

STAGING PRIVACY: ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF THE PALAZZO MEDICI

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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The Palazzo Medici was a site of significant social and political representation for the Medici. Access to much of the interior was limited, ostensibly, to the family. In republican Florence, however, visitors were a crucial component in the maintenance of a political faction. Consequently, the “private” spaces of the Palazzo Medici were designed and decorated with guests in mind. Visitor accounts reveal that the path and destination of each visitor differed according to his status and significance to the family. The common citizen waited, sometimes for great lengths, in the courtyard, taking in the anti-tyrannical message of the space. The privileged guest, who had more to provide the Medici, was given access to the more private spaces of the residence. Surrounded by art and architecture that demonstrated the faith, education, and wealth of the Medici, he was assured that his support of the family was beneficial to his own pursuits.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I arrived here at the house of the magnificent Cosimo, where I discovered a house that is— as much in the handsomeness of the ceilings, height of the walls, smooth finish of the entrances and windows, numbers of chambers and salons, elegances of the studies, worth of the books, neatness and gracefulness of the gardens, as it is in the tapestry decorations, chests of inestimable workmanship and value, noble sculptures, designs of infinite kinds as well as of priceless silver—the most beautiful I may ever have seen, or believe it possible to see.¹

-Galeazzo Maria Sforza
April 17, 1459

In the mid-1440s, Cosimo de' Medici commissioned from his favorite architect, Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, a new residence for his family in Florence, Italy. Built at the corner of the Via Larga and Via Cavour (Figure 1), the new palazzo was a block south of the Medici ancestral home, the Casa Vecchia, in which both Cosimo and his brother, Lorenzo, and their families lived (Figure 2).² Cosimo's decision to leave the Casa Vecchia is often understood as political tactic. The new (and impressive) residence was better suited to the significant position Cosimo had gained in the Republic of Florence upon his return from exile in 1434. A new home built from the ground up was a rarity in 15th century Florence, one which allowed Cosimo to dictate the layout of the rooms on all three floors of the residence.³ He and his family were then able to determine the function

¹ Rab Hatfield, "Some Unknown Descriptions of the Medici Palace in 1459," *The Art Bulletin* (College Art Association) 52, no. No. 3 (Sep. 1970): 232.

² Howard Saalman and Philip Mattox, "The First Medici Palace," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (Society of Architectural Historians) 44, no. No.4 (Dec. 1985) 329.

³ *Ibid*, 329-331. The site of the Palazzo Medici previously consisted to several smaller homes down the block from the Casa Vecchia. Once purchased by Cosimo, these buildings were torn down to make way

and decoration of the rooms within the residence, taking into account their own needs and goals for the building. Palaces of Quattrocento Florence typically consisted of multiple older homes falsely united behind a comprehensive façade. This could often result in a labyrinth of small, dark rooms and confusing hallways. The Palazzo Medici, by contrast, featured large rooms with uniform fenestration and clear paths throughout the space. Additionally, each room was designed with its function already in mind; truly, this was the Medici's domain.

The Palazzo Medici was a site of significant social and political representation for the Medici. Access to much of the interior was limited, ostensibly, to the family. In republican Florence, however, visitors were a crucial component in the maintenance of a political faction. Consequently, the seemingly “private” spaces of the Palazzo Medici were designed and decorated with guests in mind. The family utilized ancient Roman architectural and social models to dramatize these rooms within the narrative of their residence. The artwork and décor within the Palazzo sustained the ideas of privileged access and self-fashioning that was established by the architecture and its implicit rituals of admittance and exclusion. For visitors, paths through the Palazzo, as well as destinations within it, differed according to their status and significance to the family. The purpose of such a scheme was to present the visitor with messages and impressions about the Medici via the seemingly neutral medium of art and architecture.

for the basement and foundation of the new residence. The original Palazzo only occupied 10 window bays along the Via Larga; later additions to the residence extended it to the current size. Building here allowed Cosimo the new residence he desired without moving from the neighborhood of his ancestors.

Historiography

Articles and books concerning the Palazzo Medici have abounded over the last century, each concerned with varying aspects of the building. Initially, scholars addressed the radically different and ultimately influential nature of the building's exterior architecture within the context of the predominant architectural style of Florence. Palaces throughout Florence drew inspiration from the Palazzo Medici; the most obvious cases include the residences of the Strozzi, Rucellai, and Gondi families. These *palazzi* all adopted the tripartite divisions of the façade articulated through rustication, the biforate layout of windows, and the exterior benches for public seating that the Palazzo Medici introduced. On the other hand, some scholars have argued that the building was not so revolutionary, suggesting instead that the Palazzo Medici actually drew quite heavily from medieval precedents.⁴ Even more recently, scholars such as Isabelle Hyman have added to both of these approaches by highlighting the level to which the Palazzo Medici borrowed and adapted forms from public architecture.⁵ Hyman highlights the rusticated stonework and the biforate windows as direct visual connections with the architecture of authority.

Attention to the exterior of the Palazzo far eclipses interest given to the interior. The most likely explanation for this trend has to do with what is still extant. The exterior

⁴ Carl von Stegmann and Heinrich von Geymüller, *Die Architektur der Renaissance in Toscana 11, Allgemeines, Illustrazione storica, Gebäudeteile, Ornamente und Sgraffiti, Gesamtüberblick und Schlußwort*, München: Bruckmann, 1908, 17.

⁵ Isabelle Hyman, "Notes and Speculations on S.Lorenzo, Palazzo Medici, and an Urban Project by Brunelleschi," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (Society of Architectural Historians) 34, no. No.2 (May 1975), 103.

of the residence, with the exception of the *loggia*, has changed little from what was visible upon its completion around 1455. In contrast, the interior of the Palazzo has faced numerous renovations and additions, which have altered the structure of the rooms and spaces within its stone walls. The most comprehensive interpretation to date of the original layout of the Palazzo's interior is that of Wolfger Bulst.⁶ Using recently discovered plans dated to 1650, Bulst has attempted to identify each of the rooms in the Palazzo with the help of inventories and contemporary records.⁷

Reconstructions of the interior of the residence, including art, furnishings, and decorations, have been both aided and hindered by the inventories recorded for each head of the family.⁸ While these documents amply document the density of objects within the residence, they are rife with complications for the historian looking for specific information about the contents of the Palazzo: rooms are often unclearly labeled, with several rooms sharing the same title; works of sculpture or large furniture were sometimes considered part of the building, not an individual's possessions and as such were left out; works of art were often incorrectly attributed or described so sparingly so

⁶ Wolfger A. Bulst, "Die ursprüngliche innere aufteilung des Palazzo Medici in Florenz," *Jahresbericht* 14, no. 4 (1970): 369-392 and "Die sala grande des Palazzo Medici in Florenz. Rekonstruktion und Bedeutung," In *Piero de' Medici "il Gottoso" (1416-1469): Kunst im Dienste der Mediceer*, by Andreas Beyer and Bruce Boucher, 89-127, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993.

⁷ These plans reveal the layout of the Palazzo Medici prior to any additions or alterations by the Riccardi family, who purchased the home in 1659. Most notable is the location of the original main staircase at the southwest corner of the residence. See Figure 3.

⁸ Inventories included: Giovanni di Bicci (1417), Cosimo il Vecchio- for the Casa Vecchia (date unknown), Piero di Cosimo (1456 and 1463), Lorenzo di Giovanni (1429), and Lorenzo di Cosimo (1492). All the above inventories, save Lorenzo di Cosimo's are available in Marco Spallanzani, *Inventari Medicei, 1417-1465: Giovanni di Bicci, Cosimo e Lorenzo di Giovanni, Piero di Cosimo*. Firenze: Associazione 'Amici del Bargello', 1992. The inventory of Lorenzo's from 1492 is more extensive than the others and most closely reflects the state of the Palazzo Medici before the family's expulsion in 1494. It is available in Marco Spallanzani, *Libro d'inventario dei beni di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, Firenze: Associazione 'Amici' del Bargello', 1992.

as to be unidentifiable. This set of challenges has not deterred scholars from identifying a number of works that originally hung within the Palazzo until Lorenzo's death in 1492.

Francis Ames-Lewis has contributed greatly to the identification of works of art within the Palazzo Medici. His catalogue of the library of Piero di Cosimo de' Medici, housed in a study of the Palazzo Medici, provides a valuable resource not only to literary scholars but also for those looking to authenticate the literary influences the Medici brought to their artistic commissions.⁹ Perhaps even more useful to the study of the interior of the Palazzo is the paper in which Ames-Lewis aimed to explore the political iconography present within key works of art.¹⁰ Focusing on individual works located throughout the Palazzo, Ames-Lewis connected the figures of St. Bernard, Hercules, and David in these Medicean works of art with the same figures already in the service of the Signoria. He argues that the appropriation of the civic imagery of Florence was a conscious choice on the part of the Medici; the decision to include so many public symbols of Florence signaled the viewer of the shift of power from the Palazzo della Signoria to the Palazzo Medici. This idea builds upon the work of Roger Crum, who in his dissertation of 1992 entitled *Retrospection and Response: the Medici Palace in the Service of the Medici, c. 1420-1469*.¹¹ Illuminating the political events surrounding the

⁹ Francis Ames-Lewis, *The Library and Manuscripts of Piero di Cosimo de' Medici*, New York: Garland Pub., 1984.

¹⁰ Francis Ames-Lewis, "The political iconography of the Palazzo Medici in Florence," Edited by Francis Ames-Lewis and Piotr Paszkiewicz, *Art and Politics: the proceedings of the Third Joint Conference of Polish and English Art Historians*, Warsaw: Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1999, 19-30.

¹¹ Roger J. Crum, *Retrospection and Response: The Medici Palace in the Service of the Medici, c.1420-1469*, PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1992.

Palazzo's conception and construction, Crum focuses primarily on the implication of politics on the building itself. In adding artwork within the Palazzo to this framework, Ames-Lewis still manages to avoid addressing the works within the residence itself. While his conclusions are convincing, the removal of the work of art from its original placement within the Palazzo Medici renders the final interpretation of its meaning incomplete.

In an effort to provide as complete a context as possible, the works of Dale Kent and F.W. Kent provide a deeper and multifaceted understanding of the Medici, as well as the culture of Renaissance Florence. Dale Kent's comprehensive examination of the patriarch of the Medici, Cosimo, delves into nearly every conceivable aspect of his world—his patronage, religion, philosophy, and education are used to develop a better understanding of the man who led the Medici to supremacy. Her book *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance* presents overall themes regarding the patron's oeuvre, finding evidence throughout Cosimo's patronage, possessions, correspondence, and contemporary records.¹² It is truly a remarkable work, covering voluminous data from many disciplines and sources; however, as with any project of such scale, the more focused themes within individual projects are not developed in great depth. When discussing the art and architecture of the Palazzo Medici, Kent relays many of the arguments presented by previous scholars. Subsequently, the works that receive the most attention are those well-known already, such as the works of Donatello. However, though they are not given a tremendous amount of space, Kent does look into some of the lesser

¹² Dale Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance: The Patron's Oeuvre*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

known works by Fra Lippi or Fra Angelico. She has been able to posit connections and messages about these works through her familiarity with the records and letters of the Medici.

F.W. Kent, in contrast, has developed cultural studies of Renaissance Florence in a broader sense, focusing on the ties of patronage and family structures. His article, "Palaces, Politics, and Society," explores the functions of Renaissance *palazzi*.¹³ While not focusing on the Palazzo Medici alone, he does state that "The Medici palace was so potent a political fact and symbols that it set the stylistic terms within which most other Florentine palace builders were to work for the rest of the fifteenth century."¹⁴ His work provides a sense of what patrician palaces like the Palazzo Medici were used for, namely the building of connections and legacies within the neighborhood and city. Kent's recent work, *Lorenzo de Medici & the Art of Magnificence*, addresses the specific cultural world of Lorenzo.¹⁵ A considerably more condensed work than Dale Kent's treatment of Lorenzo's grandfather, the book still provides an intriguing mix of biography and careful research that makes it a valuable source in understanding the world of the Medici.

The most recent work addressing the artwork of the early Medici is Christopher Fulton's *An Earthly Paradise: The Medici, Their Collection, and the Foundations of*

¹³ F.W. Kent, "Palaces, Politics and Society in Fifteenth-Century Florence," *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* (Casa Editrice Leo S.Olschki and Villa I Tatti, The Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies) 2 (1987): 41-70.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 67.

¹⁵ F.W. Kent, *Lorenzo de' Medici and the Art of Magnificence*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004.

Modern Art.¹⁶ The result of the author's doctoral dissertation, the book aims to demonstrate that "modern" art really began with the Medici. He frames his discussion around the Palazzo Medici, but like others, addresses each artwork separately, grouping together items which make the best support for his argument.

The Palazzo Medici and its art have thus been approached in a variety of ways, none of which consider the residence as a whole, including the interior, exterior, and decoration of the residence. The two monographs dedicated to the palace, *Il Palazzo Medici Riccardi di Firenze* by Giovanni Cherubini and Giovanni Fanelli and *Il Palazzo Magnifico: Palazzo Medici Riccardi a Firenze* by Simonetta Merendoni and Luigi Ulvieri, for instance, are good examples of the fragmented nature of the sources available concerning the building. Both comprised of a collection of essays, these books treat independent aspects of the palace well but fail to address the Palazzo as a whole.¹⁷ In all of the sources mentioned, artworks are typically discussed outside the context of their original location. If mention is made of their original location, the surrounding artwork and furniture or function of the room factor little into the scholarly examination of their meaning. The interior architecture is addressed only as fact and seemingly no interpretation for the layout exists outside the aforementioned work of the Bulst. While

¹⁶Christopher Fulton, *An earthly paradise: the Medici, their collection and the foundations of modern art*. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2006.

¹⁷ Two Italian monographs dedicated to the Palazzo Medici have been published: Giovanni Cherubini and Giovanni Fanelli, *Il Palazzo Medici Riccardi di Firenze*, Firenze: Giunti Grupo Editoriale, 1990 and Simonetta Merendoni and Luigi Ulvieri, *Il Palazzo Magnifico: Palazzo Medici Riccardi a Firenze*, Venezia: Umberto Allemandi & Co., 2009. Each containing a collection of essays related to the life of the Palazzo, including the Riccardi additions to the residence, these books are referenced throughout the thesis when the particular essays address the space in question.

following the format for countless other buildings and artworks within their respective disciplines, art and architectural historians have, in effect, separated the Palazzo into pieces that seemingly do not affect one another. However, the building, as revealed in letters and accounts of the time, served its specific functions best when it was considered as whole. The impact and message conveyed to a visitor came not from one work of art, considered in isolation, but from the whole environment of the residence. The value of context for these works cannot be ignored, as the art and its surrounding architecture provide not only visual cues and messages to visitors, but also indicate the social and political functions the palace assumed under the Medici.

Approach

The pursuit of contextual understandings of the artwork and layout of the Palazzo Medici creates an opportunity to determine a new approach to this building. The methods of iconography and even social history usually follow standardized approaches. For example, an iconographic analysis, as outlined by Erwin Panofsky, relies first on a description of the work, including any pertinent details necessary to visualize the artwork. After the facts have thus been established, visual indicators are connected with textual or other artistic sources and the meaning of the work of art is determined from these influences. In this traditional format, the artwork is removed from its context in order to be compared to something else. In contrast, works considered within the frame of social history are grouped to and through each other, their meaning contributing to an essential

point or theme.¹⁸ The goal of social history is broader than that of iconography, as it seeks to explore the whole culture surrounding the object, not just its symbolic characteristics. The unification of these methods typically sees iconography as secondary to social history, as its end result, or interpretation, is usually only the first step to building the more comprehensive historical picture that social history strives to recreate. In focusing on the “culture” of the Palazzo Medici, the traditional approaches can be manipulated to better suit the smaller scale and scope of a residence. Rather than building up an iconographical analysis for each artwork individually and placing those items within a circle that speaks to a larger theme, a more useful approach to the Palazzo emerges through the use of visitor accounts and contemporary records.

In the writings of visiting dignitaries, Medici allies, and fellow citizens, the splendor and décor of the Palazzo Medici is typically described in laudatory terms. While the effusive nature of the accounts cannot be relied on to completely or accurately describe the entire contents of a room, the writings do allow the historian to 1) trace a route the visitor followed through the Palazzo and 2) determine his general feelings about the residence. What the letters and accounts lack in detail is remedied through the consideration of the inventories of the Palazzo mentioned previously. With both of these rich sources at hand, it is possible to restructure the typical visitor’s approach by blending

¹⁸“The art historian will have to check the intrinsic meaning of the work, or group of works, to which he devotes his attention, against what he thinks in the intrinsic meaning of as many other documents of civilization historically related to that work or group of works, as he can master...It is in the search for intrinsic meaning or content that the various humanistic disciplines meet on a common plane instead of serving as hand-maidens to each other.” Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York, 1939, 16.

iconography and social history into a format that not only addresses the function of Palazzo itself but also better illuminates the messages of the art and architecture.

Privacy as Privilege

In addition to the most basic function of shelter, the Palazzo Medici provided Cosimo with a space intended for the reception of the guests that were so crucial to the maintenance of a political faction in Florence. As this thesis will develop, the reception spaces of the Palazzo Medici were carefully designed to impart messages about the Medici to guests. The first layer of any message conveyed to a guest in the Palazzo Medici came from the location of the room itself. While the most common visitor waited for his patron in the courtyard directly off the entrance, the guest of a higher status was led to the first level of the residence. Here he would be received in a more intimate setting, typically in a bedchamber. The decision to receive guests in different spaces throughout the residence illuminates Cosimo's manipulation of the concept of privacy to convey privilege. Bedchambers, in their location of the first level of the residence rather than the ground floor and dedication to the personal activities of the family, were traditionally private spaces.¹⁹ That is to say, they were inaccessible to guests and the public. However, rather than denying entrance to these spaces as was expected, the Medici chose to regulate access to these spaces as a part of the message conveyed to a visitor.²⁰ Access to the familial portions of the palace was granted to few and implied to

¹⁹ Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior, 1400-1600*, New York: H.N. Abrams, 1991.

²⁰ Leon Battista Alberti, *I libri della famiglia*, Translated by Renée Neu Watkins, Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 2004. Usually reliable sources for contemporary values, including the writings of theorists and humanists like Alberti, usually turn out under close examination to be tracts of wishful

the guest that he had been granted an honor by the Medici. It is upon this fundamental understanding, of how much access one was afforded into the private space of the Medici, that the message of the artwork and décor of the rest of the palace would build.

This nuancing and leveraging of privacy to guests within the Palazzo Medici discussed in this thesis stands in direct opposition to the idea of privacy within Florentine palaces expressed by Richard Goldthwaite in his influential article, "The Florentine Palace as Domestic Architecture."²¹ Goldthwaite determines that the palace of the Renaissance Florentine was a space reserved for the immediate family of the owner only; extended family or the public were to remain outside the walls of the residence, insuring privacy for the family within. While Goldthwaite's explanations would seem align with the urgings of Leon Battista Alberti in his famous essay, "Della Famiglia", his conclusions have proved to be problematic.²² Records, anecdotes, and visitor accounts have demonstrated that, in contrast to Goldthwaite's idea of a palace as a place where "political life did not penetrate," a Renaissance palazzo saw a constant stream of visitors, many of who came with political goals in mind.²³ The Palazzo Medici, as the residence of the de facto rulers of Florence, was definitely not the site of complete privacy that

thinking, revealing more about what the elite academics or clerics of the period thought was appropriate than what actually existed. For the most part, the concepts of public and private space appear in these texts as part of a discussion about the duties and limitations of women. Sandra Weddle, "Women's Place in the Family and the Convent: A Reconsideration of Public and Private in Renaissance Florence," *Journal of Architectural Education* (MIT Press) 55, no. No.2 (Nov. 2001): 64. While these sources such as Alberti are useful in determining the role women played in society, they provide little information that explains what the Florentine citizen's concept of privacy was.

²¹ Richard A. Goldthwaite, "The Florentine Palace as Domestic Architecture," *The American Historical Review* (University of Chicago Press) 77, no. No. 4 (Oct. 1972): 977-1012.

²² See footnote 18.

²³ F.W. Kent, "Palaces, Politics, and Society," 59.

Goldthwaite suggested, nor, however, was access to all of its spaces unimpeded. As guests were both allowed into the residence to wait for the Medici and some escorted into restricted rooms away from the public eye, the Palazzo Medici seems to have existed somewhere between the poles of private and public. To understand how or why this is demands a closer look at the structure of government in Florence and the motivations of the Medici within that context.

Scholars devoted to the study of privacy recognize that concept of a life removed from the public came only with the move away from communal structures of living.²⁴ When more centralized forms of government came into existence, the individual was free to remove himself from the functioning of the state, thereby creating for the first time a division between state and personal, public and private. Countries such as Britain and France that developed the most centralized forms of government, monarchies, saw the greatest valuation of privacy amongst their citizens.²⁵ Corresponding rules of sociability, including visitations, demonstrated a careful awareness of the boundaries of personal space in the etiquette manuals of these cultures.²⁶

²⁴ Roger Chartier, *A History of Private Life*, Translated by Arthur Goldhammer, Vol. III. Passions of the Renaissance. London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989, 9 and Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand, 1962 and Roger Chartier, *A History of Private Life*, Translated by Arthur Goldhammer, Vol. III. Passions of the Renaissance, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989, 15-19.

²⁵ Chartier, *History of Private Life*, 15-19.

²⁶ Ibid, 167- 190. John Baptiste de La Salle *Rules of Propriety and Christian Civility* (1713), and Antoine de Courtin's *New Treatise on Civility in France among the Honnêtes Gens* (1671) are examples of the more complete etiquette manuals available.

The nature of private life in quattrocento Italy, especially Florence, however, is difficult to determine. Conduct manuals specific to the Italian states were not prevalent until a century after the construction of the Palazzo Medici, when the republic had become a duchy.²⁷ This reflects the more tenuous position the concept of privacy had in the Florence in the mid to late quattrocento. As a republic, Florence was in possession of a blended government structure; though centralized to the Palazzo Vecchio, the Signoria, the governing body of Florence, was comprised of citizens. Serving for only short periods of time, the citizens of Florence were never entirely separated from the running of their government as their counterparts in France or Britain. Gaining power within this environment meant ensuring that those chosen to hold government positions gave their loyalty to a faction. The maintenance of a faction, as mentioned previously, thus involved the management of many people. As they could not gather in the house of government, these political factions centered on the residence of the leading figure of the faction. Guests would congregate at this home with the hopes of attaining a favor from the powerful family in exchange for their support of the faction. In short, the republican nature of Florence created a secondary power structure amongst the citizens, a structure based on patronage.

In this context, controlling access to the private spaces of the Palazzo Medici became a powerful tool in the hands of Cosimo and his descendants. As will be

²⁷ Marta Ajmar-Wollheim, "Sociability" in *Approaching the Italian Renaissance Interior: Sources, Methodologies, Debates*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, 208. Books such as Baldassare Castiglione's *Courtier* (1528), Giovanni della Casa's *Galateo* (1558), Stefano Guazzo's *Civil Conversazione* (1574) detail the manners and rituals of 16th century Italy. These sources relate not only to a later era than the one in discussion here (1440-1492), they are also composed in relation to courtly rules.

discussed more in Chapter II, the number of visitors to the residence of a faction leader of Florence symbolized the power of his faction. Once guests were within the palace, the differentiation between places of reception became a way to visibly honor some guests over the others; those who had provided the Medici with the most reciprocal benefits and support were given the most access to their supposedly private spaces. Thus, as this thesis will demonstrate, the Palazzo Medici was not a truly private space in our modern sense of the word. As a part of the social and political functioning of the palace particular guests were given access to almost all of the residence. This staging of privacy in order to convey privilege became a crucial element of a visitor's conception of the Palazzo and of the Medici.

Roman Influences

Of course, the precedent for patronage structures within a republic such as Florence came from Rome. Here, too, the concept of privacy focused on the realities of admittance and exclusion. Vitruvius made the distinction between the public and private space within the ancient Roman home or *domus* evident in his first century *De architectura*. He defined the private spaces of the home as “belonging to the family,” and the public spaces are those “shared with visitors.”²⁸ Vitruvius's approach to privacy is particularly important to consider because his definition also integrates the status of the visitor in relation to the owner of the residence in order to determine the degree of

²⁸ Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, edited by Frank Stephen Granger, Vol. 2. 2 vols. London: Harvard University Press, 1931, 36.

access.²⁹ Those of a higher social status than the owner were allowed into those rooms of the family, earning the title of invited guests. Meanwhile, uninvited guests were allowed only within the public spaces. This distinction between invited and uninvited guests seems to correlate more closely with the observed social structures of the Renaissance palazzo.

Even the layout of the Palazzo Medici seems to have drawn inspiration from Roman models. Like the ancient Roman *domus*, the Palazzo was an ordered space; rooms were organized along a linear path, with straight walls and ninety-degree corners. While this seems unsurprising today, the labyrinth effect of earlier Italian palaces, such as the Palazzo della Signoria, stood in marked contrast to this arrangement. In addition, the residence was built around an open square *cortile*, or courtyard, from which all other areas of the building could be accessed. An open central atrium was perhaps the most recognizable element of the Roman *domus*. It was the space in which the client, or dependent, would call upon his patron to inquire if there was anything he could do for the patron that day. This ritual, the *salutatio*, was crucial to the functioning of the later Republic and early Empire and dictated the plan of the ground floor of Roman residences during that time.³⁰ The Palazzo Medici's use of the same architectural framework, addressed more in Chapter II, likely stems from the similarity in social functioning between the ancient Romans and the contemporary republican Florentines. Though he

²⁹ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, 11.

³⁰ John R. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C.- A.D. 250: ritual, space, and decoration*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991, 4.

does not specifically cite architectural similarities, Flavio Biondo wrote in his *Italia illustrata* that:

Whatever private houses which recently had been built on Via [Larga] must be compared to the work of former Roman princes and, certainly, to distinguished ones...there are no remains of private princely residences in Rome which display any greater magnificence than those [of Cosimo].³¹

Though contemporaries of Cosimo saw in the residence the strains of ancient influence, the Palazzo's strongest similarity to ancient Roman *domus* is not to be found in the magnificence of the structure. Rather, it is in the functioning of the space. As John R. Clarke states that:

...the Roman house was in no way private. It was the locus of the owner's social, political, and business activities, open both to invited and uninvited visitors. Because of this, the location, size, and decoration of each space formed codes that cued the behavior of every person under its roof...³²

The same was true for the Palazzo Medici. Built with a layout adapted from the *domus* and featuring a similar dedication to the rituals of patronage, the Palazzo Medici embodied several aspects of the Roman home, including differentiated levels of privacy.

³¹ Seen in James Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace in Florence: Magnificence and Splendour in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, Burlington, Virginia: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007, 60. Original citation found in H. Burns, 'Quattrocento Architecture and the Antique: Some Problems,' in *Classical Influences on European Culture, A.D. 500-1500*, R.R. Bolgar ed., Cambridge (1971): 273.

³² John R. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy*, 1-2.

However, the simulation of privacy, of restricted space, separates the Palazzo from ancient inspiration.

The Visitors

The chapters that follow address three main types of visitors to the Palazzo Medici with the goal of determining what messages and/or impressions they were subjected to in their experience of the edifice and its art. In his discussion of the Renaissance palazzo, F.W. Kent deduced that palaces were built for the “*vicini, amici, and parenti*” or the “neighbors, friends, and kin” of the family responsible for the building.³³ Palaces were central to the patronage structure that Florence relied upon and as such, they were sites of continual sociability. The most basic, and yet significant, social function the palace must fulfill was the visitation of clients, who came from diverse social ranks. The first of these visitors, the *vicino*, was a man who was uninvited, though not unwelcome; he was a citizen of Florence who sought an audience with the patron in order to settle a dispute, arrange a marriage, or beg for a favor. Going no further than the ground floor of the residence, the *vicino* experienced only the public spaces of the Palazzo Medici. The second guest, higher on the social hierarchy, was not always invited but was welcomed into the more exclusive areas of the Palazzo in his pursuit of the patriarch. Unlike the first visitor, this type of guest (*amico*) was afforded access to the first level, *piano nobile*, of the Palazzo where the Medici family resided. The third type of visitor was not only invited but also supremely honored; this visitor (*parente*) was given access to the whole of the Palazzo. These three levels of visitors, in

³³ F.W. Kent, “Palaces, Politics, and Society,” 58.

their accounts, reveal the level to which the Palazzo's architectural layout served a socio-political function. As will be demonstrated, the structure and utilization of "private" spaces by the Medici were staged in a manner that allowed for the construction of messages specific to each type of visitor.

The art and decorative objects within the rooms of the Palazzo played an important part in the experience of visitors. An analysis of the artworks visible along the visitors' paths reveals carefully planned programs of communication. And though it is well known that the Medici found art to be an effective vehicle for political messages, the manner in which these works were used to convey meaning to a visitor is important, because each type of guest seems to have received a slightly different message. For example, the iconography and meaning of works of art experienced by the first type of visitor are rather explicit in their political nature and their meaning easily grasped. Meanwhile, the second visitor is treated to a more nuanced expression of Medicean politics and family. His understanding of the art is informed not only by the identification of the subject matter, but is also deepened by his social status and education—things necessary for his admittance to the more private spaces of the residence. The third visitor was the recipient of the whole program, as his position allowed him to view the entirety of the Palazzo Medici. More often than not, this guest was not only able to decipher the coded messages of the architecture and art but also able to contribute to them.

CHAPTER II

ACT I: THE *VICINI* WAIT IN THE COURTYARD

Visitors to the Palazzo Medici came from almost every social class within Florence. The most frequent visitors to the Palazzo were the average citizens. These visitors came to the Palazzo to request favors from the Medici. Favors could range from the resolution of a dispute with a neighbor or business partner to an appointment to a government post to the brokering of a marriage. Regardless of the goal, the *vicini* were uninvited, though not unwanted. The distinction between the uninvited and the invited guest is crucial to understanding the social functioning of a home; it, along with class, indicates where in the residence the visitor was allowed. Naturally, invited visitors were allowed further into the Palazzo than the uninvited. An ancient concept, this classification of guests and spaces was first developed by Vitruvius in Book VI of *De architectura*. In the realm of the Roman *domus*, the vestibule, atrium, and tablinum were accessible to the uninvited, while the dining rooms, baths, and bedrooms were reserved for the invited.³⁴

Courtyard

While the Palazzo Medici cannot be said to contain the exact same rooms or types of rooms as an ancient home, there exists a similar stratification of spaces. The most common visitor, a citizen of Florence, for instance, was allowed to wait for the Medici along the benches that lined the exterior façade and the interior walls of the courtyard

³⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum*, 10.

(Figure 3). Like the atrium of a Roman *domus*, the courtyard was the place where most clients came to converse with their patron. Uninvited guests, though not allowed access to the residence beyond the courtyard, were still much desired by the Medici. Indeed, the Medici thrived when their home was the focus of such visitors, for many citizens seeking an audience with the current patriarch typically saw the courtyard of the Palazzo so full of citizens that those who arrived late in the day had to be seated on the exterior benches (Figure 4). Such a swelling of people from the Palazzo reflected the power of the Medici to affect change in their neighborhood and government. Marco Parenti in his memoir emphasizes the importance of these visitors in his discussion of the events following Cosimo's death in 1464. The lack of support for Piero after the death of his father was highlighted by that fact "that few frequented his house and they were men of little consequence."³⁵ Meanwhile, the usurper to Medici power, Luca Pitti "held court at his house, where a large part of the citizens went to consult on matters of government."³⁶ When the power in Florence shifted back to the Medici several months later, Parenti again alludes to the visitors at the Palazzo in order to indicate their good fortune, remarking that Pitti "remained cold and alone at home, and no one visited him to talk about political affairs—he who used to have his house full of every kind of person."³⁷ Clearly, a lack of visitors reflected poorly on the political standing of the leading citizens of Florence.

³⁵ Mark Phillips, *Memoir of Marco Parenti: A Life in Medici Florence*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987, 190.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 190.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 208.

The memoirs of Tribaldo de' Rossi provide a first-person glimpse into the process of waiting to speak with the current Medici patriarch, in this case, Lorenzo. For six days, de' Rossi came to the Palazzo Medici and took a seat amongst others in the courtyard, hoping to plead his case to Lorenzo. He writes that on the seventh day, "Lorenzo put on his coat and came down to the courtyard and gave audience. Ser Piero told me repeatedly to stay close to him, and that he would tell him that I was there, [we] being at the gate of the courtyard leading out into the street." He was able to begin his petition thanks to his strategic location in the courtyard and ended up walking with Lorenzo. His time and pleas were cut short, however, when they reached the street-side of the gate and Lorenzo was forced to "give audience to the 40 or more citizens who also demanded his attention."³⁸ De' Rossi's account typifies the average experience of the uninvited visitor to the Palazzo Medici. Access to spaces other than the courtyard and exterior of the Palazzo was limited, while the time spent waiting for contact with the current Medici was extensive.

Typically, accounts such as Parenti's and de' Rossi's have been utilized to explain the shifting states of power in Florence, or to demonstrate the social ritual of patronage. What is perhaps too easily ignored in these recitations, however, is the role that the Palazzo itself played. That citizens were allowed into the residence in such quantities immediately casts doubt on Goldthwaite's conception of the Renaissance palazzo as a place where the public elements did not intrude. The palazzo was crucial in providing a space for the client/patron or resident/visitor ritual to occur. Building from the foundation

³⁸ Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, London: Academic Press, 1980, 447-8.

up, Michelozzo and the Medici had the opportunity to structure space in any manner they chose. As mentioned, they could have continued the medieval Italian tradition of towered buildings, but in choosing to center the Palazzo around a central courtyard, the decision was made to abandon the closed-nature of earlier residences. Here again, the ancient Roman models provided the solution, or perhaps the inspiration, for the interaction of resident and visitor.

In his discussion of private architecture in book IV, Vitruvius explicates why the houses of the political and social elite must contain certain elements, such as courtyards, that the houses of the average citizens do not: "...magnificent vestibules and alcoves and courtyards are not necessary to persons of a common fortune, because they pay their respects by visiting among others, and are not visited by others."³⁹ The possession of a courtyard is thus specifically connected with those people who will be visited by others, namely those with political power. Supplementing this, Cicero in his *De officiis* asserts that the wealthiest homes are those who receive and entertain "crowds of every sort of people."⁴⁰ The adoption of a central courtyard in the Palazzo Medici and its subsequent use attests to much the same functioning described in these Roman treatises. Indeed, Parenti's succinct connection between the number of visitors and the power of the visited is an indication that contemporary Florentines valued this social ritual as much as the ancient Romans.

³⁹ Vitruvius, *De Architectura libri decem*, ed. F. Granger, Vol. II, London (1931), 36, as seen in Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace in Florence*, 96.

⁴⁰ Cicero, *De officiis* Book I xxxix, 139. Trans. W. Miller Cambridge Mass (1913), 143 as seen in Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace in Florence*: 96.

Florence, like other states of Italian peninsula, found value in connecting its history with that of ancient Rome. The Republican structure of government that Florence adopted, in emulation of Rome, relied upon specific citizens speaking for the good of those they represented. In both cultures, these citizens were chosen for their ability to enact change at one moment and prevent it at another; that is, they were selected by the power they wielded. The dependent citizens, or clients, flocked to the house of this powerful person, or patron, in the hopes that he would grant them a favor, likely in return for something the visitor could provide him. This system of patronage is the key to understanding not only the writings of Cicero and Vitruvius, but also the actions and choices of the Medici. The decision to adapt the layout of an ancient Roman *domus* for the Palazzo Medici reflects, at the very least for Cosimo, a desire to identify the family with the position of patron. The courtyard facilitated, architecturally, the desired interaction between a visitor/client, and the Medici/patron. A visitor, such as de' Rossi, who waited for the Medici within the courtyard, was given ample opportunity to consider the space around him. With little else to do until the Medici family member he sought appeared, a visitor likely contemplated the home of his patron.

Within the courtyard, visitors would be seated along the extensive benches lining the walls of the space. Listed in the inventory of 1492, these benches were made of wood, with decorative panels for backing, and together measured over 80 braccia (46 metres) long. Facing toward the open, bright center of the space, these benches would have afforded full view of the decoration of the courtyard (Figure 5). The principle object a visitor's eyes beheld there was Donatello's bronze *David* (Figure 6), as a statue

of the youthful, nude old Testament character was raised upon a column in the center of the courtyard (Figure 7).⁴¹ Though David seemed contemplative and quiet, with his head tilted downward and shadowed by the brim of the hat he wears, the sword clutched in his right hand introduced tension into his otherwise calm demeanor. This is continued in the relaxed stance of the young man, who rests his left hand casually resting on his hip, while his left foot rests on the severed head of a bearded man.

A plaque mounted on the column below the David provided the viewer with a context in which to approach the statue and also delivered to him a hint as to its significance:

The victor is whoever defends the fatherland.
God crushes the wrath of an enormous foe.
Behold! A boy overcame a great tyrant. Conquer, o
citizens!⁴²

⁴¹ Until the manuscript with the inscriptions for both the David and Judith was published by M. Sperling, theories as to the identity of the figure also included ancient Greek or Roman mythological characters, including Hermes or Mercury. John Pope-Hennessy in "Donatello's Bronze David," *Scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Federico Zeri* Milan: Electa, 1984, 122-127. The supposedly homoerotic reading of the work stems from the nudity, pose, and feather that lays against the leg of the figure. Support for this approach is discussed by Adrian W.B. Randolph, *Engaging Symbols: Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. No documents exist today that state categorically when or for whom this sculpture was made, which has presented a frustrating yet enticing challenge for art historians. Posited dates range from 1428 to 1469 and patrons such as the Signoria have been suggested, though most scholars will accept the Medici as the originators of the commission. While the date of completion and installation of the sculpture undoubtedly affects the understanding of Donatello's stylistic progressions, the impact of this work on visitors to the Palazzo Medici was more dependent upon their perceptions and understandings of the character of David than upon a particular date of installation.

⁴² Christine M. Sperling, "Donatello's Bronze 'David' and the Demands of Medici Politics," *The Burlington Magazine* (The Burlington Magazine Publications, Ltd.) 134, no. No. 1069 (Apr. 1992): 219.

Refocusing the narrative of David, this inscription casts David as a tyrant-slayer, a defender of his fatherland. The structure of the poetic lines incites the viewer, as a citizen, to celebrate the defeat of Goliath, the tyrant. In the context of current politics, including Cosimo's return to Florence and subsequent assumption of power, the Medici's decision to install a statue of David in their courtyard came as a result of several desires.

The first desire is revealed most clearly in the choice of inscription added to the plaque, where the Medici can be conflated either with the citizens or the narrator of the inscription itself. As they rarely held official public office, the family could be considered mere citizens in Florence, equal with all others. Though most in the city would be aware of their true position as *de facto* leaders of the Republic, the Medici-as-citizens conceit could have been understood as an attempt to dissociate themselves with the tyrant role in which their adversaries repeatedly cast them. Likewise, if a visitor was to place the Medici in the position of author or narrator of the inscription, the family would again appear to be separating themselves from the political drama the inscription inspires. By literally assuming the third-person narrative approach, the message of the inscription becomes that of the Medici. In either situation, the Medici were understood to be on the side of the victorious David, celebrating the downfall of a tyrant. Regardless of what date scholars propose for this work, they all emphasize that the Medici were seen by their political opponents as tyrants, seizing control of the Republic for unjust purposes. The *David* was an attempt to counter such an allegation. Positioned as the statue was in the center of the courtyard on a column, visible from both the ground and first floor of the

palace, as well as from the street through the *androne* (hallway), the statue was a strong visual statement of the Medici public image.

The second desire the David fulfilled was more direct and perhaps, daring. The Old Testament character of David was one of the many adopted symbols for the Republic of Florence. The city identified with the young man who beat a giant against all odds, seeing in his story some resonances of Florence's struggle against surrounding states such as Siena or Milan. In 1416, the Florentine Signoria moved from the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore a statue of David done by Donatello in 1408 to the Palazzo Vecchio, officially initiating him as a symbol of the Republic (Figure 8).⁴³ Executed in marble, this *David* was a humble and chaste hero. Though he too stood in a contrapposto pose with one foot resting on the head of Goliath and bearing another illustrious inscription⁴⁴, the marble *David* shares little formally with the later bronze *David* cast for the Medici. The direct gaze of the marble *David*, in addition to his cumbersome garments, contrasted with the intelligent contemplation and sophisticated nudity found in the bronze *David*. However better designed the bronze *David* may have been, the Medici relied on the average citizen's knowledge of the Signoria's marble *David*, for in the acknowledgment of the dual figures came much of their statue's implicit power and meaning. Commissioning a statue of David from the artist who first supplied the Signoria with a figure of the same theme was a form of the most direct appropriation of the icon of Florence. In addition to the Medici as tyrant-slayers message delivered by the

⁴³ Ibid, 222. Original citation is H.W. Janson, *The Sculpture of Donatello*, Princeton, 2nd ed. (1963), 3-12.

⁴⁴ "To those who fight strongly for the fatherland, God lends aid even against the most terrible foes." Ibid, 222.

inscription, most informed viewers no doubt made the next logical leap that the icon was not all the Medici wanted to appropriate from the Signoria. As Ames-Lewis has rightly deduced, the bronze *David* could be understood as a proclamation of the shift of power in Florence from the Palazzo della Signoria to the Palazzo Medici.⁴⁵

The statue of *David*, with its rich symbolic value, took pride of place in the Palazzo Medici courtyard. To travel from the *androne* to the primary seating area at the north side of the courtyard a visitor would have no choice but to acknowledge the striking work. Visually, it was the defining element of the courtyard, asking for the attention of every guest with its placement and curious composition. However, a visitor who waited for the Medici as long as de' Rossi inevitably found his eyes moving past Donatello's statue to consider the space around him. In addition to effectively framing the *David*, the surrounding architectural and sculptural decoration gave a visitor more to contemplate during his wait.

Architecturally, the courtyard was framed by a colonnade. Four columns on each side of the courtyard separated the covered walkways from the open center of the space. Above the columns were twelve roundels inset into the *sgraffito* frieze of beribboned swags of fruit and vegetables that were sure to draw the visitor's eye (Figure 9). Each side of the courtyard featured three of these roundels; the middle roundel was a variation of the Medici coat of arms and a roundel on both sides of it featured narrative scenes. In total, the courtyard frieze medallions included eight figurative scenes and four sets of

⁴⁵ "The political iconography of the Palazzo Medici in Florence," Edited by Francis Ames-Lewis and Piotr Paszkiewicz, *Art and Politics: the proceedings of the Third Joint Conference of Polish and English Art Historians*, Warsaw: Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1999, 20.

arms for a visitor to contemplate (Figure 10). The Medici coat of arms featured a shield with six balls, or *palle*. The shape of the shield varied over time, but the presence of fleur-de-lis on one of the *palle* on each of the shields in the courtyard indicates that these were carved sometime after 1465, when King Louis XI of France gave the Medici permission to use the motif (Figure 11). Though very subtle, the addition of the fleur-de-lis to the Medici coat of arms was a visual indication of the power the family possessed. Their use in the courtyard decorative program is unique in that no other element of the decoration so explicitly referenced the current period or the state of the family's power structure. Though the coat of arms medallions were significant and their meaning was quickly ascertained by the knowledgeable, they likely received little attention as the roundels to either side of them featured more visually dynamic narrative scenes that likely held most visitors' focus.

The figurative roundels depicted moments from ancient Greek and Roman mythology. Taken from a variety of stories, the scenes are united primarily through their format. Multiple figures enact a particular moment from their individual narrative before a blank background, making the characters of each roundel the sole focus. Though they are a substantial element in the decoration of the courtyard, the roundels have not been attributed conclusively to one artist's workshop. The artist, in any case, does not seem to have been responsible for much more than the execution of the roundels. The compositions of the scenes were taken directly from antique sources, most notably gems, cameos, and sarcophagi. Though later scholars, such as Bracker-Wester and Simon, have gone to great lengths to identify the specific scenes and posit an overall program that

speaks to the Medici and their goals, the reception of the space by most visitors would likely not have been as comprehensive.⁴⁶ The scenes are drawn from a variety of myths: *Poseidon and Athena competing for the dominion of Attica*, *Diomedes and the Palladium*, *Satyr with the young Dionysus*, and *Icarus with Pasiphae and Artemis*.⁴⁷ The diversity of these myths makes it unlikely that the common visitor to the courtyard would be familiar with them. The average visitor to this space was not a recipient of an elite humanist education that would allow him to identify and contemplate the specifics of each scene. What he was likely to glean from the roundels, rather, were their similarity to antique works of art he had been exposed to previously. Similar medallions were present, for instance, on the Arch of Constantine in Rome.

The presence of such roundels in the Palazzo Medici courtyard demonstrated to a viewer the Medici's interest and appreciation of antiquity. It seems to have been common knowledge at the time that several of the roundels were in fact copied from antique cameos or jewels in the possession of the Medici; these were housed in Piero's *studiolo* on the first floor of the Palazzo, an area off-limits to those waiting in the courtyard.⁴⁸ The

⁴⁶ U. Bracker-Wester and E. Simon, *Die Reliefmedaillons im Hofe des Palazzo Medici zu Florenz*, in "Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen", N.F., VII, 1965, pp. 15-91 and E. Simon, *Das humanistische Programm der Tondi im Hof des Palazzo Medici zu Florenz*, in E. Simon, *Schriften zur Kunstgeschichte*, Stuttgart, Steiner, 2003 ('Schriften der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft an der Johann-Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, Geisteswissenschaftliche Reihe'; 17), 67-119.

⁴⁷ East wall (entrance into the space) includes *Chiron and Prisoner*. South wall features *Diomedes and the Palladium* and *Satyr and the young Dionysius*. West wall, which opens onto the garden, has *Poseidon and Athena competing for the dominion of Attica and Daedalus* and *Icarus with Pasiphae and Artemis*. North wall includes the *Triumph of the ancient deities (Bacchus and Ariadne) on a chariot drawn by 'Psychai'* and *Bacchus and Ariadne on Naxos*.

⁴⁸ In reality, seven of the medallions are drawn from objects in the Medici collection, housed at the time in the *studiolo* of Piero on the *piano nobile*. Two more of the medallions came from coins that were in the possession of Pope Paul II. See footnote 44 for more information.

decision to effectively enlarge and display some of the family's more precious objects in the public portion of the Palazzo was not a casual one. The Medici collection of cameos and jewels was second only to the Pope's and established the family within the emerging humanist tradition, which emphasized the study and glorification of antiquity. The Medici's interest in Roman history and culture was also to be found in the last remaining element of the courtyard program, portrait busts.

Though heavily adorned today with antique statuary and inscriptions, the walls of the courtyard in the quattrocento were bare and whitewashed (Figure 7). The only disruption of their blank expanses came from the stone doorframes that led from the courtyard into the functional rooms of the Palazzo.⁴⁹ Above each of these doorways were busts of significant Roman personages. Set within plaster niches in the shape of the Medici emblem, a diamond ring with three feathers, the antique busts of Hadrian, Agrippa, Octavian Augustus, and others presided over the courtyard (Figure 12). Like the roundels of the frieze, these objects were examples of the Medici's interest in Roman antiquity. However, their presence also supported an additional, more nuanced message initiated by the other decorative elements of the courtyard.

⁴⁹ Scholars have posited that the more business-related guest would have been received in the ground floor camera, possibly an office, located at the northeastern corner of the courtyard. The specific function of the room is not revealed by inventories, which simply identify the room as one belonging to Lorenzo, much like the suite of residential rooms directly opposite it. The room was decorated, at least in the time of Lorenzo, with large magnificent canvases by Paolo Uccello. These works, in addition to the *Magi tondo* painted by both Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi, the highest valued painting in the entire palace, make the room seem eminently suited for display. The presence of a large table and chairs does indicate work of some kind was undertaken here, though the addition of a bed and a lack of published accounts of any visitor to the space seems inconsistent with the type of guest who would have been received here. Though he too likely waited in the courtyard, a visitor who then went on to confer with the Medici in an office was granted a modicum of privacy the general citizen was not. While it seems natural for us to assume that these guests were clients of the bank, and were thus allowed some privileges the general *vinci* were not, it is unsubstantiated. Without accounts to verify the function and reception of the space, the room lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

Citizens and Citizenship

While the rest of the palace featured the best work of contemporary artists, the decoration of the courtyard seems to have a dominant interest in the work and style of antiquity. Even the modern sculpture by Donatello in the space adopted the nudity, pose, and compositions of ancient works. In addition to the surface decoration, the layout of the space in which these visitors were received also relied upon the models of ancient Rome, focusing on the reception and display of visitors. Such a dedication to antiquity does not seem the result of chance; instead, it should be considered that the Medici consciously chose to adopt these symbols of ancient Rome for a particular purpose. It would be easy to state that the Medici saw themselves as the successors of the Roman emperors, as this tends to explain rather neatly and generically why the family pursued such a marked rise in the political scene of the Quattro and Cinquecento. Perhaps for Cosimo I and his descendants, who were frequently portrayed in ancient Roman armor for their sculpture busts, this idea rings true.⁵⁰ However, in the era of the early Medici, it is difficult to credit the family with such goal. Though the family was considered the de facto ruler of Florence for the majority of the Quattrocento, they were not without limits or challengers. Ousted from the state at least twice and subject to successful assassination attempts, the family could not afford to be overly confident or too eager, especially in Florence's republican environment. As a result, most of their political and artistic choices reflect an awareness of the fine line they needed to navigate between the

⁵⁰ Cosimo I, as the Grand Duke of Tuscany, displaced the former republic that his ancestor, Cosimo "il Vecchio," maintained, making him a strong comparator with Augustus, who likewise restructured ancient Rome into an imperial form of government.

wielding of power and the public's perception of them as citizens. In this balancing act lies the true appeal of the Romans.

To assume an overtly superior or princely manner in a republic such as Rome or Florence was a dangerous act, as it indicated that a citizen was overstepping his position in society. The construction of the Palazzo Medici, as already mentioned, was a monumental and unique undertaking in the current context of Florence. Built from the ground up and in such a grand format, the residence received much attention from the chroniclers of the time. Giovanni Cavalcanti wrote in his *Seconda storia* that:

[Cosimo] has started a palace, by comparison with which the Coliseum of Rome would seem worthless. And others say: Who would not build magnificently with the money of other people? And so all over the city there were many critical sermons and everything was directed angrily towards Cosimo.⁵¹

Cavalcanti's description of the Palazzo as a building that surpasses the Coliseum in expenditure would be grounds enough for the suspicion for the citizens of Florence, but his continued report of the notion that the palace was being funded with money taken from others reinforced the claim that some believed that Cosimo was acting tyrannically. Given that this was one facet of the current state of public opinion of Cosimo and his family, the decision of how to handle the decoration of the Palazzo upon its completion was not an idle one. If the Palazzo was seen to be too magnificent or expensive, the Medici could face trouble from the very citizens they hoped to draw to it. In response to

⁵¹ Translation by Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace*, 61.

the growing unhappiness and uncertainty that the Palazzo Medici and Cosimo's other building projects were inspiring among some citizens, Timotei Maffei composed a defense to possible condemnations that could be levied against the buildings and the Medici. With regards to the Palazzo, Maffei wrote that:

Someone else will perhaps blame him [Cosimo] if he goes into his house which has recently been built and sees in this marvelous stone construction the highest and widest walls, tall and sturdy columns, marble statues and wonderful pictures...and other great things which seem to suit a Prince rather than a private citizen.⁵²

While Maffei was concerned with highlighting to his reader that the presence of such things in the home of Cosimo was right and just, as they reflected well on Florence and her prosperity, he also unwittingly provides the best explanation for the decision to decorate the courtyard with the strains of ancient Rome.

At the time the Palazzo Medici was being decorated, Cosimo was facing the looming threat of being accused of tyranny; a portion of the citizens of Florence were convinced that the funds to build the Palazzo were being taken directly from the coffers of the Republic. The courtyard, as the most accessible public space of the Palazzo, was the ideal location to counter, or at the very least weaken, these allegations. Visitors to the space were not treated to a scene of overt wealth or power; objects in the courtyard did not include ornate paintings in gold frames, furnishings in rich textiles, or indeed, any images of the Medici at all. Instead, the décor focused primarily on the styles and

⁵² A.D. Fraser Jenkins, "Timoteo Maffei's 'In Magnificentiae Cosmi Medicei detractors' and the problem of patronage in mid-fifteenth century Florence, MPhil Thesis, Warburg Institute, University of London (1969), 16-17.

history of Rome. The Medici surrounded their visitor with an environment that recalled the glories of a previous republic, but centered it around a statue that was a symbol for the current republic, Florence. Though never specifically denying their own power, as the presence of the fleur-de-lis on the coat of arms indicates, the courtyard hinted to a viewer that the Medici were in the service of Florence. Allegations that the Palazzo was built with misappropriated funds were hard to sustain in the face of such a suggestively patriotic space.

As citizens of Florence who had the collective power to threaten the Medici, the *vicini* were accorded some significance in the design and decoration of the public spaces of the Palazzo Medici. The adoption of the central courtyard, likely borrowed from the Roman *domus*, provided Cosimo and his family with an architectural framework that supported the patronage system necessary for their power base. Additionally, the courtyard allowed for a previewing of the privileges granted to other guests, as each visitor who came through the *androne* from the street was visible to the crowd gathered to wait for the Medici. Those who were escorted to other doorways off the courtyard were immediately differentiated from the *vicini* by the social functionality the architecture provided. Then, often left to wait for extended periods of time, the most common citizens of Florence were left in a space designed specifically for them, with artwork that seemed to imply the Medici were not the figures of greed and tyranny that some had cast them to be. In all of this, it becomes clear that the Palazzo Medici was much more than a home; it was a stage upon which the Medici could and did enact their own script. The *vicini*, while not privileged enough to be granted access to the rest of the

Palazzo and its attendant drama, were the recipients of the first act, which established the Medici as citizens with a humanist education who sought only the best for Florence.

CHAPTER III

ACT II: THE *AMICI* VISIT THE *CAMERA*

The second type of visitor to the Palazzo Medici was of a higher social and political status than the first group. While those who waited in the courtyard could be considered *vicini*, neighbors, the second type of visitor occupied the more coveted and more rare position of *amici*, friends. They did not need an invitation to call upon the Medici; they could stop by the Palazzo at their whim and likely gain an audience with Cosimo, Piero, or Lorenzo. Visitors of this rank still desired favors from the Medici but were overall in a better position to provide the Medici something they desired in exchange. Those who were regarded as *amici* came mainly from the leading families of Florence who supported the Medici—the Tornabuoni, Strozzi, Gondi, and Rucellai, for example. For this type of visitor, contact with the current patriarch was easier managed and less rushed than for the *vicini*. Visitors, such as the *vicini*, waiting in the courtyard of the Palazzo Medici were uninvited and were thus allowed only within the public courtyard of the residence. By Vitruvius's definition, the *amici* were invited guests because they were allowed within the private parts of the home. Access to the restricted portions of the Palazzo placed these guests within the favored realm and in much closer proximity to the Medici they sought to engage.

Upon emerging into the courtyard from the *androne*, the *amico* would move to the left, towards the stairs at the southwest corner of the residence (Figure 13). Bypassing those who waited in the courtyard, this visitor was differentiated from his fellow citizens

by the route he pursued through the Palazzo. The ascension of the stairs became an architectural method of distinguishing one type of guest from another, of literally raising one over the other. Those sitting in the courtyard likely looked upon those walking past them to the stairs with some envy; undoubtedly they would have preferred an expedited path to the Medici themselves. It is crucial to note that, again, in choosing the layout of the courtyard and primary staircase, such social interactions were likely taken into consideration. Rather than place the primary staircase in a space directly off the *androne*, thereby removing the *amici* from the view of the *vicini*, the decision was made to mingle the two groups within the courtyard for a brief moment. The benefit of such an arrangement was two-fold: it demonstrated to the courtyard dwellers that the Medici had friends in high places, while subtly reminding the *vicini* of their exclusion from the more exclusive areas of the Palazzo and it also provided the higher-ranking guest a visual expression of the gift he had earned in his support of the Medici: access.

Piano Nobile

At the top of the stairs, the visitor entered the main living level of the palace, the *piano nobile*. Featuring three bedroom suites, two reception rooms, a chapel, and several smaller rooms for servants, nurses, and attendants, the *piano nobile* could be considered a more private space than the courtyard below. The definition of private, as previously mentioned, refers to the amount of access granted. Public spaces, such as the courtyard, were those spaces accessible by all. Access to the *piano nobile*, on the other hand, was restricted; records, some of which are to follow, seem to indicate that these guests,

though allowed within the privacy of the *piano nobile*, were guided by attendants or servants to the appropriate rooms.

The contents of written accounts from the quattrocento indicate that the most common space within the *piano nobile* to receive a visitor was the bedroom, or *camera*.⁵³ A typical suite of rooms in a Florentine palace consisted of the *camera* (bedroom), *anticamera* (room next to the bedroom), and *studiolo* (study). The *piano nobile* of the Palazzo Medici included three suites with this configuration (Figure 13). Each suite was dedicated to one of the male members of the family, housing him and his wife, as well as his children. The assignment of the suites varied depending on the generation that made the Palazzo Medici their home. While Cosimo was the head of the household, he occupied the suite overlooking the garden, the entrance to which was the farthest from the central staircase. Meanwhile, his youngest son, Piero, lived in the principal suite at the southeast corner of the floor and the eldest son, Giovanni, resided in the suite immediately to the left of the staircase.⁵⁴ The allocation of the suites, at least for the first

⁵³ Though every scholar that writes of the Palazzo Medici agrees that the *sala* was the primary reception room in the residence, no accounts of visitors explicitly reference being welcomed in the room. Given that the goal of this project is to track the route of visitors through the Palazzo, the *sala* deserves some attention if the prevailing opinion of its function is correct. However, the lack of explicit accounts of visitors to the space casts uncertainties as to its function and position within this investigation. Rather than assume that visitors were given access to this space simply because of its size and decoration, this thesis will continue to investigate the spaces explicitly referenced in the accounts of visitors, for they are the best evidence available for determining how the Palazzo Medici was used and why. For the best understanding of the decoration and function of the *sala*, see Wolfger A. Bulst, "Die sala grande des Palazzo Medici in Florenz. Rekonstruktion und Bedeutung," In *Piero de' Medici "il Gottoso" (1416-1469): Kunst im Dienste der Mediceer*, by Andreas Beyer and Bruce Boucher, 89-127, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993.

⁵⁴ The principal suite was always the suite which connected with the largest *sala* (*sala principale*) and typically ran along the main façade of the palazzo. Brenda Preyer, "The Florentine Casa" in *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, 37, 46-47.

generation of occupants, did not follow the typical scheme, in which the most important member of the household held the most significant space, that which connected with the *sala*.

Cosimo's decision to occupy the suite over the garden has been explained by some as one which reveals the aging man's interest in the humble act of gardening.⁵⁵ However, this seems a fanciful notion for a man whose shrewd political dealings led him from banker to de facto ruler of Florence. The amount of barriers, in the form of door and other rooms, between the central staircase and Cosimo's rooms reveals that his suite was one of the more private spaces of the *piano nobile*. Access to that space was not easily acquired, though accounts do exist of guests who were able to consult with Cosimo within his suite. Vespasiano da Bisticci, Cosimo's biographer and contemporary, records in his *Vite* a meeting with Cosimo in his *camera*, as does Alessandro de'Gonzaga.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, the vast majority of the decorative objects this room featured are unknown. The only inventory of Cosimo's possessions was completed while he still resided in the Casa Vecchia and it is unclear what objects made the transition between the old residence and the new Palazzo.

⁵⁵ Doris Carl, "La Casa Vecchia dei Medici e il suo giardino," in Giovanni Cherubini and Giovanni Fanelli, *Il Palazzo Medici Riccardi di Firenze*, Firenze: Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, 1990, 38-43.

⁵⁶D. Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici*, 24. Original citation: Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le Vite*: Edizione critica, Vol. II Florence 1976 p. 176-7. Alessandro de'Gonzaga's letter to his father, the marquess of Mantua, dated June 24, 1461.

Camera

The accounts of visitors reveal that the most important suite of the residence was that which Piero and Lorenzo would both occupy in succession at the southeast corner of the residence. Connected with both the *sala grande* and the chapel, these rooms were no larger than those of any other suite but were differentiated instead by their location. Unlike Cosimo's suite, this group of rooms was central to the most trafficked portions of the *piano nobile*. A door in the bedchamber gave into the chapel, a multifaceted space that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IV. Though prepared and used for religious service, the chapel also served as a reception space for the most important of visitors. A second doorway in the *camera* linked the space with the *sala grande*, which may well have been the gathering space in which to receive larger groups of visitors. The third and most direct entrance to the suite was from the hallway at the top of the staircase. For the *amici*, this last route seems the most likely path traversed.

Marco Parenti, the wealthy merchant, who earlier recorded the significance of visitors to a palace as reflection of political power, also provides a candid account of one of his own visits with Piero in this chamber:

And I went with them right to Piero's chambers; and because he was sleeping, they were on the point of leaving him, since no one dared to disturb him. But I was so insistent that in the end the servant was sent back in and woke him.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Phillips, *The Memoir of Marco Parenti*, 34.

Parenti's account seems to indicate that visitors to the *piano nobile* were escorted there by a servant or attendant of the Medici. This perhaps reveals how the distinction between types of visitors was enforced; it seems servants were placed near the staircase on the ground floor to discourage those not allowed to enter the family's private space and escort those who were. Additionally, Parenti's account reveals the privileges granted to him as a member of Piero's *amici*; not everyone would have the freedom to not only disrupt but also awaken the patron on whom they had come to call. While Parenti's method of admittance to the *camera* is dramatic and anomalous, his reception in the space was not. Carlo di Silvestro Gondi's *ricordanze* mentioned that on his own visit to Piero's quarters, he found "many people in his camera," indicating the acceptable nature of bedroom visitations for *amici*.⁵⁸ As in the courtyard below, it seems that several visitors were received in the space at once, leaving some to sit or stand quietly until their petition could be addressed.

Seating for guests within the camera consisted of chests placed alongside the bed (*cassoni*), a daybed (*lettucio*), and a few chairs spaced throughout the space. As a bedroom, the *camera* was obviously not intended to seat the amount of visitors who waited below, but it was an intimate space in which to engage a smaller, select group of guests. While waiting for a chance to speak, a visitor likely divided his attention between subtly listening to Piero or Lorenzo deal with his current client and studying the space around him. The visitor here had considerably more to gaze upon than his counterpart down in the courtyard did. Where the courtyard decoration could be considered

⁵⁸ Wolfer Bulst, "Uso e trasformazione del Palazzo Medici fino ai Riccardi," *Il Palazzo mediceo di Firenze* G. Cherubini and G.Fanelli ed., Florence (1990), 111.

restrained and classical, the decoration of the principal bedroom of the Palazzo was personal and contemporary.

The majority of the available wall space within the *camera* was given over to artwork executed in a variety of materials. Preference was given to two contemporary artists, Fra Filippo Lippi and Donatello. The inventory attributes to Fra Lippi and Francesco di Pesello “A painting with a gilded frame depicting a Saint Jerome and a Saint Francis.”⁵⁹ Scholars have tentatively identified this work with a painting by Fra Lippi, *Saint Jerome in Penance* (Figure 14), arguing that the scene shows Saint Jerome at two points in the story, not two individual saints.⁶⁰ Depicted in a barren and rocky landscape, the Saint’s penitential aspects are highlighted in this work. In most paintings, Saint Jerome was shown in his workshop or study and dressed in his red Cardinal’s robe. In this painting, however, Lippi paints the scene of Jerome removing a thorn from the paw of a lion with startling accuracy with regards to the narrative.⁶¹ The treatment of Saint Jerome as a hermit became more popular in Florence as the quattrocento progressed, perhaps because such penitential approaches as this appealed to the austere image that Florence desired of its leaders.

⁵⁹ “Un quadro chon chornicie messe d’oro, dipintovi uno sancto Girolamo et uno sancto Francesco, di mano di Pesello e Fra’ Filippo, f.10” Marco Spallanzani, and Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Libro d’inventario dei beni di Lorenzo, 1417-1465: Giovanni di Bicci, Cosimo e Lorenzo di Giovanni, Piero di Cosimo*, Firenze: Associazione 'Amici del Bargello', 1992, 33.

⁶⁰ D. Kent, *Cosimo de’ Medici*, 259. Now held in the Staatliches Lindenau-Museum in Altenburg.

⁶¹ Jeffrey Ruda, *Fra Filippo Lippi: life and work with a complete catalogue*, New York: Phaidon Press, 1993.

Donatello's works within the *camera* also related religious subject matter to a viewer, including a low-relief marble panel in a wood frame depicting "an Ascension."⁶² John Pope-Hennessy argues that a panel in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London should be identified with the one listed in the inventory (Figure 15).⁶³ Another marble relief panel by Donatello is noted in the inventory, which portrayed "Saint John with many figures...and other things in perspective."⁶⁴ With a bit more visual characterization of the work to rely on, this work was easier for scholars to identify. *The Banquet of Herod* relief in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lille is accepted as that which once hung on the walls of the *camera* (Figure 16). The strongly linear nature of the *Banquet of Herod* contrasted greatly with the loose, wispy style of the *Ascension*. Both works, however, would have demonstrated to a guest the Medici's appreciation not only for the works of Donatello, but also traditional New Testament narratives.

Two additional religious paintings by Fra Lippi are believed to have been hung above the doors of the *camera*.⁶⁵ Both currently in the collection of the National Gallery of London, these paintings were not recorded in the inventory of 1492 but are without a

⁶² D.Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici*, 250.

⁶³ John Pope-Hennessy, *Donatello's relief of the Ascension with Christ giving the keys to St. Peter*, London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1949, 37-46. The attribution of the panel to Donatello is not in doubt, but not all agree that this panel depicts an Ascension, as it would appear first to be a representation of St. Peter receiving the keys. Perhaps until more information is available, it would be best to consider the panel at the Victoria and Albert Museum to be an example of what the Medici Ascension panel could look like.

⁶⁴ "Un quadro di marmot chon molte figure di mezzo rilievo e alter chose a prospettiva, c[i]oè – di sancto Giovanni, di mano di Donato, f.30" in Spallanzani, *Libro d'inventario dei beni di Lorenzo*, 33.

⁶⁵ Ames-Lewis, "The political iconography of the Palazzo Medici in Florence," 27.

doubt Medici commissions.⁶⁶ *The Annunciation* features the emblem of the Medici on the low wall separating the Virgin from the Angel Gabriel (Figure 17), while the second work of the same shape features the seven onomastic saints of the Medici family seated on a marble bench (Figure 18). In contrast with the other religious works in the room, these two paintings feature elements that make them uniquely Medicean. Where the other works feature didactic and sacred narratives that could reasonably be found in other Florentine households, the gathering of the seven name saints of the family was unusual. The inclusion of the protector or name saint of the patron within a religious scene was rather common, but such figures were typically arranged around the Virgin and Child or a Crucifixion scene. *The Annunciation*, on the other hand, was traditional in its composition but striking in its detail and coloring. Like the gathering of saints, this painting featured a beautiful expression of piety claimed for the Medici in the placement of their emblem within the holy scene. The inclusion of specific iconography associated with the Medici family within religious artworks occurred throughout the Palazzo Medici, but the Lippi lunette paintings were the only examples of such blending available for the gaze of the *amici*.

In addition to the pieces attributed to specific artists, many anonymous works in the space featured spiritual themes, including a marble relief of the Madonna and Child

⁶⁶ Objects such as these are only a small example of the works known to have been housed within the Palazzo Medici but not recorded by the inventories. Donatello's bronze *David* is another instance. Why these works were left out of the inventories is unclear. As Dale Kent neatly summarizes, "[no] inventory has come to light that lists all the works of art in the Medici house or the palace between 1418 and 1492....the inventory of the palace contents after the death of Lorenzo de' Medici in 1492 constitutes a rough guide to works probably commissioned by Cosimo or his sons..." D. Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance*, 244.

surrounded by four angels, one painting of Saint Paul, another of Saint Peter, and a final one of Saint Lawrence.⁶⁷ While none of these works have been identified with extant pieces, their presence, in addition to the works already discussed, give an indication of the preponderance of religious works within the principal bedchamber of the Palazzo. Any visitor to the space would have been left little doubt of the Medici's piety.

Over the last available doorway, which lead into the *anticamera*, busts of Piero de'Medici and his wife, Lucrezia, by Mino da Fiesole were set into a crescent shaped niche (Figure 19). Though only the bust of Piero is identifiable today, it provides a good basis on which to understand the style and character of the works. Carved from marble, the portrait bust is a mix of static and dynamic elements. The shoulders and chest of Piero face forward, though the delicately carved floral brocade garment seems stiff, revealing little of the body underneath. Above the collar of his robe, however, his head turns quickly to the left. The somber expression of the bust softens only momentarily as his eyes focus on a point somewhere above the horizon. The inclusion of such busts within the *camera* in the era of Lorenzo could be understand as commemorative memorials to his parents, but these busts were carved in 1453, meaning they were likely in place in the *camera* long before the death of Piero or Lucrezia. A guest who came to meet with Piero and saw these sculptures likely experienced a small moment of bewilderment upon seeing them presiding over the room from the niche, as works like these were previously commissioned as votive works or reliquaries. Though Piero and his wife were alive, these busts still carried potent familial messages to a viewer, forming

⁶⁷ Spallanzani, *Libro d'inventario dei beni di Lorenzo*, 27.

in his mind a concrete image of the serious and attractive couple. Additionally, their location over the door that led into an the *anticamera*, the room in which the rest of Piero's family lived, perhaps provided guests a hint that they had not truly gained entrance to the family's only private space.

While waiting in and scrutinizing the *camera*, a guest might have found his gaze wandering back again and again to the bed in the center of the room; he wanted to be prepared to approach Piero or Lorenzo when it was clear the guest before him had completed his visit. The inventories of the Palazzo Medici rarely go into any detail when addressing furniture such as a bed, as these large pieces were considered a part of the architecture and not a decorative possession of the owner. At most, the inventory describes the type of wood the bed was built of and what the mattress was filled with.⁶⁸ It is known that the principal chamber of the Palazzo contained both a bed and daybed. Beds of this period were typically large, with wooden headboards that climbed half the height of the walls of the space. Daybeds, on the other hand, were large benches, though they too featured a large headboard that mimicked that of the bed. A poem written on the occasion of a diplomatic visit to the Palazzo Medici in 1459 provides some of the detail about the bed of the *camera* that the inventory lacks:

And Piero's chamber, cheerful and genteel,
was prepared in a manner worthy of emperors and queens
for the great and unconquered fighter,
With a canopy of silk with fringed curtains,

⁶⁸ "Uno lettuccio di br. 5 ½ di letto lavoro, f.25." and "Dua materassini pieni di lana, f.1" in Spallanzani, *Libro d'inventario dei beni di Lorenzo*, 26, 28.

and on the bed a cover of Alexandrian velvet,
embroidered with silver and fine gold.
And all around on every side
it shone more brightly than the noonday sun
with the scent of cypress, incense and pine.⁶⁹

Though it must be considered that the bed was outfitted more richly than normal in order to impress the diplomatic visitor who would be sleeping here during his stay, the poem does convey a sense of the design and scale of the bed. With a canopy and curtains framing the bed, it was the largest inanimate presence in the room. As it was where Piero or Lorenzo would recline while conversing with their guests, it was also center of activity within the room.⁷⁰

The guests conversing with their patron likely stood beside the bed, or seated themselves upon the lids of chests that surrounded the bed. These chests were known as *cassone* and they were introduced to a household upon the marriage of the man in whose room they were contained. Though their primary functions were seating and storage, these chests were ornately carved and painted with scenes that contributed to the beauty of their surroundings. A guest in the chamber after 1448 likely gazed at, then sat upon, the two large chests, painted by Francesco Pesellino with scenes from Petrarch's *I Trionfi*, commissioned by Piero in honor of his marriage to Lucrezia Tornabuoni (Figure 20). Petrarch's poem of the procession of Triumphs was a favored work of Piero's, as evidenced by his commission in 1441 for an illuminated manuscript of the vernacular

⁶⁹ Hatfield, "Some Unknown Descriptions", 235.

⁷⁰ Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace*, 129. See also, F.W. Kent, "Palaces, Politics, and Society," 62.

Italian work.⁷¹ The depictions of the Triumphs on the *cassone* were meant to recall the triumphal processions of ancient Rome that Petrarch had in mind while writing the poems, thus a variety of fantastic creatures pull the Triumphs on carts and carriages across the rectangular panels in a visual reenactment of the poem. Love, Chastity, and Death traveled across one chest, while Fame, Time, and Eternity graced the other. Though the Triumphs are split between the two chests, all but Eternity share the same background, giving a viewer a sense of continuity between the two objects.

Like many other *cassoni* of the period, the images on the chest were not chosen lightly. Though purchased by the future husband, *cassone* were considered a part of the bride's dowry and the images they contained were intended to guide the young woman in her married life.⁷² The didactic functions of Petrarch's Triumphs were particularly apt within the context of a Medici marriage; the family, while concerned as all were with chastity and honor, expected its brides to have a deeper understanding of the significance of the future, of where the family was ultimately going and what part they played in that journey. To a guest, the didactic functions of the chests were less pointed. Rather than a reminder of the hierarchy of fates the bride must consider, scenes of the Triumphs reminded an educated man of his choices and motivations. Like the Medici, in whose room he stood, the guest would likely have connected the images on the chests with his own reading of the poem. Perhaps the scenes reminded him of his own goals; it was

⁷¹ As seen in Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, "The Medici-Tornabuoni Desco da Parto in Context," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) 33 (1998), 144-145. Original citation F. Ames-Lewis, "Matteo de'Pasti and the Use of Powdered Gold," *Mitteilugend es kunsthistorischeInn stitutesi n Florenz*28 (1984) pp. 351-362.

⁷² Cristelle Baskins, *Cassone painting, humanism, and gender in early modern Italy*, Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

possible that his visit to the Medici that day even related to one of the concepts. It is difficult to characterize the reaction of a guest to the scenes as the appeal of Petrarch's poem was in highlighting the personal concerns of the reader. To one guest, the Triumph of Death over Chastity might be that which caught their attention. For another guest, their beliefs were expressed best in the Triumph of Eternity over all other. Evidence of the import of the most significant Triumph for Piero and Lucrezia was to be found on the wall directly opposite the bed which these chests surrounded.

Depicting yet another scene of Petrarch's *I Trionfi*, this time the Triumph of Fame alone, the large wooden circular painting on the wall would have been recognizable to any viewer as a *desco da parto*, or birthing tray (Figure 21). Trays such as this were used to bring refreshments and gifts to a new mother while in her recovery after labor. This particular tray was larger than most, measuring over 97 cm across, and was commissioned by Piero on the occasion of birth of his son, Lorenzo, in 1449. Visitors to the *camera* from then on would have encountered the tray painted by Giovanni di Ser Giovanni Guidi, known as Lo Scheggia, as the inventory of the room at the time of death of Lorenzo in 1492 still lists "a round childbirth tray painted with the Triumph of Fame."⁷³ Framed by the immediately identifiable feathers of Piero's emblem, the center of the tray depicts the figure of Fame. In contrast with the Fame figure found on the nearby wedding chests, this figure stands on a globe rather than within a mandorla, and in her left hand sits a golden Cupid, while her right hand holds a sword. Beneath her, twenty-eight men on horseback approach her with arm outstretched to demonstrate their

⁷³ "Uno desco tondo da parto, dipintovi il Trionfo della Fama, f.10." Spallanzani, *Libro d'inventario dei beni di Lorenzo*, 27.

loyalty to her. The composition of the scene and the attributes given to the figure of Fame would seem to indicate Fame has earned a position of power through a balance of force and love. To a viewer, the implications of this new iconography for Fame were readily obvious; the Medici, through similar use of strength and persuasion, now stood atop their own little orb of dominion, Florence. The choice of Fame for the birth tray of their first son, who would be the inheritor of his family's power and position, was a celebration of their achievements and of their own fame.

Devotion and Dynasty

Where the courtyard guest studied the works and styles of the ancients, or at least contemporary artists' emulations of the ancients, a friend of the Medici contemplated the religious and personal messages in the principal *camera*. Removed from the public space by a staircase and several doorways of protection, the camera featured the works the family's wealth and position enabled them to commission. The *amici* saw in the *camera* a personal side of the Medici that the courtyard lacked. The favored subject matter of most works within the space were religious in nature, though intriguing secular elements provided illuminating glimpses into the education and outlook of the family. With so much artwork crowding the walls, the likelihood of a visitor's ability to take in, identify, and contemplate every work was slim. Instead, an overall impression of the artworks was likely the best that could have been achieved, especially given the shorter waiting periods for these guests.

The visitor to the *camera* had primarily religious works within his view. Covering a wide range of subject matter, from penitence to redemption, these works demonstrated

to a guest the family's piety and devotion. As with other spaces in the Palazzo though, the Medici were careful in the choice and display of the works of art within the room. A survey of the stories and subjects addressed in these works reveals that they did not give a preference to one particular theme over another. This equitable distribution of focus conveyed an appreciation of a variety of religious narratives, while preventing a visitor from establishing a singular, misguided understanding of the family's religious views. A wall of penitential images in the *camera*, for instance, could convey the idea that Piero or Lorenzo was most interested in his redemption from sin. A guest leaving the camera with this message surely wondered what sins plagued the Medici patron. The heterogeneity of religious themes amongst the artworks in the *camera* was a defensive choice, one that ensured that the visitor left with a sense of the family's devotion in generic terms.

The secular pieces and even a few of the religious works within the space focused on the family themselves. Though the only portraits of members of the family were the busts of Piero and Lucrezia, several other works reference the idea of familial destiny or dynasty. Fra Filippo Lippi's painting of the seven onomastic saints of the Medici, while devotional in nature, also served as a history of the family. Centered in the painting is Saint John the Baptist, the name saint for the Medici family patriarch, Giovanni di Bicci. On either side of him, the saints Cosmas and Damian reference Giovanni's son, Cosimo, and likewise from there down the family line. The use of emblematic devices, such as the diamond ring or feather motifs, within Lippi's *Annunciation* painting and Lo Scheggia's *Triumph of Fame* birth tray also make the family presence evident in works that would otherwise appear as straightforward

religious or humanist scenes. The devices were also a useful way to insure that a visitor would connect the significance of the work with the Medici family. The emphasis on the triumphal imagery within the camera was undoubtedly the strongest visual explication of the Medici's focus on their family to a visitor knowledgeable enough to decode the images. The birth tray of Lorenzo revealed to a viewer the Triumph that the family most identified with: Fame. Triumphant over Death, Fame was perhaps the ideal expression of what the Medici hoped to achieve. Each generation was expected to maintain and grow the power base of the family, ensuring that though the individuals may die, the legacy and name of the Medici would survive.

Within the *camera*, furniture, sculpture, and paintings were used to convey an essence of the Medici family to their friends that was different from that which they shared their neighbors. Visitors to the *camera* understood the family to be pious and devout Christians, familiar with the ideas of penance and redemption. At the same time, they were able to recognize the family's pursuit and celebration of fame. Binding these seemingly disparate elements together for the Medici was the concept of family. A visitor on his way down the staircase after his conference with Piero or Lorenzo in his camera left with more than a resolution to his inquiry, he left with an impression of the Medici subtly informed by the decoration of the space he had just visited. A glimpse into the semi-private world of the Medici revealed to him the devotional and dynastic aspects of a powerful family.

CHAPTER IV

ACT III: THE *PARENTI* SEE ALL

Least numerous, the third type of visitor to the Palazzo Medici truly fulfilled Vitruvius's characterization of the invited visitor. This guest was typically welcomed to the Palazzo often for substantial periods of time. While the *vicini* and *amici* waited upon the inclinations and whims of the Medici in order to gain an audience, this third type of visitor was given immediate attention and preference. Comprised of dignitaries, allies, and Popes, these guests were not only explicitly invited by the Medici, but also extended more privileges and freedoms within the Palazzo than any of the other visitors. If the general citizens calling on the Medici were considered *vicini*, and the valuable acquaintances from their social class *amici*, then this third class of visitors would be considered *parenti*, or literally relatives. While they need not share any actual genetic link to the Medici, these visitors were treated as one might treat a revered member of the family; they were allowed complete access to the familial spaces of the Palazzo, a visible demonstration of the trust and value bestowed upon them by the Medici.

The best accounts of such a visitor to the Palazzo Medici stem from the diplomatic visit of a fifteen year old. On April 17, 1459, Galeazzo Maria Sforza, son of Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, arrived in Florence for a short stay. While waiting for Pope Pius II to arrive in the city, Galeazzo resided in the newly completed palazzo of Cosimo de' Medici, one of his father's chief allies. The letters he and his entourage sent back to Milan are the most direct and complete reaction of any guest to the Palazzo

Medici extant. The accounts of Sforza and his counselors were laudatory, describing the Palazzo in flowering language that best suited the very public and political function of such letters. Though written to his father and signed by Galeazzo, the letters describing Florence and the Medici palace demonstrate a comprehensive use of rhetorical style better suited to a scholar and are thus believed to have been written by one of his secretaries.⁷⁴ Though the words may belong to a secretary, they reveal what Galeazzo experienced during his visit. They are confirmed by one of Sforza's counselors, Niccolò de Carissimi, who also directed letters to the elder Sforza. His description of the Palazzo and the day's activities closely correlate with the letters signed by Galeazzo. He too exclaims over the beauty of the Palazzo Medici in his description of the honors bestowed upon the young Galeazzo. Though the accounts of these visitors provide a sense of the wonderment with which the newly completed Palazzo was received, it must be remembered that the letters were intended to demonstrate to the Duke the great esteem in which Cosimo held their relationship. By treating the Duke's son to the finest food and the most excellent accommodations, Cosimo assured Sforza that his relationship with the Medici remained strong.

In addition to the first-hand accounts of the Sforza party, an untitled and anonymous poem of 1459 also captured the essence of the Palazzo during the Sforza visit. Known as the *Terze Rime*, the poem details the most remarkable interior aspects of

⁷⁴ Hatfield, "Some Unknown Descriptions," 232.

the Palazzo Medici, mainly the lavish décor and materials.⁷⁵ While helpful for describing the palace at the time of Sforza's visit, the *Terze Rime* neglected to address certain objects or spaces. For instance, objects made from materials such as bronze or terracotta were ignored in favor of objects and decorations of gold or silver, and the top level of the residence was excluded all together, as it only contained storage rooms and servants quarters. This was likely due to the author's obvious goal of praising the Medici and their projects; he apparently believed that only the most luxurious objects and spaces spoke to the magnificence and splendor of the Medici.

Chapel

With all three of these accounts originating from one visit, it seems clear a visit from the *parenti* differed remarkably from the visits of either the *vicini* or the *amici*. This is evidenced first by the manner in which the Sforza group was received. Carissimi's first letter to his patron describes the party's arrival in Florence and subsequent reception at the Palazzo Medici:

...I went to and dismounted at the palace of Cosimo. And first I found Piero di Cosimo all in state at the top of the first stair, who embraced and kissed the aforesaid Count with great lovingness, and took the hands of and welcomed the whole entourage as pleasingly as he could. Then the aforesaid Count went immediately into the little chapel of

⁷⁵ Translations of the poem given here are those provided by Rab Hatfield in "Some Unknown Descriptions of the Medici Palace in 1459," *The Art Bulletin* (College Art Association) 52, no. No. 3 (Sep. 1970): 232-249. Original document cited in Hatfield, *Terze rime in lode di Cosimo de' Medici e de' figli e dell' honranza fatta l'anno 1458 [sic] al figlio del duca di Milano et la papa nella loro venuta a Firenze*; Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale.

the aforesaid Cosimo. He was waiting for him there, even though suffering all over from the gout. And he threw himself forwards with reverence, and the said magnificent Cosimo gathered him to his bosom...⁷⁶

Like the *amici*, these guests were directed towards the stairs that led to the *piano nobile*. However, all similarity ends there as Cosimo's son, and not an attendant, greeted them in his finest garments. Then, rather than being escorted directly to the *sala* or the *camera*, Sforza and his advisors were led to the heart of familial space within the Palazzo, the chapel. Galeazzo's own letter continues the narrative:

I went to see the magnificent Cosimo, whom I found in his chapel. He embraced me with great generosity and affection, and almost weeping with happiness and tenderness, said that in all his life he could never have been more pleased by anything, since wishing above all to see your Excellency, seeing me he seemed to see you.⁷⁷

The purpose of the letter is revealed in the last line, when the author indicates the reception of the Duke's son was considered a great honor by Cosimo.

The chapel was located at the end of the hallway on the *piano nobile*, directly opposite the staircase a visitor would climb to access the main level of the residence (Figure 13). Accounts from *amici* do not include access to this chapel, though its presence within the Palazzo was well known. The right to place a sanctified altar within

⁷⁶ Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace*, 107.

⁷⁷ D.Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici*, 306.

a private residence was granted to Cosimo and his wife, Contessina de' Bardi, in 1422 by Pope Martin V. Before this, private lay households were not allowed to possess an altar or offer services within home. The honor the Pope's dispensation bestowed upon the Medici was felt throughout Florence, with other prominent families quickly pursuing a similar permission for their own residence. Though the walls of this chapel were bare of paint when Sforza arrived, the space did not fail to impress (Figure 22).⁷⁸ Cristina Acidini Luchinat, the primary scholar on the chapel, suggests that at the time of Galeazzo's visit fabric or tapestries were hung, giving visual character to the walls.⁷⁹ This seems a plausible idea as Galeazzo described the space as "...no less ornate and handsome than the rest of the house."⁸⁰ White walls would not have earned such grand praise when he describes the rest of the Palazzo as "...the most beautiful I may ever have seen, or believe it possible to see."⁸¹ The Terze Rime, always effusive in praise of the spaces of the palace, supports Galeazzo's judgment of the chapel:

And there is a chapel so ornate
That it has no like in all the universe,

⁷⁸ Books and articles concerning the vibrant wall frescoes of the *Journey of the Magi* by Benozzo Gozzoli dominate much of the research done regarding the Palazzo Medici. However, this project had not begun at the time of Sforza's visit. Sforza's portrait is actually thought to have been sketched by Benozzo during his stay at the Palazzo Medici, as his visage appears on the young horsemen on the far left of the procession following the youngest Magus. See Cristina Acidini Luchinat in *I Restauri nel Palazzo Medici Riccardi: Rinascimento e Barocco*, Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 1992 and *The Chapel of the Magi: Benozzo Gozzoli's frescoes in the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi Florence*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1994.

⁷⁹ Cristina Acidini Luchinat, "La Capella dei Magi: architettura e breve storia," in Simonetta Merandoni and Luigi Ulvieri. *Il Palazzo Magnifico: Palazzo Medici Riccardi a Firenze*, Venezia: Umberto Allemandi & Co., 2009.

⁸⁰ Rab Hatfield, "Some Unknown Descriptions," 232.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 232.

So well prepared is it for the worship of God.
And whoever looks at it well on every side
Will say it the tabernacle of the divine Three,
For it is lovely and elegant throughout.⁸²

The “lovely and elegant” decoration of the chapel did undoubtedly earn the admiration of a visitor, though what the exact decoration of the space was remains unclear. Even without Beonzo Gozzoli’s frescoes of the Adoration that were painted later in 1459, the appointments to the space were suitable for the reception of a guest of Sforza’s status.

The most visually stunning elements of the chapel in the spring of 1459 were to be found in the temporary décor, but on the floor and ceiling. Inlaid marble and semi-precious stones of red, green, and white drew the visitor’s gaze downward (Figure 23). As the visitor passed from the entryway into the chapel proper, he stepped on circles of red porphyry contained within squares of white Carrara marble, with details set off with green serpentine marble. A central disc of red porphyry, surrounded by fourteen detailed patterns set within more circles, likely caught and held a visitor’s attention for at least a moment (Figure 24). The intricate details of the pavement have been interpreted under the influence of various religious and philosophic lenses, all relying heavily on humanist or Neoplatonic texts.⁸³ While these arguments speak to the possibilities of Medici intentions or their own personal beliefs, the likelihood of such elaborate schemes imparting meaning to a viewer, particularly a foreign one such as Galeazzo, was slim.

⁸² Ibid, 234.

⁸³ “Un pavimento neoplatonico” by Maria Teresa Bartol in Cristina Acidini Luchinat, Benozzo Gozzoli, *La Cappella dei Magi*, Milano, Electa, 199, 25-28.

To complement the intricate pavement of the floor, the coffered wood ceiling of the chapel was carved in sections, with circles and squares again serving as the primary organizing shapes (Figure 25). Painted white, red, and green, then extensively detailed in gold, the ceiling of the central part of the ceiling provided a more opulent place for the eyes to rest, eminently appropriate in a space focused on the contemplation of the heavens. Located above the recessed apse, the Saint Bernardino monogram for Christ is set within a golden sun motif, again surrounded by Medici *imprese* of diamond rings and feathers (Figure 26).

Perhaps the most significant feature of the room, both visually and spiritually, was the altarpiece. Fra Filippo Lippi's *Adoration of the Christ Child with Saint Bernard and Saint John the Baptist* (more commonly known as the *Palazzo Medici Adoration*) was painted in the later 1450s (Figure 27).⁸⁴ Placed on the red and white marble altar shortly before Galeazzo's visit, the painting was a striking work in its composition and color. The infant Christ lies naked in a small meadow of greenery and flowers. His mother kneels over him, wearing her traditional blue cloak. From the dense background of tree trunks the childlike figure of Saint John the Baptist emerges to stare not at the Christ child, but at the viewer. Behind his shoulder, Saint Bernard of Chiaravalle (Clairvaux) rests his elbows on a rocky outcropping. Above all these figures, God the Father appears with arms outstretched to bless the scene, with the Holy dove hovers beneath him. Interpretation of the work, like the pavement designs, operated on several levels. For the

⁸⁴ The original altarpiece is conserved in Berlin; it was removed from the Palazzo Medici in 1494, when the Medici were expelled from Florence. The piece seen today in the chapel is a contemporary work of his workshop. Acidini, *La Capella dei Magi*, 91.

most basic understanding of the work, only knowledge of contemporary religious motifs was necessary. The vertical axis between Jesus, the dove, and God made for a visual explication of the Holy Trinity, to whom the chapel was dedicated. A more informed visitor familiar with Florence would have been able to comprehend the additional significance of the remaining male figures within the paintings: St. John the Baptist was the patron saint of Florence, while St. Bernard was the patron saint of the Signoria. The decision to include the two figures which are not typically shown in Adoration scenes indicates a second level of meaning for the altarpiece, one which seems unavoidably political. Saint John the Baptist, as was discussed in Chapter III, could have specific significance to the family as he was the name saint for Cosimo's father, Giovanni di Bicci. However, the inclusion of Saint Bernard, whom no one else in the family could claim as an onomastic protector, lessens the strength of such an argument. This altarpiece then, like the David of the courtyard, appropriated icons of Florence into the service of the Medici.

The Sforza party was clearly impressed with the Medici family chapel, despite its seemingly simple décor. As one of the earliest guests to the Palazzo, they were not able to view the brightly colored and intricately detailed frescoes of Gozzoli, nor the intarsia wood choir stalls of Giuliano da Sangallo that enthralled so many later visitors.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ The frescoes of by Benozzo Gozzoli were completed by the end of 1459 but had not even begun at the time of Galeazzo's visit. The choir stalls are attributed to Giuliano da Sangallo and were likely installed after the death of Piero under the guidance of Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici. For more information, see Cristina Acidini Luchinat, *La Cappella dei Magi*, in Benozzo Gozzoli. *La Cappella dei Magi*, a cura di C. Acidini Luchinat, Milano, Electa, 1993, 7-26 and B. Paolozzi Strozzi, *I legni intarsiati. Il coro ligneo*, su disegno di Giuliano da Sangallo, in *I restauri nel Palazzo Medici Riccardi. Rinascimento e Barocco*, a cura di C. Acidini Luchinat, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano) 1992, 94-97.

Galeazzo's account of the chapel as "ornate and handsome" indicates its decoration was pleasing to the eye but provides little in way of measuring his response to the messages of the space. This is in line with the purpose of his letters—to impress upon his father the extraordinary house of his ally and the reception he was treated to within it. The Terze Rime, while still focused on expounding on the greatness of the Medici, does manage to identify the key function of the space, "prepared...for the worship of God," and its message, "the tabernacle of the Divine Three."

In any case, the combined elements of this small space made for an attractive and peaceful interior in which to contemplate the message of the mass or to receive a most important visitor. Cosimo's decision to welcome Galeazzo and his party in the chapel must be understood within the context of the function of the space and its significance. No room within the Palazzo so clearly spoke to Cosimo's faith and privileges at the same time. Rather than receive his honored guest in the *sala* or *camera*, semi-private places of reception, Cosimo chose the space which best reflected the message he wanted to convey to Galeazzo and his advisors. Receiving Galeazzo in the intimate, familial space of the chapel gave the impression of the boy's status as *parente*, while also casting Cosimo as a devout and honorable Christian.

Though they received an intimate welcome to the palace from Cosimo and Piero directly, realities of being a guest of the Medici intruded, even for the Sforza party. Carissimi remarks in his letter that the group was "obligated to leave because of the multitude who arrived wishing to see the aforementioned magnificent Cosimo," indicating the citizens of Florence wishing to see the Medici were still waiting below in

the courtyard.⁸⁶ However, *parenti* were not shown to the door after their meeting with the Medici, but were rather encouraged to tour the rest of the magnificent home Cosimo had built. Niccolò de Carissimi again explains to the Duke that

...the aforesaid [Galeazzo], together with the company, went on a tour of this palace, and especially of its noblest parts, such as some of the studies, chapels, salons, chambers, and garden, all of which are constructed and decorated with admirable mastery...⁸⁷

The next closest space off the vestibule of the chapel was the principal camera of the Palazzo. Though normally Piero's room, this chamber had been set aside for the next two weeks for Galeazzo. The description of the magnificent bed and decoration of the room given in the *Terze Rime* was addressed in Chapter III. The next room on the tour of the residence was the *anticamera*, located through the north doorway of the *camera*.

Anticamera

The *Terze Rime* continues the description of Piero's suite, declaring:

His antechamber no less richly
Was prepared with bed and canopy
and with curtain and ornament around.⁸⁸

Like the primary *camera*, the smaller *anticamera* was a space primarily intended for sleeping. While Piero or Lorenzo certainly slept in the *camera*, it is unclear from the

⁸⁶ D. Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici*, 306.

⁸⁷ Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace*, 108.

⁸⁸ Hatfield, "Some Unknown Descriptions," 235.

available sources whether their wives joined them there. Traditionally, the *anticamera* is thought to have housed the wife and children of the man who slept in the primary chamber.⁸⁹ Possible evidence of this is found in the allocation of furniture in the inventory to this space.⁹⁰ Though the central bed would seem to have been of equal size and dressing as that of the camera, several daybeds (*lettuci*) are also listed, perhaps indicating sleeping spaces for children or servants.

Like the chamber it adjoins, the *anticamera* was well decorated and featured religious artworks executed by some of the favored Medici artists. Two sculptural panels of the Madonna and Child, one in marble and the other in bronze, were done “by the hand of Donato.”⁹¹ Where the *camera* was decorated with the detailed and intelligent works of Fra Filippo Lippi, the program of the *anticamera* featured on the emotional and contemplative paintings of the Dominican Fra Angelico. A small *tondo* of the Virgin and a wooden “*tavoletta* depicting Our dead Lord, being carried to his tomb by many

⁸⁹ Bulst put forward this idea, of the anticamera housing the wife, in "Die ursprüngliche innere aufteilung des Palazzo Medici in Florenz," *Jahresbericht* 14, no. 4 (1970): 389-90. He argues that the inventory, which lists a bed and several other daybeds in the *anticamera*, could indicate that the room was used much like the *camera*, but for the women and children. This idea has been addressed by Lindow in *Renaissance Palaces*, pg. 131. However, Brenda Preyer, in “The Florentine Case” in *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, 46-7 argues that the inventory is not a strong enough source, and unable to find any corroborating evidence, believes the *anticamera* is merely an extension to the camera. Until there is a better study of where the women and children of the palace lived and slept is conducted, I remain convinced of Bulst’s validity, at least for the Palazzo Medici. The presence of so many beds and daybeds indicate these rooms needed to sleep many.

⁹⁰ “Tre materasse, c[i]oè una rossa e una di bordo piena di lana et un guarnello bianca piena di bambagia, f. 6.” And “Uno materassino do bordo e una coltre bianca, f. 5” Spallanzani, *Libro d’inventario dei beni di Lorenzo*, 34.

⁹¹ “Uno quadro di bronzo dorato, entrovei la Nostra Donna chol bambino in braccio, chornicie adorno, di mano di Donato, f.25” and “Uno tavoletta di marmo, di mano di Donato, entrovei una Nostra Donna chol bambino chollo, f. 6” Spallanzani, *Libro d’inventario dei beni di Lorenzo*, 33.

saints” are both attributed to Fra Angelico in the inventory of 1492.⁹² Neither of these works has been confidently connected with existing pieces. The character of Fra Angelico’s paintings, however, provide a small glimpse into what the appeal and purpose of his paintings may have been to the Medici. Cristoforo Landino, a friend of Lorenzo’s, described the artist’s work as “very precious, devout and rich.”⁹³ This, in addition to the described subject matter and size of the works, contribute to a sense of the works as dear and personal.

The largest artwork in the room was a painted tondo of the *Adoration of the Magi*. Attributed to Pesello in the inventory, scholars have agreed that the work was actually done by Domenico Veneziano and is now in the collection of the Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin (Figure 28).⁹⁴ The tondo depicts the Magi and their procession paying homage to the newly born Christ within a detailed and extensive landscape heavily influenced by the Netherlandish style. Though darker in coloring than other known works of Fra Angelico, the tondo does feature a similar attention to richness; figures in the procession wear garments of luxurious velvet, brocade, and lace that are finished in delicate daubs and lines of gold. The attention given to the procession of figures, however, nearly eclipses what should be the most significant portion of the narrative, the Adoration. Located in the lower right portion of the painting, the Holy Family receives the devotion of the eldest Magus in front of a stable filled with livestock

⁹² “Una tavoletta, dipintovi il Nostro Signore marito chon molti santi che lo portano al sepolchro, di mano di Fra’ Giovanni, f. 15” Spallanzani, *Libro d’inventario dei beni di Lorenzo*, 33.

⁹³ D. Kent, *Cosimo de’ Medici*, 251.

⁹⁴ “Uno tondo alto br.2, entrovi la storia de’ Magi, di mano di Pesello, f. 20.” Spallanzani, *Libro d’inventario dei beni di Lorenzo*, 33.

and camels. Though the scene depicts a sacred moment in the narrative of Christ, the main concern of the painting seems to be on the privileges of a wealthy life instead. Like the Lippi paintings in the *camera* next door, the secondary implications of the work reflect on the status of the family.

Unlike that of the *camera*, the decorative theme of the *anticamera* was specific and obvious. The inclusion of so many images that focus on the Virgin and Child within the space indicates their intended audience. These works were likely private devotional works for a wife or child to contemplate. As the Sforza party entered this room, the space could not be deemed entirely private or removed from the access of men, as Alberti and other contemporary theorists desired. However, it is unlikely the group lingered for long, as this was the space of women and their true goal lay through the only other doorway in the space.

On the wall left of the doorway they sought in the *anticamera* were two small paintings that were decidedly not religious in nature, nor were they likely intended for the primary occupants of the space. The inventory lists two portraits, not of family members, but of Cosimo de' Medici's closest allies: Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, and Erasamo di Narni, a Venetian *condottiere* better known as Gattamelata.⁹⁵ Painted by "a Venetian artist," these works did not fit within the program for the rest of the room but their purpose was evident. Beyond the door the marked lay perhaps the most private room in the Palazzo Medici, the *scrittoio*, or study. Accessible only through this doorway, well within the restricted spaces of the residence, the room was not easy to gain access to,

⁹⁵ "Uno colmo di br.ii ½ con dua teste al natural, cio[è] Francesco Sforza et Ghattamelata, di mano d'uno da Vinegia, f. 10." Spallanzani, *Libro d'inventario dei beni di Lorenzo*, 33.

though its fame was known to many. Like the portrait busts of Piero and Lucrezia in the *camera* marked the entrance to the truly familial space of the *anticamera*, the portraits beside the entrance to the study served as indicators of what type of visitor was allowed through the doorway: *parenti*.

Scrittoio

Measuring roughly eight by ten feet, the study was a very small space within the Palazzo Medici. As the final room in the principal suite of Palazzo Medici, it was the ending point for any guest privileged with a tour of the space. The *Terze Rime* again provides a narrative of the party's journey through the residence, attempting to evoke for a reader the beauty of the space and the excitement of the guests:

Likewise, one sees on the other side
an exit done with such art that I take it
for true relief—and it's flat intarsia—
Which gives into the triumphant and lovely study,
that has such talent and order and measure
that it represents angelic exultation.
With complete art in inlays and painting,
in perspective and carvings sublime,
and in great mastery of architecture.⁹⁶

Much of the poem's admiration for the study stems from the intarsia, or wood inlays, that decorated the walls and doors of the room. Though the *scrittoio* was destroyed in a subsequent remodel of the Palazzo, descriptions such as this and surviving copies of the

⁹⁶ Hatfield, "Some Unknown Descriptions," 235-6.

room executed by other Italian princes provide a sense of the wonderful sight that greeted a visitor in the space. The study of Federigo da Montefeltro in his palace in Gubbio, better known as the Gubbio *studiolo*, for instance, is believed to be based upon the *scrittoio* of the Palazzo Medici (Figure 29). Though the wood was flat, inlays laid in near perfect perspective fooled the eye into believing the cabinets of the room were open, revealing their contents.

When the real cabinets were opened, the true splendor of the *scrittoio* could be discerned. As listed in the inventory of 1492, the contents within the eighty square feet of the study were valued more highly than the contents of the rest of the Palazzo. The Sforza party would have been shown bowls full of ancient coins, cameos, and jewels, some of which were the basis for the medallions carved in the frieze of the ground floor courtyard. Another cabinet featured jewelry, where rings and necklaces competed with rosaries fashioned of precious materials. Yet another cabinet contained ornate illuminated manuscripts that Piero is known to have spent a great deal of time studying and cataloging.⁹⁷ The *Terze Rime* records the viewing of this cabinet, as well as others:

There are great numbers of highly ornate books
and vases of alabaster and chalcedony
that are decorated in gold and silver.
And all things there are beautiful and good,
some by nature and other with human talent
made thus with whole perfection.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Ames-Lewis, *The library and manuscripts of Piero di Cosimo de' Medici*, 31-38.

⁹⁸ Hatfield, "Some Unknown Descriptions," 236.

The decoration and contents of the cabinets within the *scrittoio* were stunning in their value and beauty, but they did not comprise the whole of the small room.

Framing the stunning inlaid wall decoration were the glazed terracotta floor and ceiling executed by Luca della Robbia. On a separate visit to the Palazzo, Filarete marveled at the “extremely ornate studietto with the pavement and also the ceiling made of figurative enameled terracottas in such a way that it creates the greatest admiration in whosoever enters the room.”⁹⁹ The floor tiles were destroyed in the remodel that removed the *scrittoio*, though the ceiling tiles that decorated the barrel vaulted space were saved. Now housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the tiles are classic examples of della Robbia’s blue and white tin-glazed terracotta works. The twelve tiles that comprised the central portion of the ceiling decoration portrayed the Labors of the Months (Figure 30). In the center of each circle, a laborer is seen completing the labor required that month, while the border of the tile gave a visual account of the amount of daylight available during the average day that month, as well as the location of the sun in the appropriate house of Zodiac. Though the subject matter of the tiles was common throughout medieval Italy, the craftsmanship and pigmentation of the tiles made them an eye catching element of the *scrittoio*.

The contents of the study were the most valuable pieces of the personal collection of the Medici. Though these objects obviously impressed to guests, their inclusion in the

⁹⁹ Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace*, 164.

scrittoio was first and foremost for the pleasure and study of Piero or Lorenzo.¹⁰⁰ It is from the ancient coins and texts contained in this room that Lorenzo's tutors will go about providing him the humanist education his parents sought for him; likewise, this is where Piero retreated to read when gout limited his movements.¹⁰¹ Tucked away, behind the barrier of two semi-private rooms, the *scrittoio* is arguably the most private space of the principal suite. The only guests allowed to penetrate its beautiful wooden depths were those whom Piero or Lorenzo saw as trustworthy and capable of respecting and understanding the objects within. In the grand scheme of the Palazzo, the *scrittoio* was a treasure and was treated as such. Access to the room was a gift to the highest level Medici supporters, one equivalent with an invitation into the family itself.

Personal and Privileged

Invited and honored, a guest to the Palazzo Medici who fell within the *parente* category was rare. Typically of equal rank or higher to the Medici in social and political standing, these guests were treated in a manner that insured their continued support of the family. Within the Palazzo Medici, this resulted in access to all areas of the residence, regardless of the privacy normally accorded to the space. This was demonstrated amply in the diplomatic visit of Galeazzo Maria Sforza to the Palazzo Medici in 1459. The young Count of Pavia, heir to the Duke of Milan, and his group of advisors were allowed

¹⁰⁰ There were *scrittoio* included in every suite of rooms within the Palazzo Medici, thus Cosimo and Giovanni/Giuliano did need to share in the study of the principal chamber. Lorenzo's study housed by far the largest collection, in part because of his own antiquarian interests, but also because he inherited the collections of his father, Piero, and brother, Giuliano, upon their deaths.

¹⁰¹ Ames-Lewis, *The library and manuscripts of Piero di Cosimo de' Medici*, 336-337.

access to the best places of the residence due to their position as the envoy of Cosimo de' Medici's ally, Francesco Sforza.

Greeted in the family chapel, housed in the chamber of Piero, and shown throughout the Palazzo, these guests had all the benefits of family. Particularly within the *anticamera* and *scrittoio*, these guests were allowed to view the seemingly unedited spaces of the family. For instance, the religious artworks of the *anticamera* were specific, unlike those of the *camera*. Featuring works that involved primarily the Virgin and Christ, these religious works were traditional and eminently appropriate in a space typically reserved for women and children; thus, these works could be the natural choice for the room. However, the inclusion of the portraits of Sforza and Gattamelata are evidence that the room did not escape the manipulation that marks the rest of the Palazzo. The décor of the room speaks primarily to the respectable wife and obedient child and that is perhaps exactly what a guest was supposed to observe of the room.

The *scrittoio* seems to have an odd juxtaposition of purposes. It was the most hidden, private space of the Palazzo but at the same time, the most arranged for impressive display. Guests were stunned by all elements of the room, from its contents, cabinetry, and ceiling, to its floor; the room was truly the crowning jewel of the Palazzo Medici. However, as none of the other classes of visitors write of the wonders of this room, the *parenti* seem to be the only recipients of this expression of the Medici's supreme wealth and elite education. The decision to sequester the best objects of the Medici collection in this small room likely stems from the same one that led to the decorative scheme of the courtyard—a careful attention to that line between citizen and

prince. To display these objects to every visitor to the Palazzo Medici would have been considered too ostentatious for a citizen of Florence. However, as the Medici also had to entertain and interact with the “princes” of Italy, they need to possess an environment commensurate with their guests and evidential of their own status. Within the Palazzo, these environments were by default the private spaces, such as the chapel or *scrittoio*, due to the political structure of Florence which demanded some level of austerity from its citizens. Rather than chafe at these restrictions, the Medici seem to have embraced them within the Palazzo, using the access to these spaces to visibly distinguish between their guests. With the accounts of Sforza and other *parenti* circulating through letters, people learned of the treasures of the Palazzo Medici and desired similar access, to see for themselves the bowls of gems, shelves of books, and vases of untold value. The *amici*, who could see the door to the *anticamera* but not cross its threshold, were aware that they were not the most privileged of the Medici’s guests. Like the courtyard *vicini*, they too had something to aspire towards.

The recently built residence of the Medici was put to good use in the reception of visitors of all kinds, though perhaps no group appreciated the Palazzo as much as those who were honored enough to experience the whole interior. Niccolò de’Carissimi da Parma wrote to the Duke of Milan that:

To me it seems like being in a new world, and I am of the opinion that in my days I shall never see anything worthier than this which I have seen and am first seeing. And not

only I hold this opinion, but all the company here, who do nothing else but discuss it.¹⁰²

For a visitor of de 'Carisimi's significance to leave the Palazzo with such a feeling was beneficial to Cosimo, who knew that his generosity with the Duke's son and advisors would reflect well on the strength and constancy of their relationship. Unlike the visitor of the courtyard, the *parenti* were treated to the personal collections and spaces of the Medici because they could be trusted to see the multifaceted value to possessing such treasures. To share the materials and rewards of their vast wealth with the *vicini* would only earn the Medici more trouble. In some ways more dangerous than the crowds of neighbors, the *amici* were likewise treated to select elements of the Medici's personal world. For the *parenti*, a close relationship likely earned them much more than a tour of the Palazzo Medici in the long run, but the role played by the Palazzo Medici in nurturing that relationship should not be overlooked.

¹⁰² Hatfield, "Some Unknown Descriptions," 233.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Through the accounts of visitors and the content of inventories, this thesis has aimed to demonstrate how the Palazzo Medici was used in the era of the early Medici (1445-1492). This thesis has considered the art and architecture of the residence together because a complete context of a guest's visit to the Palazzo factored into how the building served this purpose. In the hands of the Medici, the Palazzo was a multifunctional tool, well suited to the maintaining the family's political faction. While housing the family and their collections, the building also provided the Medici the stage on which to present themselves to Florence and the world. Emphasizing and manipulating the concept of privacy and access to it, the family was able to privilege spaces within the palace in order to provide an initial layer of meaning to a guest's visit.

The least privileged of any guest to the Palazzo Medici was the neighbor of the Medici, the *vicino*. This common citizen of Florence sought favors from the Medici in exchange for his dedication to the family's faction. With little status to entice the Medici, he waited in the only completely public space of the Palazzo, the courtyard. Meanwhile, certain visitors that had more to offer the Medici, being of equal or higher status than the family (*amici* or *parenti*), were afforded some privileges. Not forced to wait with the lowest of the guests in the courtyard, these guests were brought within the main living spaces of the Palazzo on the *piano nobile*. Containing the suites of the Medici, this level of the residence was restricted all but to those deemed suitable by the Medici. Though

staged as private spaces of the family, the bedchambers and chapel of the *piano nobile* were frequently penetrated by visitors to the Palazzo Medici. This indicates their actual separation from these spaces from the public spaces was not absolute. Access to the Palazzo Medici indicated the privileges the *amici* had earned in the service of the the family. Such privileges resulted in a shorter wait for the Medici and an increased likelihood that the visitor would get from the Medici the favor he desired. The backing of the Medici, despite the sometimes rocky political environment of Florence, almost always proved to be beneficial to the recipient.

Building upon the notion of access to private spaces as a privilege, the artwork and decoration of the Palazzo conveyed nuanced messages to guests, furthering the building's dedication to the maintenance of the faction. Demonstrating their cognizance of the unspoken power of images, the Medici decorated the significant reception rooms of the Palazzo in a manner that constructed for their visitor a concept of the Medici dynasty. Artworks and furniture throughout the space were selected with specific goals in mind. The guests of the courtyard (*vicini*), for instance, were reminded via works of classical inspiration that the Medici family were mere citizens of Florence too, and that ultimately, they were not the tyrants some contemporary critics were making them out to be. The visitors to the *camera* (*amici*) understood the Medici to be concerned with the growth and status of their family, and as devout and serious Christians, moral at their core. Meanwhile, the rare guest who saw all of the Palazzo (*parente*) enjoyed the education, wealth, and faith of the family, likely seeing in the rooms and collections of the family the elements that made them powerful and thus, helpful. Each type of guest left the

Palazzo with a slightly different conception of the Medici family, one that was designed for him.

The Palazzo Medici was thus designed and decorated with the reception of guests in mind. Like the senatorial class of the ancient republic of Rome, the leading citizens of Florence maintained their power through the creation of political groups or factions, whose large numbers allowed them to maintain a majority of elected officials in the government. Maintaining control over Florence for most of the quattrocento, the Medici faction gathered in and around the residence of their leader, Cosimo. Imbued with the power to impart messages via the architecture that manipulated the idea of privacy and the art that celebrated the most significant traits of the family, the Palazzo Medici was an integral part of the maintenance of the political faction that the Medici controlled.

APPENDIX

FIGURES

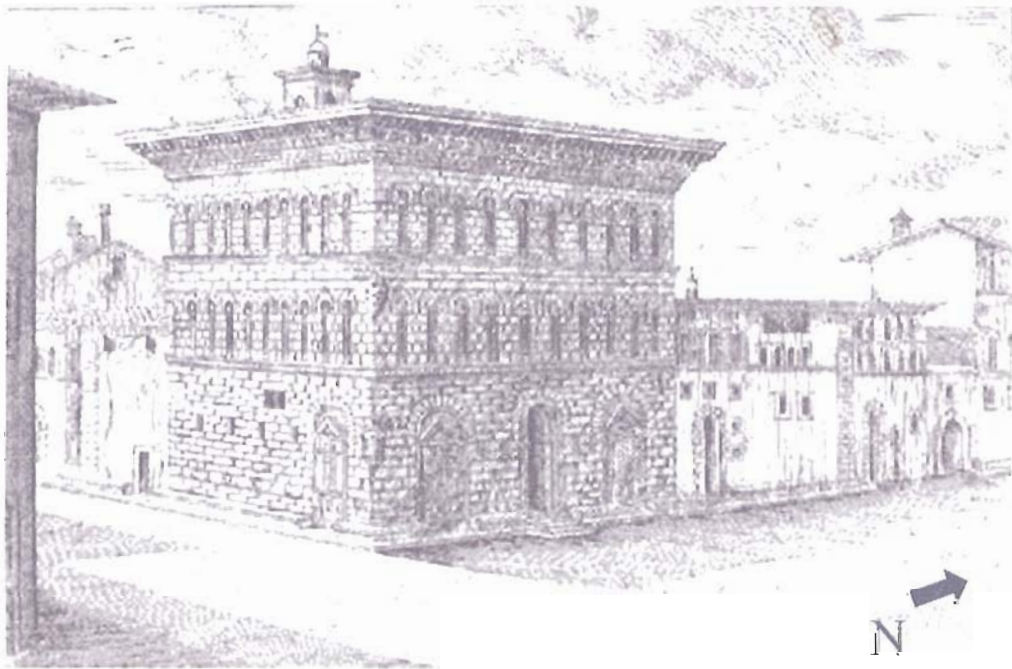


Figure 1. *View of Medici Palace and Via Larga to the north* (from Leopoldo del Migliore, *Firenze Città Nobilissima*, Florence, 1684), Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence, Italy.

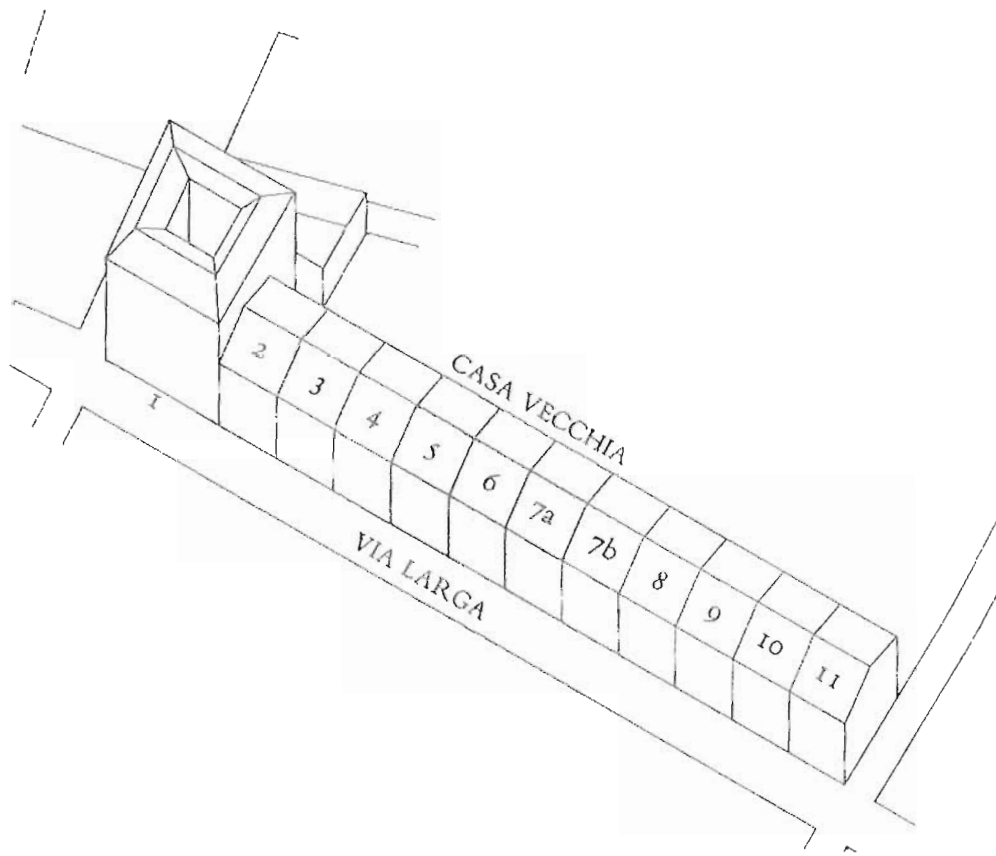


Figure 2. Properties along the Via Larga, c. 1460. Florence, Italy. (I. The Palazzo Medici)

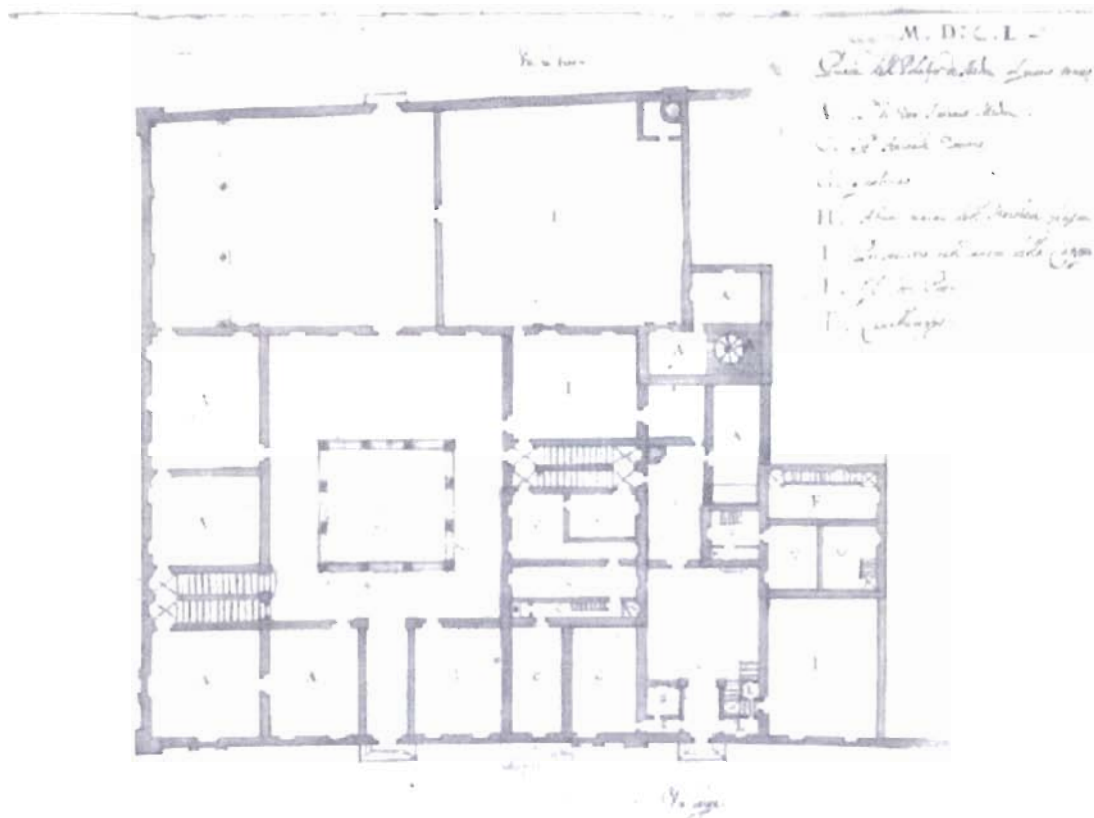


Figure 3. Pianta di Palazzo Medici: pianterreno 1650. Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Guardaroba Medicea, 1016.



Figure 4. Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, *Benches on the exterior of the Palazzo Medici, along the Via Larga*, c.1444. Florence, Italy. © Alec and/or Marlene Hartill.

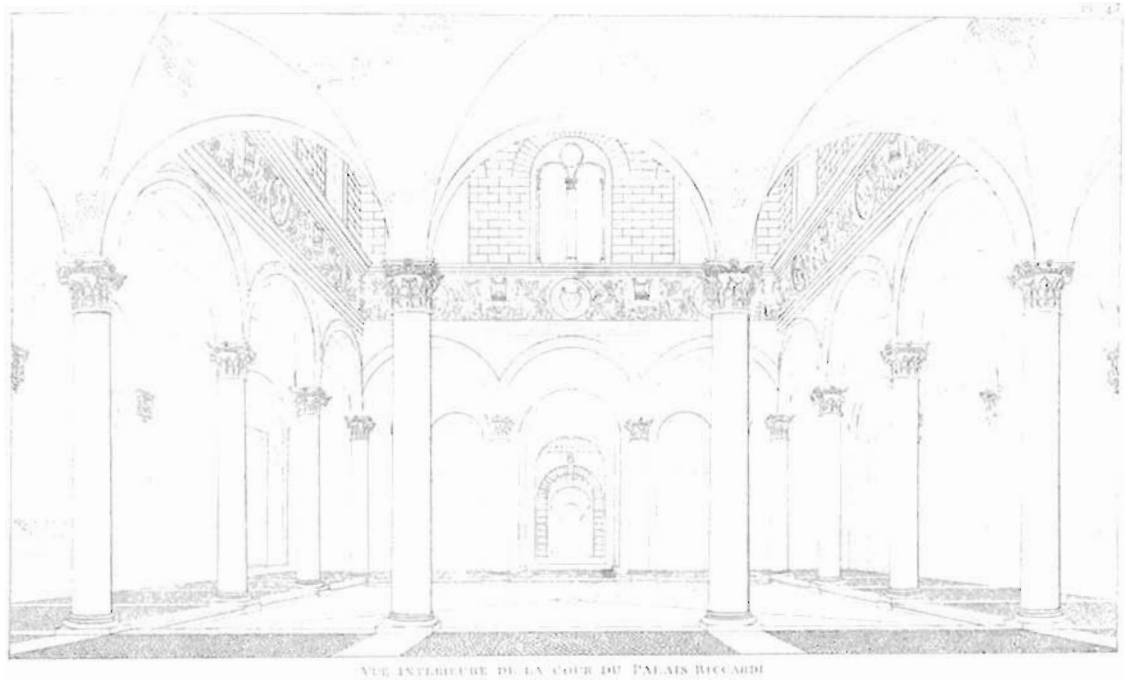


Figure 5. Auguste Henri Victor Grandjean de Montigny (French author, 1776-1850), *Architecture toscane, ou, Palais, maisons, et autres edifices de la Toscane: Perspective of the light court of Palazzo Medici-Riccardi*, 1846. Ink on paper (offset lithography).



Figure 6. Donatello, *David*. Bronze, 185 cm. Museo nazionale del Bargello, Florence, Italy.



Figure 7. Reconstruction of the courtyard of the Palazzo Medici, with blank walls and Donatello's *David* on a column in the center. Florence, Italy. (Picture altered by author.)



Figure 8. Donatello, *David (Marble David)*, 1416. Marble, 191 cm. Museo nazionale del Bargello, Florence, Italy.



Figure 9. Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, *Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Florence: inner cortile, detail of arcade and decorative medallions*, begun 1444. Florence, Italy.



Figure 10. Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, *Palazzo Medici courtyard*: roundels with mythological scenes and arms of the Medici, begun 1444. Florence, Italy.



Figure 11. *Detail of roundel in Palazzo Medici courtyard, begun 1444. Florence, Italy.*



Figure 12. Roman, *Bust of Hadrian*, 2nd century AD copy of model from 117 AD. Marble, 68 cm. Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

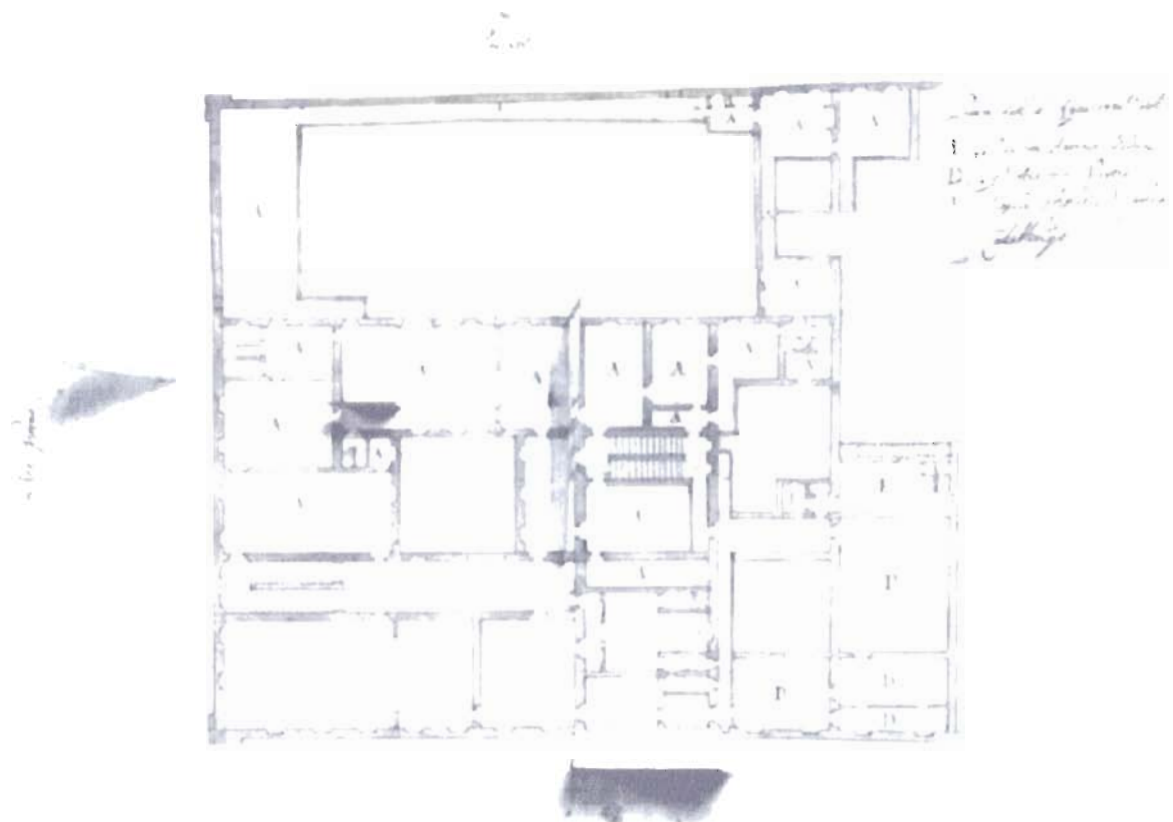


Figure 13. Pianta di Palazzo Medici: il primo piano, 1650. Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Guardaroba Medicea, 1016.



Figure 14. Fra Filippo Lippi, *Saint Jerome in Penance*, c. 1439. Tempera on panel, 53 x 37 cm. Staatliches Lindenau-Museum, Altenburg, Germany.



Figure 15. Donatello, *Ascension and Delivery of the Keys to Saint Peter*, 1425-7. Marble relief, 41 x 104.1 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Great Britain.



Figure 16. Donatello, *Feast of Herod*, 1435. Marble relief, 49.8 x 71.8 cm. Musée des beaux-arts, Lille, France.



Figure 17. Fra Filippo Lippi, *The Annunciation*, c.1450. Egg tempera on wood, 68.6 x 152.7 cm. National Gallery, Great Britain.



Figure 18. Fra Filippo Lippi, *St. John with six other saints (Seven Saints)*, c.1450. Egg tempera on wood, 66 x 150.5 cm. National Gallery, Great Britain.



Figure 19. Mino da Fiesole, *Piero de' Medici*. Marble. Museo nazionale del Bargello, Florence, Italy.



Figure 20. Francesco Pesellino, Upper: *Triumph of Love, Chastity, and Death*. Lower: *Triumph of Fame, Time, and Eternity*, c. 1448. Tempera on wood, 45.4 x 157.4 cm. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, United States.



Figure 21. Giovanni di Ser Giovanni (called Lo Scheggia), *The Triumph of Fame*, c.1449. Tempera, silver, and gold on wood, with engaged frame, diameter 92.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, United States.



Figure 22. (L)Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, *Palazzo Medici Riccardi*; interior of the chapel. Florence, Italy. (R) Reconstruction of the chapel without the frescoes of Benozzo Gozzoli (done by author).



Figure 23. Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, *Pavement of the Palazzo Medici chapel*, c. 1450. Marble. Florence, Italy.

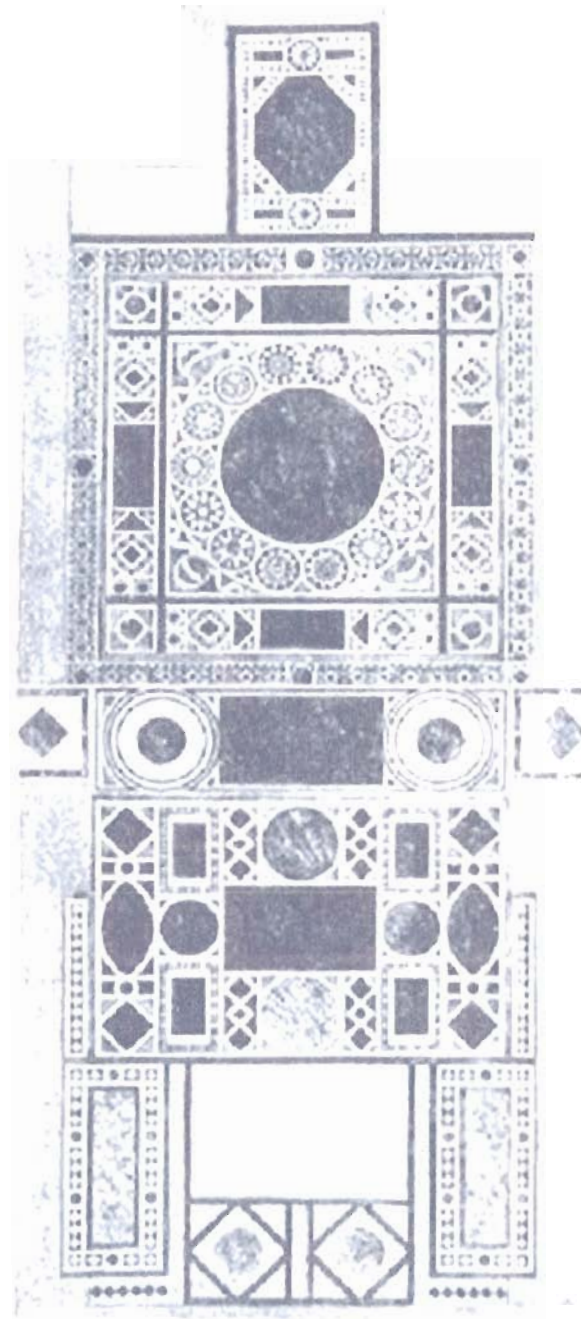


Figure 24. Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, *Overhead view of pavement of the Palazzo Medici chapel*, c. 1450. Marble. Florence, Italy.



Figure 25. Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, *Ceiling of the Palazzo Medici chapel*, c. 1450. Tempera and gilding on wood coffers. Florence, Italy.



Figure 26. Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, *Detail of the ceiling of Palazzo Medici chapel, Saint Bernardino monogram of Christ*, c. 1450. Tempera and gilding on wood. Florence, Italy.



Figure 27. Fra Filippo Lippi, *Adoration of the Child*, c.1459. Painting on panel. Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, Germany.



Figure 28. Domenico Veneziano, *Adoration of the Magi*. Tempera on poplar wood panel, (original piece is circular) diameter 84 cm. Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, Germany.



Figure 29. Designed by Francesco di Giorgio Martini and executed by Giuliano da Maiano, *Studiolo from the Ducal Palace in Gubbio, Panels 9-12*, c.1478-82. Walnut, beech, rosewood, oak and fruitwoods in walnut base, H. 485 cm, W 518 cm, D. 384 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, United States.



Figure 30. Luca della Robbia, *December*, c.1450-56. Glazed terracotta, 60 x 60 x 10 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, Great Britain.

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