Lorenzo de’ Medici was a key figure in creating “The Renaissance.” A patron of the arts in fifteenth-century Florence, he dedicated himself even more to collecting objects from the past, documented in 173 unknown letters published here for the first time. This material provides the most ample picture of an early collector. Lorenzo acquired ancient sculptures to embellish his palace, but his predilection was for small objects – coins, hardstone vases, and gems. He collected objects from post-Antique times as well. To build his collection Lorenzo developed contacts that spanned Italy, France, and the Levant. However, his main source was the Roman dealer Giovanni Ciampolini, whose scandalous behavior demonstrates gamesmanship in the art market, true then as now. The book reveals how objects were studied, where they were displayed, the criteria for selecting them, and their monetary worth, and it examines the public and private sides of Lorenzo as a collector. After his death, others were eager to obtain his objects, and information about early collectors highlights where the collector Lorenzo was unique.

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Lorenzo de’ Medici
Collector and Antiquarian

Laurie Fusco
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More information
To Ruth O. Rubinstein

and Nicolai Rubinstein
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Laurie Fusco
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Prologue: The Documents

I. The Appendixes

Letters from Lorenzo’s correspondence are in the first section of Appendix I. They are mostly in the Archivio di Stato and the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence. Many of these were from members of the Tornabuoni family working at the Medici bank branch in Rome – Giovanni, Antonio, and Nofri, assisted by Luigi da Barberino (we call them “the bank group”). In addition, some letters were sent to Lorenzo’s various representatives, including his secretaries Niccolò Michelozzi and Piero Dovizi da Bibbiena. Only ten letters were written by Lorenzo himself (and one by his brother Giuliano); however, joining these are twenty-nine summaries of letters Lorenzo dictated, as recorded in the registers (the protocolli). In the second section of Appendix I are “other” letters about Lorenzo, his objects, or his interest in antiquities. They are primarily located in archives outside Florence.

Renaissance texts are in Appendix II, the first section with notices about Lorenzo’s objects when they were in the hands of previous owners, and the second with texts describing him as a collector, his interest in antiquities, or his objects. Following are two sections with information about the fate of Lorenzo’s objects after his death, that is, what happened to them following the French invasion of Florence in 1494.

The Medici inventories are in Appendix III. The first section has entries from Lorenzo’s inventory of 1492 and also entries from the inventories of his forebears; the latter are important because they list some objects that were not in Lorenzo’s inventory but which he obviously inherited. The second section has entries from the sixteenth century, mostly grand-ducal inventories, which provide further information about Lorenzo’s objects.

II. People Mentioned in the Documents

In the Index an asterisk (*) indicates that there is additional information about various people in the documentation. Because this book is addressed primarily
to art historians, notes about artists (except for little-known ones) are brief, and those about bankers, humanists, political appointees, rulers, secretaries, and the like are more ample. Notes about owners of antiquities are sometimes extensive so that Lorenzo can be better seen in a context of collecting.

### III. Transcriptions and Translations of Documents and Early Printed Books

Documents are transcribed with the original spelling of words, for example, “verità”; when a letter is missing from a word whose meaning might not be clear without it, the letter is added in brackets, for example, “ce[r]te.” If the spelling of the word or the grammar is odd, this is indicated by “[sic]” and an explanation might be given, for example, “prede [sic=pietre].” Modern punctuation is used, and accents and apostrophes are added. Where the writer crossed out words, it is indicated by “[canceled],” and the words are preserved, for example, “Questa è molta più bella e più [canceled: sottile] gie[n]tile.” If there is a repetition, it is indicated by “[repeated],” and the words are kept, for example, “M'aveva detto che a Mantova [repeated: che a Mantova] era rimasto non so che vasi belli.” When a space is left because the writer neglected to put in the words, it is indicated by “[blank].” If the paper is torn so that letters or words are missing, this is indicated by “[paper torn here].” and if a spot on the paper obscures the words or the handwriting is unclear, it is indicated by “[illegible].” For titles of people, the uppercase is used only when the person is being addressed (“Vostra Magnificenza mi harà per excusato se non la ha così come voleva”); the lowercase is used if the person is being referred to (“Intendo el magnifico Lorenzo havere havuto quella bella corniola”). Exceptions are for elevated titles, such as a Pope (“Nostro Signore”) or a King (“Re di Francia”), a person not identified by a name (“el Cardinale della Colonna”), and governmental bodies (“Signori Priori di Libertà e l Gonfalonieri di Giustitia”).

Unlike a document, a passage in an early printed book, which is a kind of public record, is, for the most part, copied as it appears (punctuation, capitalization, etc.). However, to make the reading easier, abbreviations are expanded: “&” is changed to “et”; “u” is changed to “v”; and “j” is changed to “i.”

In the translations of both documents and printed books, the proper names are sometimes clarified. For example, “Guillaume d’Estouteville” replaces “Jeronimo Tutavilla” because this Cardinal was French, and “Giuliano della Rovere” replaces his appellation by the Cardinal’s titular church “San Piero a Vincula.” Titles are anglicized except for marchese, messer, ser, signore, madonna, madama, and monsignore. In the translations, “detto,” “decto,” and “dicto” are included, for example, “And to the said Carlo.” To simplify the variants “predetto,” “sopradetto,” “sopracritto,” “prefatto,” and preditto,” they are all translated as “aforesaid.”

The Florentine calendar year began on 25 March instead of our 1 January. Although we have used the modern style, we put the Florentine year in brackets, indicated by “s.f.” for “stile fiorentino.”
The abbreviations used for the location of archives and libraries are given at the beginning of the bibliography.

In citing a document, the word “filza” or “busta” (both meaning “box”) is excluded, as is the word “folio” or “carta” (both meaning “page”). For example, “MAP, filza 52, folio 14” is abbreviated to MAP 52, 14. Documents separated into folders in the box are indicated by “ins.” for “inserto” (“folder”). All numbering of boxes and their folios are the currently used numbers. When the reader finds a different citation in the literature, it is because either there is a mistake or the numbering has been changed.

IV. CURRENCIES AND MEASUREMENTS

For currencies, see R. A. Goldthwaite, in Goldthwaite and G. Mandich, Studi sulla moneta fiorentina (secoli XIII–XVI), Florence, 1994. For measurements, see M. Spallanzani, Libro e Inventari.

The currencies were primarily the Venetian gold ducat (ducato) and the Florentine gold florin (fiorino), of equal weight and with approximately the same value. The currency of Rome was the cameral florin (fiorino di camera) and weighed somewhat less.

The florin was divided into soldi and denari:

1 florin = 20 soldi = 240 denari
1 soldo = 12 denari

The following abbreviations are used in a ledger or inventory: f. = florin, s. = soldo, d. = denaro, duc. = ducat.

Two currencies appear in Francesco Cegia’s I ricordi (Doc. 233): the fiorino largo d’oro/fiorino largo d’oro in oro and the fiorino largo di grossi, and Goldthwaite is cited in a note.

The standard linear measurements were the braccio (literally meaning the “arm”) and the soldo. One Florentine braccio equals 58.36 centimeters. There were 20 soldi in a braccio, and therefore each soldo is about 2.92 centimeters.

Weights for precious metals in Florence were measured by the pound (libbra), which equals 339.54 grams. The subdivisions were as follows:

1 pound = 12 ounces (once), and therefore each ounce is 28.29 grams
1 ounce = 24 denari, and therefore each denaro (sometimes spelled danaro) is 1.17 grams

V. WORDS FOR OBJECTS

ANCIENT COINS AND RENAISSANCE MEDALS

The word “medals” (medaglie in Italian and nomismae in Latin) can mean ancient coins or Renaissance medals. In most cases, the meaning is clear because of
the context or because the writer qualified the objects, for example, "medaglie antichi." When the meaning is unclear, we use "medallions," thereby indicating coins and/or medals. Sometimes coins were described as being "carved" (see Objects Made in Metal in this section).

**TABLET**

The word *tavola*, normally meaning “table,” which appears in a few documents, was also used for a “tablet,” for example, an ancient inscribed tablet in marble, bronze, or lead. Also, “tavole” or “tavolette” could be the plaques on which cameos or coins were placed. Additionally, “tavola” was used for a small slice of a precious or semiprecious stone, such as “una tavoletta” of jasper.

**HARDSTONE VASES**

Today scholars sometimes call all hardstone objects hardstone “vases,” no matter what their shape (a cup, dish, pitcher, plate, wine cooler, etc.), and this is followed here. However, when the shape is given, it is specified, for example, “cup” for *coppa*.

**GEMS**

Usually the words are straightforward (*gemme* in Italian and *gemmae* in Latin). However, other words were sometimes used (*pietre* and *pietre fine* in Italian and *lapilli* in Latin). A “cameo” (*cammeo*) is carved up in relief, and an “intaglio” (*intaglio*) is carved into the stone, but when they are used in the plural, they can mean gems in general, which we indicate in the translations. Also when used in the plural, “cornelians” (*corniuole*) sometimes means “intaglios” made of any kind of stone.

**GEMS VERSUS JEWELS VERSUS PRECIOUS OBJECTS**

The word “gems” means not only ancient gems but also jewels (like diamonds and sapphires), and it can be used collectively to mean both ancient gems and jewels. When the meaning is unclear, alternative translations are given and the word is put in brackets, for example, “gems/jewels [gemmae].”

The words *gioie* in Italian and *iocalia* in Latin are particularly difficult because it can mean ancient gems or jewels or a combination of various precious objects (gems, jewels, jewelry, hardstones vases, and/or coins). When a precise meaning is clear from the context, it is put in brackets, for example, “gioie [i.e., gems].” When the meaning is unclear, a suggested translation is given, with the word in brackets, for example, “gems/jewels [gioie].”

**OBJECTS MADE IN METAL**

For bronze objects the word is usually straightforward (*bronzo* in Italian and *aere* in Latin). However, bronze coins were sometimes described as being in “metal”
(metallo) to distinguish them from coins made in more precious gold and silver; furthermore, since bronze is an alloy of various metals, other words were used, such as “copper” (rame). In the translations the original word is kept, but bronze is put in brackets, for example, “coins in gold, silver or metal [i.e., bronze].”

Sometimes a coin or piece of metalwork was said to be “carved” (scolpita or intagliata in Italian and caelata or toreumata in Latin). It means “cast.”

MATERIALS OF HARDSTONE VASES AND GEMS