including as assistants in the thriving shops of their husbands. Women in abusive marriages could seek justice in Venetian ecclesiastical courts, and apparently obtained it. Numerous places of refuge existed for specifically female victims of circumstance: orphans, for instance, and former prostitutes. In Venice, too, however, despite a general level of freedom and opportunity greater than that in many other European settings, the dowry system—and especially the wild dowry inflation of the Renaissance centuries—resulted in the forced monachation of many women, although we cannot know what portion of the total of professed women these unhappy nuns represented.

More pertinent to Barbaro's theme, and distinctive of Venice, is the relatively great prominence enjoyed by noblewomen.²⁴ Like women of the elites everywhere

23. For women in Venice, see Monica Chojnacka, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Stanley Chojnacki, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice: Twelve Essays on Patrician Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Alexander Cowan, *Marriage, Manners and Mobility in Early Modern Venice* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007); Cecilia Cristellon, *La carità e l'eros: il matrimonio, la chiesa, i suoi giudici nella Venezia del Rinascimento, 1420–1545* (Bologna: Società Editrice Il Mulino, 2010); Joanne M. Ferraro, *Marriage Wars in Late Renaissance Venice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Daniela Hacke, *Women, Sex, and Marriage in Early Modern Venice* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004); Jutta G. Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); and three essays from Eric Dursteler, ed., *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400–1797* (Leiden: Brill, 2013): Anna Bellavitis, “Family and Society,” 319–52; Cecilia Cristellon and Silvana Seidel Menchi, “Religious Life,” 379–420; and Anne Jacobson Schutte, “Society and the Sexes in the Venetian Republic,” 353–78.

24. A complex and comprehensive understanding of the condition of noblewomen in Venice is provided by the many essays of Stanley Chojnacki, of which twelve are collected in his *Women and Men*,

in Europe at this time, their sexual lives were exceedingly constricted, as were their opportunities to appear in public settings and participate in political affairs. But they had other and not negligible liberties. They could own personal property acquired as gifts from their kin. Their dowry wealth was their property, too; and although its management was ceded to their husbands so long as the latter lived, women reclaimed their dowries as widows, from which they could make gifts while alive and bequests at their deaths benefiting both their marital and natal kin. Thus they were benefactors not only of their sons and daughters, but also of other kin, as well as female servants and friends.²⁵

Most striking, however, is the authority enjoyed by noblewomen as the mothers of their sons. These they reared in the absences of their husbands—and their husbands were often absent, for months or even years at a time, on commercial ventures, as provincial officials, or as ambassadors to distant courts—and very often as widows, choosing to remain in the marital household for decades while their children reached maturity. Acting in their husbands' stead, they had the capacity to present their sons at age eighteen (after 1497, age twenty) to the Avogaria di Comun, an august body of state attorneys, to present proof of their registration as legitimate descendants of a noble clan and thus as eligible to enter the political offices of the Republic.²⁶ Beyond this exceptional privilege, their high prestige in Venetian society is manifested in many ways, as it is to some extent in the exalted status accorded the *dogaresa*, the wife of the Doge.²⁷

The extraordinary position of Venetian noblewomen is the consequence of the exceptional nature of the Venetian nobility. Elsewhere in Italy and northern Europe, nobles were mounted soldiers, and the horse was virtually the synecdoche of nobility, reflected in the terms used for that elite in the western European languages (*cavaliere*, *chevalier*, *cavalier*, *caballero*, *Ritter*). But Venetian nobles were not horsemen, and while they did do battle at sea, neither they nor their subordinates fought on land, employing mercenary forces in their conquests of *terraferma*. The Venetian nobility was not a warrior class, therefore, but a network of extended families whose wealth and status derived from maritime ventures, at least before 1500, rather than agricultural production or territorial aggrandizement. Although composed of merchants, who were often viewed as upstarts and newcomers, the Venetian nobility was very old—ancient, in fact, as several of the

and which provide much of the material reviewed in this section.

25. For their role as patronesses, disposing of this wealth, to women of their household, courtyard, and neighborhood, see Dennis Romano, *Patricians and Popolani: The Social Foundations of the Venetian Renaissance State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 131–40.

26. A role frequently noted by Chojnacki, but see especially his essay “Kinship Ties and Young Patricians” (orig. 1985) in *Women and Men*, 206–26.

27. Holly S. Hurlburt, *The Dogaresa of Venice, 1200–1500: Wife and Icon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

old noble clans had migrated to the Adriatic lagoons on which Venice arose during the last centuries of the Roman era. It was indeed, as Ronnie Ferguson terms it, “Europe’s oldest mercantile aristocracy.”²⁸

Furthermore, although this noble stratum evolved over time, with newer families joining and sometimes surpassing older ones, it was at one particular moment—actually a number of decades, beginning in the 1290s—that its identity became fixed. That moment, or process, known as the *serrata del Gran Consiglio* (“closing of the Great Council”), resulted in the permanent definition of the noble class as those belonging to, or descending from, those families which then were members of the principal Venetian governing council. Where other nobilities, however legitimate might be their claims to high status, had a shifting composition, rarely established by any record of origin, with unclear and often contested claims to authority, the Venetian nobility was created by legislative act and constituted a legally-defined class uniquely entitled to participate in government. And so it was until 1797, when Napoleon Bonaparte put an end to the Republic, with two exceptions: in 1381, when thirty wealthy commoner families (including Trevisan’s) were admitted to the nobility in recognition of their sacrificial contributions to Venetian coffers, and in the seventeenth century, when demographic and fiscal stress prompted the Republic to open the rolls of nobility to those who were willing to pay to be inscribed.

The closure of the nobility entailed necessarily the high valuation of women. An elite that one entered only by birth necessarily assigned to women, in their roles as mothers, responsibility for the reproduction of the class. The quality of those women became, in consequence, an issue. In 1420, although the women chosen as wives by members of the patriciate could come from foreign or commoner origins, it was required that they be of legitimate birth.²⁹ In 1422, it was further required that sons of patricians who had married women of low origins would be denied noble status—thus making “maternity,” as Stanley Chojnacki comments, “a determinant of nobility.”³⁰ In 1506, it was decreed that women marrying patricians must themselves be of noble birth, so that the nobility of sons now depended on the noble status of both paternal and maternal lineages. Here is the origin of the famous *Libri d’oro*, or “golden books,” the registers in which were inscribed the names of these illustrious progenitors of the next generation of noble sons.³¹ In 1526, it was further ruled, to accentuate these requirements and

28. Ronnie Ferguson, “Venetian Language,” in Dursteler, ed., *Companion to Venetian History*, 929–57, at 932.

29. Chojnacki, “Marriage Regulation in Venice, 1420–1535” (orig. 1998), in *Women and Men*, 53–75, at 56–57.

30. Chojnacki, “Marriage Regulation,” 56, 63–64; “The Power of Love: Wives and Husbands” (orig. 1988), in *Women and Men*, 153–68, at 156–57n15 (302).

31. Chojnacki, “Marriage Regulation,” 63.

guarantee their fulfillment, that as a condition of holding political office, the marriages of noblemen be officially registered.³² Finally, in 1535, it was required that the marriage contracts detailing the identities of both spouses be read aloud in the presence of the Doge and at least four of the six ducal councillors.³³ The wives who married Venetian noblemen, in short, were to possess the highest social valuation, so as to ensure the genuine nobility of their male issue. Oddly, then, in this situation, the patriarchy was dependent on a matriarchy.

The requirement of high-value wives drove dowry prices higher. The dowry was a nearly universal phenomenon in Europe.³⁴ It consisted of a quantity of wealth transferred from a bride's natal family to that of her spouse, considered to be her share of her father's patrimony, utilized in theory for her maintenance during the marriage and intended in the end, in most cases, to promote the welfare of her children. Dowry inflation was characteristic of the Renaissance era, and was by no means specific to Venice. But rates of dowry inflation in Venice were exceptional. The average patrician dowry (net of trousseau, a gift to the groom) rose from 873 ducats in the period 1361–1390 to 1,230 ducats in the period 1466–1477, to 1,732 ducats in the period 1505–1507.³⁵ The Republic attempted to stem the tide of dowry increases, which had the undesirable consequence of creating a privileged subgroup of the nobility capable of demanding, and supplying, such huge sums. In 1420, it set a cap to patrician dowries of 1,600 ducats, which was raised to 3,000 in 1505 and to 4,000 in 1535.³⁶ Despite the imposition of this ladder of caps on dowry expenditure, the limits were circumvented (in the fifteenth century) in about half the cases,³⁷ and continued to be flouted after 1505.³⁸

32. Chojnacki, "Marriage Regulation," 65. Despite this legislation, a very few women of high social status but of foreign or commoner birth were, by special petition, allowed to marry Venetian noblemen: see Cowan, *Marriage, Manners and Mobility*.

33. Chojnacki, "Marriage Regulation," 72.

34. See the annotated bibliography of Alexander Cowan, "Marriage and Dowry," in *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Renaissance and Reformation*, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0014.xml>.

35. Chojnacki, "Gender and the Early Renaissance State" (orig. 1998), 27–52, at 44; "Getting Back the Dowry" (orig. 1999), in *Women and Men*, 95–111, at 97. These figures are for nobles. To compare, in the mid-fifteenth century, the median patrician dowry was five times as large as the median dowry for commoner families: Chojnacki, Introduction, 1–24, at 9. For the dowry in Venice, see also Anna Bellavitis, "La dote a Venezia tra medioevo e prima età moderna," in *Spazi, poteri, diritti delle donne a Venezia in età moderna*, ed. Anna Bellavitis, Nadia Maria Filippini, and Tiziana Plebani (Verona: QuiEdit, 2012), 5–20.

36. Chojnacki, "Gender and the Early Renaissance State," 45, 48, 52; "Marriage Regulation," 56–57, 67, 71.

37. Chojnacki, "Gender and the Early Renaissance State," 46.

38. Chojnacki, "Marriage Regulation," 70.

Other consequences flowed from soaring dowry costs. Fewer women married, because the huge dowry one daughter required meant that another could not be funded, and would be dispatched instead to a convent, whether or not she had a religious vocation.³⁹ At the same time, fewer men married, both because fewer women were available, but also because families came to designate one son to carry on the lineage, while the others, as bachelors, resorted to concubinage or other alternatives for sexual expression amply available in Venice. More pertinent to Barbaro's theme, however, is that those few women on whom dowry wealth was lavished often acquired considerable power through their capacity to dispense wealth in life and, by testament, in death.⁴⁰ In the end, they distributed their riches in roughly equal parts: one-half to their marital family (their sons and daughters), and one-half to their natal family (their brothers, sisters, and other kin).⁴¹ In so doing, they created a second system of inheritance, parallel to but unlike the patrimonial system, whereby wealth among the nobility descended only in the male line. Moreover, they won the interest and loyalty of their kinsmen, who could look forward to splendid gifts from their mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and sisters, to augment their inheritance from their fathers. Dowries tended to reduce wives to a quantity of wealth, but wives who were free to manage their dowry and other personal possessions themselves became wealthy.

Thus did the distinctive nature of the Venetian nobility impel it to exalt the position of the noble matron and mother. And such is the social context for a cultural phenomenon otherwise inexplicable: the authorship of a treatise on marriage focused on the capacity and responsibility of the wife by a young bachelor on the verge of his career as a member of a unique political class. Writing in 1415, Barbaro could have observed only the first stages of this evolution of marital ideology and practice characteristic of the Venetian Renaissance. Yet he anticipates the effects of its full development over the next 150 years,⁴² grasping with uncanny foresight how the obsession with dowry would corrupt noblemen in search of a bride, and jeopardize the essential project, if Venice were to prevail, of the biological and cultural reproduction of the noble class. This threat he confronts with the force of his classical learning, displayed in his disciplined and persuasive prose. In

39. Chojnacki, "Measuring Adulthood: Adolescence and Gender" (orig. 1992), in *Women and Men*, 185–205, at 199; "Subaltern Patriarchs: Patrician Bachelors" (orig. 1994), in *Women and Men*, 244–56.

40. Chojnacki, "Patrician Women in Early Renaissance Venice" (orig. 1974), in *Women and Men*, 115–31, at 126–31; "Dowries and Kinsmen" (orig. 1975), 132–52, at 143. For the accumulation of dowry wealth by English wives in this era, see also Barbara A. Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

41. Chojnacki, "Patrician Women," 118, 125.

42. A point Chojnacki often makes, citing Barbaro in text and notes: see, for instance, his "Marriage Regulation," 59; "The Power of Love," 156–57; "'The Most Serious Duty': Motherhood, Gender, and Patrician Culture" (orig. 1991), in *Women and Men*, 169–82, at 169; "Measuring Adulthood: Adolescence and Gender," 187; and "Subaltern Patriarchs," 247–48.

the history of culture, there are few cases so explicit of the intersection of theory and practice as this one of a young nobleman and precocious humanist engaging the system of marriage and dowry, the major engine of social interaction within the ruling elite.

Why *De re uxoria*?

It is now apparent why Francesco Barbaro wrote the treatise *De re uxoria*, a phrase translated here as *The Wealth of Wives*. But whence this title? And why this translation?

Barbaro's work has often been referred to as a work "on marriage," including by the present author.⁴³ The German classicist Percy Gothein, likewise, its major twentieth-century translator, entitled it *Das Buch von der Ehe* (The Book on Marriage, 1933).⁴⁴ Earlier, in 1536, the earlier German translator Erasmus Alber had named his version of the work *Eyn güt büch von der Ehe* (A Good Book about Marriage); in 1667, the French translator Claude Joly opted for *L'estat du mariage* (The Condition of Marriage); and in 1677, the anonymous English translator expanded the title to *Directions for Love and Marriage*. But if Barbaro had wished to write a treatise "on marriage," he had better titles readily at hand. He could have written *De nuptiis*, *De coniugio*, *De matrimonio* (all three mean On Marriage), or even, following Saint Augustine, *De bono coniugali* (On the Good of Marriage), a work he knew well. But this was not his intent. He is concerned not with marriage *per se*, but with the contribution of wives to the family, as critical participants in family formation and continuity.

So we return to the exact words of Barbaro's title: *De re uxoria*. Literal translations might include *On the Wifely Matter*—since *uxoria*, the adjective modifying the noun *res* ("thing" or "matter"), stems from the noun *uxor*, meaning "wife"—or possibly *On the Matter of Wives*. But these titles do not clearly convey the nature of the project Barbaro has undertaken. Nor would the titles *De uxoribus* (On Wives) or *De officio uxoris* (On the Duties of a Wife), although the latter, appearing in the earliest manuscripts of the work, is the title of its second part—a match to the first part, entitled *De delectu uxoris* (On the Selection of a Wife). The title of the first part alone, to complicate the matter, is assigned to the whole work by Italian translator Alberto Lollo in 1548: *La eletion della moglie* (The Selection of

43. In King, "Caldiera and the Barbaros," 31–35; "The School of Infancy: The Emergence of Mother as Teacher in Early Modern Times," in *The Renaissance in the Streets, Schools, and Studies: Essays in Honour of Paul F. Grendler*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler and Nicholas Terpstra (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 41–86 (hereinafter cited as "The Emergence of Mother as Teacher"), at 59–61; *Venetian Humanism*, 92–98.

44. Gothein, ed., *Das Buch von der Ehe*. For the remaining titles named here, see the Bibliography, "*De re uxoria*: Editions and Translations."

the Wife), changed to *La scelta della moglie* (The Choice of the Wife) in the revised edition of Lollo's translation published in 1778 and subsequently.⁴⁵

At this point, it should be recalled that in 1412, Barbaro received his doctorate in both laws at the University of Padua. There he was steeped in the language of the *Corpus iuris civilis* (The Body of Civil Law) composed from 529 to 534 by the committee of legal experts delegated by Emperor Justinian I to codify not merely the laws, but the books of laws, and thus the legal theory of ancient Rome—arguably that civilization's greatest achievement, and the foundation, as well, of European legal thought. In those legal texts, too, Barbaro would have encountered many times over the term *res*, meaning not just “thing,” but in the legal universe—then as now—the “matter” or case under discussion. He was also likely aware that the second-century CE Roman jurist Gaius had written the textbook *De re uxoria*, and he certainly knew that the phrase *res uxoria* made a substantial appearance in Justinian's *Codex*, one of the four sections of the sixth-century *Corpus iuris civilis*, in Liber V, especially Titulus XIII, among other scattered references.⁴⁶ In these legal writings, the phrase *res uxoria* was concerned with the dowry and related property issues, and thus not with the wife but with that portion of her father's wealth that she brought to her marital family. In this sense, as well, the phrase appears in two works with which Barbaro was also thoroughly familiar: Cicero's *De officiis* (On Duties), and, with a slightly broader intonation, the *Noctes atticae* (Attic Nights) of Aulus Gellius.⁴⁷

In sum: Barbaro does not intend a treatise “on marriage” or on “wives,” simply put, but something else. He wishes, in fact, to discuss precisely what he says: the *res uxoria*, the wealth the wife brings as a dowry from her father's household to her husband's, intended to pass ultimately to the children of the marriage. The dowry was a matter of resounding importance in the society of Renaissance Italy, as evident in accelerating dowry values, and important for no one more than the young men who hoped to benefit from the immense sums that they could acquire by an advantageous marriage. But it is the worth of dotal wealth in this sense, the most commonplace and consensual sense, that Barbaro rejects. His treatise *De re uxoria* envisions, in fact, a very different kind of marital wealth: that consisting

45. For Lollo's translation of 1548 and its subsequent reprintings, see the Bibliography, “*De re uxoria*: Editions and Translations.”

46. For Gaius's *De re uxoria*, see *ad vocem* Gaius in *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, ed. William Smith (London: John Murray, 1902), online at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0104:entry=gaius-bio-2>. Liber V, Titulus XIII of Justinian's *Codex* is online at (among other sites) <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/justinian/codex5.shtml>.

47. Cicero, *De officiis* 3:15; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes atticae* 1.6.3, quoting the orator Quintus Metellus, who speaks of the perturbations of having a wife: “non oportuisse de molestia incommodisque perpetuis rei uxoriae confiteri” A reference to legal issues concerning the dowry is also found in Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 7.4.11, but Barbaro could not have known this passage at this time. These passages are identified by Gothein in *Buch von der Ehe*, 89.

of the moral and intellectual qualities of the wife. It is these, not the conventional dowry, which will enrich the family, and secure the continuation of the lineage by ensuring the robust health and mental and spiritual characteristics of its progeny.

Consequently, the title *De re uxoria* is translated here as *The Wealth of Wives*, so as to capture Barbaro's principal argument: that a young man should marry a wife who brings with her a real endowment of moral and intellectual qualities, and not a false and delusory dowry measured in ducats and trinkets. It is a deliberately allusive phrase, for the "wealth of wives" suggests not only the gifts made to their husbands, but the gifts of mind and soul that are inherently theirs and never given away, employed for the benefit of the family. That allusiveness matches the allusiveness of the original Latin title, which seems to announce what Barbaro will denigrate, the conventional dowry, but signifies an altogether different kind of wifely wealth. With the phrase *de re uxoria*, Barbaro summons up the rhetoric of the law courts, but in the treatise that follows, he erodes and inverts the significance of the legal principle. The Latin title, *De re uxoria*, is in fact a trick, a riddle, a clever pun.

But if Barbaro plays with his readers—and those to whom he addressed himself would have had, unlike ourselves, an instant recognition of the dissonance between his title, read superficially, and his message—his object is not to amuse, but rather, loftily, to instruct. For although he refers at times to his treatise with some deprecation, calling it "this brief commentary," or "these few notes," or "these jottings of mine," in a somber tone he also articulates plainly, at one key point, the larger claim that animates the whole. That statement is found in the dedicatory letter to Lorenzo, in which Barbaro tells how his mentor Zaccaria Trevisan "gravely expounded to me nearly the whole of the elegant science of marriage as taught by the ancients."⁴⁸ (Barbaro, 66) The vision of marriage Barbaro presents is in his own mind no small manual of wise precepts, but in itself a branch of philosophy, a "science," as it was understood in his day, although not in ours.

Barbaro paints with a broad brush in his treatise on *The Wealth of Wives* because of the immeasurable importance of what he has to say to the young men of his generation, aristocrats like himself, on the verge of marriages that will result either in worthy descendants who will bring honor to the family and distinguish the lineage—or, should they fail in their marital responsibility, unworthy offspring who will hasten the deterioration and eventual annihilation of the clans whose ancestors had built and sustained their world.

48. The phrase "science of marriage" is used to translate Barbaro's very elusive *ratio uxoria*, a term also used at a later point to describe Lorenzo's deep understanding of marriage: "sic cum ad praeceptionem meam tua quoque uxoria ratio accesserit . . ." Gnesotto, *De re uxoria*, 99 (77). In both cases, the Latin phrase describes a profound knowledge of the nature of marriage, but especially as concerning the *uxor*, the wife.

The Dedication to Lorenzo de' Medici

One such young aristocrat, and the particular dedicatee of Barbaro's work, was the scion of a patrician family just engaged to be married to the daughter of another. The Medici were the richest bankers in Florence, and enjoyed the powerful connections that went with mercantile wealth—connections that would allow Lorenzo's brother Cosimo, less than twenty years after Barbaro's 1415 visit, to rise to become covert lord of the city. The Cavalcanti clan, whose daughter Ginevra was espoused to Lorenzo, was of equivalent stature, and could boast as ancestor Guido Cavalcanti (1250/1259–1300), pioneer of the poetic *dolce stil nuovo* (sweet new style) and friend of Dante Alighieri.

Barbaro was certainly not of lesser social rank than his Medici hosts—not at all. His own family was one of the inner circle of the Venetian nobility, whose origins were mercantile, like those of the Florentine patricians, but who had acquired an addendum of luster from their legally-prescribed privilege and permanent membership in a political elite. In wealth, in cultural refinement, in political importance, Barbaro's family matched or exceeded the claims of the Medici clan at this stage of its evolution.

Over the next decades, however, the Medici would become the foremost patrons in Italy of Renaissance art and ideas. In 1415, they were already on the road to that eminence. As Barbaro recounts in his dedication to Lorenzo, the humanist Roberto de' Rossi, Lorenzo's teacher, was in attendance at the Medici gatherings.⁴⁹ Lorenzo had his Rossi just as Barbaro had his Barzizza and his Guarino. Also in attendance were two more prominent members of the vibrant Florentine humanist circle that orbited about the Medici: the orator and later chancellor of Florence Leonardo Bruni (c. 1370–1444), and the wealthy bibliophile Niccolò Niccoli (1364–1437).⁵⁰

So these young noblemen were peers, amid a generation of others like themselves, who would make splendid marriages so as to accumulate wealth,

49. The humanist Roberto de' Rossi had studied Greek with Manuel Chrysoloras in Florence during the latter's stay in Florence from 1397 to 1400. He was, as teacher of Cosimo and Lorenzo, a major figure of the Medici circle and, as colleague of Leonardo Bruni and Niccolò Niccoli, of early Florentine humanism. See Lauro Martines, *The Social World of the Florentine Humanists, 1390–1460* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963; reprint Toronto: University of Toronto Press for the Renaissance Society of America, 2011), 108–10.

50. Leonardo Bruni was the most eminent of the early Florentine humanists, chancellor of the Florentine republic (1410–1411, 1427–1444), and author of enormously important rhetorical works, translations from the Greek, and the first humanist history of Florence. Niccolò Niccoli was a wealthy patron, bibliophile, and collector. For these figures, see the annotated bibliographies by Craig Kallendorf in *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Renaissance and Reformation*, at (respectively) <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0069.xml> and <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0175.xml>.

consolidate alliances, and above all, with the births of sons, continue the lineages from which their own social amplitude derived. It is to these young men, through Lorenzo, that Barbaro will speak—"so that through you I might reach many of our generation" (Barbaro, 66)—to alert them to their most serious responsibilities and the need to consider in their calculations the true wealth of wives.

Barbaro wishes to reach wider circles of the young elite because, as he points out, Lorenzo himself does not require instruction: he has already learned the sage truths that Barbaro offers from the wise elders of his family: "For you imitate that excellent man, your father Giovanni, and your illustrious brother Cosimo, with the stores of whose authority, wisdom, and counsel you have been amply supplied." (Barbaro, 66) And in his marriage to Ginevra Cavalcanti, a young woman of incomparable worth, he himself exemplifies the principles that Barbaro will expound: "What more luminous, what more worthy example could I put forward than yours?" (Barbaro, 124)

Yet, though Lorenzo does not require Barbaro's instruction, Barbaro will bestow his treatise upon him as a gift: a wedding present. In this, he is an early practitioner, if not the originator, of an Italian custom that endured into modern times: the presentation of a literary gift *per nozze*, on the occasion of a marriage—sometimes a brief work illuminating the history of the families thus united, sometimes an extensive and important work of scholarship. At the outset, Barbaro explains: "Our ancestors . . . used to give gifts to those who were joined together in marriage, so that the token they gave of their love and support would be not only a pledge but also an ornament." (Barbaro, 65) He will not give a rich gift, however, a superfluous show to one who is already rich, but rather, a gift not from his fortune but of his friendship: a work of his own hand, a "brief commentary on the wealth of wives," which will be useful because it comes at "this moment of your own nuptials," and will be recognized "as the sign of our good will and firm friendship." (Barbaro, 67) In closing the dedicatory letter, he reinforces his message: "May you hear me with kind and attentive ears, and receive this work, such as it is, for the sake of our friendship, and in lieu of a glittering gift, on the occasion of your nuptials." (Barbaro, 67)

Although Lorenzo de' Medici, inarguably, is the focus of Barbaro's dedication, he is not the only figure to whom Barbaro offers lavish tribute. For here appears, as well, Zaccaria Trevisan, the Venetian nobleman and pioneering humanist who had long mentored Barbaro, especially in the period 1412 to 1413, after the younger man had completed his formal university studies and before the elder's death. Barbaro describes Trevisan's contribution to his work: "... I have for the most part followed [the precepts] I learned from Zaccaria Trevisan—that illustrious citizen of Venice, a man peerless in our age for his intellect, wisdom, justice, deep knowledge, and great deeds, and tightly bound to me by the law of friendship—in conversations about this matter we had from time to time. In these he gravely expounded to me nearly the whole of the elegant science of marriage