

NICOLÒ MASSA, HIS FAMILY AND HIS FORTUNE

by

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THE VARIED interests of the Venetian physician Nicolò Massa (d. 1569) found expression in a range of publications on subjects which included anatomy, syphilis, plague and other pestilential fevers, venesection, and logic. Successful as a writer, he was also renowned as a practitioner and as a teacher, though he never held a university chair. He combined a shrewd common sense and an eye to business with a flair for self-advertisement, for the telling story in which he appeared more acute and resourceful than his fellows. The result was success, and Massa became a rich man.

Not surprisingly in view of his many interests and self-dramatizing character, Massa has caught the attention of a succession of historians.¹ But there are still aspects of his career which deserve to be better known, and sources which have been largely overlooked. These include a rich vein of biographical information running through Cicogna's monumental work on Venetian inscriptions.² This material is important because Cicogna had access to family papers in the possession of a descendant of Nicolò's nephew Lorenzo, especially Nicolò's biographical notes concerning himself and his family, dated 1565, and a draft will, dated 1566, the second of the three he is known to have made. Although the present whereabouts of these papers is not known, Cicogna has left a useful indication of their contents. In addition, a new source relating to Nicolò Massa has recently come to light in Venice at the Istituzioni di Ricovero e di Educazione.³ Amongst the archives preserved at the Istituzioni are those of the Zitelle, founded in 1560 to house and protect girls in moral danger. It was to the Zitelle that Nicolò Massa's principal heir, his daughter Maria, bequeathed her estate, and with it a variety of financial and legal papers.⁴ These consist primarily of

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¹ The fullest account of Massa's life and work is in L. R. Lind, *Studies in pre-Vesalian anatomy*, Philadelphia, American Philosophical Society, 1975. This includes an English translation of the whole of Massa's *Liber introductorius anathomiae*, and publishes for the first time a transcription (not altogether perfect) of his last will and testament.

² Emmanuele Antonio Cicogna, *Delle iscrizioni veneziane*, 6 vols., Venice, 1824–1853, vol. 1, pp. 113–115, 358; vol. 2, pp. 426–429; vol. 4, p. 691; vol. 5, pp. 18–22; vol. 6, pp. 805, 889. Lind refers only to vol. 1 of this work, whereas the material based on family papers is found in vol. 2.

³ I am grateful to Dottor Giuseppe Ellero, archivist of the Istituzioni, for his kindness in bringing this source to my attention, and to the Istituzioni for permitting me to study it.

⁴ Istituzioni di Ricovero e di Educazione, *Zitelle, Commissaria di Maria Massa* (hereinafter *Commissaria Massa*). The papers fill three substantial files, Buste 1–3.

deeds, copies of wills and tax returns, account books, and notebooks. Many are in the hand of Nicolò Massa, and of particular interest are two notebooks, one recording his principal financial and property transactions 1536–61, the other financial and miscellaneous notes 1563–68. Also of interest is a long draft of the earliest of his three wills, dated 1562.⁵

The papers reveal only a little about Massa's intellectual interests and medical practice. There are glimpses of his relations with other practitioners – the surgeon, Giovanni Andrea dalla Croce, appears as a witness to a contract, and there are papers relating to the physician, Zuan Grataruol, his friend and executor. There are also notes of medicines obtained by Massa during the 1550s from his friend, Justo di Megi, apothecary at the sign of the Bell, for his patients in the nunnery of S. Servolo. Occasionally, too, he recorded loans from his private library. But the papers are mainly important as a source of biographical information concerning Massa and his family, and as a testimony to his business acumen. They present a rare and vivid picture of how a successful Renaissance doctor built up and managed a fortune based on his medical practice.

THE BURDEN OF FAMILY AFFAIRS

According to his own account, Nicolò Massa was born in Venice in the parish of S. Pietro di Castello on 14 March 1489.⁶ This is four years later than the date usually accepted, which was calculated from his age at death as recorded in the parish registers of S. Zuan Nuovo: “adi 27 agosto 1569. lo eccelente ms. Nicolo Masa medicho de ani 84 in circha e sta amallato mesi 4 da frieve”.⁷ While the parish priest of S. Zuan Nuovo dated Massa's birth as c. 1485, his publisher, Giordano Ziletti, put it even earlier, c. 1483.⁸ In fact, contemporary overestimates of his age were a joke in Massa's own lifetime – jealous colleagues were said to be bringing forward the date of his demise. Although born before Venetian parishes recorded baptisms, Massa himself had his father's testimony to his birth in 1489, and it is on this basis that events in his life should be dated. When, for instance, his friend, the syphilologist Alvisè Luisini, recorded that Massa went blind in his eightieth year, he referred to the year 1568–69, that is, as we would expect, immediately before Luisini published a dialogue to console him on the affliction.⁹

⁵ *Ibid.*, Busta 3. The notebooks are labelled *Libro nottatorio de beni aquisiti dal' ecc. te Nicolò Massa* and *Squarza foglio scritto per man del ecc. Nicolò Massa dal anno 1563 sino l'anno 1568*.

⁶ Cicogna, *op. cit.*, note 2 above, vol. 2, p. 428.

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 114. From the parish entry is derived that in the death registers of the city: “27 Augusti 1569. Lo eccelente m. Nicolò Massa de ani 84 da febre mesi 4. S. Z. Nuovo”, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Provveditoria alla Sanità*, Reg. 8004.

⁸ Nicolò Massa, *Il libro del mal francese*, Venice, 1566. In the preface, dated October 1565, Ziletti says that Massa, then aged eighty-two, had for some months been too weak to leave home to treat his patients. His mind was nevertheless still active, and a book *De partu hominis* and other writings were said to be forthcoming.

⁹ Luigi Luisini, *Dialogo intitolato la cecità*, Venice, 1569. In this work, of which the dedication is dated May 1569, the joke is made about overestimates of Massa's age, while he himself states that he is aged eighty, ff. 34v–36v. Massa's papers make possible a complete identification of the characters in the Dialogue and reveal its intimacy. They were Nicolò Massa himself, his nephews Apollonio Massa and Nicolò Crasso, his grandson Francesco Grifalconi, and his friends Alvisè Luisini and Giovanni Martini – the latter also the brother-in-law of Apollonio Massa.

Massa traced his descent from a Genoese merchant family which settled in Friuli in about 1400, and which later moved to Venice.¹⁰ Nicolò's father, Apollonio Massa, apparently also a merchant, served in the war against the Turks at Negroponte in 1470, and later, in 1483, married Franceschina Danese, who bore him six sons and three daughters. Apollonio's death in 1505, when Nicolò was little more than a boy, was one of a series of misfortunes which befell the family. Of Nicolò's five brothers all were dead by 1530, when he placed an inscription to them in S. Domenico di Castello. The last of them, Antonio Massa, died in 1529, leaving Nicolò responsibility for the welfare of his son, the future physician Apollonio Massa, at that time still a boy, certainly under sixteen years of age.¹¹ Of Nicolò's sisters, Vicenza Massa was unmarried and a constant invalid. Nicolò cared for her in his own home. We do not know the nature of her complaint, but she was a difficult, perhaps unbalanced, woman. She was the enemy of Nicolò's daughter, Maria, unwilling to see her though they shared the same house, and in his will dated 1562 Nicolò had to urge his daughter to Christian patience in dealing with Vicenza's peculiarities.¹² His other two sisters, both of whom survived him, were more normal. This was not an unmitigated blessing for Nicolò, for it fell to him to provide their dowries, the price of which in Venetian society was notoriously high.¹³ His second sister, Lucrezia, was perhaps the mother of his nephew Nicolò Crasso, a lawyer who appears as a character in Luisini's *Dialogo intitolato la cecità* and to whom Nicolò Massa dedicated his final publication, the *Diligens examen de venae sectione* (Venice, 1568). His third sister, Paula, married Antonio Caresini, who, alas for Nicolò, became a war hero running the Turkish naval blockade of Nauplia in 1538. He forced his way eleven times through the Turkish fleet with a cargo of food and munitions, but eventually his luck ran out and he died of wounds. His death left Nicolò with the tutelage of a second nephew, Lorenzo, only about seven years old, who was later to take his uncle's name and, as Lorenzo Massa, embark on a career in the Venetian civil service.¹⁴

Nicolò's own domestic life appears to have been little happier than that of his family. He never married, and although he kept a mistress, Cecilia Raspante, she was not living with him when she died in 1559. By her he had a son, Alvise, born in the parish of S. Basso in 1529, who lived only six years, and his daughter Maria, born in the parish of S. Trovaso in 1525.¹⁵ Undeterred by Maria's bastardy, Nicolò married her off to Zuan Grifalconi, a member of a landed Venetian family. In the marriage

¹⁰ The following information, except where stated otherwise, is from Cicogna, *op. cit.*, note 2 above.

¹¹ A bequest to Apollonio, which he was not to receive before his sixteenth birthday, was made in the will of his grandmother Franceschina Massa written in 1529, *Commissaria Massa*, Busta 2, fasc. P.

¹² *Ibid.*, Busta 3. He referred to his sister as follows:

"qual Vicenza o sempre tenuta in casa mal sana et infermiza, e lo sempre fatta governar et servir de quanto li ha bisognado."

¹³ *Ibid.*, "le qual mie sorelle maridai delli mei danari".

¹⁴ Cicogna, *op. cit.*, note 2 above, vol. 1, p. 131; vol. 5, pp. 18–22. Further information on Lorenzo's family is contained in Venice, Museo Civico Correr, *Raccolta Cicogna*, MSS. 3423 and 3431.

¹⁵ Cicogna, *op. cit.*, note 2 above, vol. 2, pp. 28–29. Nicolò's papers show that he invested money in Cecilia's name in 1541, and that she died in 1559, *Commissaria Massa*, Busta 3, *Libro nottatorio*, *op. cit.* Her death was recorded by the Venetian Health Office as having occurred in the parish of S. Canzian on 7 May 1559: "dona cecilia raspante da un cancaro", Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Provveditori alla Sanità*, Reg. 798.

contract, dated 1548, she was formally legitimized, so that she could inherit her father's property. On top of this, Nicolò agreed to provide a dowry of no less than 4,000 ducats, and clothes to the value of a further 500 ducats.¹⁶ In view of the ill luck of the Massas, it will be no surprise that Zuan died less than two and a half years later, in 1551. Maria then moved into the house of her father and cantankerous aunt, taking with her her infant son, Francesco Grifalconi. Nicolò who had by this time launched only the first of his dependent nephews on a career, now had to look to the education and financial affairs of his grandson. He had to recover his daughter's dowry, and then guide her in safeguarding and administering the Grifalconi inheritance. Under her father's direction, Maria Massa was soon involved in a law suit with the Grifalconi family concerning property at Frassinella in the territory of Rovigo.¹⁷ She was also to note testily in a tax return submitted as guardian of her son in 1566 that she could give no exact details since her Grifalconi relatives had never let her see the papers relating to the inheritance. She referred nonetheless to an interest in a shop and houses in Venice, and to modest amounts of property on the mainland at Cittadella, Oderzo, and Frassinella.¹⁸ On top of this, Nicolò Massa had to look to the management of his own rapidly growing fortune, partly invested in his own name and partly in that of Maria. The complexity of the demands on him became apparent in 1566, when no less than four returns for the tax on real estate (the *decima*) had to be submitted from the Massa household. Two were nominally submitted by Maria Massa, the first in her own name, the second as guardian of her son. The remaining two were submitted by Nicolò, one in his own name, the other as the executor of a charitable trust set up by a former Secretary of the Senate, Bernardino Redaldi. All four tax returns were drawn up in the same hand, and there can be no doubt that Nicolò Massa was the guiding spirit throughout.¹⁹ Indeed, in his notebook he recorded his submitting all four tax returns in person, and while Francesco Grifalconi was formally under the guardianship of his mother, it was to his grandfather that he later gave the credit for the management of his affairs.²⁰

Massa's family misfortunes are significant because of their effect on his literary output, and they go far to explain aspects of his work. At the simplest level it is hardly surprising that pestilential fever was amongst the principal subjects on which he wrote, seeing how many members of his family it carried off. In his *De febre pestilentiali* (Venice, 1556) Massa referred to the cases of his father (f. 12v), his brother Tommaso, who may have died of plague (pestilential fever *cum . . . apostemate inguinis*, f. 13r),

¹⁶ *Commissaria Massa*, Busta 2, fasc.P.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Busta 2, fasc.N. Massa referred to his grandson as "Francesco fiolo de Maria quale io amo cordialmente, et ho defesso da tante insidie et litte fatoli dalli suo parenti da parte de suo padre", *ibid.*, Busta 3, will dated 1562, f. 62v.

¹⁸ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Dieci Savi sopra le Decime*, Reg. 368, f. 825r-v.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Reg. 368, ff. 817v, 819v, 825r-v, 1153v-1154r. These are the Office's registered copies of the returns. The originals are contained in the same archive, Busta 129. Nicolò became executor of the trust, jointly with his friend Justo di Megi, on Redaldi's death in 1526. It involved the administration of an income of 158 ducats a year deriving from rents in Venice.

²⁰ *Commissaria Massa*, Busta 2, fasc.Q. The will of Francesco Grifalconi, dated 11 July 1569.

and his sister Vicenza and nephew Apollonio, both of whom recovered from typhus (*pestichiae*) during the epidemic of 1527 (f. 61r). It was also typhus (*petechie*) which carried off his brother Antonio in 1529.²¹ More importantly, the demands of Massa's family affairs, alongside those of a busy practice, inevitably limited his achievement. Commenting that the range of Massa's writings was characteristic of Renaissance medicine, L. R. Lind also observed that "perception and penetration become thinner in the case of those men whose output is large".²² This is a fair comment on Massa, but in the circumstances understandable. Throughout his work Massa referred continuously to his busy practice, and bemoaned his lack of time for writing. We owe his *Ragionamento* on the plague in Venice in 1555 to the respite of a convalescence from a stomach complaint brought on, as he said, by his toil day and night, visiting the sick patricians of Venice,²³ whilst his *Diligens examen de venae sectione* was the product of his retirement, a period when his grandson Francesco Grifalconi and a paid amanuensis had to make up for his failing eyesight.²⁴ Many times in his *Epistolae medicinales* he referred to his commitments which precluded his writing in depth,²⁵ and which had nothing to do with his intellectual interests. To his nephew Lorenzo, for instance, he wrote in 1552, "I am held up by constant business matters, which, as you well know, are far from my own choosing and alien to literary studies".²⁶ In 1557 he wrote that he could hardly stop to eat and that he was old and worn out with visiting his patients.²⁷ His slighting comments on Vesalius' *Fabrica* reflect not only his annoyance at what he regarded as plagiarism, but his frustration in the face of the achievement of a younger man free from the impositions of a family and a busy practice. Massa claimed he had no time to read the *Fabrica*, let alone to emulate it: "I who am held up by so many matters in visiting the sick can by no means read large volumes."²⁸ Yet Massa never accepted the limitations upon him. He was always promising further, more profound studies – books on the muscles and the veins, a general anatomy, a book on childbirth – promises which he was never able to fulfil.²⁹

NICOLO MASSA'S CAREER AND WRITINGS

It would be wrong to turn to the golden eggs of Massa's wealth without first considering the goose which laid them, his career and his writings. For Nicolò Massa was a self-made man, as he made clear in his draft will of 1562: "What I have bequeathed

²¹ Cicogna, op. cit., note 2 above, vol. 2, p. 428.

²² Lind, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 168.

²³ Nicolò Massa, *Ragionamento sopra le infermità che vengono dall'aere pestilentielle del presente anno MDLV*, Venice, 1556, f. 3r.

²⁴ Luisini, op. cit., note 9 above, f. 38v.

²⁵ Nicolò Massa, *Epistolarum medicinalium tomus primus*, Venice, 1558, e.g. f. 119v, to his nephew Apollonio in 1542: "Optabam equidem et animi et corporis quietem longe maiorem quanquod mihi in praesentia sit, ut doctissimo Ioanni Dryandro tuo . . . respondere possem".

²⁶ Nicolò Massa, *Epistolarum medicinalium tomus alter*, Venice, 1558, f. 35v. "Continuis enim distineor negotiis quae, ut minime tu ignoras, longe sunt a voluntate mea, literarumque studiis aliena".

²⁷ *Ibid.*, *tomus primus*, f. 168v.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 51v–55v. "Ego qui plurimis negotiis in viscendis aegris detentus, volumina ingentia minime legere possum."

²⁹ Lind, op. cit., note 1 above, p. 177; Nicolò Massa, *Il libro del mal francese*, op. cit., note 8 above, dedication.

is my own free property acquired by me, and as I have said I am a debtor to none . . . except to my Lord the Eternal God, to whose infinite goodness I owe all the blessings of body and soul and, through my own hard and assiduous efforts, my goods and property. For at the outset I had no inheritance, no paternal goods of any kind . . .". He explained that on the death of his father the estate had not even been sufficient to allow his mother to recover her dowry.³⁰ When she herself died in 1530, her will was largely a matter of second-best beds.³¹ Without doubt, Massa's wealth came from medicine. His friend Alvise Luisini, in the dedication of his famous omnibus on syphilis, wrote that the nobility of Venice and almost the whole of Europe consulted Massa as a new Aesculapius, partly by letter and partly in person. Returning home after successful treatment, they sent him gold and silver: "so that what you possess (and everyone knows how much that is) has come to you from the magnanimity of heroes and princes, not from money extorted by degrees from the people, which is the way that most doctors of this city grow rich."³² The sour note of his last comment adds a degree of credibility to the whole, and he returned to the same theme in the dialogue in Massa's honour published just before the latter's death: "Don't you know what income and reputation you have gained from practice in this city . . . for from extraordinary achievements and curing desperate cases your earnings haven't been modest but very great, in silver and gold. And these treasures have been given to you by illustrious men recommended to you in letters from republics, kings and princes who sent them into your care from distant countries, seeing little to be gained from the wisdom of their own famous doctors."³³

Nicolò Massa's career was launched when he took his degree in surgery from the Venetian College of Physicians in 1515. This was followed by his degree in arts and medicine from the same College in 1521.³⁴ Why he should have gone to the expense of two degrees is puzzling, since a degree in arts and medicine was by itself sufficient qualification to practise surgery. It would seem that either in 1515 he did not anticipate a career as a physician, or, more probably, could not then afford the long education

³⁰ *Commissaria Massa*, Busta 3. "quello che io li ho lassato essendo mio libero, et per mi aquistado, et ancho come o ditto non son debitor de persona alcuna. . . . salvo che de il mio signor Iddio eterno, dalla infinita bonta del quale cognosso haver havuto tutti li beni cosi dell'animo, come del corpo, et roba et faculta mediante le mie grande et assidue fatiche. . . . Perche prima io non ho havuto heredita ne beni paterni de alcuna sore. . . ."

His mother, in repayment of her dowry, claimed an interest in a house and a small amount of land at Marano, the old family home of the Massas. Nicolò Massa also bequeathed an interest in this property in his wills but he does not appear to have derived any benefit from it in his lifetime.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Busta 2, fasc.P. The will of Franceschina Massa, dated 1529.

³² Luigi Luisini, *De morbo gallico omnia quae extant*, Venice, 1566–67. "ita ut quicquid possides (quod quantum tum sit omnes norunt) Heroum, Principumve largitione pervenisse ad te constet, non ex nummo paulatim ex populo coarcevat, ut est ditescendi mos plurimum huius urbis medicorum."

³³ Luisini, *op. cit.*, note 9 above, f. 37r–v. "Non sapete voi quanti guadagni, e qual riputatione è stata e è la vostra nel medicare in questa città? . . . percioche facendo esperienze incredibili, e risolvendo in bene casi disperati, non havete fatto guadagni minuti anzi larghissimi di argento e d'oro, e questi thesori vi sono stati donati da uomini illustri che per lettere vi furono raccomandati da Republiche, Regi, Imperatori, che mandorono quelli da lontani paesi sotto la tutela vostra e cura, poco profitto vedendo ne la sapientia de' suoi famosi medici."

³⁴ Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, *MSS. Italiani*, Classe VII, Codice 2379 (®9686), f. 13v.

which was necessary. It has been taken for granted that he studied at Padua. This is overwhelmingly probable, but unproved. He certainly did not graduate there as has also been assumed, nor did he teach there.³⁵ Venice, “the compendium of the universe”, as Luisini called it, was his world, and he refused invitations to practise outside the city: “This worthy man was in demand by Popes and kings, but contenting himself like a good philosopher and refusing their requests he serves his native city and lives there with great honour.”³⁶ Massa recorded that he learned philosophy and Greek from Sebastiano Foscarini and Giovanni Bernardo Feliciano, and it has been supposed that these were his teachers at Padua. In fact, both taught at Venice, where arts were studied at the Scuola di Rialto and privately.³⁷ Massa may therefore have received part of his education in his native city, although he would have had to go elsewhere for his studies in medicine. There was no formal medical teaching in Venice, though degrees were awarded there on the basis of studies elsewhere.

Success came relatively early. In 1524 he became physician to two institutions, the Scuola di S. Giorgio, and the nunnery of the Sepulchre,³⁸ and in January 1527 Lucas Panetius thought it worthwhile to dedicate a new edition of Galen’s *Methodus medendi* to him. In it he praised Massa as the most able recent writer on syphilis, and noted that Massa’s treatise on the subject was just passing through the press.³⁹ This chance reference establishes 1527 as the date of Nicolò Massa’s earliest publication, his *Liber de morbo gallico* published in Venice by Francesco Bindoni and Maffeo Pasini with a misprinted colophon dated 1507.⁴⁰

Massa was not fortunate in his publishers. Bindoni and Pasini, who published for him until 1550, set a low typographical standard. In 1555 Massa turned briefly to Andrea Arrivabene, but soon settled down with the publisher who served him for the rest of his life, Giordano Ziletti, at the sign of the Star.⁴¹ Ziletti had probably brought up the Bindoni and Pasini press, for he certainly took over their remaining stock of Massa’s works. His productions were of mixed quality, but few of the works which he issued for Massa were free from long lists of errata and corrigenda. It is worth listing here the principal editions of Massa’s books, all published in Venice, since the rise of his fortune followed closely the chronology of their publication.

1. *Liber de morbo gallico* (Bindoni and Pasini, 1527, 1532, 1536). New edition (Ziletti, 1559). Third edition, greatly extended (Ziletti, 1563), also issued in translation as *Il*

³⁵ Both Lind, *op. cit.*, note 1 above, p. 168, and C. D. O’Malley, ‘Niccolò Massa’, *Physis*, 1969 11: 458–468, credited Massa with a degree from Padua, whilst George Sarton endowed him with a chair. Peter Krivatsky, ‘Nicola Massa’s *Liber de morbo gallico* dated 1507 but printed 1527’, *J. Hist. Med.* 1974, 29: 230–233, has even contrasted “the Paduan Massa” with “the Veronese Fracastoro”.

³⁶ Marco Guazzo, *Cronaca*, Venice, 1553, f. 429v, quoted in Lind, *op. cit.*, note 1 above, p. 168.

³⁷ On the Scuola and on Foscarini, Bruno Nardi, ‘La Scuola di Rialto e l’umanesimo veneziano’, in V. Branca, *Umanesimo europeo e umanesimo veneziano*, Venice, 1963, pp. 93–139. On Feliciano, who taught at Venice c. 1520–41, and only thereafter at Padua, Cicogna, *op. cit.*, note 2 above, vol. 4, pp. 206–210.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 428.

³⁹ Galen, *Terrapeutica*, *Galenii methodus medendi, vel de morbis curandis*, Thoma Linacro Anglo interprete, Venice, 1527.

⁴⁰ Krivatsky, *op. cit.*, note 35 above.

⁴¹ On these publishers, see Fernanda Ascarelli, *La tipografia cinquecentesca italiana*, Florence, 1953, pp. 176, 200.

- libro del mal francese* (Ziletti, 1565 and 1566).
2. *Liber introductorius anathomiae* (Bindoni and Pasini, 1536). Unsold copies were reissued by Ziletti in 1559 with a new title-page.
 3. *Liber de febre pestilentiali* (Bindoni and Pasini, 1540). New edition (Andrea Arrivabene, 1555 and 1556).
 4. *La loica, divisa in sette libri* (Bindoni and Pasini, 1550). Unsold copies were reissued by Ziletti in 1559.
 5. *Epistolae medicinales* (Bindoni and Pasini, 1550). Unsold copies were reissued by Ziletti in 1558 with new introductory matter and one additional letter as *Epistolarum medicinalium tomus primus*.
 6. *Epistolarum medicinalium tomus alter* (Ziletti, 1558).
 7. *Ragionamento . . . sopra le infermità che vengono dall'aere pestilentielle del presente anno MDLV* (Griffio for Ziletti, 1556).
 8. *Diligens examen de venae sectione in febris ex humorum putredine ortis* (Ziletti, 1568).

In addition the translation from the Arabic of Sorsanus' life of Avicenna, commissioned by Massa and then translated by him from Italian to Latin, appeared in successive editions of the *Canon* published by the Giunta press from 1544. Outside Venice there were further editions of the first volume of the *Epistolae medicinales* and of the *Liber de morbo gallico*, the first Lyons editions of the latter work bearing a title less offensive to French readers, *Liber de morbo neapolitano* (Lyons, 1534).

Massa's first book, the *Liber de morbo gallico*, shows many of his attitudes already formed. Syphilis, in his view, was a new disease which first appeared in Italy at the time of the siege of Naples in 1494. It was, he believed, conveyed primarily by sexual intercourse. Indeed, one of the principal diagnostic signs was the contact of a patient with an infected woman, but, more rarely, it could be spread by non-sexual contact, or even be generated spontaneously in the body.⁴² He described the symptoms of syphilis vividly and from experience, although without distinguishing clearly the successive stages of the disease. Hard ulcers on the penis were from the outset an infallible diagnostic sign in those infected by copulation. Other symptoms, varying from case to case, included fever, pains in the limbs, swelling in the groins, loss of hair, and various skin manifestations, including scaly patches on the palms and the soles of the feet. He also described the gummas, and how they might break down to produce deep, hard-sided ulcers, and he noted the destructive effect on the bones, and resulting deformities. He had also seen advanced cases where the nervous system was affected, leading to paralysis.⁴³

Massa sought to understand the disease and its pathology in traditional humoral terms, interpreting its symptoms as the product of an excess of cold, dry phlegm produced in the liver.⁴⁴ But in other respects the challenge represented by a new disease was evident, especially in the search for treatments outside the ancient phar-

⁴² Nicolò Massa, *Il libro del mal francese*, op. cit., note 8 above, pp. 2–5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 15–27.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

macopoeias. Mercurial salves, already in use against scabies and other skin diseases, were used to treat syphilis almost from the outset. Guaiac wood, or *lignum indicum* as Massa called it, was brought in later. Imported from the West Indies to Spain in about 1508, it was popularized by Ulrich von Hutten's *De guaiaci medicina* (Mainz, 1519), and came into use in Italy during the 1520s. Antonio Musa Brasavola claimed to have introduced it at Ferrara in 1525 or 1526, using a method of treatment which he had learned from a book from Spain.⁴⁵ Nicolò Massa's full account of guaiac, already included in the 1527 edition of his treatise, must therefore have been one of the earliest Italian studies of the subject, as indeed he was later proud to record.⁴⁶ As further new drugs were introduced, so Massa brought his treatise up to date. The 1563 edition included accounts of treatment with china root and sarsaparilla, both introduced in the mid-1530s, the former from China and the latter from the West Indies. But Massa was not committed to any one form of treatment and if necessary he tried a variety of remedies. Guaiac was his first resource. His patients were prepared by a careful regimen with regard to the six Galenic non-naturals, by bloodletting and by digestives and light purgatives. A strong decoction of guaiac was then drunk twice a day for at least forty days, along with a milder decoction taken as required throughout the day. The strong decoction was taken in a warm room, after which Nicolò's patients retired to bed for two hours in order to sweat profusely under the effect of the drug. China root and sarsaparilla were alternative sudorifics, administered in a similar way. Massa nevertheless found them less effective, and he noted in 1563 that after trying them doctors had returned to guaiac.⁴⁷

Massa's approach to treatment was thoroughly pragmatic. If guaiac and its substitutes failed, the doctor was free to experiment:

for in great and exceedingly difficult diseases it is permissible to try everything provided that one proceeds reasonably . . . for I am not of the opinion that nothing can be added to the discoveries of the learned, which would be madness, as if to hold that those who have not been cured by mild medicines may not be cured by stronger or very potent ones, even if they are not universally known. In any event it is better to try them than cruelly and impiously to leave the sick to languish without help.⁴⁸

The first of the more extreme remedies was the mercurial salve. An ointment based on a controlled amount of mercury mixed with animal fats was rubbed on the joints nightly. The joints were then bound up, and the patient put to bed for two hours to sweat. The treatment caused suffering in the form of ulcers in the mouth, a constant dribbling of foetid saliva, loss of sleep and appetite, and diarrhoea. But Massa

⁴⁵ Antonio Musa Brasavola, 'De morbo gallico', in Luisini, op. cit., note 32 above, vol. 1, pp. 601, 661.

⁴⁶ Nicolò Massa, *Liber de morbo gallico*, Venice, 1563. In the dedication of this edition to Cardinal Carlo Borromeo, Massa wrote: "quod morbi genus medicamentis novis et inusitatis curandum esse docui, quae antequam a me invenirentur et scriberentur quam multi perierunt ignoratione medentium".

⁴⁷ Nicolò Massa, *Il libro del mal francese*, op. cit., note 8 above, pp. 77–194. The Italian text is translated from the Latin edition of 1563.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 193. "imperoche nelle grandi e sopramodo difficili malatie è licito a far sperienza d'ogni cosa, con ragione pero procedendo . . . perche io non sono di quel parere che non si possi aggiungere punto alle cose trovate da savi, che sarebbe cosa pazza da dire, come a voler tenere che quelli li quali non sono risanati da lievi medicine non si possino rihavere con le piu forti over fortissime, ne da tutti conosciute che in ogni modo è meglio a tentarle che usar crudeltà e impietà lassando i poveri languenti senza aiuto niuno. . . ."

recorded that many had been saved by it under the care of rational physicians and even under empirics.⁴⁹ If the ointments failed, Massa had recourse to fumigations. This treatment could have serious consequences for the vital organs, and Massa reserved it for advanced cases where all else had proved vain. Each day the patient sat naked in a hot room by the stove, surrounded by a form of tent. Sulphide of mercury (*cinaprio*) and incense were then placed on the fire, and the patient was urged to endure for as long as possible, if necessary with his nose outside the tent for fresh air. After this he was sent to bed to sweat.⁵⁰

The *Liber de morbo gallico* is typical of Renaissance medicine. Massa was devoted to classical learning and eager to interpret the new disease in classical terms, whilst at the same time coming to terms with new remedies and treatments. The book also tells a lot about Massa's practice, demonstrating his resourcefulness and his refusal to give up a case as hopeless. Some of his patients were evidently treated over a long period. He records courses of guaiac of up to ninety days in severe cases, and patients who received up to three courses. Treatment was prolonged further where several remedies were tried successively, and it is not surprising that Massa's bills were large. The book also shows something of Massa's manner in relation to his patients: "It seems to me of great benefit to the sick to be visited by a grave, famous, and truly learned doctor whom the patient can trust and have confidence in. The doctor will tell the patient that, amongst his other successes, he has cured much more serious illnesses."⁵¹ Massa followed the same practice in relation to his readers, peppering his works with lively accounts of his own successes. There was, for instance, the case of Giovanni Broila, a nobleman who endured years of syphilis with tumours and ulcers all over the body and corruption of the bones such that his appearance became monstrous. He was treated without success by doctors at Turin, Milan, Pavia, and Lyons before he turned to Massa in Venice and was cured.⁵² The moral was obvious. Massa's works were indeed his own propaganda. He wrote, to quote the words which Luisini put into his mouth in the *Dialogo intitolato la cecità* "to make myself known to the men of my age".⁵³ Whether or not Massa was well paid by his publishers, his books were the root of his fortune. They advertised his practice to a European audience, and attracted the patients on whom his wealth depended.

Massa carried out a large number of post-mortem examinations of his syphilitic patients from at least 1524.⁵⁴ Morbid anatomy became a regular feature of his work, and in 1535 he was singled out by the Venetian *Provveditori alla Sanità* to carry out a series of anatomies to establish the nature of an epidemic affecting the city.⁵⁵ He also played his part in the public anatomy performed annually by the Venetian medical

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 195–220.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 231–239.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46. "Parmi che al infermo sia di gran giovamento che sia visitato da qualche medico grave, famoso, veramente dotto, perche egli possa haver buona fiducia in simil soggetto, e prestargli fede, mentre fra gl'altri buoni successi suoi dirà il medico all'infermo che ha sanato malatie di gran lunga maggiori. . . ."

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 155–157.

⁵³ Luisini, *op. cit.*, note 9 above, f. 35r.

⁵⁴ Nicolò Massa, *Il libro del mal francese*, *op. cit.*, note 8 above, p. 12.

⁵⁵ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Provveditori alla Sanità*, Reg. 727, ff. 293r–306v.

colleges. The annual anatomies of Venice were unaffected by the changes introduced at Padua by Vesalius, and throughout the century they were carried out formally by a number of participants. In December 1536 there were four – a *lector*, who read the text of Mundinus, a *declarator*, *demonstrator*, and *incisor*, and the role of *demonstrator* fell to Massa.⁵⁶ When he was not a participant, he nevertheless played his part in discussing the anatomy with the younger men.⁵⁷

1536 saw the publication of his second book, the *Liber introductorius anathomiae*. This was a practical textbook for students, showing how to carry out an anatomy from the first incision onwards. Again the classical and Arabic teachers were revered, whilst the book was invigorated by experience gained from numerous anatomies held in the hospital of SS. Pietro e Paolo and the monastery of SS. Giovanni e Paolo. Massa himself saw no contradiction here:

Indeed I praise Plato, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen, Avicenna, Averroes and other very learned men who have been most helpful to posterity with their labours. But I am not the kind of man who would say that nature created men without errors, for since men have existed all of them have been capable of mistakes. They have also erred in certain matters of fact, for all of us cannot do all things . . . Thus when I do not agree with the ancients it is because the fact of truth differs from their statement about it.⁵⁸

On this basis he justified the full title of his book, which promised to reveal parts, functions, and uses of the body overlooked by others, ancient and modern. His success in fulfilling his promise has been variously assessed. In his biography of Vesalius, C. D. O'Malley found the book "somewhat overrated, making certain contributions and correcting some errors, but remaining too much under the shadow of Galen".⁵⁹ Later, he gave a more favourable appreciation, noting Massa's introduction of the term *panniculus carnosus*, and praising other aspects of his work – his account of the abdominal wall, intestinal canal, and appendix, the observation that the size of the spleen varied in those suffering from certain ailments, the discovery of the prostate gland, his denial of the seven-celled uterus, his reference to the malleus and incus, and his statement that the interventricular septum was a "dense and hard substance without a cavity", perhaps a denial of Galen's interventricular pores and a hint towards the pulmonary circulation of the blood. At the same time, O'Malley commented unfavourably on the "cryptic brevity" of so many of Massa's descriptions.⁶⁰ This is justifiable comment, but Massa's brevity was perhaps inevitable in what was, after all, a short book on how to perform an anatomy, not an account of the fabric of the body in the manner of Vesalius. Massa's experience of anatomy, although considerable, was infinitely less than that of Vesalius. He lacked Vesalius's obsessive passion for the subject and his vision of it as an area of pure research. For Massa,

⁵⁶ Biskupski Musej, Hvar, Yugoslavia, Minute book of the College of Physicians, 1534–1555. I am grateful to the Bishop of Hvar for allowing me to study this manuscript and to the Royal Society for a research grant.

⁵⁷ Richard Palmer, 'Physicians and surgeons in sixteenth-century Venice', *Med. Hist.*, 1979, **23**: 451–460, especially p. 458.

⁵⁸ Lind, *op. cit.*, note 1 above, pp. 175–176.

⁵⁹ C. D. O'Malley, *Andreas Vesalius of Brussels*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1964, pp. 122–123.

⁶⁰ O'Malley, *op. cit.*, note 35 above.

anatomy remained an adjunct to medicine. It was the groundwork for surgery, showing the correct sites for incisions and areas where especial care was needed. He noted the extreme consequences of surgical mistakes; ignorance of anatomy could cause the death of patients. It is no surprise that he digressed into surgery, dealing, amongst other things, with wounds of the peritoneum and demonstrating his own method of sewing up intestines. Anatomy was also the guide to morbid processes, and many of his patients ended their courses of treatment on his anatomy table, sometimes at the request of relatives.⁶¹

The *Liber introductorius* is best judged in its own terms as a practical manual. It is full of hints such as the use of probes to examine cavities, and pipes, syringes, and bellows to inflate organs such as the bladder, kidneys, stomach, and womb to show their capacity and explore their function. It also contains useful suggestions such as boiling the liver as a preliminary to studying its veins. The treatise amply justifies L. R. Lind's assessment of it as a "remarkably clear account of the human body by a skilled dissector who was proud of his ability".⁶²

Massa's third publication, the *Liber de febre pestilentiali, ac de pestichiis, varolibus et apostematibus pestilentialis*, came out in 1540, and later the opportunity presented by the epidemics in Venice in 1555–6 was seized for a reprint. The impulse for the book probably sprang from the epidemic of plague and typhus which affected Italy in the years 1527–29. Most of the book was written long before publication, and it was referred to in the *Liber introductorius anathomiae* of 1536.⁶³ Massa had put aside this work unfinished, and completed it later through the encouragement of friends. The *Liber de febre pestilentiali* begins with a definition of pestilential fever as epidemic, usually fatal, and contagious. It was not a distinct disease in the modern sense, and Massa associated it with a range of different symptoms which included *variolae, morbilli, petichiae* (which he insisted on calling *pestichiae*), and bubonic *apostemata*. This theoretical approach underlies the whole work, and, while going beyond classical medicine in acknowledging the possibility of contagion in epidemics, it remains within a highly traditional framework.⁶⁴

More interesting in that it was written in the immediate circumstances of the epidemic in Venice in 1555, is his second work on the same theme, the *Raggionamento sopra le infermità che vengono dall'aere pestilentiale del presente anno MDLV*. This is free of the generalities inherent in the term "pestilential fever". Indeed, the book arose from a specific question from the Health Office to the College of Physicians: was the disease bubonic plague (*peste o giandussa*) or not? Massa's interpretation of the phenomena of the epidemic was nonetheless wholly Galenic. The disease struck many people simultaneously, irrespective of age, sex, occupation, or manner of life. The cause must therefore lie in the element noted by Hippocrates as common to all, the air. In Massa's view warm, damp weather had corrupted the atmosphere, producing

⁶¹ The preceding comments are based on Lind's translation of the *Liber introductorius* in the *Studies*, op. cit., note 1 above, pp. 176, 184, 186–187, 212.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 186, 192, 194–195, 198, 200, 204.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 229.

⁶⁴ Nicolò Massa, *Liber de febre pestilentiali*, Venice, 1556, especially ff. 11v *et seq.*, 22v.

fevers through the resulting putrefaction of the humours. The disease was spread in a secondary way by contagion, but the sick were mostly infected by breathing corrupt air. The practice of strict isolation of the sick followed by the Health Office should therefore be moderated, and far more attention paid to sanitation, street cleaning, and the removal of evil smells which could further taint the air.⁶⁵

Surprisingly, his third work on the subject, *De essentia causis et cura pestilentiae venetiis grassantis anno 1556*, published as Letter 35 in his *Epistolarum medicinalium tomus primus* (Venice, 1558), contradicts much of this advice. This work was concerned with the epidemic in Venice in 1556, and was based on an address commissioned from Massa and presented by him before the Doge and Senate – an indication of his influence at the height of his career. Massa's views had probably undergone a transformation, although perhaps he regarded the epidemic of 1556 not as a recrudescence of that of 1555 but as a separate phenomenon with different causes. In any event, he now believed that the disease had been imported with infected goods from Istria, and had been spread by contagion. It was not caused by corruption of the air. He was clearly driven to these conclusions by observation of the phenomena of the epidemic – the sort of research which was routine in the Health Office of Venice. But how did he relate his new understanding of the disease to the classical view that epidemics derived from the atmosphere? The answer is revealing. Massa's views on anatomy show that he believed that the ancients could be wrong. Nevertheless, in dealing with plague he preferred to accommodate conflicting experience with the classical texts by subtlety rather than declare that the classical authors were in error. The phenomena of the plague of 1556 did not correspond to Galenic theory. But Massa did not allow this to falsify Galen – rather he declared that the epidemic could not be called “true plague”, as described in the classical texts, a sophistical but influential solution which posed more problems than it solved.⁶⁶

Massa's next publication was his first book of *Epistolae medicinales*. Publishing letters had an obvious attraction for him. He could increase his fame by publishing on a variety of subjects without having to sit down and write a book. But the *Epistolae* were also attractive in another way. The principal correspondent in the first volume is his nephew Apollonio Massa, and it is hard to resist the impression that, at least in part, it was published to promote his reputation in the early years of his career. From his father's death in 1529 Apollonio had been under Nicolò Massa's care: “from the swaddling bands until his marriage . . . I housed him, fed and clothed him, and caused him to study in various Universities and made him a doctor of arts and medicine, and in all these things I spent on him a very great deal of money, besides great efforts made on his behalf and much pain and trouble. . . .”⁶⁷ Apollonio followed his uncle in

⁶⁵ Nicolò Massa, *Ragionamento*, op. cit., note 23 above, especially ff. 2v–7r, 11v, 14v–18r, 23v–24r.

⁶⁶ Nicolò Massa, *Epistolarum medicinalium tomus primus*, op. cit., note 25 above, especially ff. 169r, 177r. On the disastrous consequences of this solution in the plagues of the 1570s, when physicians' declarations that the disease was not “true plague” undermined the work of the Italian Health Offices, cf. Richard Palmer, ‘The control of plague in Venice and Northern Italy’, University of Kent at Canterbury Ph.D. thesis, 1978, chapter 9.

⁶⁷ *Commissaria Massa*, Busta 3, Nicolò Massa's draft will of 1562, f. 60v. “. . . dalle fasce fino al tempo si volse maridar . . . io lo tenuto in casa nutrito, vestito, et fato studiar in diversi studii, et fatosi dottor delle

taking a degree in surgery in the Venetian College of Physicians in March 1538.⁶⁸ Later in the year he left to study in Germany. There he was shown favour by Elizabeth of Saxony, to whom in 1540 Nicolò dedicated his *Liber de febre pestilentiali* in order to smooth the path for his nephew. Apollonio's move to Germany at a time when so many of the best German scholars were travelling to Padua to sit at the feet of Vesalius, Da Monte, and others was extraordinary. Even more surprising was his choice of university. In 1540 he matriculated at Leipzig, where he was the only non-German amongst 132 students who registered for the *Sommersemester*.⁶⁹ Only the previous year the Protestant Duke Henry had succeeded his Catholic brother in Ducal Saxony and, on advice from Wittenberg, had proceeded to dismiss the Leipzig professors who did not accept the Reformed faith.⁷⁰ It is therefore likely that Apollonio's move to Germany was inspired by Lutheran sympathies, especially as in the winter of 1541 he went to Electoral Saxony and matriculated in Luther's university, Wittenberg.⁷¹

For Nicolò Massa this must have been a disturbing time. It perhaps accounted for much of the pain and trouble his nephew brought him, although we know too that Apollonio bled him of considerable sums (the side of the correspondence not represented in the *Epistolae* being letters asking for money),⁷² and that Nicolò sometimes found him ungrateful.⁷³ Nicolò himself never wavered in his religious sympathies. His wills include concern for masses for his soul and those of his family, and a readiness to have any of his books burned which were contrary to the orders of the Council of Trent. He was also a member of three Venetian *scuole*, one purpose of which was the pooling of merit for the salvation of the soul.⁷⁴

In his *Epistolae* Nicolò was concerned to portray Apollonio in a favourable light. He made no mention of his matriculation at Wittenberg. Instead, he showed that Apollonio had good academic reasons for being in Germany. The *Epistolae* refer to his medical studies under Heinrich Auerbach at Leipzig, where, like students at Padua, he could study at the bedsides of patients as well as in the classroom. They also refer to his growing expertise in anatomy attained there through daily practice, and point out the advantages of his contact with Johannes Dryander and his friendship with Philip Melanchthon,⁷⁵ the latter in the innocuous context of linguistic studies. Nicolò's frankness in describing Apollonio's years in Germany is hard to explain

arte et medicina, per le qual tutte cose ho speso per lui tutti de li mei molti et molti danari, oltra molte fatiche per me fate, et molti affani et fastidii havuti per lui. . . ."

⁶⁸ Biskupski Musej, Hvar, Minute book, op. cit., note 56 above, f. 38r. He was approved for the degree unanimously, with the admiration of the College.

⁶⁹ Georg Erler, *Die Matrikel der Universität Leipzig*, 3 vols., Leipzig, 1895–1902, vol. 1, p. 631.

⁷⁰ G. R. Elton (editor), *New Cambridge modern history*, vol. 2, Cambridge University Press, 1958, pp. 354, 431.

⁷¹ C. E. Foerstemann, *Album Academiae Vitebergensis*, Leipzig, 1841, p. 193.

⁷² *Commissaria Massa*, Busta 3, draft will of 1562, f. 60v.

⁷³ Cicogna, op. cit., note 2 above, vol. 2, p. 429.

⁷⁴ *Commissaria Massa*, Busta 3, draft will of 1562. Nicolò left bequests to two monasteries and his own parish. He was a member of the Scuola Grande of San Marco, and of the Scuole of San Giorgio and Sant'Antonio dei Marinari.

⁷⁵ Nicolò Massa, *Epistolarum medicinalium tomus primus*, op. cit., note 25 above, ff. 1r, 119r.

except as a bold attempt to show that there was nothing to hide. Certainly by 1550 Apollonio had had time to recover his position. Between March and May 1542 he went through the stages required at Leipzig for the doctorate in medicine.⁷⁶ In June he returned to Venice and joined the College of Physicians. Within three months he became its treasurer, so beginning a long respectable career.⁷⁷

The impression that the first volume of the *Epistolae* was meant to promote the career of Apollonio is confirmed by the fact that, eight years later, Nicolò did the same for his second nephew, Lorenzo. Since the death of his father in 1538 Lorenzo had been of constant concern to Nicolò: "I have always tried to help Lorenzo with all diligence and not a little effort and expense, giving him a good education in the city and in Padua and elsewhere."⁷⁸ In 1552 and 1553 Lorenzo was studying arts at Padua, completing the education which he needed for entry to the Venetian civil service in 1553.⁷⁹ It was while he was away that Nicolò wrote to him some of the letters published in his *Epistolarum medicinalium tomus alter*. This second volume was clearly meant to smooth Lorenzo's path in his secretarial career, for Nicolò dedicated it to the Doge, Lorenzo Priuli, whose kindness to Lorenzo Massa he specifically noted.

Taken together, the two volumes of letters cover an extraordinary range of subjects, including anatomy and surgery (especially wounds of the head, chest, and abdomen), the medicinal baths at Caldiero in the Veronese, epilepsy, paralysis, syphilis, fevers (including an interesting account of tertian malaria), and superfoetation. There are also letters on the general principles of medicine and on philosophical subjects – the creation of the world, the immortality of the soul, and the generation of man. Apart from his nephews, Massa's correspondents included the Venetian philosopher Sebastiano Foscarini, the Paduan professors Antonio Fracanzano and Giovanni Battista da Monte, and distinguished medical practitioners such as Agostino Gadaldino. Many of the letters took the form of *consilia*, written advice to patients in Italy and elsewhere, amongst them figures as prominent as Alvertus Corvinus of Poland. More personal than a formal treatise, the *Epistolae* gave Massa the ideal opportunity to advertise his ability and parade his successful cures. There was, for instance, the case of Marco Goro, a Venetian nobleman wounded in the head by a halberd. Goro had been dumb for eighteen days until Massa removed a fragment of bone from his brain. Thereupon he began to speak, to the applause of the doctors and senators watching the operation. He might, hinted Massa, have made a full recovery – for he became epileptic – had he not been such a difficult patient, with a scorn for regimen and a passion for caviar.⁸⁰

Not only do the letters give a picture of Nicolò Massa with his patients, they also reveal something of his students and of medical education in Venice. In Massa's lifetime Padua was famous for the clinical teaching of Giovanni Battista da Monte in

⁷⁶ Erler, *op. cit.*, note 69 above, vol. 2, pp. 77–78.

⁷⁷ Biskupski Musej, Hvar, Minute book, *op. cit.*, note 56 above, ff. 54r, 55r.

⁷⁸ *Commissaria Massa*, Busta 3, draft will of 1562, f. 62r. "Al qual Lorenzo io ho sempre et con ogni studio cercado de zovarli con non pocha mia fatica et spesa, facendoli insegnar boni costumi et bone lettere, così nella cita come in Padoa et altrove. . . ."

⁷⁹ Cicogna, *op. cit.*, note 2 above, vol. 5, p. 18.

⁸⁰ Nicolò Massa, *Epistolarum medicinalium tomus alter*, *op. cit.*, note 26 above, ff. 90v–91r.

the hospital of San Francesco. But teaching at the bedsides of patients was by no means new. From as early as 1465 the University of Padua required graduands to have practised for at least one year with some famous doctor.⁸¹ Students appear to have fulfilled this regulation by gaining practical experience concurrently with their theoretical studies. Many attached themselves to Paduan doctors, but others were attracted by the greater range of experience available in Venice, and by the reputation of doctors there. This was the pride of the Venetian College of Physicians. Valerio Superchio, who had himself come to Venice from Pesaro to practise medicine, made the point in a letter to the Venetian Health Office which he drafted on behalf of the College in 1535:

you may be sure, gentlemen, that in this city there are highly approved doctors, who are the equal in fidelity, diligence, and prudence of all the doctors in Italy and abroad. And the reason is that this city being very populous and rich all those with good enterprising minds come here to practise and earn their living. Here you see more cases in a week than in any other city in a year because everyone, nobles and people alike, want to be served with consultations and disputations and more than one doctor for his needs. So that it is impossible for men not to attain the greatest perfection in this art. The other reason is that here the medicines, both simple and composite, are excellent, so that the doctor's intentions can be carried out to the best advantage, whereas God only knows what happens in other cities.⁸²

Vesalius was one of many students who looked to Venice for practical experience, for he later referred to the period "when I was treating the sick in Venice under the direction of the most famous professors there".⁸³ Alvise Luisini was another. He studied for two years in the 1550s under Gian'Antonio Secco, and claimed to have scarcely left his master's side, visiting patients and learning from his skill in diagnosis and his admirable bedside manner.⁸⁴ Massa himself drew students to Venice from more than one university, and from a variety of nationalities. Vincenzo Calzaveia, who inspired the Italian edition of Massa's *Liber de morbo gallico*, was amongst them, as Massa's publisher recorded:

In 1562 your excellency left the distinguished University of Bologna, attracted by the fame of so great a man, and came to Venice purely to meet him and find out if he matched up to the high reputation which he had throughout Italy . . . and so, considering his genius, you chose to follow Massa alone to learn from him the true science of medicine on firm foundations rather than follow many others at once who taught with little profit in the universities and in other private places.⁸⁵

⁸¹ *Statuta almae universitatis d. artistarum et medicorum Patavini gymnasii*, Venice, 1589, f. 44v.

⁸² Biskupski Musej, Hvar, Minute book, op. cit., note 56 above, f. 18r. "et siati certi, Signori, di questo, che in questa vostra cita sonno approbatissimi medici, gli quali di fede, diligentia, prudentia et sopra tutto di perfetta doctrina et experientia possona star al paragone de tutti gli medici di Italia et fuor de Italia. Et la raggione el vole, percioche essendo questa terra popolissima et richissima tutti gli boni et solerti ingegni per essercitarsi et guadagnare gli concorreno. Et piu casi se gli vedde in una septimana che in cadauna altra citade in uno anno, perche ognuno così nobile como plebeio vol esser servito et vol collegii et desputationi et piu de uno medico nelli bisogni suoi, per modo che e impossibile che gli huomini non vengano a grandissima perfectione di questa arte. Una altra ragione e che qui sono le medicine così semplice como composite perfetissime, di maniera che qui si puol eseguir le intentione medicinale ottimamente, che negli altri lochi idio sa como la va."

⁸³ O'Malley, op. cit., note 59 above, p. 75.

⁸⁴ Luigi Luisini, *De compescendis animi affectibus*, Basle, 1562, dedication.

⁸⁵ Nicolò Massa, *Il libro del mal francese*, op. cit., note 8 above, dedication. "l'anno 1562, essendosi vostra eccellenza partita dal nobilissimo studio di Bologna, mosso dalla fama d'un tanto huomo, si trasferi a Vinegia solo per conoscerlo e per certificarci se era vero quel tanto che con si ampla laude di lui si predicava per tutta Italia. . . . La onde considerando l'altezza del suo ingegno, si elesse di voler più tosto

Massa's considerable ego has not escaped the eyes of his critics, and he responded warmly to an admiring audience. Throughout his career he showed a concern for medical education, and his publications had a characteristic pedagogic intention. The *Liber de morbo gallico* stated candidly that "our intention is to instruct young doctors",⁸⁶ and his *Liber introductorius anathomiae* was a student manual. As well as letters of instruction to his nephews, the *Epistolae* included correspondence with his students. A letter addressed *ad bonarum artium studiosos*, dated 1556, begins characteristically: "When as usual I was in the boat on my way to visit the sick with certain students of arts and medicine, we were discussing questions of philosophy and medicine (as is my custom on other occasions), and as usual they asked me freely. . . ." On this occasion the subject was what Massa saw as the growing habit of finding fault with medical authorities. He himself never wavered in his devotion to classical, and, less typically, to Arabic scholarship, and he urged his students to profit from any author with a good mind, whether classical, medieval, or modern.⁸⁷ Amongst Massa's other letters those on anatomy were drawn from him by students anxious to have his opinion of the *Fabrica*, while that on surgery was dictated to a Spanish student, Petrus Domitius Melonus, again in a boat on the way to his patients.⁸⁸ Not only did he bring his students to the bedsides of the sick, but he also allowed them to be present at *collegia*, discussions between consultants called in to advise in particular cases. His letter on tertian fever gives an instance of such a case, and it records the questions which ensued in the boat on the way home.⁸⁹

Teaching led on naturally to the examination of degree candidates in the Venetian College of Physicians. In this period the number of degrees awarded by the College was substantial, largely because of the influence of Vettor Trincavella, an active member who was also professor of practical medicine at Padua. Towards the mid-sixteenth century, degree candidates at Venice chose up to seven sponsors (*promotores*) from the members of the College. Most chose three or four, and almost all sought to have Trincavella amongst the number. In the decade from 1545 to 1554 he acted as sponsor in 102 graduations out of 125 in which the sponsors are known. All the other members of the College came far behind him, but amongst the most popular choices was Nicolò Massa. Thirty-three candidates selected him as one of their sponsors in the same decade, amongst them an Englishman, Thomas Vavasour. The principal sponsor also awarded the insignia of the degree to successful candidates, and this too was a task which frequently fell to Massa.⁹⁰

Massa was never Prior of the College, but he served at least two terms, in 1543 and 1548–9, as *Consigliere*, one of the two councillors of the Prior.⁹¹ With the Prior, the

seguitare il Massa solo, per imparare da esso con bon fondamento la vera scientia della medicina che accostarsi a molti altri insieme che con poco frutto l'insegnavano ne gli studii e in altri luoghi privati."

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁸⁷ Nicolò Massa, *Epistolarum medicinalium tomus alter*, op. cit., note 26 above, ff. 1r–3v.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, *tomus primus*, f. 51v *et seq.*; *tomus alter*, note 26 above, f. 84v.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, *tomus alter*, f. 74v.

⁹⁰ The preceding information is based on Biskupski Musej, Hvar, Minute book, op. cit., note 56 above, Vavasour graduated on 12 December 1533, f. 174r.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, ff. 56r, 125r. *Consiglieri* normally served for six months. Massa was elected on 8 March 1543 and on 17 September 1548.

Consiglieri had powers to call meetings and propose motions. They also had a variety of other duties. Massa, for instance, had to be present at pharmacies when mithridatum was made,⁹² and took part with the officers of the Surgeon's College in the examination and licensing of surgeons who did not take the full doctorate.⁹³

Massa's remaining books, *La loica* and the *Diligens examen*, were also written with students in mind. *La loica* (Venice, 1550) was an elementary treatise on logic, and the only work which he wrote in Italian apart from the *Raggionamento*. It proclaimed itself "useful to all students, not only of philosophy, medicine and rhetoric, but also of grammar, history and every sort of science". The *Diligens examen de venae sectione et sanguinis missione in febribus et in aliis praeter naturam affectibus* (Venice, 1568) grew out of a discussion with students while visiting the sick, and it contained a long table for students outlining forty circumstances in which venesection was, or was not, advisable. Experience showed Massa that venesection was harmful to patients with putrid fever, which he defined as fever caused through putrefaction of the humours in the veins, a category which included typhus, plague, and other diseases. Indeed, almost all such patients died after bloodletting, while those that recovered had a long and difficult convalescence. Yet there appeared to be good Galenic authority for the practice. The crunch came when Massa's nephew Nicolò Crasso, to whom the book was dedicated, went down with putrid fever. Almost all his doctors wanted to draw blood, while Massa alone stood out against it. Crasso took his uncle's advice and survived. Clearly Massa had to explain himself. In doing so he made the point that authorities were not to be accepted uncritically: "Those who persist in bloodletting in all fevers deriving from putrefaction of the humours, supported purely by authority without reason or experience, should therefore see how mistaken they are. For the authority and the words of Galen are true on the conditions which I have mentioned, that is, when they are attested by reason and experience." Nevertheless, he made it clear that when reason and experience were applied to Galen's teaching on venesection the result was not the conclusion that Galen was in error. Galen's teaching was true, but misinterpreted.⁹⁴ As in Massa's approach to classical theories of epidemics, the function of reason and experience has more to do with the interpretation of the classical texts than with falsifying or replacing them. In this Massa was entirely typical of his time. Statements that the ancients were sometimes wrong, such as were often made in the context of anatomy, had few repercussions in the sixteenth century in physiology or pathology. But if Massa's interpretation and refinement of the classical texts saved them from falsification, it had another consequence in making them increasingly remote from the needs of the time.

⁹² *Ibid.*, f. 127v, 25 February 1549. Massa was present at the manufacture of mithridatum by Hieronymus at the sign of St. Jerome. In 1548 he also served on a sub-committee of the College concerned with the question of the ingredients of mithridatum, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, *MSS. Italiani*, Classe VII, codice 2369 (= 9667), f. 31r.

⁹³ Many instances are found in the records of the Surgeons' College, e.g. in 1543, *ibid.*, codice 2328 (= 9722), ff. 132v, 135r.

⁹⁴ Nicolò Massa, *Diligens examen de venae sectione et sanguinis missione in febribus et in aliis praeter naturam affectibus*, Venice, 1568, especially pp. 1–9.

NICOLÒ MASSA'S FORTUNE

It was in 1536, nine years after his first publication, that Nicolò Massa became a man of property. He purchased four *campi* of land at Peragetto in the area of Mestre.⁹⁵ Here he built his country house, the symbol of the successful Venetian. He took a deep interest in the project, which showed something of his personal taste. Behind the house he set up a pergola, and he formed a garden which he planted with apple, cherry and nut trees, vines, and roses. Four years later he consolidated the property by acquiring a small piece of land, which lay inconveniently in the middle of his own, from the Scuola of Santa Maria of Mestre. He did this by exchange, giving up part of his land in return. Bargaining in small pieces of land was typical of the way in which Venetians built up their mainland estates, but Nicolò moved with unusual subtlety – he had first made himself the Scuola's creditor by becoming the local tax farmer. The land which he gained was larger than that which he gave up, increasing his property to five *campi*, and he made up the difference in cash and by reducing the Scuola's tax bill. Towards the end of his life Nicolò settled the Peragetto estate on his nephew Apollonio.⁹⁶

It was also in 1536 that Massa acquired his first property in Venice. During her lifetime, his mother had enjoyed the use of a house in the parish of S. Pietro di Castello under the will of her brother Zuan Danese. Although after her death in 1530 it was expected to return to Massa's Danese cousins, he nevertheless managed to claim the property for himself. The house was old and ruinous, but, as in all Massa's property transactions, acquisition was just the first step. He restored the building, which was on three floors, and divided it into two houses worth fifteen ducats a year in rent by the 1560s.⁹⁷

By 1538 Nicolò Massa had a comfortable income and there was a steady flow of money to be invested. He began to deposit money in the mint, in government funds at fourteen per cent interest per annum. In the years between 1538 and 1543 he invested 941 ducats, 200 in the name of his sister Vicenza, 171 in the name of his daughter Maria, and 114 ducats each in his own name and those of his mistress Cecilia Raspante, his sister Paula, and his nephews Apollonio and Lorenzo. At the same time, between 1539 and 1540, he purchased from the Proveditori sopra Camere the revenues from a property tax (*daie over colte*) paid by the Scuola of Santa Maria and others in the district of Mestre. He had become a tax farmer. In return for an outlay of some 542 ducats he was able through his agent to collect and retain taxes worth some thirty-three ducats a year. This was a substantial long-term investment, which he was later able to bequeath to his daughter.

His next move was to buy a business. In 1544, at an auction held by the

⁹⁵ The following account of Massa's investments is based on his own *Libro notatorio de beni aquistadi, Commissaria Massa*, Busta 3, and on a separate *Summario di beni aquistadi dall' ecc. m. Nicolò Massa*, *ibid.*, Busta 2, fasc.P. Historians' estimates of the normal Venetian *campo*, the *campo trevigiano*, appear to vary from 3,657 square metres (0.9 acre) to 5,204 square metres (1.29 acres).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, Busta 3, *Squarzafooglio* . . . , f. 1r.

⁹⁷ Nicolò claimed in his tax return in 1566 that he collected no rent on the property as his tenants were poor, but he thought it worthwhile in his last will to leave the rents to his sisters for life, and thereafter six ducats a year for ten years to the poor of the Danese family. The houses themselves were to be occupied by poor widows.

Sopragastaldi, he purchased the bakery of the parish of Santa Maria Maddalena.⁹⁸ In 1552 he went on to buy the bakery premises and both business and premises were placed in the name of his daughter. Later, in 1556, he also bought Maria three-quarters of a house in the same parish, and in due course the bakery moved there. This led to law suits with the owner of the other quarter, Zuan da Molin, who had to be bought off in 1560 with a large financial settlement. The house was nevertheless worth it, for in 1566 the upper floors alone were bringing Maria a rent of fifty-six ducats a year. Massa also acquired property in the parish in his own name. In 1548 he bought a house and a fruit shop, a very large undertaking, for it cost him a full 1,000 ducats.

But Nicolò's most important investments were made towards the end of his career. In 1556 he purchased a farm of some 38½ *campi* at Peseggia towards Treviso in the Podestaria of Mestre. This was done in his own name and that of Maria. The land was furnished with workmen's cottages, barns, and stables, and cost Nicolò 2,400 ducats. He immediately began improvements, planting vines and trees and repairing buildings. Two years later, he more than doubled his holding. In the first of two transactions he invested a further 1,400 ducats, purchasing fourteen additional *campi* with a large gentleman's house for his own use, a courtyard, garden, and out-buildings. Following this, at an auction held by the Sopragastaldi, he acquired a further 38½ *campi* adjoining the land which he already held. This land was cheaper, although it cost him 1,867 ducats, for it was unproductive, without trees and almost without vines, and Nicolò had to build a house for his workmen, barns, a well, and boundary ditches. Consolidation was now called for, since some of the land lay in scattered pieces, and in 1560 he brought off a deal with the trustees of the village church. Some four *campi* of the land which he had bought in 1557 lay in the village of Gardegnan. Massa now exchanged this for the slightly smaller, but more central, church property alongside his new house. From this series of transactions Nicolò Massa had created at Peseggia a manageable estate of some ninety-one *campi*, producing wine and crops of grain, millet, sorghum, beans, and other vegetables. It also brought him rents from small plots let to tenant farmers, not to mention the annual honorifics, a pig, two geese, 150 eggs, two pairs of capons, and two pairs of hens.

The following table summarizes Massa's principal transactions, without taking account of expenses in maintenance and improvement:

1536	4 <i>campi</i> of land at Peragetto	164 ducats
1536	Building a house and garden at Peragetto	378 "
1538-9	Investments in the mint	371 "
1539-40	Purchase of tax revenues	542 "
1541-43	Investments in the mint	570 "
1544	A bakery	550 "
1548	A house and fruit shop	1,000 "
1552	Bakery premises	386 "
1556	¾ of a house	969 "
1557	38½ <i>campi</i> of land at Peseggia	2,400 "
1559	14 <i>campi</i> of land and a house at Peseggia	1,400 "
1559	38½ <i>campi</i> of land at Peseggia	1,867 "
1560	Settlement to Da Molin	415 "

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, Busta 2, fascicoli L-M. These papers include the statutes of the guild of bakers (*matricola dei fornari*).

The chronology clearly follows that of his publications, and reflects the progress of his career. By 1536 Massa was able to afford a country house, but until about 1540 his investments remained modest. In the following decades they rose dramatically, reaching their peak in 1559. These were the years of success. Two stages in this process are illustrated in the records of the Venetian College of Physicians. The College collected a tax from physicians and surgeons in Venice and the Dogado to pay the salary of the physician in the Venetian fleet. This tax was assessed on returns of income in the previous year from earnings and from investments. Assessments on the former were calculated at four lire per 100 ducats, on the latter at two lire per 100 ducats, and the resulting figure was then reduced by allowances – one lira for the rent of a house, one-half lira for dependent relatives and servants.⁹⁹ In 1542 Nicolò Massa was rated at 11½ lire, the ninth highest of sixty-six physicians assessed. His papers suggest that investments and rent at this time brought him approximately 165 ducats a year, so it would seem that his income from practice was then in the order of 255 ducats a year. Ten years later, in 1552, he was assessed at twenty-one lire, the fourth highest of eighty-six physicians.¹⁰⁰ His annual income from investments and rent was now approximately 231 ducats – a modest rise since at least one of his new investments benefited his daughter and not himself. So it would seem that Nicolò's earned income had risen dramatically to some 460 ducats per annum.¹⁰¹

Massa's success was founded not only on his obvious abilities, but on the shrewd use he made of them. What emerges above all from his papers is his resourcefulness, evident in the bargaining by which he built up a decent estate from scattered pieces of land. He was not the only physician to invest in this way. Others, like Vettor Trincavella, did precisely the same.¹⁰² But few can have had a keener eye for detail, nor have made more of his opportunities, than did Nicolò Massa.

MASSA'S DEATH AND THE BREAKING UP OF THE FAMILY

From Massa's papers it is clear that he carried his whole family on his shoulders, and his wills were informed by a brooding concern for what would follow after his death. Mercifully, his obstreperous sister Vicenza predeceased him in 1563, so he was spared the agonisings about what would become of her which ran through his will of 1562. But in other respects the end of his life could hardly have been gloomier nor more in keeping with the ill luck of his family. One of his consolations in his blindness had been his grandson, Francesco Grifalconi. In 1569 he was about twenty years of

⁹⁹ Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice *MSS. Italiani*, Classe VII, codice 2369 (= 9667), f. 19v *et seq.* The mid-sixteenth-century statutes of the College, which confirm the method of assessment laid down in 1488.

¹⁰⁰ Biskupski Musej, Hvar, Minute book, op. cit., note 56 above, ff. 52v–53v, 158v–161r.

¹⁰¹ These are conservative estimates, based on the assumption that Massa claimed allowances for the rent on his house, his dependent sister, and only one servant.

¹⁰² Trincavella's will is in Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Archivio Notarile*, Busta 1214, testamento 1032, and the tax return of his heirs made in 1566 in *ibid.*, *Dieci Savi sopra le Decime*, Reg. 368, ff. 899v–900r. The latter volume, covering residents in one-sixth of the city, records land and property of a large number of physicians including Michel'Angelo Biondo, Andrea Baranzoni, Zambattista Peranda, Fabrizio Rin, Domenico da Castello, Prospero da Foligno, Girolamo Grataruol, and Francesco Butirono.

age and just embarking on a career. No expense had been spared on his education, including masters to teach him Latin and Greek, and in 1567 Nicolò had placed him in the Ducal Chancellory following in the footsteps of Lorenzo.¹⁰³ Alvise Luisini paid tribute to him in his dialogue finished in May 1569, and recorded Nicolò's dependence on him. Little more than one month later Francesco Grifalconi fell ill. It was typhus, Nicolò's old enemy, which had carried off so many of his family, and about which he had written so many words. Francesco died, after making his will, on 11 July 1569.¹⁰⁴ It was a bitter blow for Nicolò. A fortnight later he made his own last will, and on 27 August he followed his grandson to the grave.

In his last will Massa entailed the bulk of his property. His daughter Maria inherited the income, but was to share the revenues from his last purchase of 38½ *campi* at Peseggia with her cousins Apollonio and Lorenzo. In making the bequest Nicolò urged his daughter and nephew to amity: "I beg that all three should love each other and live in peace and goodwill, helping one another as brothers and sister."¹⁰⁵ It was not to be, for with Nicolò's death the guiding hand in the family's affairs was removed. Maria, already a widow, was overcome by the double loss of father and son. She rapidly became a bitter, neurotic woman, requiring her companion, Benetta, to share her bed, to spend hours each night talking her to sleep, and to taste all her food for fear that her enemies might poison her.¹⁰⁶ Within months she quarrelled bitterly with her cousins, convinced that they were out to cheat her of her inheritance.¹⁰⁷ When she died in 1585 she bequeathed her wealth to the Zitelle, where she had taken refuge in the plague of 1576, for the purpose of providing dowries for its inmates.¹⁰⁸

It was hardly the outcome which Nicolò Massa intended. Apollonio Massa, on the other hand, had a distinguished career as a physician, although, unlike his uncle, he never published. He was elected *Consigliere* of the College of Physicians in 1544, and from October 1549 to September 1551 he served two annual terms as Prior. It was a priorate notable for a redrafting of the College statutes, and on three more occasions in 1577, 1578 (again serving as *Consigliere*), and in 1587 he was called on to help with reforms.¹⁰⁹ During the plague of 1576 he was amongst those who advised the Health Office, and he was also one of thirty doctors deputed to serve the sick in the city. By the end of the year he was the most senior member of the College, and the Health

¹⁰³ *Commissaria Massa*, Busta 2, fasc. P, f. 33r.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, fasc. Q, a copy of the will, which named his mother as heir, witnessed by the physicians Zuan Grataruol and Zambattista Peranda. The death was recorded as follows in the Venetian Health Office: "Die 11 ditto. M. Francesco nevoido del eccelente m. Nicolò Massa di ani 20 amala za zorni 15 da petechie. San Z. Novo." (Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Provveditori alla Sanità*, Reg. 804).

¹⁰⁵ From the text of the will in Lind, *op. cit.*, note 1 above, p. 326.

¹⁰⁶ *Commissaria Massa*, Busta 3, *Processo di lite tra l'intervenienti delle Citelle . . . e madonna Benetta*.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Busta 3. Maria wrote to her cousins: "vedendomi donna sola et derelicta pensate di condurmi a confessare che siate patroni come dite nella scrittura vostra della facultà mia. Vi ingannate perche Dio Benedetto defenderà la mia innocentia et la mia ragione dalle vostre calumnie et dalle vostre perturbationi che mi date."

¹⁰⁸ Maria's death was recorded by the Venetian Health Office on 16 September 1585. "La magnifica madona Maria Massa fiola del q. eccelente medicho m. Nicolò de anni 63 da febre giorni 17. San Z. Novo." (Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Provveditori alla Sanità*, Reg. 817). A copy of her will is found in *Commissaria Massa*, Busta 2, fasc. Q.

¹⁰⁹ Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, *MSS. Italiani*, Classe VII, codice 2369 (= 9667), ff. 1r, 39r, 40r; *ibid.*, codice 2371 (= 9665), p. 8.

Office exempted him from the work of examining corpses for signs of plague, because his large practice included many monasteries, and because, as had happened to his uncle, his eyes were failing.¹¹⁰ Towards the end of his life, he was not only doctor, but Procurator of the nunnery of the Convertite on the Giudecca, which mainly housed repentant prostitutes, and a bust of him by Alessandro Vittoria was erected in the chapel there in 1587.¹¹¹

Lorenzo Massa grew even more famous. He went to Rome as Secretary to the Venetian embassy, and in March and April 1561 he had charge of the mission after the ambassador, Da Mula, had blotted his copy-book by accepting a cardinalate. In 1563 he became Secretary of the Senate.¹¹² His importance to the State was recognized in 1591 when, to safeguard his life in view of the most secret affairs with which he had to deal, the Council of Ten awarded him a residence in the Procuratie in Piazza San Marco.¹¹³ Lorenzo was noted not only for his knowledge of Latin and Greek, but also as a theologian and a Hebrew scholar, as a large number of books dedicated to him bore witness.¹¹⁴ He was no doctor, but was nevertheless well known for his medical knowledge. He is, in fact, a reminder that medical studies were by no means exclusively a professional matter, as Nicolò Massa showed by discussing medical subjects in his letters to him, and by welcoming to his anatomies a non-medical audience including Girolamo Marcello, a Venetian Senator and philosopher, and the Ducal Secretaries Vincenzo Riccio and Alessandro Businelli.¹¹⁵ It was also in keeping that it was to Lorenzo Massa that the complete works of Vettor Trincavella (Venice, 1599) were dedicated. Lorenzo also became Secretary to the Riformatori dello Studio di Padova, the Senate committee responsible for the University, and it is appropriate that he, nephew of a famous anatomist, played a role in the establishment of a permanent anatomy theatre at Padua in the years 1583–84.¹¹⁶

The deaths of Apollonio in 1590 and Lorenzo in 1604 brought Nicolò Massa's immediate family to an end. There remained, however, a more permanent testimony to him in his published works and in an array of monuments in the monastery of S.

¹¹⁰ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Secreta, Materie miste notabili*, Reg. 95, ff. 10v, 109r–v, 123v, 149r–v.

¹¹¹ His bust, in terracotta, is now in the gallery of the Seminario Patriarcale in Venice. Cf. Comune di Venezia, Assessorato alla Cultura e Belle Arti, *Venezia e la peste 1348–1797*, exhibition catalogue, Venice, 1979, p. 251. A further glimpse of Apollonio's life is given by his role as executor of the will made in 1559 by Adrian Willaert, the Flemish musician, Maestro di Capella of S. Marco. (Museo Civico Correr, Venice, *Mariegola* 122, formerly *Cicogna MS*. 2117.)

¹¹² Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Provveditori sopra Ospedali*, Busta 3, *Parti et elezioni* 1561–1577. An instance of legislation, in this case hospital reforms, dated 13 March 1563, bearing Lorenzo's signature.

¹¹³ Museo Civico Correr, Venice, *Raccolta Cicogna MS*. 3431.

¹¹⁴ *Cicogna*, op. cit., note 2 above, vol. 5, pp. 18–22.

¹¹⁵ From the translation of the *Liber introductorius anathomiae* in Lind, op. cit., note 1 above, pp. 174, 182.

¹¹⁶ Referring to Lorenzo Massa's reforms in the University in November 1583, the acts of the German Nation record that: "publicum et perpetuum theatrum in lectorio supremo sumptibus Domini Veneti extrui secretarius curavit." (A. Favaro (editor), *Atti della Nazione Germanica Artista nello Studio di Padova*, vol. 1 (Deputazione Veneta di Storia Patria, serie prima, documenti, vol. 14, 1911), p. 192). Cf. Giuseppe Sterzi, 'Giulio Casseri, anatomico e chirurgo', *Nuovo Archivio Veneto*, nuova serie 1909, 18: 207–278; 1910, 19: 25–111, especially 1909, 18: 221–222. Giuseppe Favaro, 'L'insegnamento anatomico di Girolamo Fabrici d'Acquapendente', in Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, *Monografie storiche sullo Studio di Padova*, Venice, 1922, pp. 107–136, especially p. 113.

Domenico di Castello, which served as the Massa family shrine. Here Nicolò had placed inscriptions to his parents, brothers, and sisters, and here, too, was a chapel with a rich altar-piece and other paintings set up by Antonio Caresini and his son, Lorenzo Massa. There was also a monument to Apollonio Massa, put there in 1572 by his son Antonio. In the main cloister was the tomb of Nicolò himself, erected by his daughter in 1569.¹¹⁷ Nicolò Massa's tomb and the monument to Apollonio were both ennobled by fine marble busts by the sculptor Alessandro Vittoria, and although S. Domenico was suppressed in the Napoleonic era, the busts survive in the care of the Ateneo Veneto, lively portraits of two distinguished physicians of sixteenth-century Venice.¹¹⁸

DOCUMENTS

Nicolò Massa's summary of his property, submitted for tax purposes to the *Dieci Savi sopra le Decime* and registered on 23 March 1566. The original return is in Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Dieci Savi sopra le Decime*, Busta 129, and the Office copy in *ibid.*, Registro 368, ff. 1153v–1154r.

Laus Deo

Per non manchar del debito et obedir alla parte presa ultimamente nel eccellentissimo Consegio de Pregadi che ogn'uno habia dar in nota la sua condition all'officio vostro magnifici Signori Diese Savii sopra le Decime, io Nicolo Massa medico, habita in contra de S. Zuanne Novo, notaro qui sotto quanto mi trovo haver cosi in questa terra come di fuori, et prima.

In contra de S. Piero di Castelo appresso S. Dominico una casa vecchia in tre soleri con doi porte afftade in doi afftation, una a s. Andrea Cavacanal per ducati sie all'anno et li altri doi sono afftadi a s. Marco Calafao per ducati nove all'anno, i qual fitti non si scuodeno per esser persone povere oltra che si spende assai in concieri.

Item in contra della Madalena in rio terrà una casa e botega de frutaria in doi soleri afftada a s. Francesco de Vistaldo paga de fitto all'anno ducati cinquanta.

Item in Mestrina in villa de Peragetto una casetta de muro con il suo bruolo, galde al presente m. Appolonio Massa mio nepote gratis, senza pagar fitto ne cosa alcuna de altra sorte, ne mai è sta afftada, ne de essa trazo utilita alcuna, ma piu tosto mi ha datto spesa di pagar quelli la governano et guardano.

Item scuodo a Mestre dalli destretuali per conto de daie over colte ducati disdotto all'anno.

Item scuodo dalla Scuola de Madona Santa Maria de Mestre lire ottantacinque soldi quindese de pizoli per conto de daie over colte.

Item m'attrovo in villa de Pesegia sotto Mestre de mia rason da campi settantaun in circa de terra, pol esser pocco manco o piu perche io non l'hò misurade et sono in piu pezi, et in questo numero ho compreso lo cortivo et case delli habitadori. Et la casa tegno per mio uso, qual mi è piu presto di spesa et dano che di utile, insieme con esso cortivo et un poco di bruoleto, attento che bisogna tenir et pagar uno che guardi et governi ditta casa et cortivo, de modo che li campi lavoradi possono esser da 65 in circa, qualle la mazor

¹¹⁷ Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare*, Venice, 1663, p. 25.

¹¹⁸ The busts are reproduced in Figures 1 and 2, and I am grateful to the Ateneo Veneto and in particular to its Librarian, Dr. Palumbo, for permission to do so. Cf. Luigi Belloni, 'I busti di Nicolò Massa e di Santorio Santorio all'Ateneo Veneto', *Physis*, 1970, 12: 411–414. The inscription from Nicolò's tomb found its way separately to the Seminario Patriarcale (which also holds Vittoria's second bust of Apollonio recorded above, note 111), and was reproduced in the *J. Hist. Med.*, 1969, 24: 339.



Figure 1. Nicolò Massa: marble bust by Alessandro Vittoria in the Ateneo Veneto, Venice.



Figure 2. Apollonio Massa: marble bust by Alessandro Vittoria in the Ateneo Veneto, Venice.

Nicolò Massa, his family and his fortune

parte sono terre magre grosse. Qual campi 65 in circa lavora al presente alla parte Nardo Capellesso delli quali posso trazer per mia parte formento staia 40 et meglio staia 10, sorgo staia 8, fava, fassuoli et altri legumi staia 5, vin masteli 25 in mia parte per esser mal videgade.

Item affitto un campo e mezo delle ditte terre con un cason sopra a s. Zubedeo Vanin, paga de fitto staia doi et mezo di formento.

Item un campo e un quarto et mezo delli ditti tien affitto s. Antonio Vanin, paga de fitto formento staia un et mezo all'anno.

L'habitor paga onoranze, cioè un porcho de L.130, doi oche, ovi 150, doi para de caponi, et doi para de galine. Ne altro mi trovo haver. Resta che mi arricomandi alle vostre clarissime Signorie.

Maria Massa's summary of her property, also registered on 23 March 1566. The original return is in Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Dieci Savi sopra le Decime*, Busta 129, and the Office copy in *ibid.*, Registro 368, f. 817v.

Laus Deo

Io Maria Massa, fiola del eccellente m. Nicolo Massa medico phisico, et relita del quondam m. Zuanne Grifalconi, per non mancar d'ogni mio debito, et ancora per non manchar d'obedientia alla parte presa nel eccellentissimo Consegio de Pregadi ch'ogn'uno debia dar in notte la sua condition al vostro officio, magnifici Signori Diese Savii sopra le Decime, per tanto io qui sotto nottaro quanto mi trovo haver cosi in questa terra come di fuori, et prima

Una casa in doi soleri nella parte del a pepian da una banda sotto ditta casa se fa l'aviamiento del mio forno, qual casa a pepian et aviamiento de forno tien affitto s. Domenego da Solz forner, e paga de fitto de ditta casa ducati sette all'ano. Dell'aviamiento poi non diro altro per che forni non pagano per esser esenti per parte dell'eccellentissimo Consegio di Diese. Li doi soleri di sopra tien affitto m. Paulo de'Agazi et paga de fitto all'anno ducati cinquantase.

Item mi trovo haver in contra de S. Apponal appresso el ponte di sansoni un mezado un botegin e suoi magazeni di basso, qual mezado et magazeni tien affitto m. Stefano Carnaza sanser, et paga de fitto ducati vintidoi all'anno. El botegin tien affitto s. Francesco de Jacomo Strazaruol, paga de fitto ducati quatro e meza all'anno.

Item me trovo haver in villa de Pesegia sotto Mestre campi disnuove in circa, che sono la mitta de campi trentaotto et mezo (se ben forno compradi et pagadi per quaranta), sono pro indiviso col eccellente mio padre. Tien alla parte Nardo Capellesso. Delli quali posso per mia parte un'anno per l'altro trazer formento staia dodese in quatorde, meglio staia doi, sorgo staia doi, fava, fassuoli, et altri legumi in tutto da staia tre, vino un'anno per l'altro da mastelli diese in circa secondo le sason, et questo perche le terre sono magre et mal videgade ita che sono cative. Et questo e quanto mi trovo haver. Prego Iddio eterno conservi il vostro stado insieme con voi felice. Io habito in contra de S. Zuanne Novo in case delle monache de S. Servolo.

SUMMARY

The Venetian physician Nicolò Massa (d.1569) is well known for his writings on syphilis, anatomy, plague and pestilential fevers, venesection, and other subjects. New information concerning him is provided by family papers which have recently come to light in Venice. They contain a wealth of biographical details, tracing the steps by which he accumulated a fortune from medical practice, and revealing the domestic and business preoccupations which tended to limit his achievement as a physician and anatomist. Massa's career and writings are examined in this light.

The ill luck which brooded over Nicolò Massa's family brought him a large number of dependents whose affairs he was called upon to manage – his daughter Maria, and his nephews Apollonio and Lorenzo. Apollonio Massa (d.1590), after a university

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education in Lutheran Germany, had a prominent medical career in Venice, and was twice Prior of its College of Physicians. Lorenzo Massa (d.1604) was a scholar and civil servant, who as Secretary to the Riformatori dello Studio played a role in the foundation at Padua of a permanent anatomy theatre.