

ALVISE CORNARO AND THE “SOBER LIFE”



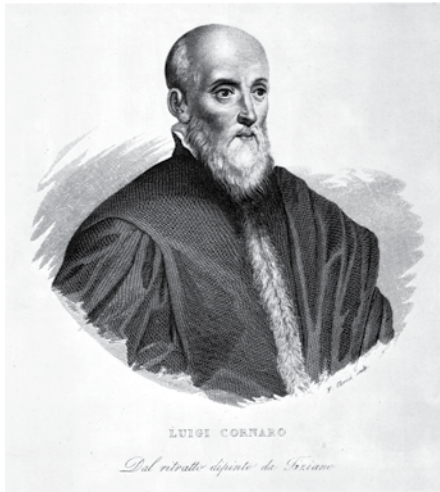
Padua, Cornaro Loggia and Odeon

In the 16th century, Padua was a place where leading figures and patrons would meet, and their presence helped to shape the city once and for all. One of their number was **Alvise Cornaro** (circa 1484-1566). Born in Venice, he studied law until he was 22, but soon began dealing with business, having inherited from his maternal uncle a great many assets, which enabled him to promote artists and works of architecture, and to devote his time to highly refined cultural activities. A passionate humanist, with an interest in architecture and archaeology, he surrounded himself with the brightest intellectuals and artists of the time, and was a close friend of the playwright known as Ruzante and the architect Falconetto. As the author of the treatise entitled *De la vita sobria*, which you are invited to browse in this room, and of which you can purchase a copy in the shop, he encouraged the patrician class of the Veneto to invest in agriculture and to reclaim the marshy areas of the region.



DID YOU KNOW

Alvise Cornaro was a fervent supporter of the reclamation of the inland areas of the Veneto region, and in particular of the area at the foot of the Euganean Hills, to promote what he defined as “sainted agriculture”, viewed as an activity carried out by mankind on nature, and a source of (spiritual) richness and wellbeing. It was by taking their cue from these models for living, and with a special passion for the architectural forms of the classical world, that the design decisions for the Villa dei Vescovi were taken, with Alvise assuming a leading role in proceedings.



Portrait of Alvisio Cornaro, engraving



Alvisio Cornaro, *De la vita sobria* ("Writings on the Sober Life"), Venice, 1558

In the treatise *De la vita sobria*, Cornaro proposed a model for living that went against the grain in terms of the customs of the nobles of the time, since Cornaro matched parsimonious nutrition with a life lived in accordance with the dictates of nature. The aim was to pursue a **salubrious, measured lifestyle** as the only one, in his opinion, that would allow you to live well and into old age. He begins by making reference to his own experience, recalling how he overcame an illness by adopting a frugal diet and keeping well away from any spiritual trauma ("melancholy, hate, and other perturbations of the soul").

The Cornaro Loggia and Odeon is an architectural complex commissioned by Alvise that was built in Padua in the early 16th century. The Loggia was intended for the staging of the comedies of Ruzante; Cornaro and Falconetto imagined it as the *frons scenae* (proscenium) of an ancient theatre - a fixed backdrop for different spectacles. The Odeon, for its part, was dedicated to music and erudite conversation. The ceiling of the central room was decorated with grotesques by Sustris, in line with a taste for all things ancient that would go on to be fundamental to the decoration of the Villa dei Vescovi.



Cornaro Loggia, Padua



Padua, Cornaro Odeon, frescoes by Sustris



Falconetto, San Zaccaria, Codevigo



House of Alvisio Cornaro, Codevigo

Another of Alvisio Cornaro's holiday homes was **Codevigo**, in the province of Padua. Founded by the Romans (the toponym derives from *caput vici*), the history of the municipality owes a great deal to the Cornaro family, who commissioned the architect Falconetto to design the façade of the **church of San Zaccaria**. Alvisio, moreover, built his *villa rustica* here, which was altered to make it suitable for staging the plays of his great friend, the playwright known as Ruzante. Today, the architecture of the villa, mostly attributed to Falconetto himself, is hard to read due to the substantial modifications that have been made.