Preface

This is a book about the University of Mantua. It began in 1999 when I saw tantalizing references to a Jesuit university in Mantua in documents in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu. Then in December 2001 I found a treasure trove of material about a real and lively institution in the Archivio di Stato of Mantua. Despite the abundant records, not even specialists in university history have heard of the University of Mantua. Previous scholarship consists of a short article published in 1871 and a laureate thesis of 1969–70, which yielded another short article in 1972, plus a handful of passing references. Bringing to light an unknown university proved irresistible.

The Peaceful University of Mantua, its formal name, was a joint lay and Jesuit institution. The Jesuit part began in 1624, and law and medicine were added in 1625. But the university lasted only until the autumn of 1629. The War of the Mantuan Succession and the terrible Sack of Mantua, July 18–20, 1630, sealed its fate. Mantua has no university today.

Why study a university that lasted only a few years? There are several reasons. The story of the University of Mantua offers the opportunity to follow the creation of a university ab uovo, as the Gonzaga and the Jesuits organized the institution, raised the money, and found professors. Another reason is that the documents provide unusually detailed information about the relationship between an Italian ruling family and a university. Previous

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1. See Mainardi, 1871; Ardenghi, 1969–70, 1972. Despite its title, Davari, 1876, has only a fleeting comment on the university. Some recent studies, especially of the Jesuits, note that there was a university but offer no further information. Frijhoff, 1996, 87, in his comprehensive list of European universities between 1500 and 1800, writes only "Mantua (1625). Jesuit; suppressed in 1771/3. Catholic."
Gonzaga dukes had supported a variety of scholars in different fields of learning; Duke Ferdinando (1587, ruled 1613–26) extended patronage of learning to its logical conclusion by founding a university. Still another reason is that the events in Mantua display the higher education politics of the Society of Jesus. Although the Jesuits had considerable success joining and sometimes dominating established universities and creating new ones in northern Europe, they met many rebuffs in Italy. They succeeded in Mantua.

The university united a princely family and the Society of Jesus, two powerful forces shaping Italian history. The partnership produced a medium-sized Italian university with professorships in canon and civil law, the full range of medical positions, and the first professorship of chemistry in Italy. Jesuit professors taught the humanities, mathematics, philosophy, and theology. While common in northern Europe, a university with both lay professors and Jesuits was unusual for Italy.

The winds of intellectual change blew briskly through the lecture halls of the Peaceful University of Mantua. The medical faculty taught a heady mix of anatomical dissection, experimentation, Galenism, and Paracelsianism. The star professor of medicine was the first to isolate the symptoms of angina pectoris. Giacomo Antonio Marta, the leading law professor, attempted to shift the foundations of *ius commune* from traditional texts to the decisions of tribunals. He also had much to say about church-state jurisdiction, the most controversial legal issue of the day. Studying the University of Mantua opens a window into Italian intellectual history in a time of ferment. Examination of the University of Mantua also permits comparison between what Jesuits and professors in civic universities taught. Despite many similarities, Jesuits and lay professors inhabited two different academic cultures.

Colorful figures walked through the classrooms of the University of Mantua. Ferdinando Gonzaga fancied himself a scholar and dared to debate Galileo Galilei. Although the Gonzaga were better known for their exploits on the battlefield and in the bedroom, Luigi Gonzaga became a Jesuit, a saint, and the heavenly patron of the Mantuan Jesuit college. Professor Marta also loved the Jesuits. But he hated the papacy and spied for a Protestant monarch.

The setting is Mantua. Except in art and music, Mantua and the Gonzaga, whose rule began in 1328 and ended ignominiously in 1708, have not attracted much scholarly attention in recent decades. In the 1920s and 1930s Romolo Quazza produced comprehensive political and diplomatic histories about Mantua and the Gonzaga when they were at the center of European politics. Then scholarly attention shifted to other regions of Italy. It is time to return to Mantua and the world of north Italian princely courts.

2. See Quazza, 1922, 1926, 1933. Recent studies on the War of the Mantuan Succession will be cited in the appropriate places.
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como Antonio Marta: Antipapal Lawyer and English Spy, 1609–1618,” in The

This book is dedicated to my friends and former students at the University
of Toronto, another idiosyncratic university.