

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00294-4 - Gender, Honor, and Charity in Late Renaissance Florence

Philip Gavitt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

GENDER, HONOR, AND CHARITY IN LATE RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

This book examines the important social role of charitable institutions for women and children in late Renaissance Florence. Wars, social unrest, disease, and growing economic inequality on the Italian peninsula displaced hundreds of thousands of families during this period. To handle the social crises generated by war, competition for social position, and the abandonment of children, a series of private and public initiatives expanded existing charitable institutions and founded new ones. Philip Gavitt's research reveals the important role played by lineage ideology among Florence's elites in the use and manipulation of these charitable institutions in the often futile pursuit of economic and social stability. Considering families of all social levels, he argues that the pursuit of family wealth and prestige often worked at cross-purposes with the survival of the very families it was supposed to preserve.

Philip Gavitt is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of History at Saint Louis University and the founder of its Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies. A recipient of several fellowships from the Fulbright-Hays Program, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, and both a former Fellow and visiting professor at the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies (Villa I Tatti), he is the author of *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence* (1990).

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00294-4 - Gender, Honor, and Charity in Late Renaissance Florence
Philip Gavitt
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00294-4 - Gender, Honor, and Charity in Late Renaissance Florence

Philip Gavitt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

GENDER, HONOR, AND CHARITY IN LATE RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

PHILIP GAVITT

Saint Louis University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00294-4 - Gender, Honor, and Charity in Late Renaissance Florence
Philip Gavitt
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107002944

© Philip Gavitt 2011

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2011

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Gavitt, Philip, 1950–
Gender, honor, and charity in late Renaissance Florence / Philip Gavitt.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-00294-4 (hardback)

1. Charities – Italy – Florence – History. 2. Family – Economic aspects – Italy –
Florence – History. I. Title.

HV295.F5G38 2011

361.70945'51109031-dc22 2010042281

ISBN 978-1-107-00294-4 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for
external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee
that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00294-4 - Gender, Honor, and Charity in Late Renaissance Florence

Philip Gavitt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

To Terry



Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00294-4 - Gender, Honor, and Charity in Late Renaissance Florence

Philip Gavitt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

She was the youngest daughter of Prince – , a leading nobleman of Milan, who could count himself among the richest men of the city. But the high opinion he had of his title made him regard his resources as barely sufficient – actually inadequate, in fact – to support its dignity. His one thought was to preserve the family fortune at least at its present level, and to ensure that it would never be split up, as far as lay in his power. We are not told exactly how many children he had, but only that all the younger ones were destined to the religious life, so that his wealth could pass intact to the eldest son, whose fate it was to carry on the family name – in other words, to beget children, and then to torture them and himself in the same way that his father had done. The poor Signora was still hidden from view in her mother's womb when her future status was irrevocably fixed.

– Alessandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, trans. Bruce Penman
(London: Penguin, 1972), 175

“Gli italiani sono indisciplinati cronici, sembrano non comprendere che la libertà individuale si coniuga con quella collettiva, che le regole vanno rispettate.” Se il ministro dei Lavori pubblici, Enrico Micheli, reagisce con un laico rimprovero al weekend con 51 vittime, il teologo ammonisce: “Se il carabiniere non vede, Dio vi guarda. Violare il codice della strada è peccato.”

– *La Repubblica*, 21 July 1999

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----------------|
| Acknowledgments | <i>page ix</i> |
| Introduction | i |
| 1. Charity, Discipline, and State-Building in Cinquecento Florence | 26 |
| 2. Gender, Lineage Ideology, and the Development of a Status Culture | 67 |
| 3. Law and the Majesty of Practice | 93 |
| 4. Innocence and Danger: Pedagogy, Discipline, and the Culture of Masculinity | 122 |
| 5. From <i>Putte</i> to <i>Puttane</i> : Female Foundlings and Charitable Institutions in Florence | 160 |
| 6. Unruly Nuns: <i>Clausura</i> and Confinement | 196 |
| Conclusion: The Honor of God, of the City, and of Their Own Houses | 228 |
| Bibliography | 245 |
| Index | 265 |

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-00294-4 - Gender, Honor, and Charity in Late Renaissance Florence
Philip Gavitt
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00294-4 - Gender, Honor, and Charity in Late Renaissance Florence

Philip Gavitt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Long book projects seldom, if ever, come to completion without the assistance of institutions, colleagues, friends, and family – certainly, this is no exception. Fundamental to the support of this project have been the National Endowment for the Humanities, which provided two summer stipends and a yearlong fellowship for college teachers in 1996–7; the American Council of Learned Societies, in the summer of 1990; and the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies (Villa I Tatti) and its director at that time, Walter Kaiser, who through the Leopold Schepp Foundation provided a fellowship in 1990–1, and again, quite generously, a visiting professorship in 1996–7. I wish especially to thank Patricia Rubin, the Villa I Tatti acting director that academic year, whose scholarly collaboration in particular on matters Vasarian and Borghinian was generous and invaluable, as was the assistance of Allen Grieco, Sara Matthews Grieco, Peggy Haynes, Julian Kliemann, and Michael Rocke. The Villa I Tatti seems to have a particular gift for bringing together scholars whose work is closely related, and I benefited from collaborations far too numerous to list here. One collaboration stands out, however, and that is the many useful and witty discussions with William Wallace, to which I always look forward in ways that only good friends can. For the Venetian references in the book, I thank the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation – its funding of another project inadvertently yielded documents of interest to this project as well.

Many Italian institutions and friends deserve thanks, such as the Archivio di Stato, the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, and the Biblioteca Moreniana in Florence. Obviously the most crucial institution for my research has been the archive of the Ospedale degli Innocenti. During the years of my research there, Franco Sartini and his family emerged as particularly welcoming and gentle spirits, as did Lucia Sandri, whose support, friendship, and scholarly collaboration have made my forays into the Innocenti archives a constant source of joy. Scholars can

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00294-4 - Gender, Honor, and Charity in Late Renaissance Florence

Philip Gavitt

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

now also benefit from her dedication to the reorganization and digitization of the Innocenti's archival inventory. Of the many Italian scholars who were willing to discuss areas of mutual interest, Gustavo Bertoli, Carlo Corsini, Maria Fubini Leuzzi, Pietro Mozzato, Giuliano Pinto, Sergio Piva, and Pier Paolo Viazzo were all gracious hosts and colleagues.

The College of Arts and Sciences at Saint Louis University has generously supported my research with numerous Mellon grants and summer stipends. In addition, my colleagues in Saint Louis University's Department of History have also listened to my ideas with a keen and even occasionally sympathetic ear, especially Don Critchlow, Tom Madden, and Hal Parker; the executive committee of the department has been generous with departmental grants. Michal Rozbicki generously helped obtain copyright permission for the cover image from the National Museum in Posnan, Poland. Practically every graduate student in the department has helped in some way, but in particular Chris Lane's eye saved me from a potentially embarrassing omission, and a seminar discussion with Patrick O'Banion and Vincent Ryan considerably sharpened my thinking on the limits of the term "confessionalization." Eric and Julie Forster were wonderful companions, neither annoying nor crazy.

The support, goodwill, and even patronage of colleagues in the field was indispensable, especially from Renée Baernstein, Karen-edis Barzman, Elizabeth Bernhardt, Judith Brown, Gene Brucker, William Connell, Jonathan Davies, Wietse de Boer, Konrad Eisenbichler, Felicia Else, Edward English, Angela Fritsen, Mayu Fujikawa, Richard Goldthwaite, John Henderson, Bill Kent, Dale Kent, David Kertzer, Julius Kirshner, Thomas Kuehn, Marion Leathers Kuntz, Carol Lansing, Thomas Mayer, Tony Molho, Reinhold Mueller, John Najemy, John Paoletti, David Peterson, Elizabeth Pilliod, Eve Sanders, Rick Scorza, Jutta Sperling, and Nicholas Terpstra. To the last two scholars I owe a special debt of gratitude. The late Marvin Becker's influence is, I hope, apparent – his absence is certainly deeply felt. I thank my editor at Cambridge University Press, Beatrice Rehl, as well as Emily Spangler, Brigitte Coulton, and James Dunn, for their patience and their tireless efforts during the production of this book. I beg forgiveness from any colleagues or friends inadvertently omitted; I thank all of them as well, retaining responsibility for any errors in the book that remain.

In addition to the Sartini family, I owe a great debt to the Italian families who provided shelter and often a good deal more: the late Paolo Poesio, and Carla Poesio, as well as Marino Zorzi and Rosella Mamoli-Zorzi. Finally, my own family has suffered mostly in silence while they waited for this project to finally come together. My sons, Brendan, Thomas, and Leo, have been staunch advocates, close friends, and loyal Italophiles. This book's dedication reflects gratitude beyond measure.