



Figure 2a. Matteo De'Pasti, the obverse of the portrait medal of Sigismondo Malatesta, bears date 1446. Cast bronze, diameter 84 mm. Photo: Geldmuseum, Utrecht, with permission.

# Out of sight, yet still in place

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## *On the use of Italian Renaissance portrait medals as building deposits*

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Originating within the elite environments of the Italian courts, the Renaissance portrait medal is a typically humanistic invention, combining the passionate study of the Roman past with the active pursuit of a patron's individual fame. Ambitious and self-conscious patrons were quick to discover the versatility of the portrait medal and its effectiveness in promoting a glorified image of the self. Being small and easily reproducible, portrait medals had a vast circulation. As collector's delight, they held pride of place in the Renaissance *studiolo*.<sup>1</sup> But quickly enough, the Renaissance portrait medal was put to a different use as well, namely as building deposits. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it became standard practice to issue foundation medals at the start of prestigious building projects, such as cities, churches, palaces, bridges, or fortifications. At the high point of festively orchestrated ceremonies, the patron would deposit a small number of the medals inside the foundations, along with the first stone. At the same time, specimens of the foundation medal were distributed among those present at the ceremonies to remind them of the patron's acts of munificence.<sup>2</sup>

Looking into the origins of this practice, the present article investigates the building deposits of Sigismondo Malatesta (1417–1468) in Rimini and of Pope Paul II (1464–1471) in Rome. In tune with the theme of this issue of *RES*, specific attention will be given to the non-visibility of the medals deposited within the foundations

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1. On Renaissance medals, see *Perspectives on the Renaissance Medal*, ed. Stephen K. Scher (New York: Garland, 2000); Philip Attwood, *Italian Medals c. 1530–1600 in British Public Collections* (London: The British Museum, 2003); John Graham Pollard, *Renaissance Medals*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2007). The standard reference remains G. F. Hill, *A Corpus of Italian Medals of the Renaissance Before Cellini*, 2 vols. (London, 1930).

2. Attwood (ibid.), p. 59ff.; Georg Satzinger, "Baumedailen. Formen und Funktionen. Von den Anfängen bis zum 16. Jahrhundert," in *Die Renaissance-Medaille in Italien und Deutschland*, ed. G. Satzinger (Münster: Rhema, 2004), pp. 97–133. Examples range from the foundation of new St. Peter's in Rome (1506), the Uffizi in Florence (1561), and the city of Valletta on Malta (1565), to the inauguration of the statues on the Ponte S. Angelo (1669), to name but a few examples.

and walls of buildings; while some portrait medals were indeed deposited, their counterparts continued to circulate above ground, both as highly appreciated gifts and objects of study. As I will argue, this is in marked contrast with "traditional" building deposits, as they are documented world-wide in virtually every culture. It will be a point of interest to establish which powers were attributed to the portrait medals that were deposited, and, finally, to identify possible classical models for these practices.

### **Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta of Rimini**

Sigismondo Malatesta was without doubt among the most successful *condottieri* of his time. Following in the footsteps of his father Pandolfo, he made a profitable career out of the countless wars and shifting alliances between the principalities on the Italian peninsula. In demand by the Florentines, the Sforza, the pope, or Venice, Sigismondo was generally regarded as a military genius. Therefore, it was only appropriate that the first humanistic treatise on warfare, Roberto Valturio's *De re militari* (ca. 1455), was dedicated to him.<sup>3</sup>

Befitting a man of his standing, Sigismondo had a vivid interest in classical culture. According to the humanist Flavio Biondo, he entertained banquet guests for hours on end with stories about the glorious Roman past.<sup>4</sup> During the 1440s, Sigismondo established a flourishing humanist court in Rimini, attracting prominent scholars, such as Basinio da Parma, Leon Battista Alberti, and the above-mentioned Roberto Valturio. Within this humanistic circle, Sigismondo actively fostered the Roman origins of Rimini, or "Ariminum." To Sigismondo, the grand public works of

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3. Joanna Woods-Marsden, "How Quattrocento Princes Used Art: Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta of Rimini and 'Cose Militari,'" *Renaissance Studies* 3 (1989):387–413. See also Helen S. Ettliger, "The Image of a Renaissance Prince: Sigismondo Malatesta and the Arts of Power" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1989).

4. See letter from Flavio Biondo to Lionello D'Este from February 1, 1446, in B. Nogara, *Scritti inediti e rari di Flavio Biondo* (Rome: Tipografia poliglotta vaticana, 1927), p. 159.



Figure 1. Piero della Francesca, fresco in the funerary chapel of Sigismondo Malatesta, ca. 1451. Tempio Malatestiano, Rimini. Seat Archive/Alinari Archives. Photo Alinari, with permission.

emperor Augustus in Rimini were a source of inspiration for his own building projects.<sup>5</sup>

This active patronage of the arts was essential for Sigismondo to reinforce his own position. Since Rimini was technically a papal fief, the Malatesta family needed papal approval for each succession to power, even if they had effectively been ruling the city since the thirteenth century. His entire life, Sigismondo was after favors from emperors and popes alike, hoping they might result in a noble title that would secure rulership over Rimini for himself and his descendants. The fresco in his funerary chapel in the Tempio Malatestiano by Piero della Francesca represents the warlord kneeling in front of St. Sigismund, to whom the chapel was dedicated. But a closer look reveals a striking resemblance between the saint and the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund of Hungary (d. 1437) who had knighted both Sigismondo

and his younger brother Domenico during a ceremony in the town hall of Rimini in 1433, when Sigismondo was sixteen years old (fig. 1).<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, the odds were against Sigismondo: With the Peace of Lodi of 1454, the powers of Italy reached a political equilibrium that would last until the end of the century. An even greater threat to Sigismondo's position was constituted by the aggressive policy of the popes to reclaim their authority over the Papal States. In 1462, at the height of this dispute, Pope Pius II excommunicated his unruly vassal, burning Sigismondo's effigy in front of St. Peter's. A crusade mounted against Sigismondo that resulted in his losing his territory, with the sole exception of Rimini and its immediate surroundings.<sup>7</sup> The accusations of blasphemy, idolatry, simony, and tyranny contained in the excommunication bull would damage Sigismondo's

5. Emperor Augustus was hailed as founder of the city in a marble portrait medallion (diam. 38 cm), made by the sculptor Agostino di Duccio for the Chapel of the Liberal Arts in the Tempio Malatestiano. It is now in the Museo Civico in Rimini. The inscription read "DIVUS AUG PATER"; see *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta e il suo tempo*, exh. cat. Palazzo dell'Arengo in Rimini (Vicenza: Neri Pozza editore, 1970), p. 95.

6. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, "Notes on the Iconography of Piero della Francesca's Fresco of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta Before St. Sigismund. Theoi Athanatoi Kai Tei Polei," *Art Bulletin* 56 (1974): 345–374.

7. P. J. Jones, *The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State. A Political History* (London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 231–233.

reputation for centuries to come. But this ugly turn of events was still far away during the heyday of Sigismondo's career, when the Malatesta court in Rimini was a magnet for talent. As did many patrons of his time, Sigismondo soon discovered the potential of the recently invented portrait medal.

### The portrait medals of Sigismondo Malatesta

Believing that they immortalized virtues of the sitter, Italian humanists attributed great powers and qualities to portraits, be it on ancient coins, on wooden panels, or portrait busts.<sup>8</sup> The painted portraits of Pisanello (d. 1455) were highly praised for their ability to confer eternal life and fame to the sitter, while inducing strong emotions in the viewer.<sup>9</sup> No wonder that the bronze portrait medals, as Pisanello invented them in the late 1430s, were particularly well received at the Italian humanist courts. Their format would be followed by generations of medalists to come: an idealized portrait with the name of the sitter, an appropriate emblematic image, and motto on its reverse. Over the years, Pisanello would provide an impressive number of patrons with portrait medals: the absolute "must-have" of that moment. Among his sitters, besides Sigismondo Malatesta, were also the Greek emperor John VIII (by many considered his first medal), Francesco Sforza of Milan, Lionello D'Este of Ferrara, Cecilia Gonzaga of Mantua, Alfonso II King of Naples, and renowned scholars, such as Guarino Guarini.<sup>10</sup>

As is evident from its form, size, and material, the portrait medal originated from an intimate knowledge and appreciation of the classical coin. As testimonies of the glorious Roman past, humanists and other collectors had an insatiable appetite for them, sending them round as tokens of friendship, often accompanied by poems

or letters.<sup>11</sup> Just like these ancient coins, contemporary portrait medals started to be distributed as gifts among friends or dependents and soon after their invention, they started to be collected as well.<sup>12</sup> Part of the immense appeal of the portrait medal resided in the flexibility of its iconography and size. Since the medal was not a legal means of payment, sitters were not bound to the right of coinage, and could freely experiment with legends, portraits, and emblems. Easy to reproduce and of relatively low cost, portrait medals became soon recognized as a most efficient means of communicating complex political or intellectual messages.<sup>13</sup>

Sigismondo Malatesta singularly perceived this potential, as is demonstrated by the effective and easily recognizable reverses he picked for his portrait medals. Both medals he commissioned from Pisanello depict him as a self-conscious *condottiere*, either dressed in full armor, ready for battle (1443; Hill n. 33), or actively engaged in combat (1445; Hill n. 34).<sup>14</sup> Later on, Sigismondo would also commission about thirty more portrait medals from his court artist, Matteo De'Pasti (d. 1468), a goldsmith and architect from Verona, possibly trained by Pisanello himself. One of Matteo's most celebrated medals was issued in occasion of the completion of the Castel Sismondo in Rimini. The medal bears the date of 1446, when Sigismondo and his household finally took up residence in the castle (fig. 2a and b). The medal depicts Sigismondo bare-headed, facing to the left, and dressed in an armored suit. Around him runs the legend "SIGISMUNDUS PANDULFUS MALATESTA PAN[DULFI] F[ILIIUS]." On the reverse appears the Castel Sismondo, shown with its crenellated walls and massive defense towers, along with the words "CASTELLUM SISMUNDUM ARIMINENSE M CCCC XLVI."<sup>15</sup> The medal was a great achievement, being

8. *The Image of the Individual. Portraits in the Renaissance*, ed. Luke Syson and Nicholas Mann (London: The British Museum, 1998).

9. Basinio da Parma, courtier at the Malatesta court, praised Pisanello's portrait of his teacher Vittorino da Feltre in the following way: "Father Vittorino, glory of the Roman language, you too will live by the skill of Pisano; the same expression, the same face as on the man; and he has also portrayed with skill the gravitas of a Caesar and his white hair. . . . The portrait struck terror even in me, who was his pupil, . . . and I was overjoyed to realize that you too, great Vittorino, were alive"; as cited in G. F. Hill, *Pisanello* (London: Duckworth, 1905), p. 186. Pisanello would also make a portrait medal of Vittorino da Feltre, see Hill (note 1), n. 38.

10. *Pisanello. Painter to the Renaissance Court*, ed. Luke Syson and Dillian Gordon (London: The National Gallery, 2000), especially the section on portrait medals, pp. 109–130.

11. John Cunnally, "Ancient Coins as Gifts and Tokens of Friendship During the Renaissance," *Journal of the History of Collections* 6 (1994):129–143; Syson and Gordon (note 10), p. 109.

12. Luke S. Syson, "Holes and Loops. The Display and Collection of Medals in Renaissance Italy," *Journal of Design History* 15 (2003):229–244; A. F. Flaten, "Identity and the Display of 'Medaglie' in Renaissance and Baroque Europe," *Word & Image* 19 (2003):59–72.

13. Stephen K. Scher, "An Introduction to the Renaissance Portrait Medal," in Scher (see note 1), pp. 1–26.

14. The 1445 medal is believed to commemorate Sigismondo's appointment as Captain General of the papal troops that year, an absolute high point in his military career. See Bruna Restani, "Le medaglie di Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta," *Studi Romagnoli* 48 (1997):331–364. Compare Syson and Gordon (note 10), pp. 36 and 113 for a different dating.

15. Hill (see note 1), n. 184, diam. 80 mm (there are nine variants of this medal alone in Hill). Given that De'Pasti's presence in Rimini



Figure 2b. Matteo De'Pasti, the reverse of the portrait medal of Sigismondo Malatesta with the Castel Sismondo, bears date 1446. Cast bronze, diameter 84 mm. Photo: Geldmuseum, Utrecht, with permission.

the first Renaissance portrait medal to show a building on its reverse. This was obviously a deliberate revival of the genre of classical coins with buildings, much appreciated by humanist collectors.<sup>16</sup>

The construction of Castel Sismondo was a fundamental step in securing Sigismondo's position within Rimini. Once papal permission was obtained,

is documented only from 1449 onward, there has always been some confusion about the dating of this and other medals carrying the date 1446. Pier Giorgio Pasini, therefore, proposed a dating of 1449; see his "Matteo dei Pasti. Problems of Style and Chronology," in *Italian Medals*. Center for the Advanced Studies in the Visual Arts. Symposium Papers. 8 (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1987), pp. 143–159. Syson and Gordon (see note 10) agree with him; Woods-Marsden (see note 3) and Restani (*ibid.*) do not.

16. *Bauten Roms auf Münzen und Medaillen*, ed. Harald Kùthmann (Munich: Beckenbauer, 1973). Matteo De'Pasti would design one more portrait medal for Sigismondo with a building on its reverse, namely the Tempio Malatestiano (see note 25 to follow).

the first stone had been laid in a festive ceremony on March 20, 1437, "in mercordì a hore 18 e minuti 48 in circa"—without doubt upon consultation with an astrologer, as was general practice in the Renaissance.<sup>17</sup> Despite recent restorations, the fortress is today but a shadow of its former self. In its original design, the castle was surrounded by an impressive moat twenty-five meters wide and eight meters deep. Its polygonal form was at the absolute forefront of military design.<sup>18</sup>

17. Cesare Clementini, *Raccolto storico della fondazione di Rimini e dell'origine e vite dei Malatesti* (Rimini 1627; reprint Bologna: Forni, 1969), p. 309. There was often a desire to align the birth horoscope of the patron with that of his city or building. See Mary Quinlan-McGrath, "The Foundation Horoscope(s) for St Peter's Basilica, Rome, 1506. Choosing a Time, Changing the Storia," *Isis* 92 (2001):716–741.

18. Joanna Woods-Marsden, "Images of Castles in the Renaissance. Symbols of Signoria, Symbols of Tyranny," *Art Journal* 48 (1989):130–137; see also her article in note 3, pp. 394–396.

Deemed impregnable and capable to withstand artillery attacks, contemporaries generally attributed the design of the castle to the military genius of Sigismondo and in an extraordinary gesture, he decided to strengthen the bond with his fortress even more by naming it after himself. Emulating classical examples, Sigismondo then organized a contest for the best poem celebrating both the castle and its founder: The winning composition by the renowned Latinist Maffeo Vegio was proudly inscribed on its facade.<sup>19</sup>

Being praised in poems, military treatises, and flattering biographies of its patron, Castel Sismondo became the emblem of Sigismondo's authority both over Rimini and its territories. Remarkably enough, the fresco in Sigismondo's funerary chapel included an idealized view of Castel Sismondo. Aside from some slight differences, the framing in a *tondo* is an obvious resemblance to the medal of De'Pasti, as is the portrait in profile of the kneeling Sigismondo (fig. 1).<sup>20</sup>

### The building deposits in Malatesta territory

The very practice of using portrait medals as building deposits is most probably connected to this prestigious building project. Over the centuries, an astonishing number of deposited portrait medals has been uncovered within the castle. During the demolition of one of its main entrances in 1624, for instance, a great number of large bronze medals with the Castel Sismondo on their reverse were found on the level of the soil water. Along with these medals, a number of smaller medals decorated with the monogram SI (for Sigismondo) were found as well.<sup>21</sup>

Since they had simply not yet been invented at the moment of the castle's foundation in 1437, the portrait

medals were in all likelihood deposited at either the start or conclusion of a distinct phase within the construction. At least that seems to be the case of the extraordinary gilded medal with Castel Sismondo (Hill 174, diam. 83 mm)—in fact, the only gilded specimen that we know of—found in 1972. The medal had been stuck in the wall at the base of the arch supporting the vault, at a height of about five meters above ground level, “as its literal support.”<sup>22</sup> The same applies to the building deposits retrieved in the main hall of Castel Sismondo in 1983. As many as twenty-four bronze portrait medals had been deposited in cavities evenly distributed along the walls, at a height of about three meters. The medals of this deposit were grouped in three: one larger bronze medal with the castle, together with two smaller medals with the Malatesta helmet. In all cases but one, the portraits of Sigismondo were facing upward.<sup>23</sup>

Besides Castel Sismondo, the other important monument in Rimini packed with Malatesta building deposits is of course the Tempio Malatestiano: the medieval Franciscan church that the Malatesta family had used as their burial church since the thirteenth century. Presumably during the Jubilee of 1450, Sigismondo decided to rebuild the church entirely after a design provided by Leon Battista Alberti.<sup>24</sup> At that point, the well-known portrait medal, with a never-realized plan of the Tempio on its reverse, must have been commissioned from Matteo De'Pasti.<sup>25</sup>

Having suffered severely from bombardments, the church was in great need of restoration after the Second World War. During these rebuilding works, a number of building deposits were found in various locations. At the funerary chapel of Sigismondo twenty-two portrait medals were found, deposited within the backs of two

19. Just as he had done in an earlier poem on a fortress in Gradara, Vegio introduced Castel Sismondo as speaking in the first person: “Aspice quam mole ingenti cultuque superbo | Quae sim, quam miris machina structa modis | Sismondo nomen mihi, Sigismundus et auctor | Quantus ab exemplo disce sit ipse meo. | Quem Malatestorum magno de sanguine natum | mirare, et laudes effer ad astras suas.” See also Piergiorgio Parroni, “I castelli nella letteratura umanistica e cortigiana,” in *Castel Sismondo. Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta e l'arte militare del primo rinascimento*, ed. Angelo Turchini (Cesena: Ponte Vecchio, 2003), pp. 325–336.

20. See the articles of Woods-Marsden (notes 3 and 18) and Lavin (see note 6).

21. “Al piano dell'acqua buona, [furono trovate] quantità di medaglie di bronzo grandi, con ritratto di Sigismondo da una parte, e dell'altra il disegno del Castello istesso, con la quale v'erano anco delle piccole [medaglie],” Clementini (see note 17), vol. II, pp. 723–724.

22. Angelo Turchini, “Medaglie malatestiane rinvenute in Castel Sismondo, con una relazione sul ritrovamento di Giovanni Giuccioli Menghi,” in *Castel Sismondo e Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta*, ed. C. Tomasini Pietramellara and A. Turchini (Rimini: Ghigi, 1985), pp. 129–148, esp. 133.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Charles Hope, “The Early History of the Tempio Malatestiano,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 55 (1992):51–154; Corrado Ricci, *Il Tempio Malatestiano* (Milan: Bestetti & Tuminelli, 1924).

25. Hill (see note 1), n. 183. Sigismondo's portrait is crowned with a laurel. The legend on the reverse of the medal reads: PRAECL. ARIMINI. TEMPLUM AN. GRATIAE V[OTUM].F[ECIT]. M.CCCCL. See also *Leon Battista Alberti*, ed. Joseph Rykwert and Anne Engel (Milan: Electa, 1994), pp. 484–485. At the opening of [X] Sigismondo's grave in August 1756, six specimens of this medal were found underneath his body, displayed in the form of a cross. Ricci (see note 24), p. 350.



Figure 3. Part of the deposited bronze portrait medals of Sigismondo Malatesta, found during restoration works in the Tempio Malatestiano in 1948. Published in exhibition catalogue *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta e il suo tempo* (Rimini, Neri Pozza Editore 1970), p. 168.

black marble statues of elephants. In all probability, the portrait medals had been deposited during the inauguration of these marble elephants on October 15, 1450.<sup>26</sup> That same month, another group of eight medals, all of superior quality, had been deposited on top of the pilaster, again at the left-hand side of the chapel's entrance. This time, the deposit consisted of four large portrait medals with Castel Sismondo on the reverse and four smaller ones with the coat of arms of Sigismondo (fig. 3).<sup>27</sup>

But Sigismondo's portrait medals were also deposited outside of Rimini in the fortifications that were built from the late 1440s onward in Malatesta territory. Portrait medals have been retrieved in places such as Fano, some sixty kilometers from Rimini; S. Giovanni in Galilea

in the Apennines, and Verucchio.<sup>28</sup> The systematic distribution of these deposits over Sigismondo's territory is a strong indication for a deliberate policy in this respect. A well-known letter of Matteo De'Pasti to Sigismondo, written from Rimini in December 1454, underwrites this hypothesis.<sup>29</sup> De'Pasti notified Sigismondo of having sent twenty medals to be deposited in the new fortress of Senigallia, approximately seventy kilometers from Rimini.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, he mentioned the objective to deposit medals in all construction sites of that moment ("a ciò ne sia in tutti li luochi che ora si lavora"). Borrowing the terminology of the late Alfred Gell, one might indeed surmise that the medals

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 61–71.

29. At the time, De'Pasti was supervising the construction of fortifications in Senigallia; Marinella Bonvini Mazzanti, "La riedificazione di Senigallia," in Turchini (see note 19), pp. 173–192.

30. "Io mandai venti de le facende [*medaglie*] a Senigaglia per ser Baptista e Sagramoro, che le metesse in lo revelino di sopra dal cordone, come scrissi alla S. V. a ciò ne sia in tutti li luochi che ora si lavora. Si che non so al presente que me abia a fare. Scrivete a chi par a la S. V. che me dia argento per gettar la medaglia piccola che conzio, a ciò che ne possa gettare per far quanto volete se faccia"; Siena, Archivio di Stato, Carte Malatestiane, as cited by Pasini (see note 27), pp. 48–49.

26. "Adì 15 del ditto [ottobre 1450], fonno posti dui alifanti in la capella del S. a Santo Francesco; l'abade de San Gaudenzo glie benedisse. . . . A dì 23 del ditto fonno missi dui altri alifante in la ditta capella e fonno benedidi per lo dicto abate"; *Cronaca Riminese*, as cited by Corrado Ricci (see note 24), p. 218. The deposit consisted of nine large bronze medals with "Fortitude" on its reverse (Hill n. 178), along with thirteen smaller ones, with Fortitude enthroned (Hill n. 181).

27. Pier Giorgio Pasini, "Note su Matteo dei Pasti e la Medagliistica Malatestiana," in *La medaglia d'arte*. Atti del primo convegno internazionale di studio (Udine: C.I.A.C. Libri, 1973), pp. 41–75.

distributed the agency of the patron over a network of monuments and a territory.<sup>31</sup> In this respect, it is telling that the medals of Matteo De'Pasti were issued in huge numbers. His master Pisanello usually had provided his patrons with one single medal, leaving the responsibility of their reproduction to them.<sup>32</sup>

### The building deposits of Pope Paul II in Rome

At about the same period, a very similar strategy was followed in the Palazzo Venezia in Rome, the most important building project of Pope Paul II Barbo. Construction of the palace adjacent to his *titulus*, the basilica of S. Marco, had already started in 1455, while Barbo was still a cardinal.<sup>33</sup> Following the example of the medals of Castel Sismondo and the Tempio Malatestiano, Pietro Barbo also commissioned a portrait medal to commemorate the construction of his palace. The work of an anonymous medalist, it was the first portrait medal ever to be produced in Rome. Its obverse bears the bare-headed effigy of the cardinal, with the legend "PETRUS BARBUS VENETUS CARDINALIS S MARCI." The reverse shows the facade of the Palazzo di S. Marco with the legend "HAS AEDES CONDIDIT ANNO CHRISTI M CCCC LV."<sup>34</sup> Once elected to the papacy in 1464, the building plans were significantly enlarged to match the patron's newly acquired status.<sup>35</sup> A new series of foundation medals was issued, this time with an adjusted effigy and legend: "PAULUS II VENETUS PAPA," while the year on the reverse was changed into 1465 (fig. 4a and b).<sup>36</sup>

Owner of the largest collection of ancient coins, gems, and medals of his time, Paul II was generally acclaimed for his numismatic expertise.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps



a



b

Figure 4a and b. Portrait medal of Pope Paul II with the Palazzo di San Marco on its reverse. Cast bronze, diameter 33 mm, bears date 1465. Photo: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Münzkabinett, with permission.

31. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 21.

32. J. Graham Pollard, "The Italian Renaissance Medal. Collecting and Connaissanceurship," in *Italian Medals* (see note 15), pp. 161–169.

33. C. L. Frommel, "Francesco Pius' II. und Pauls II. Palazzo Venezia, Palazzetto Venezia und San Marco," *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 21 (1984):71–164.

34. Hill (see note 1), n. 738. Compare this inscription to that on the eastern facade of Palazzo Venezia: "Petrus Barbus Venetis Cardinalis Sancti Marci Has Aedes Condidit Anno Christi MCCCCLV."

35. A. Modigliani, "Paolo II e il sogno abbandonato di una piazza imperiale," in *Antiquaria a Roma. Intorno a Pomponio Leto e Paolo II*, ed. M. Miglio (Rome: Roma nel Rinascimento, 2003), pp. 125–161.

36. Hill (see note 1), n. 783; S. De Caro Balbi, "Di alcune medaglie rinvenute nelle mura del Palazzo di Venezia in Roma," *Medaglia* 5 (1973):23–34.

37. His biographer Gaspare da Verona called him "numismatum tam veterum quam recentium cognoscitor egregius investigatorque assiduus"; see *Le vite di Paolo II di Gaspare da Verona e di Michele Canensi*, ed. G. Zippel (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1904), p. 4.

because of this interest, he would commission more portrait medals than any other fifteenth-century pope.<sup>38</sup> And besides distributing them among friends and dependents, he also deposited a substantial amount of them in his building projects, such as the fortresses both in Rome and the Papal States.<sup>39</sup> Others were

38. Roberto Weiss, *Papa Paolo II. Un umanista veneziano* (Rome, Venice: Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, 1958); De Caro Balbi (see note 36), p. 29.

39. There are also portrait medals of the above-mentioned type (Hill n. 783) with HANC ARCEM (Arx, meaning "fortress") instead of



destined for the Vatican Palace, for the part that was built during his pontificate. Several bronze medals of Paul II were found there during rebuilding works in the seventeenth century.<sup>40</sup> In the late 1940s, two terracotta vessels with portrait medals of the pope were found in a staircase.<sup>41</sup>

But by far the largest deposits of portrait medals have been retrieved in the foundations of the Palazzo di S. Marco or Palazzo Venezia. Most of them have come to light during excavations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Carefully coated in protective layers of wax, the medals had been placed in groups of two, three, or five within terracotta containers, or *dindaroli* (fig. 5). They had been placed along the perimeter of the palace, at a distance of about three meters from one another. The numbers of portrait medals deposited by Paul II must have been overwhelming indeed, by far outdoing those of Sigismondo Malatesta: Archival research has demonstrated that in 1466 alone, payments were made for 129 of such vessels.<sup>42</sup> Also in terms of preservation, Paul II was a step ahead of Sigismondo, who apparently lacked a consistent method of preserving his deposited portrait medals.<sup>43</sup>

### Depositing rituals and classical forms

The custom of depositing objects within buildings is a long, universal tradition. Practiced from pre-Columbian pyramids to Minoan palaces on Crete, and from Roman camps to medieval houses, these so-called building

deposits testify to an apparently deeply ingrained need to seek protection for buildings. Although the typology of the deposits can assume various forms—ranging from beads, ostrich eggs, terracotta figurines, to even the sacrifice of animals and human beings—their main intention seems to be apotropaic: that is, to protect the building and its inhabitants from disease and misfortune.<sup>44</sup>

The most direct precedent for the disposition of portrait medals is, of course, the deposition of coins. Especially when found in specific areas of the building (under a mosaic pavement, underneath or on top of a column) or within some kind of container, the unintentional loss of the object can be effectively ruled out. Such is the case of a terracotta vessel with two coins found under the floor of a home in Ostia dated to the third century B.C.<sup>45</sup> or the 352 silver coins deposited within the foundations of an Isis-temple at Eretria, Greece, during the second century B.C.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, coins were sometimes put in walls or doors; during the installation of the bronze doors of the Roman Curia in S. Giovanni in Laterano in 1660, it was discovered that they contained coins with the effigy of Emperor Domitian (d. A.D. 96). Widespread in antiquity for both sacred and domestic architecture, the practice had been continued throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>47</sup> At the end of the thirteenth century, the Carrara of Padua had inscribed themselves in this tradition, when they deposited terracotta containers with Carrara coins, the so-called

HAS AEDES ("building"). Weiss (see *ibid.*, p. 51) linked this variation with the fortresses built by Paul II in Rome and in the Papal States, at Todi, Cascia, and Terracina during the period of 1465–1466.

40. Weiss (see note 38), p. 77 cites from Giacomo Grimaldi's *Descrizione della basilica antica di S. Pietro in Vaticano. Codice Barberini latino 2733*, ed. R. Niggl (Vatican City: Vatican Library, 1972), fol. 155: "pars palatii apostolici frontem faciens ad via Alexandrinam a Paulo secundo excitata, ut marmorea notabant insignia, et complures nummi aenei cuius imagine ad vivum expressa cum literis 'Paulus Venetus Papa Secundus'; in altera parte 'has aedes aedificavit' (Hill n. 783); in aliquibus vero numismatibus magnis aeneis erat ipse Paulus in throno Maiestatis cum cardinalibus (Hill n. 775); quae reperta fuerunt in fundamentis atque parietibus dictatum aedium."

41. Fabrizio Mancinelli, "Il cubicolo di Giulio II," *Bollettino Monumenti, Musei e Gallerie pontificie* 3 (1982):63–103; esp. p. 66.

42. Weiss (see note 38), p. 54.

43. As we have seen, the medals in Castello Sismondo were simply put inside cavities in the wall; in Verrucchio, they had been placed just below the chalk; in S. Giovanni in Galilea, the medals had been put inside a glass flask; and in Fano and in Montescudo, terracotta vessels were used, which, unfortunately, have not been preserved; see Pasini (note 27).

44. Klaus Klusemann, *Das Bauopfer. Eine ethnographisch-, prähistorisch-linguistische Studie* (Graz/Hamburg, Selbstverlag, 1919). More recently, Vesa-Pekka Herva, "The Life of Buildings. Minoan Building Deposits in an Ecological Perspective," *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 24 (2005):215–227; Peter Woodward and Ann Woodward, "Dedicating the Town. Urban Foundation Deposits in Roman Britain," *World Archaeology* 36 (2004):68–86; D. Freidel and L. Schele, "Dead Kings and Living Temples. Dedication and Termination Rituals Among the Ancient Maya," in *Word and Image in Maya Culture, Explorations in Language, Writing, and Representation*, ed. W. F. Hanks and D. S. Rice (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989), pp. 233–243. See also *I riti del costruire nelle acque violate*, ed. Mirella Serlorenzi and Helga di Giuseppe (Rome, forthcoming).

45. M. Donderer, "Münzen als Bauopfer in römischen Privathäusern," *Bonner Jahrbücher des Rheinischen Landesmuseums* 184 (1984):177–187.

46. Rita Müller-Zeis, "Griechische Bauopfer und Gründungsdepots" (Ph.D. diss., Saarbrücken University, 1994), catalogue nr. 54.

47. During the demolition of old St. Peter's, many medieval coins were found in the foundations of chapels or under columns; see Grimaldi (note 40), fols. 175–176. At another occasion, an old coin with the portrait of St. Nicholas was found in the foundations of old St. Peter's; see *ibid.*, fol. 274.

*tessere*, within the city walls and the foundations of both a tower and a church in their territory.<sup>48</sup>

Apart from this continuous tradition, there also seems to have been a deliberate revival of ancient deposition practices in humanist circles, based on the reading of authoritative ancient sources. One such source is Tacitus' description of the elaborate foundation ceremonies of the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in June of A.D. 70. The author described various offerings to Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, and the tutelary gods of the place, at the end of which "many gold and silver coins were showered in the foundations."<sup>49</sup> Although the sources never mention the link explicitly, these ritual gestures are easily recognized in a number of foundation ceremonies in the direct environment of Sigismondo Malatesta. In September of 1431, when Sigismondo was fourteen years old, his half-brother Galeotto Roberto (d. 1432) initiated the construction of new fortifications in Rimini with an ostentatious display of ceremonies. At the end of the ceremonies, which involved members of the Malatesta family and the clergy of Rimini, Galeotto Roberto threw many coins, "molti danari," inside the foundations.<sup>50</sup> A few years later, in 1449, this ritual was performed again, this time in Mantua, where Duke Ludovico Gonzaga threw large numbers of golden and silver coins into the foundations of a new city wall.<sup>51</sup>

To humanists, the deposition of coins and medals into foundations was clearly regarded as a ritual with classical overtones. In his biography of Paul II, the humanist Bartolommeo Platina classified the deposition practices of the pope as "*more veterum*," or "following customs of the ancients."<sup>52</sup> Another biographer of the

48. Weiss (see note 38), pp. 70–71; A. Saccocci, "Teche e 'medaglie' murali carraresi (1355–1405)," in *Le mura ritrovate: fortificazioni di Padova in età comunale e carrarese*, ed. Adriano Verdi (Padua: Panda Edizioni, 1988).

49. Tacitus, *Histories* 4, 53.

50. "Galeotto Roberto diede principio a fondar il muro della fortezza alla porta di S. Andrea dal Gattolo, dopo haver il vicario del vescovo dato la beneditione e cantate le litanie. E prima di tutti, Domenico Malatesta gittò la prima pietra, e Giovanni Rossi portò la calcina, con la quale fu murata detta pietra, e il vescovo con l'acqua santa e con le solite e ordinarie cerimonie della Chiesa, la benedì e nei fondamenti Galeotto Roberto gettò molti denari"; see Clementini (note 17), pp. 259–260.

51. Andrea Da Schivenoglia (d. 1467), "Famiglie mantovane e Cronaca di Mantova," Biblioteca Comunale di Mantova, ms. 1019 (II, 2), as cited by Restani (see note 14), pp. 335–336.

52. *Platynae historici liber de vita Christi ac omnium pontificum*, ed. Giacinto Gaida (Citta di Castello: Lapi, 1913–1932), p. 388: "numismata prope infinita, ex auro, argento aereve sua imagine signata . . . in fundamentis aedificiorum suorum more veterum collocabat."



25. Salvadanaio rinvenuto nella muratura del II piano nel Palazzetto (Roma, Museo di Palazzo Venezia)

Figure 5. Deposited terracotta container ("dindarolo") with three bronze portrait medals of Pope Paul II as found in the walls of Palazzetto Venezia. From Silvana De Caro Balbi, "Di alcune medaglie rinvenute nelle mura del Palazzo di Venezia in Roma," *Medaglia. Rivista trimestrale* 5 (1973):25.

pope, Michele Canensi, also linked the deposition of portrait medals to classical models. He stated that the medals had been deposited within the buildings with "*optimis auspitiis*," borrowing terminology of Roman divinatory practices. From him we also know that the deposition ceremonies at the Palazzo di S. Marco were performed along with a benediction and some kind of ceremony.<sup>53</sup>

53. "Domum insuper iuxta ipsam ecclesiam magnis impensis testudineoque aedificio funditus construxit; cuius quidem fundamenta cerimoniali cum benedictione atque aliquanta auri argentique numismatici depositione, ut saepe in magnis dignisque aedificiis fieri assolet, optimis auspitiis iecit." *Le vite di Paolo II* (see note 37), p. 82.

### The urge of remembrance

Besides, the tossing of a coin or medal in the foundations of a new building must have been rather common in this period. The grand foundation ceremonies of the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence may serve as an example.<sup>54</sup> A team of astrologers had established the most propitious moment for the laying of the first stone as August 6, 1489. While that morning masses were celebrated in many of Florence's churches, the wealthy merchant Filippo Strozzi (d. 1491) threw in the first shovel of fill in the foundations of his new family palace along with a portrait medal specially designed for this occasion and some coins.<sup>55</sup> Strozzi then encouraged occasional bystanders to join him by picking up a stone and throwing it in. His neighbor Tribaldo De' Rossi became so involved that he ran home to pick up his children. With Filippo's permission, he made his son throw in a coin and some flowers as he wrote in his *Ricordi*: "When I had given him a liliated quattrino, [my son] threw it in, and I had him throw a bunch of damask roses he had in hand, and I said: 'Remember this,' and he said, 'Yes [I will, dad],' and they were together with Tita our servant."<sup>56</sup>

Tribaldo's recommendation to his son to remember what they had just witnessed may be taken as a valuable clue about the intentions underlying foundation rituals. Before anything else, the ceremonies may have served to mark the importance of the act of founding to all present and imprint it as such in their memory.<sup>57</sup> The main attention went, of course, to the founder, in this case Filippo Strozzi: Strozzi's name would remain attached to the family palace for generations to come, as he established in his testament.<sup>58</sup> But by asking bystanders to join him in the foundation ceremonies, Filippo turned

them from mere spectators to participants, thus securing their involvement, and perhaps even their support, for the huge enterprise. Once the deposited objects were hidden from view by the ongoing construction, those who had been present at the foundation ceremonies still would have a vivid recollection of their participation in that act of foundation, whose memorable character was symbolized by the buried metals and coins. Thus, the active participation of the bystanders was instrumental in creating a collective memory of the event.

### Portraits and the desire for immortality

Also in the cases of Sigismondo Malatesta and Pope Paolo II, there can be no doubt about their desire to perpetuate their name by means of the deposited portrait medals. This intention was already well understood by contemporaries of Sigismondo and Paul II. In a letter written to Sigismondo, the Veronese canon Timoteo Maffei (d. 1470), well connected with the humanistic elite of his day, explicitly linked Sigismondo's fondness for portrait medals to his desire for immortality (*tui nominis immortalitatem*). Maffei moreover stated that he had witnessed (*vidi*—"I have seen") that the portrait medals of Sigismondo were either sent off as gifts to other courts or were deposited "within the foundations or within walls."<sup>59</sup> This urge for fame and immortality could also encounter hostile responses: Pope Paul II, for instance, was accused of "his great desire for eternity . . . , so that, when after a thousand years [his buildings] will fall down with age, the monuments of Paul's name [i.e., the medals] will leap out of them!"<sup>60</sup> There is an interesting notion at play here that buildings and cities, even papal and magnificent as they may now be, in the end are subject to decay and even oblivion. Future generations will be able to identify their patron Paul II by means of his buried portrait medals.<sup>61</sup>

54. R. A. Goldthwaite, "The Building of the Strozzi Palace. The Construction Industry in Renaissance Florence," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 10 (1973):97–194.

55. Hill (see note 1), n. 1018. The portrait medal depicts the aged Filippo Strozzi, while its reverse bears a falcon in an oak tree decorated with the Strozzi coat of arms. There is no inscription, except for the name of the sitter: "PHILIPPUS STROZA."

56. Tribaldo De Rossi, "Ricordanze," in *Delizie degli eruditi toscani* (Florence: Cambiagi, 1770–1789), p. 249, as cited by Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 447. A year later, De' Rossi repeated this act of throwing coins at the foundation ceremonies of the Palazzo Gondi.

57. On the foundation ritual, see Mircea Eliade, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour. Archetypes et répétition* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), pp. 30–33.

58. "Perchè io intendo et voglio che decta mia casa sia per ogni futuro tempo in perpetuo habitata da dicti Strozzi, et rimanga nella famiglia degli Strozzi" as cited in F. W. Kent, "Più superba de quella de Lorenzo; Courtly and Family Interest in the Building of Filippo Strozzi's Palace," *Renaissance Quarterly* 30 (1977): 311–323, note 47.

59. "Ad quondam tui nominis immortalitatem, Matthaei Pasti Veronensis opera industriaque vidi aere auro et argento innumeras quasi coelatas imagines, quae vel in defossis locis dispersae, vel muris intus locatae, vel ad exteras nationes transmissae sunt"; letter written in 1453 from Timoteo Maffei to Sigismondo Malatesta, as cited by Weiss (see note 38), p. 71. There is also a portrait medal of Timoteo Maffei, signed by Matteo De'Pasti (Hill n. 159).

60. "Magna aeternitatis cupido . . . numismata eam ob causam tuae imaginis, non cudis modo, sed fundamentis aedificiorum parietibusque admisceas, ut illis, vetustate ruentibus, exiliant post mille annos monumenta nominis Pauli," Ammanati Piccolomini, *Lettere 1444–1479*, ed. Paolo Cherubini (Rome, Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello Stato, 1997), p. 1203.

61. In this respect, one also needs to keep in mind the powers attributed to portraits in this period; see note 8.

This same sensibility is present in a much-quoted passage in the architectural treatise of the Florentine Antonio Averlino, better known as Filarete (d. 1469), in his architectural treatise, the *Libro Architetonico*: a dialogue in twenty-five books between a patron and his architect on an ideal city called Sforzinda.<sup>62</sup> At the beginning of the book, there is much debate about the foundation and inauguration ceremonies for this new city. When discussing these matters, the author/architect assured his patron of being perfectly informed of the state-of-the-art procedures.<sup>63</sup> Once the location had been marked with ropes indicating the gates and principal streets, an astrologer established the most auspicious date and time for the ceremonies. In the presence of his family, the bishop, and the architect, the patron then received a number of gifts, among which were a marble foundation stone, inscribed with the year and names of the patron, bishop, and architect, respectively; and five flasks filled with five different liquids, all of them bearing on the qualities of the future inhabitants of the city. When his imaginary patron had asked why one should place votive objects within the foundation, the architect's response was clear:

The reason I put these things in this foundation is because, as every man knows, things that have a beginning must have an end. When the time comes, they will find these things, and know our names, and remember us because of them, just as we remember when we find something noble in a ruin or in an excavation. We are happy and pleased to find a thing that represents antiquity and gives the name of him, who had it done.<sup>64</sup>

Although the fictional foundation ceremony of Sforzinda does not include portrait medals,<sup>65</sup> Filarete

62. Working from 1460 onward as an architect at the court of Francesco Sforza in Milan, Filarete designed among other buildings the façade of the Castello Sforzesco and the Ospedale Maggiore. See *Filarete's Treatise on Architecture, Being the Treatise by Antonio di Piero Averlino known as Filarete*, 2 vols., ed. John R. Spencer (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1965). Although never put in print, the book had a wide circulation. A copy in Florence with the date 1465 is dedicated to Piero De' Medici: Apparently, Filarete fell out of grace with Francesco Sforza soon after completing the work.

63. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 44.

64. *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 45–46: "La cagione perchè io metto queste cose in questo fondamento si è, che, come ogni huomo sa, tucte le cose che hanno principio hanno a havere fine: quando sarà quel tempo, si troveranno queste cose, e per questo da loro saranno ricordati e nominati, come che noi nominiamo quando per cavamento o ruina si truova alcuna cosa degna, noi l'abbiamo cara e piaceci haver trovato quella cotal cosa che ci presenti antichità et nome de quegli che l'hanno fatto."

65. The foundation ceremonies of Filarete's Ospedale Maggiore in Milan on April 12, 1465, however, did include the deposition of

provides an illuminating account of the practices for the laying of first stones or foundation stones as they were observed in this period.<sup>66</sup> Ambitious and self-conscious patrons had an obvious interest to endow the foundations of their buildings with elaborate ceremonies, gathering large crowds as witnesses of these *memorable* events. Finally, Filarete alluded to the pleasure that the deposits would yield to their finder and the historical sensation that the findings would provoke.<sup>67</sup> While carefully assembling the fragments of a past civilization, Renaissance humanists developed a sensibility for the eventual collapse of their own culture. The Renaissance portrait medals, valued for immortalizing the virtues of the sitter, circulated as gifts and objects of study in a network of friends, dependants, and collectors. By depositing them in the foundations of important building sites, the patrons claimed that their agency was distributed not only over their territory, but also could resurface over time.

portrait medals: "una cassetta di pionbo dove era piu cose, intra l'altre v[er]era certe memorie di teste scolpite di alcuni huomini degni di fama" see *Filarete's Treatise on Architecture* (note 62), p. 320.

66. Examples are the previously mentioned foundation ceremonies of the city walls of Rimini (1431), of Castel Sismondo (1437), but also those of Palazzo Strozzi in Florence and the Torre Bentivoglio in Bologna (both in 1489); see also Georgia Clarke, *Roman House—Renaissance Palaces. Inventing Antiquity in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 25–29.

67. Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past. Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1999).