Early Years: Family Background, Education, Giulio Romano

1.1 Family Background

On the seventh of September of 1459, according to the contemporary chronicler Andrea Schivenoglia, the Duke of 'Clenij' or 'Clunii'—in fact Johann I, Duke of Cleves—arrived in Mantua representing Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, at the Mantuan Council presided over by Pope Pius II. During his visit he was lodged in the house belonging to the *massaro* of Mantua, an important financial officer of this small but powerful North-Italian state.¹ The Duke's host, Vivaldo della Strada, belonged to a family whose common ancestor, Lorenzo, had in 1228 been called from Brescia to serve as *podestà* of Mantua. In this he followed a tradition of his family, many members of which fulfilled similar functions in Lombardy and Piedmont.² Until their extinction in an outbreak

1 Vivaldo Strada was elected Councillor and *massarius* of the Comune of Mantua in 1445; he died in 1475, cf. Piccoli 1988, who quotes the Mantuan chronicle Andrea Schivenoglia: 'E che venuto allora ambasciatore del duca di Borgogna il duca di Clunii, questo foe allogato in casa de Vivaldo Strada da drè la via de San Dominico andando verso San Christophora'; a similar passage is quoted by Carlo d'Arco in the entry on the Stradas in his manuscript *Annotazioni genealogiche di famiglie mantovane che possono servire alla esatta compilazione della storia di queste* (ASMn, *Documenti patrui* 220, vol. vii, pp. 65–75); but it cannot be found in D'Arco's own edition of Schivenoglia (D'Arco 1857a, the relevant passage on p. 139). D'Arco's ms. reads 'Clunij', but the relevant passage in his edition of Schivenoglia reads 'Clenij'. Doubtless Schivenoglia himself was confused, since Philip the Good was represented at the Mantuan Council by his brother-in-law, Duke Johann I of Cleves, assisted by the young cleric Ferry de Clugny. Though Clugny actually conducted the negotiations, he was too young and in too subordinate a position to have been given a separate residence; they left Mantua on 24 September. Already in February 1459, at the Marquis of Mantua's order, Vivaldo had imposed a special tax on all Mantua citizens to finance works to make the city accessible to the boats in which the Pope was to arrive (*ibidem*, pp. 133–134).

2 Lorenzo had been *podestà* in Brescia, and it is very likely that he was related to the Strada who in 1025 were admitted among the families constituting the *Comune* of Pavia, several of whose members fulfilled similar functions in many towns of Lombardy and Piemonte. First and most important among these was Torello, a contemporary of Lorenzo, *senescalco* of Frederick II and a well-known *trovatore*, who was *podestà* in Parma, Forlì, Florence, Pisa, Avignon and Savigliano. He is particularly distinguished in being identified with Torello d'Istria, the protagonist of Boccaccio's novella (*Decamerone*, 10th day, 9th novella), from which it appears that he participated in the Third Crusade; cf. Zucchi 1950; Antonio Strada 1940.

FIGURE 1.1–1.2 The former Strada house at 25 Via Mazzini, Mantua: courtyard and a capital with the Strada arms.

of the plague around 1630 the Della Strata—or Strada, as they began calling themselves in the sixteenth century—appear to have held a respectable, but not particularly notable position among the local urban patriciate. Their occupations included those of notary and apothecary (*speziale*), while some of them held functions within the administration of the town and of the Gonzaga state. Apart from the said Vivaldo, their most illustrious representative in the Quattrocento seems to have been Giovanni Francesco, canon of Mantua cathedral, and private chaplain and chamberlain of Cardinal Ludovico Gonzaga.³

The *massaro* Vivaldo and his descendants inhabited a house in the Contrada della Pusterla, located at nr. 25 of the present Via Mazzini, which was probably the largest house belonging to any of the various branches of the family, and possibly its cradle. The house has been altered many times, but some of its parts seem to date back to the thirteenth century, and it is clear that it was partially reconstructed and extended sometime after the middle of the fifteenth century. The beautiful columns of red Veronese marble whose capitals are decorated with the Strada arms [Figs. 1.1–1.2] must date from this time, and it is tempting to connect this conversion with the expected visit of the Burgundian delegation. This holds in particular for the large reception hall constructed about this time, which was provided with a quite festive decoration in fresco, consisting of a frieze hung with garlands and painted shields with the arms of several Mantuan families [Fig. 1.3].

The frieze itself is composed of panels decorated with a rich, classicizing candelabre motif, alternated with portrait-medallions representing Roman

3 On the Strada of Mantua, see D'Arco, ms. *Famiglie Mantovane*, s.v. Strada (as in n. 1); D'Arco 1857(b), II, p. 283 and now the privately printed genealogy by Yves Chabot de l' Allier, *Généalogie de la maison de Strada: De Strada de Rosberg dite de Strada d'Arosberg, de Strada de Mantoue, de Strada de France, de Strada de Prague*, s.l. 1990.

FIGURE 1.3–1.5 The former Strada house at 25 Via Mazzini, Mantua: the painted frieze in the *salone* and details showing images derived from imperial portrait medallions.

emperors [Figs. 1.4–1.5].⁴ Though these medallions are rimmed by an archaic, still essentially Gothic cornice which strangely contrasts with the classicizing impact of the candelabre-motif, the garlands, and the profiles of the emperors, it is evident that these interesting, but not particularly diversified heads are chiefly inspired by the obverses of Roman imperial coinage. When the mature Jacopo Strada, in the preface of his 1575 edition of Caesar, recalled how he had been ‘a puero enutritum et jam olim exercitatum’ in the science of Antiquity—and this meant numismatics in particular—he may well have been thinking of his visits to what was the chief seat of his family.⁵

Yet this may have been not very frequent visits, since in fact his relationship to Vivaldo and his progeny was rather distant. Vivaldo had been only a second cousin of Jacopo's great-great-grandfather Giovanni, who in 1452 was appointed *vicario marchionale* of Castelluchio by Ludovico Gonzaga, second *Marchese* of Mantua.⁶ Giovanni's son Giacomo, of whom nothing further is known, had three children, Simone, Elisabetta and Clementina. From Simone's testament, drafted in September 1513, we know that he was living in Curtatone, a suburb of Mantua situated on the lake near the famous sanctuary of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Simone left his house in Curtatone with some of its land in usufruct to his widow, Andreola, and a modest legacy to his niece Antonia de' Botti, daughter of his sister Clementina; he appointed his only son Clemente as residuary legatee. But since Don Clemente was a cleric, and Simone did not wish his estate to pass to the Church, he instituted an entail in favour of

4 This space, at present divided in three rooms, originally formed one ample, almost square hall, as is indicated by the remnants of the original decoration, which have recently been carefully restored. I am grateful to Gino Basoni for having allowed me to inspect these rooms.

5 Dedication of Strada's edition of Caesar, 1575, p. *4v.

6 D'Arco, ms. *Famiglie mantovane*, II, s.v. Strada (as in note 1).

Giovanni Rinaldo, the son of his sister Elisabetta and the late Giovanni Donato Bolgaroni. He moreover determined that during Don Clemente's life his sister and her son would retain the use of the house within Mantua, in the Contrada della Bue, which they were inhabiting at the time.⁷

Giovanni Rinaldo—or Rinaldo—took his mother's name, and also his father appears to have used the name of De Strata. Though it was not unusual that—in default of male heirs—the name and arms of a given family were assumed by a daughter and her progeny, this still suggests that Gian Donato was of a lesser rank than his wife; it is, for instance, not impossible that Gian Donato was a converted Jew, related to the Bulgarini from Verona who later in the sixteenth century would likewise settle in Mantua.⁸ By 1514, when Simone della Strata made his testament, Gian Donato had died, and his son Rinaldo must already have married his first wife, who would become the mother of his eldest surviving son, Giacomo—or Jacopo, as he would consistently style himself—Strada.⁹

The date of Strada's birth is not known with certainty; the only roughly contemporary source is the cartouche in Titian's 1567–1568 portrait of Strada. This cartouche was added at a later date, probably by Strada's son or grandson (both called Ottavio), and gives the (mistaken) date of 1566 and Strada's age as 51, which would establish the year of his birth as 1515.¹⁰ In view of the fact that Strada's half-brothers were still minors after his father's death in 1564, and that he himself was still begetting children in the late 1570s, this date is more likely than the year 1507 given by some secondary sources.¹¹ From the acts in which Rinaldo's widow, Antonia, in the name of her children, renewed the *enfiteusi* or lease of several plots of land held by her late husband (and by his cousin

7 ASMn, *Notarile*, Notary Ioan Benedetto de Cippi, 18 September 1513. I am very grateful to Daniela Ferrari to have helped me find and interpret this and other documents on Jacopo's immediate ancestors.

8 cf. D'Arco, ms *Delle famiglie mantovane*, II, p. 240 (as in note 1).

9 It should be noted that in his letters our protagonist regularly styled himself 'Jacopo Strada', only rarely 'da Strada' or 'della Strada', as he is referred to in some secondary literature. This also applies for his son and successor Ottavio, and even the latter's progeny, though enrolled in the French nobility, seldom used the *particule*.

10 The inscription reads: Jacobus De Strada Civis Romanus Caess. Antiquarius Et Com. Belic. An: Aetat: Li: et C M.D. LXVI. On the portrait, see Wethey 1969–1975, II, pp. 141–142, cat. nr. 100; an X-ray reproduced in Mucchi 1977, p. 302. Von Busch 1973, p. 214 and p. 356, n. 151 has already pointed out that the date 1566 is not necessarily wrong: though the painting of the portrait is documented in Niccolò Stoppio's correspondence of 1567–1568 it is possible that Strada visited Venice on his way back from Rome in 1566, and that it was begun on that occasion.

11 F.T. Schulz 1938 (basing himself on Svatek 1883).

Clemente and uncle Simone before him) it appears that, while she was the mother and guardian of Pietro Paolo and Ottavio, she was only the stepmother of Jacopo.¹² Jacopo's own mother must have been the Cecilia who, according to D'Arco, was Rinaldo's wife in 1522, and about whom nothing more is known at present.¹³

About Rinaldo himself little is known either, except that he is probably identical with the *Messer Rinaldo Strata*, the Gonzaga bailiff at Portarolo, who in 1556 received his 'provisione et sallario' from the Ducal administration.¹⁴ While he originally lived in the Contrada della Bue, in 1564 his widow inhabited a house in the Contrada della Serpa, though she still held the leases of both the house in the Contrada della Bue and the farm at Curtatone which her husband had inherited from his cousin Don Clemente.¹⁵ The question of the wealth of the Stradas is of some importance in view of Strada's later career: doubtless his—for an artist—exceptional prosperity in the 1560s was partly due to the generosity of his patron, Hans Jakob Fugger, and to his marriage to a noble German heiress. Yet even this marriage itself would certainly not have been possible, had he not on his own account been able to maintain his status as a gentleman.

Simone della Strata's testament of 1514 gives only a partial account of the wealth of the family at that date: though we know that he owned the modest farm and its appendages at Curtatone where he was living at the time, and of which he left the usufruct to his wife, as well as the house in the Contrada della Bue in Mantua in which his sister and her son were living, we do not know what was included in the residue of his estate. Since the residue was left to

12 ASMn, *Registri notarili* 1564, fol. 757v.: 'domina Antonia, eiusdem quondam domini Rainaldi uxor et mater [crossed out: ac tutrix et pro tempore curatrix testamentaria] ac legitima administratrix predictorum Petri Pauli et Octavii <...> per suis propriis nominibus ac nomine et vice predicti domini Jacobim eorum fratris absentis<...>'.

13 D'Arco, *Famiglie mantovane*, p. 68; I have not found the document on which he based this assumption, but it is corroborated by Strada's naming one of his daughters 'Sicilia'.

14 ASMn, *Archivio Gonzaga*, busta 410, nr. 45, fasc. 9 [Registri economici incompleti, entrata et spesa].

15 In 1564, after her husband's death, Antonia renewed the *enfiteusi* for a house in Mantua in the Contrada della Bue, and a cottage with field and orchard in Curtatone, doubtlessly close to their own property in both places; cf. above, note 12. *Enfiteusi* is a lease contract, normally renewable every nine years, and entailing an obligation to improve the land held in tenure. Antonia's leases included a house in the Contrada della Bue, within the town of Mantua, which had been held by her husband—and by Simone della Strata in his son Clemente before him—from the 'venerabile ospitale magno' of Santa Maria della Cornetta at Mantua [ASMn, *Registri notarili* 1564, fol. 757v.] and some lots of arable land, a vineyard and an orchard and comprising a hut and the use of a well in the territory of Curtatone, held from Mantua Cathedral [ASMn, *Registri notarili* 1564, fol. 1165v.].

his son, Don Clemente, this was very probably the larger part, and apart from Simone's financial assets may well have included a further house, probably his chief residence, in Mantua. The burial in the church or cemetery of Santa Maria delle Grazie that Simone ordained in his will—'honourably, according to his condition and means, with eight priests'—certainly was not that of a pauper or a modest *contadino*.¹⁶ All this property would in the end come to Rinaldo Strada, who apart from what he may have inherited from his own father, will have considerably added to his fortune: after all, of all possible offices, his function as collector of the revenue for the Gonzaga was most likely to add considerably to its incumbent's prosperity. In 1564 his widow did not live in the house in the Contrada della Bue, but in another house in the Contrada della Serpa, which may well have been the family's principal residence, inhabited by Don Clemente until his death. Altogether it is likely that Jacopo's parents, if not wealthy, were at least quite well to do, and this assumption is corroborated by the fact that Jacopo, who had to share his inheritance with two brothers and two sisters, very shortly after his father's death began constructing his imposing mansion in Vienna.¹⁷

1.2 Mantua and the Gonzaga

It is very unfortunate that almost nothing is known of Strada's youth and his education: the earliest direct reference to his existence we have dates only from 1546, when he had already been settled in Southern Germany for some years, and of course had had ample time both to finish any formal education he may have received, to complete his training as an artist and possibly to absolve an apprenticeship as a goldsmith. The following sketch of Strada's formative years is therefore largely hypothetical: it is based in part on data culled from sources dating from later years—in particular Strada's own correspondence and writings—and in part on the indications provided by the facts of his later career. In attempting to fill in the blank spots I will propose some explanations that appear the most probable in view of the few data available, and of custom and practice of Strada's milieu and epoch.

16 'Egregius vir ser Simon de la Strata <...> devote recommendavit corpus vero suum cum ab eo anima separata fuerit seppelire voluit in ecclesia sive cimiterio Domine Sancte Mariae Gratiarum extra Curtatonam honorefice secundum eius conditionem et facultatum cum octo presbiteros' [will as cited above, note 7].

17 Strada's house in Vienna is discussed in detail below, Chapter 7. Strada's early prosperity may in part have been due to what he inherited from his mother.

Doubtless the chief formative influence of Strada's life was the fact of his having been born in Mantua, in those years arguably the major Italian court after the Roman *Curia*. Strada grew up in the Mantua of Federico II Gonzaga, fifth Marquis and first Duke of Mantua, and of his forceful and cultured mother, Isabella d'Este, 'summi ingenii ac raræ virtutis heroina' according to Ulisse Aldrovandi.¹⁸ Of equal importance, this was the Mantua of Federico's principal artist and *prefetto delle fabbriche*, Giulio Romano, who gave shape to the Mantuan splendour dreamt of by his patrons; a splendour which was, much later, so loyally publicized by Strada himself.¹⁹

Perhaps the most salient characteristic of Mantua as an independent state was that its head—the dynasty, the court—was much too big for its body: though situated in the fertile valley of the Po, it was a state of middling size and of modest economic and strategic importance. Neither the notorious 'splendour' of the Gonzaga dukes, nor their close relationship with the Emperor himself would suffice to arrest the relative ascendancy of their Florentine cousins, which culminated in the Pope conferring the title of Grand Duke of Tuscany on Cosimo I in 1569: a *cause célèbre* which would haunt international diplomacy for almost a decade. Yet this splendour was truly exceptional, and is best illustrated by the sheer size of Federico II's court. His household comprised close to thousand members, as many as were enrolled in the households of the Emperors Ferdinand I and Maximilian II themselves. Not surprisingly, it was greatly reduced at his death. The presence of such a disproportionate courtly environment in a relatively modest country town like Mantua implies that the culture at court was more easily diffused among a relatively large proportion of the population than it was in larger towns such as Rome, Milan or Florence. It is doubtless no pure coincidence that Strada's principal interests closely corresponded to some of this culture's major preoccupations, preoccupations which had been ruling passions for several generations of Gonzaga.

Central among these was their profound interest in classical Antiquity, both in an historical and in a more strictly archaeological sense, a humanist interest not surprising in the town which boasted Virgil as its most illustrious son.

18 Bologna, University Library, *Fondo Aldrovandi*, Ms. 136, fols. 27v–29v; quoted in *Scienza A Corte* 1979, p. 186 and document n. 60, p. 237.

19 A vast literature on Mantua in the Renaissance exists. The catalogue of the London exhibition *Splendours of the Gonzaga* 1981 provides a convenient general introduction in English. The basic modern history of Mantua is *Mantova: La Storia, Le Lettere, Le Arti*; more recent literature (books published 1980–1989) given in Padovani 1989. In the following sketch I have refrained from citing the relevant secondary sources, which would swell the bibliography to unmanageable proportions; literature used for particular problems will be cited where appropriate.

FIGURE 1.6–1.7 Andrea Mantegna, *The Standard Bearers and The Bearers of Trophies*, scenes from *The Triumphs of Caesar*, 1485–1505; Hampton Court, Royal Collection.

Influenced by the general tenor of humanist studies of the early Renaissance, and by the convenient availability of the quite impressive Roman remains of nearby Verona, the study of classical Antiquity in a more narrowly antiquarian sense had been initiated in the second half of the fifteenth century by Mantegna and his associates. The works that probably most strongly influenced later local artists were the frescoes in the famous *Camera degli Sposi* in the Castello di San Giorgio, and, even more, the series of paintings in tempera illustrating *The Triumphs of Caesar*, now at Hampton Court [Figs. 1.6–1.7].

The interest in the visual aspects of classical civilisation had been stimulated by the presence in Mantua—apart from that of a host of minor humanists—first of Leon Battista Alberti, and later of Giulio Romano, who had acquired his astonishing expertise and understanding of Classical art under the aegis of Raphael himself [Fig. 1.18].²⁰ Both these eminent architects, however, had been called to Mantua in the first place to satisfy the passion for building and for architectural and interior decoration of the Gonzaga; a passion of extraordinary proportions even for an Italian princely family of the Renaissance, and of which the immense bulk of the sprawling and eclectic Ducal Palace,

20 A description of the antiquarian tour undertaken around Lake Garda by Felice Feliciano, Samuele da Tradate, and Mantegna is given in *Andrea Mantegna* 1992, p. 17; Isabella d'Este's 'insatiable desire for antiquities' has been described in detail in Brown 1976; Brown also studied the collection of her brother in law, Sigismondo Cardinal Gonzaga (Brown 1991). More general information on Mantuan interest in the Antique in Signorini 1989 and Brown 1989. A detailed general study of Giulio Romano's profound debt to Antiquity does not as yet exist; but see Burns 1989(a).

Alberti's Sant' Andrea [Figs. 1.8] and Giulio's Palazzo del Te [Figs. 1.9–1.10] are the most eloquent witnesses. Equally intimately related with the revival of Antiquity was the dynasty's passion for collecting, which was initiated by Isabella and lavishly pursued by her descendants, and which resulted in a museum of

FIGURE 1.8

FIGURE 1.9

Leon Battista Alberti, Sant'Andrea, Mantua, begun 1472: facade and nave.

Giulio Romano, Palazzo del Te, Mantua, *cortile*.

FIGURE 1.10

Giulio Romano, The Wedding Banquet of Cupid and Psyche, 1526–1528, Camera di Amore et Psyche, Palazzo del Te, Mantua.

art and antiquities which at its fateful sale to Charles I of England in 1627–1628 was among the very first in Europe.²¹

1.3 Formal Education

In view of the institutional accessibility of a princely court in general and of the relative size of Federico's court, which was largely recruited from Mantua itself, the courtly environment could not fail to impress an intelligent and curious youngster such as Jacopo must have been. In view of his father's status as a Gonzaga 'vasallo' and his function in the Ducal administration, Jacopo must have had some immediate experience of it, possibly even as a page or in some other minor function within the household. If so, he would have had ample opportunity to get acquainted both with the intellectual preconceptions of this erudite milieu and with the material sediment in which these preconceptions found their expression: the collections brought together by the Gonzaga and the artistic creations they commissioned. In any case his later accomplishments indicate that he received both the formal education that was habitual for boys of his background and an artistic training.

Strada doubtless received grounding in the *studia humanitatis* in Mantua, perhaps even within the direct ambit of the court, following a curriculum rooted in the tradition of Vittorino da Feltre's celebrated *Cà Giocosa*.²² The contention implied in a passage in Antonio Agustín's *Dialoghi intorno alle medaglie*, that Strada, like Pirro Ligorio, Hubert Goltzcius and Enea Vico, would have known hardly any Latin, should be critically interpreted for each of these celebrated artist-antiquaries.²³

That Strada's classical and linguistic studies bore fruit is clear from his later activities: neither his numismatic studies nor his polyglot lexicography is conceivable for someone who had not received a thorough training in the classical languages. It is true that Strada's correspondence is largely in Italian, but in that he is no exception: even Agustín himself, who certainly was an important classical scholar, corresponded in Italian with his friend Onofrio Panvinio, one of the most brilliant scholarly antiquaries of the sixteenth century.²⁴

21 The fundamental study on the dispersal of the Gonzaga collections remains Luzio 1913; more recently, Howarth 1981.

22 On Vittorino, see Garin 1958; *In Traccia del Magister Pelicanus* 1979.

23 Agustín 1592, p. 117. For Agustín 'intendere la Lingua Latina' implied not merely being able to read and/or write Latin, but being professionally trained as a classical philologist; see below, Ch. 15.1.

24 Agustín 1980, *passim*.

It is also true that Strada was no particularly elegant Latinist, yet his *Epitome thesauri antiquitatum* (Lyon 1553) and the prefaces to the other books he published demonstrate that he had a quite sufficient command of the language to express himself with assurance. Both his sensitivity for the language and his informed and critical attitude towards classical and modern scholarship are displayed in his selection of the learned commentaries complementing the text of his 1575 edition of Caesar and his careful choice of a translator for the text of Sebastiano Serlio's *Settimo Libro d'Architettura* of the same year.²⁵ Strada was endowed with a similar sensitivity for his native language; his Italian letters are clearly the work of a well-educated man. Not devoid of a touch of *sprezzatura*, they are couched in a correct, but robust and spontaneous Italian that is occasionally enlivened by an aptly inserted proverb or felicitous image. They are, moreover, written in an excellent, individual, humanist book-hand [Figs. 1.11–1.12].

Yet it remains open to doubt whether Strada, after having received his basic education in the liberal arts, further paved the way for his later antiquarian studies by attending a university, as would not have been unusual for a

FIGURE 1.11–1.12 Examples of Strada's handwriting: a letter to Ferdinand I, King of the Romans, 21 February 1558, and an undated draft of a letter to an anonymous correspondent, 1568.

25 Gian Bernardino Bonifacio, *Marchese d'Oria*; see Jansen 1989, p. 212.

boy of his background who had demonstrated a particular intellectual ability. According to Josef Svátek, who did not cite his sources, Strada had studied at Pavia and Bologna, an assertion for which I have found no confirmation. Yet the possibility cannot be excluded, and it is corroborated by the fact that Strada is occasionally referred to as ‘il dottor Strada’.²⁶ His presence in Bologna in the 1530s would be particularly significant: should he have studied there, he could have first met there at least some of the contemporaries with whom he would rub shoulders later in his career. One thinks of his later patron Hans Jakob Fugger; of Georg Sigismund Seld, afterwards as *Reichsvizekanzler* an extremely powerful member of the Imperial Court; of Otto Truchsess von Waldburg, afterwards Cardinal and Prince-Bishop of Augsburg [Fig. 1.15]; of the young Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle, soon to be Bishop of Arras [Fig. 1.14]; of Paul III’s grandson, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese [Fig. 1.16], and of the Spanish scholar Antonio Agustín [below, Fig. 3.89].

Either at Bologna or Pavia he could have followed the courses of Andrea Alciati, the most celebrated specialist of Roman law of his time [Fig. 1.13]. Alciati’s profound interest in the purely antiquarian aspects of classical studies was at least partly responsible for the great advance in antiquarian studies in the 1540s and 1550s, to which several of his students—such as Agustín—notably contributed.²⁷ Such training and such contacts would have contributed to the

FIGURE 1.13–1.16 Andrea Alciati flanked by some of his pupils, Cardinals Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle, Otto Truchsess von Waldburg and Alessandro Farnese; in later life Strada would be in personal contact with all of these.

26 Svátek 1883, p. 329. In his letters to Hans Jakob Fugger Niccolò Stopio sometimes refers scathingly to Strada as ‘il dottor Strada’, probably intended as a sarcasm [f.i. 19 October 1567, BHStA-LA 4852, fol. 80/74]; Jacopo was moreover probably identical with the ‘Dottore Strada’ whose presence was requested by some noblewomen of Mantua as a witness to their—forced—abjuration; probably this increased his troubles with the Inquisition; cf. Pagano 1991, pp. 7 and 16, n. 32.

27 On Alciati, see Abbondanza 1968. Alciati came to Pavia in 1533 from Bourges, taught at Bologna from 1537 until 1541, when he returned to Pavia. Fugger and Seld, who had already studied with Alciati in Bourges, arrived in Bologna in 1534. Alciati—who maintained contacts with many other learned Germans, such as Konrad Peutinger and Bonifazius

confident ease with which Strada moved within the learned circles of erudite scholars, prelates and artists around Cardinals Cervini and Farnese, during his visit to Rome in the 1550s, as much as the recommendation of Strada's patron, Fugger, and as the first copies of his *Epitome thesauri antiquitatum* he carried with him.²⁸

1.4 Artistic Training

The earliest archival data that provide concrete information about Strada's career are found in the minutes of the meetings of the Nuremberg Council in the mid-1540s. These make clear that at that time Strada was still active as an artist: he is indicated as 'Jacob Strada from Mantua, painter (*Maler*)', or 'Jacob Strada, the Italian artist (*Künstler* or *Künstner*)'.²⁹ The thousands of numismatic drawings which were produced in his workshop, part of which at least were produced by Strada himself, demonstrate that he was a quite capable, if not particularly gifted, draughtsman. That Strada was indicated as a '*Maler*' suggests that he had also learnt at least the rudiments of painting; in fact in an inventory of the contents of the palace of the Duke of Bavaria at Schleißheim, dating from the second half of the eighteenth century, a series of pictures representing the Liberal Arts is attributed to him.³⁰

Probably as part of his training as a draughtsman, Strada also learnt to execute measured architectural drawings, and this corresponds to an interest in architecture and monumental decoration which is a recurring theme in his career. In the preface to his edition of the *Settimo Libro* of Sebastiano Serlio's treatise, he refers to 'the knowledge I have of architecture, in which I have always taken great delight, and I still do'.³¹ Apart from the work he would do in his function as Imperial architect, about which little concrete is known, he

Amerbach—dedicated all eight volumes of his *Parerga* (1538 and 1544) to his pupil Otto Truchseß von Waldburg. Farnese and Granvelle studied in Bologna, Agustín obtained his doctorate in law in Bologna in 1541, where he first arrived at least in 1536. Art historians are usually unaware of Alciati's prominence as a founding father of Roman law as modern academic discipline: his interest in emblem culture must be considered as a mere erudite pastime, though obviously closely related to his antiquarian studies.

28 See below, Ch. 3.6–3.7.

29 Documents 1546-11-01; 1546-11-02; 1547-03-12.

30 Quoted in Verheyen 1967, p. 65, n. 34; I have not been able to individuate these paintings. Since this attribution is so particular, and Strada certainly was no well-known artist, the attribution must have been based on a signature, locally available sources (older inventories) or an old tradition; it therefore deserves to be taken seriously.

31 Serlio, 1575, Preface p. a. iiii: 'la cognitione ch'io ho delle cose del' Achitettura, della quale mi son sempre diletato, e diletto<...>'.

FIGURE 1.17 Giulio Romano, ceiling of the Camera delle Aquile, Palazzo del Te, Mantua.

FIGURE 1.18 Titian, portrait of Giulio Romano, ca 1536–1540; Mantua, Palazzo del Te.

would execute a design for the Antiquarium of the Munich Residenz that is not without merit. This and other instances of Strada's interest in architecture will be discussed in detail in Chapters 5–10.

It is reasonable to assume that Strada received his initial training chiefly in his hometown, therefore within an artistic milieu that was largely determined by the shining example afforded by Giulio Romano's achievements [Figs. 1.9–1.10, 1.17; 1.19–1.21]. It is self-evident that his artistic development was strongly influenced by this erudite and versatile master, whose works Strada would always admire and propagate, and whose graphic remains he would later bring into his possession. Perhaps even more telling is the fact that the large-scale copying or reproducing of drawings by tracing them with the aid of blackened paper, a technique typical for Strada's workshop, was first practiced, according to Armenini, in Giulio's studio.³² It is also borne out by Strada's own style, in as far at least as it is possible to judge this from the few independent drawings that can be securely attributed to him. Sometimes these seem in fact to come even closer to that of Giulio's temporary collaborator, Francesco Primaticcio, whom the very young Strada probably had seen at work in the Palazzo del Te [Figs. 1.19–1.21], and whose more mature and independent creations he may have admired later in France.³³

32 Armenini 1587, pp. 76–77.

33 Primaticcio was a.o. responsible for the *Camera degli Stucchi*; on Strada's possible visit to Paris and Fontainebleau, see below, Ch. 3.4.

FIGURE 1.19–1.21 Francesco Primaticcio, with Giovan Battista Mantovano, Camera degli Stucchi: ceiling, detail of the ceiling, and detail of the frieze, Palazzo del Te, Mantua.

Though there is no concrete indication in the sources that Strada worked as an apprentice or assistant in Giulio's studio, his style and technique as a draughtsman and his own architectural designs betray the influence of the master and strongly suggest that he received his artistic education in Giulio's immediate orbit: a supposition strengthened by his later espousal of Giulio's work. It was of course not really unusual for youngsters even of patrician families to begin their training by grinding colours and doing other basic and menial jobs for their masters: Michelangelo is merely the most illustrious example of this. But it remains the question whether the parents even of a talented youth willingly allowed him to engage in such a craft when no particular ill-fortune made this

a dire necessity, as had been Michelangelo's case. But it is not certain that the status of a liberal art accorded to painting and sculpture in the most advanced intellectual circles of Florence and Rome was immediately shared by a large proportion of the population of more provincial centres.³⁴ Since Strada's family appears to have been quite well-to-do, it is possible that the young Jacopo was allowed to haunt Giulio's studio and the ducal *cantiere*, picking up what he could, receiving some formal instruction from Giulio or some of his collaborators, but never actually assisting on an official basis in the execution of their works: his interest and competence in the visual arts thus developed in a *dilettante* manner similar to that expressly approved of by that Mantuan *arbiter elegantiarum*, Count Baldassare Castiglione, whose bones rested in the same church as those of Strada's great-uncle Simone.³⁵

Certainly this is what Strada would have us believe from the mid-1550's onward: though a professional draughtsman working on a big and lucrative project for Hans Jakob Fugger, Strada was indicated by Giovanni Battista Armenini, whom he employed in this same project in Rome in 1553–1555, as a 'mercante Mantovano', a merchant from Mantua, rather than as an artist. And when Strada had entered the service of Emperor Ferdinand I he explicitly defended himself against an antiquarian rival, who had dismissed him as a mere—and therefore ignorant—goldsmith, by attributing his know-how in that craft solely to his interest also in the physical aspects of ancient coins.³⁶

1.5 Giulio's Collections

The assumption that Strada received his education in the visual arts in Giulio's milieu is supported by his familiarity with Giulio Romano's *medagliere*. This connection is documented in Strada's eleven-volume numismatic *Corpus*, manuscript copies of which are preserved in Vienna and Prague, and which is complemented with thousands of pen-and-ink drawings commissioned by

34 Exceptional both because of his extraordinary genius and passionate sense of vocation, Michelangelo is a less apt example than, for instance, the Milanese Giuseppe Arcimboldo, who made much of his noble descent, or Ippolito Andreasi from Mantua, whose tenuous link with one of the cities magnate families did not prevent him from studying and honourably exercising the craft of painting.

35 Santa Maria delle Grazie. See: Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, I, xlix. A drawing of Castiglione's tomb, designed by Giulio Romano, is found in the Codex Chlumczansky that once made part of Strada's collection.

36 Armenini 1587, pp. 64–65; Doc. 1559-06-00; discussed below, Ch. 4.2.

his patrons.³⁷ In his descriptions of Roman coin types Strada always indicated the owner of the best exemplar he had been able to study. These included only a few from Castiglione's collection, to which his heirs had admitted the young Jacopo, but a not inconsiderable number of the medals described he had found in Giulio's collection.³⁸ Giulio's expertise as a numismatist and the high quality of his coin cabinet were singled out for particular praise by Vasari, who had admired Giulio's house and collections during his 1544 visit to Mantua: 'Giulio, who was a most universal man, could discourse on every subject; but especially on medals, on which he spent quite a lot of money and much time to know about them'.³⁹ So when Strada claimed to have been 'a pueri enutritum' in numismatics, he may well have thought less of his contemplation of the Quattrocento fresco's in his great-uncle's house as of the hours he had profitably spent in going through Giulio's medals; medals whose significance was explained to him by their owner, who would have enjoyed the enthusiasm of his young guest and have helped and directed him in obtaining the accomplishments necessary to pursue his studies. Correct draughtsmanship was of some importance in this, and the similarity of the technique Strada developed with that current in Giulio's studio as described by Armenini is therefore hardly surprising.

It is likely that not only Strada's drawing style, but also his antiquarian procedure reflects Giulio's approach. In the absence of Giulio's own studies after the Antique, hardly any of which have survived, an analysis of the numismatic drawings produced in Strada's studio provides an instrument to evaluate Giulio's own handling of antique precept. This is particularly so in those cases in which the architectural reverses of Roman coins were represented. The minute image of the coin (of a diameter of up to 5 cm at most and moreover often so worn as to be hardly legible), is blown up to five times its actual size, and the building depicted is in fact a complete and detailed reconstruction based possibly in part on literary sources, but certainly also on a Giuliesque variety of contemporary architecture. A good example is Strada's drawing of the *Pons Aelius*, based on a coin of Hadrian, in which the *rustica* is strongly reminiscent of that of Giulio's *Cortile della Mostra* and *Pescheria*. Its resemblance to Giulio's

37 On this *Magnum ac novum opus*, see below, Ch. 3.3.

38 Cf. Jansen 1993, appendix 1b, pp. 232.

39 Vasari/ Milanese 1906, vol. 5, p. 551: 'seppe ragionare Giulio, il quale fu molto universale, d'ogni cosa; ma sopra tutto delle medaglie, nelle quali spese assai danari e molto tempo per averne cognizione'.

own, earlier reconstruction in his fresco of *The Vision of the Cross* in the Vatican Stanze is striking [cf. below, Ch. 15.3].⁴⁰

This familiarity with Giulio's architectural work suggests that Strada would have been as welcome to study Giulio's architectural drawings as he was to handle his coins and medals. These drawings were kept in a large cupboard in Giulio's home, as is related by Vasari. For four days, during Vasari's visit to Mantua, Giulio entertained his Tuscan colleague, showing him:

<...>all his works, and in particular all the plans of the ancient buildings of Rome, of Naples, of Pozzuoli, of the Campagna, and of all the best antique remains which are known, in part drawn by himself, in part by others. Afterwards he opened an immense cupboard and showed him the plans of all the buildings that had been constructed according to his own designs and order, not only in Mantua and in Rome, but all over Lombardy; that I for me do not believe one can see either newer or more beautiful fantasies for buildings, nor better arranged ones.⁴¹

This means that Strada even as a boy was confronted with both the latest developments in architectural design and the best known monuments of classical Antiquity; and it implies that he was also made familiar with the archaeological techniques that had been developed by Raphael and his circle in order to study the remains of such monuments and to restore them—at least in effigy—to their pristine splendour. Giulio had been closely involved in these projects—the fruits of which are evident in his Mantuan work—and he may well have continued his studies even after Raphael's death. There is, for instance, some evidence that he planned to produce a set of drawings of the entire spiral frieze of the shaft of the Column of Trajan, just as Strada claimed to have done after him.⁴² Giulio's studio and collection therefore provided

40 Pirro Ligorio reconstructed the bridge in quite different way in his master plan of Ancient Rome. For a more detailed discussion, see Jansen 1993, pp. 218–219.

41 Vasari/ Milanese, 1906, vol. 5, pp. 552–553: '<...>tutte l'opere sue e particolarmente tutte le piante degli edifizii antichi di Roma, di Napoli, di Pozzuolo, di Campagna, e di tutte l'altre migliori antichità di che si ha memoria, disegnatte parte da lui e parte da altri. Dipoi, aperto un grandissimo armario, gli mostrò le piante di tutti gli edifizii che erano stati fatti con suoi disegni et ordine, non solo in Mantova et in Roma, ma per tutta la Lombardia, e tanto belli, che io per me non credo che si possano vedere né le più nuove né le più belle fantasie di fabbriche né meglio accomodate.'

42 On Raphael's project, see Mandowsky/Mitchell 1963, pp. 15–19; Fontana/Morachiello 1975; Barocchi 1977, 3, pp. 2971–2985; Nesselrath 1984; Pagliara 1986, pp. 38–45; Günther 1988, pp. 60–63, 318–327 and *passim*; on Giulio's participation, see Vasari/ Milanese, 1906, vol. 5,

Strada with two interests that would remain fundamental throughout his career: the study of Antiquity and the practice of architectural design.

1.6 Early Training as a Goldsmith?

Strada's interest in Antiquity, and in particularly in the science of numismatics as expounded by Giulio, moved him—probably even before spending some time at university—to have himself taught the rudiments of the art of the goldsmith. That at least is what he claims in a letter of 1559 to Maximilian, titular King of Bohemia, in which he refers to the craft of the goldsmith as 'the art which I have learned as a boy, to enable me in time better to learn what I have, thanks to God, learnt with great effort and expense, in the field of antique marbles and medals<...>'.⁴³ In the next chapter his connection with one of the most celebrated representatives of the trade, Wenzel Jamnitzer, will be discussed, together with the question whether Strada ever professionally exercised the craft himself. But if he learned its rudiments 'da putto', as a boy, he learned it at Mantua, and the question remains who in the circle of Giulio Romano could have taught him. Giulio himself produced great quantities of designs for goldsmith's work: part of these were working drawings for pieces that were actually executed for the table or credenza of Federico II and Cardinal Ercole—the most splendid witness to this remains the credenza of the Olympian Gods as depicted in the *Sala di Psiche* [Fig. 1.10, 1.22]—but others should be regarded as light-hearted exercises in mannerist design stimulating a prospective patron's appetite [Figs. 1.23–1.24].⁴⁴

Strada would later show his interest in these designs not only by acquiring an ample quantity of them after Giulio's death, but also by having them copied in his workshop on behalf of his own patrons.⁴⁵ Yet Giulio himself was no practising goldsmith, and therefore Strada cannot have learned the craft under the master's own supervision. It is more likely that he learned it in the workshop of one of the Gonzaga's goldsmiths employed in the actual execution of

pp. 525; Günther 1988, pp. 326 and Burns 1989<a>. On a preserved set of drawings of the column of Trajan, see Arasse 1984.

43 Doc. 1559-06-00: '<...>[l'] arte ch'io ho da putto imparato, per meglio poter poi col tempo venir ad apprendere quello che per gratia di dio ho con gran fatica et spesa apresso, in parte dal[l'] antichità de marmi et medaglie<...>'.
 44 On Giulio Romano as a designer of goldsmith's work, see Hartt 1958; Hayward 1970; Bukovinská/ Fučíková/ Konečný 1984; Ugo Bazzotti, 'Disegni per argenterie', in *Giulio Romano* 1989, pp. 454–465.

45 Discussed in detail in Bukovinská/ Fučíková/ Konečný 1984.

FIGURE 1.22 Gold and silver-gilt tableware shown on the 'credenza' shown in the fresco depicting *The Wedding Banquet of Cupid and Psyche*, detail of Fig. 1.10.

both Giulio's and their own designs. In view of Strada's social standing and his later career, I think it not likely that he would have been content with a minor master; a plausible hypothesis is that he was taught by the goldsmith and medal maker Niccolò de' Possevini, otherwise known as Niccolò da Milano. In his autobiography Cellini recounts how Niccolò helped him obtain his first commission when he arrived in Mantua in 1528—and how happy he was to get rid of this dangerous competitor. Yet like Cellini, Niccolò must have been an excellent modeller, since he is probably identical with the Niccolò da Milano whose collaboration in the stucco decoration of several rooms in the Palazzo del Te is well-documented.⁴⁶ If he counted Strada among his pupils, this would help to explain the latter's interest and understanding of this type of decoration. Strada's interest in stucco—after all the medium that was most suited to recreate

46 Cellini 1866, pp. 88–89; Bertolotti 1889, pp. 39 and 65; *Th-B* 25, p. 435 (Niccolò da Mantova and Niccolò da Milano). Their identity is implied by Sarzi 1988.

FIGURE 1.23–1.24 Giulio Romano, designs for a silver or gold salt cellar and for a two-handled drinking vessel.

the atmosphere of Antiquity—can be inferred from the detailed documentation he commissioned of Raphael's Vatican *Loggia* and of the decoration of the Palazzo del Te itself; his understanding of the medium is demonstrated by the rather jewel-like decoration of some rooms in the castle at Bučovice in Moravia, with which Strada can be linked, and with its lost examples in the Vienna Neugebäude, which were executed on behalf of Maximilian II in the early 1570s, possibly likewise under Strada's general supervision.⁴⁷

1.7 Significance of his Mantuan Background for Strada's Development

Apart from the formal training Strada received there, the general knowledge and experience that Strada could acquire in such a lively, fecund and exciting artistic milieu as was the Mantua of Isabella d'Este and Giulio Romano, must have been invaluable for his later career. The erudite atmosphere at the Gonzaga court was fostered both by Isabella d'Este and her son, the Marquis Federico, whose patronage attached such scholars as Paride da Ceresara, Mario Equicola and—somewhat later—Benedetto Lampridio, and who employed such

47 On Strada's commission of the drawings of Raphael's *Loggia*, see below, Ch. 3.7 and Ch. 13; on the Neugebäude, Ch. 9; on Bučovice, Ch. 10.

erudite officials as Giovanni Giacomo Calandra; it is best exemplified in the figure of Baldassare Castiglione.⁴⁸ While the latter provided Strada—and so many of his contemporaries—with an outstanding model of courtly deportment and learned urbanity, all these examples taught him how to apply the erudition he achieved to practical purposes. Thanks to the presence of Giulio Romano, however, the antiquarian passion that permeated almost every cultural activity in the Mantua of the Renaissance exerted the most profound influence on the young Jacopo, who thus was schooled in the style and intellectual prejudices of Renaissance Rome at first hand before he ever set foot there.

The young Strada must, moreover, have been greatly impressed by the ample variety of artistic activities that were practised in Mantua, and in particular by Giulio's organizing talent and his superb mastery and taste in combining these various arts to serve a common goal: that is a courtly environment of great visual elegance and refinement. It was an environment which, because of the ceremonial and theatrical sensitivity of the dynasty's members and the contributions expected from their courtiers and from the humanists, poets, musicians and artists they employed, can almost be regarded as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in itself. Strada's taste for, and understanding of the role of such a *Gesamtkunstwerk* within the society of a dynastic state was schooled at Mantua, and it was this that would prepare him later to fulfil functions at the Imperial court that were—to some extent, and at a more modest level—similar to those of Giulio at the court of the Gonzaga.⁴⁹

48 on Paride da Ceresara, see De' Angelis 1979; on Mario Equicola, see P. Cherchi, 'Equicola, Mario', in *DBI* 43, pp. 34–40; on Lampridio, see Talvacchia 1988, pp. 240–242; Calandra was *castellano* and later, as chancellor, one of the most prominent members of the Gonzaga court; he played an important role in the cultural life of the state and kept in contact with many authors both in Mantua and elsewhere (including Castiglione, Paolo Giovio, Bandello, Ariosto and Aretino). He was also closely involved in the organizing of the construction and the decoration of the Palazzo del Te, and more in general in the dynasty's dealings with the artists they employed, including Giulio Romano and Titian, cf. Zapperi 1973.

49 On Strada's relationship to Giulio, see also Jansen 1989.