1 Florence and Cosimo

The city of Florence enjoyed a lively intellectual and artistic community in the middle and later decades of the sixteenth century. The city's literary academy, the Accademia Fiorentina, sponsored weekly public lectures on Petrarch and Dante as well as a series of lectures for members. They kept the study and composition of Florentine literature, old and new, at the center of attention for the city's elites. Even their quarrels engaged readers and partisans both in the city and across the Italian peninsula. Florence's longstanding and continuing achievements in the visual arts saw unprecedented support; they too came to enjoy a city-sponsored academy, the Accademia del Disegno. In addition, artists found themselves the subjects of a learned assessment of the history and rise of their fields with the publication of the *Lives of the Artists* by their colleague Giorgio Vasari. The classics professor Piero Vettori led a team of humanistically trained scholars in producing new and improved editions of Greek and Latin texts. The city produced a specialist in Florentine studies, Vincenzio Borghini, who helped plan public celebrations and artistic projects in addition to his research on the city's past. The noted intellectual Benedetto Varchi returned to Florence; and the list of writers, poets, and men of letters in the city continued to grow in the years that followed.

Florentines had long reputations for strong and divergent opinions, and the world of letters was no exception. Debates in person and in writing were regular features of its landscape. Yet Florentines also continued to share a range of common interests, and to translate those interests into a number of major collaborative projects in editorial work, publications, and scholarly research. One of the most notable and typically Florentine features of this community was the dominance of humanistic and literary concerns. In many other Italian cities, particularly in university towns,

philosophy, law, and medicine all maintained high profiles among members of the learned community. In the cities of northern Europe, the local theologians and their debates about religious reform during these years pushed other topics to one side. Many Florentines cared deeply about religious issues, and Florentines contributed to advances in legal scholarship as well as philosophy. Nonetheless, letters remained at the heart of their interests and at the center of their public cultural life.

One reason for the city's particular focus on the humanities was the relocation of its university culture to Pisa. Thus, for the greater part of the year, both faculty and students, particularly in medicine and law, held their own lectures, disputations, and gatherings there. More important was the city's own longstanding reputation as a center and home for humanistic scholarship and writing. When sixteenth-century Florentines wrote history, they could recall – and cite – Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini, and others who had established standards and new traditions of modern historical writing. When they edited ancient texts they could look with pride to Angelo Poliziano's principles of classical textual scholarship. Writers on art could build on the work of Leon Battista Alberti. In addition, many men of letters were not only scholars, but also authors. They composed letters and speeches, but especially they were writers of poetry. Their Latin verse added to the city's great tradition. In particular, however, Florence had been the home or the heritage of the writers who had laid the foundations of modern vernacular literature, notably Dante Alighieri, Francesco Petrarca, and Giovanni Boccaccio. Sixteenth-century Florentines wrote most of their poetry, as well as their prose, in their own tongue.

The world of letters was increasingly vernacular not just in Florence but across Italy. The ever-larger print industry broadened the readership of the modern language; the circles of academies and other societies that appeared in more and more cities produced streams of new poetry, mostly in vernacular and often idealizing the poetry of Petrarch. Although Florentines shared this feature with their Italian colleagues, given their unique relationship to the literary language their interests were particularly their own. The privileged situation of Florentines as the descendants of these literary giants might have led merely to localism or complacency. Instead, a number of Florentines engaged creatively with humanistic and literary issues. Some of that engagement was oral and face to face, and hence left no direct trace; most of the discussions and debates at the Accademia Fiorentina passed unrecorded, as did their

many conversations. Yet some exchanges were preserved in letters, and some of the lecturers edited and published their lectures. A number of publications, large and small, show clearly the signs of collaborative work, and of ongoing debate as well. The recurring nature of these exchanges compelled participants to consider which arguments persuaded their colleagues, and which needed refinement or more.

Just as important, these Florentines engaged with one another not simply on a single topic or even in a single discipline, but on several, and often over many years. They discussed not only poetry but also the language in which it was written, its history as well as its modern practice. Their interests continued to expand and develop; an interest in the language of Boccaccio's day might lead to curiosity about the customs and even the objects he described, including the era's visual culture from the practical level of family crests to the achievements of Giotto. Pierfrancesco Giambullari shows this overlapping set of interests in his work. Although he is now best known for his theories about the origins of the Florentine language, he also studied contemporary language usage; in addition, he assisted Vasari in the first edition of his *Lives of the Artists*. So too, Benedetto Varchi was admired for his poetry, but also for writing history as well as philosophy. Girolamo Mei, the classical scholar now remembered for his study of ancient music theory, also edited Greek tragedies, wrote on the nature of Tuscan verse, and carried on a much-followed debate with Vincenzio Borghini over how to assess material and textual evidence for the city's founding and location.

Not only did they find their studies of one subject enriched by the others; they also noticed similarities from one subject to the next. As they examined the history of the vernacular language, for example, they could see points of change similar to the moments of transition they found in architecture and painting. Changes over time were clearly the province of historical scholarship, a field in which Florentines excelled. Yet it seemed that conventional history, with its focus on rulers and politics, did not offer an effective way to explain developments in practices such as language that changed not due to the actions of individual rulers or leaders, but through collective usage. Indeed, as Benedetto Varchi would note, most ancient historians had failed even to describe the customary practices of their own times sufficiently in their writings for later readers to identify them accurately. They certainly offered no tools to examine or explain how customs developed and changed.

Thus Florentines worked during these decades, with increasing success, to turn the tools of humanist scholarship to the study of their modern language and then beyond, to the practices and the material products that made them distinctively Tuscan and Florentine. They began to take an interest in the writings, not always very humanistic or literary, of their fourteenth-century forebears, and the language in which they wrote. They studied the rise of communal governments and the factions of pope and emperor, Guelf and Ghibelline, which had given rise to Florence and its fellow city states, and looked back to the Carolingians and Ottonians who had shaped the power dynamics of the peninsula before them. The ages that Petrarch once had dismissed for failing so utterly to maintain the glory of antiquity, they began to appreciate as the eras that had given birth to their own culture. The study of language would remain their anchor for discussing and explaining the features of the past that fell outside the usual realm of historical study. These tools would continue to serve later generations of scholars in Florence and beyond who took an increasing interest in the study of groups of people, their language, and culture. They also bequeathed successfully a narrative about the rebirth of learning and the arts in Italy in general and in Florence in particular.

These achievements, as well as the community that produced them, would hardly have seemed likely in the Florence of the 1520s and 1530s, as these scholars grew up, received their educations, and in some cases began their careers. During those years the city's future seemed likely to be as unstable as its present. They agreed, when they reflected later on the history of their city, that the turning point was the government of Duke Cosimo. The return to order and civil life, along with the restoration of old institutions and the foundation of others after those years of uncertainty, added to the sense that this group of scholars marked a new generation in the city. In their writings they had reason to refer often to the events of the preceding decades, the political crises that had seemed likely at several points to derail the city's traditions not only of politics, but also of scholarship, letters, and the arts. Their own story must therefore begin with a survey of those events and the steps that they, as well as Cosimo, took to rebuild the life of their city.

The City

When Cosimo was appointed head of the Florentine Republic early in 1537, Florentines surely hoped for an end to the political instability that had been the city's lot for some forty years. Florence's external, foreign

problems were perhaps the most obvious. Over the course of the Italian Wars, as the peninsula suffered from the invading troops and competing claims of the French, Spanish, and Germans as well as the shifting alliances among Italian states, Florence's freedom to govern itself seemed to be slipping away. At the beginning of the wars in 1494 two years after the death of Lorenzo de' Medici, anti-Medicean forces in the city repudiated Piero, the would-be heir to the familial role as political boss, over his negotiations with the French. Amid the warfare and instability across the peninsula, Florentines undertook to restructure the city's government; those efforts were brought to an end when the city was besieged in 1512. At that point, the victorious Spanish brought back the exiled Medici to rebuild a government, an effort headed by Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, the younger brother of Piero. That process was complicated a year later when the cardinal was elected pope as Leo X, which took him from Florence to Rome. Leo continued to dominate the city through a representative. That was briefly his younger brother Giuliano, duke of Nemours, followed by Lorenzo, duke of Urbino, who died young, in 1519. Leo then put his cousin Giulio in charge (son of Giuliano, brother of Lorenzo, who had been killed in the Pazzi conspiracy). Giulio, both before and after his election as Clement VII in late 1523, left a delegate in charge, primarily Cardinal Silvio Passerini, who was not from Florence at all.[1]

The disorder that accompanied the Sack of Rome in 1527 offered Florentines an opportunity to remove their papal administrator and install a republican government. Yet two years later the city was besieged again by the troops of Charles V, allied with Clement; the city capitulated in the autumn of 1530. Not surprisingly, Charles and Clement favored Medici control dominated by Habsburg oversight; Alessandro, duke of Penne, the illegitimate son of Lorenzo, duke of Urbino, was declared "duke of the Florentine Republic" in 1532. Alessandro in turn fell less than five years later, assassinated by his own cousin. An emergency team of advisors then appointed Cosimo, a more distant cousin, with a provisional title and limited powers. Within months he would face rebellion and invasion by exiles and their allies. It hardly seemed likely that he would go on to a successful rule of over thirty years, hand off his expanded title peacefully to his sons, and define Florence and Tuscany as its own state in practice, if not in name.

Florence's internal politics and administration had also been undergoing a series of continuous changes and developments during these years.

[1] John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200–1575* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 426–34.

Florentines had always been known for their factions and parties, sets of alliances and interests that divided along multiple axes and that might wax or wane in strength. In the early decades of the century the Medici themselves formed one such axis. During their years of exile they had developed networks of power and influence across the Italian peninsula and beyond, though they had also alienated others. Those connections had served them well in 1512 and continued to do so with the family's two papal administrations; the Medici papacies made Rome and its politics particularly important for Florence during these decades and those that followed.[2] Another factional axis took shape from the political restructuring and reforms that began in the 1490s and the moral vision inspired by Savonarola. That group, or cluster of sympathizers, was often referred to as *piagnoni* after the bell at San Marco; their opponents acquired the label *arrabbiati.* There was yet another division over how broadly representative government should be; the *ottimati* believed that oligarchic control would bring more stability and sounder decisions than did those *popolani* who favored broader government traditionally identified with guilds.

These internal factions all used and depended on the external powers and alliances that remained at war across the peninsula and beyond in order to further their goals; the constantly shifting political scene required attention and vigilance. Given the frequent recourse to exile as a way to punish those on the losing side, significant numbers of Florentines were living involuntarily in other cities for extended periods of time. They collected in a number of locations, especially Rome and Venice, and allied not only with fellow Florentines, but also with foreign powers.[3] Others removed themselves voluntarily from the city. Given the frequent travel habits of the city's elites, artists, and men of letters, such absences might or might not be understood as political in nature.

Those Florentine men who had an active public life during these decades thus differed greatly from one another in their political visions for the city as well as their practical decisions for themselves.[4] In addition,

[2] Nicholas Scott Baker, *The Fruit of Liberty: Political Culture in the Florentine Renaissance, 1480–1550* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 49–97.

[3] On the community in Venice, see Paolo Simoncelli, "The Turbulent Life of the Florentine Community in Venice," *Heresy, Culture, and Religion in Early Modern Italy: Contexts and Contestations*, ed. Ronald K. Delph, Michelle Fontaine, and John Jeffries Martin (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2006), 113–33.

[4] Baker, *Fruit of Liberty*. R. Burr Litchfield, *Emergence of a Bureaucracy: the Florentine Patricians, 1530–1790* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Felix Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965).

the opinions of a given individual might well change over time as political events unfolded and the political landscape shifted. As Burr Litchfield, Nicholas Scott Baker, and others have argued, these men and their families were an important force for continuity and stability in the city. During these transitions and despite regime change, this group of Florentines retained solid roles in the administration of Florence and Tuscany; they served both to shape the development of its bureaucracy and to maintain it in the years that followed. Despite their many strenuous points of disagreement during these decades over their preferred shape and size for city government, they were generally united in a desire to maximize their city's independence from foreign control. They also hoped to maintain a role for their families in its administration. Overall, these Florentines met both goals successfully.

The events of 1530 reinforced for most of them the value of the city's liberty; it also focused the core definition of that liberty as the freedom of the city from domination by foreign powers.[5] Florentines were compelled after the siege to negotiate with the victorious Hapsburg and papal forces to form a government that they hoped would offer the greatest possibility for such independence while nonetheless meeting the approval of the forces that had just defeated them. A balìa of Florentines approved naming Alessandro de' Medici the city's leader as the best option. In February 1531 an imperial representative ratified that selection, naming him the leader of the republic that had been overthrown in 1527.[6] Indeed, this government's legitimacy rested upon the claims that the republican government of 1527 had resulted from violent usurpation of the legitimate government that had preceded it. The troops that had fought in its unsuccessful defense came in for particularly harsh punishment.[7] Most members of the office-holding class were spared, but there was a large number of exiles.

Yet such a solution would not work on its own; the governmental structures of 1512–1527 had not found strong support among Florentines, so their mere reinstatement would not strike deep roots or command much loyalty. Clement negotiated with a number of prominent Florentines, and in April 1532 a committee of twelve formulated a new government. It abolished the Signoria and established a larger body, the Two Hundred (Dugento), and a smaller one, the Forty-Eight (Quarantotto), also referred to as the Senate; these offices held a lifetime tenure. Four senators were chosen by lot to serve with Alessandro as his council for two-year terms as

[5] Baker, *Fruit of Liberty,* 140.
[6] Ibid., 142–50.
[7] Ibid., 134–39.

the city's main executive body. Alessandro's title as duke of the Republic was compared to the doge of Venice.[8]

Charles V's recognition of this government helped to stabilize it. That support was strengthened when his (illegitimate) daughter Margarita married Alessandro in 1536. Clement VII, the senior Medici, retained practical influence in the city through a representative until his death in 1534. By that time, apparently on the recommendation of some of the ottimati, construction had begun on the Fortezza da Basso, the immense new fortress built into the city walls. The imperial troops already present in the city moved there in late 1535.[9] Despite this papal and imperial support, Alessandro nonetheless found numerous Florentine detractors. They fell into several groups. Some of the exiles hoped for the opportunity to restore something like the republican government of 1527 of which they had been a part. Some ottimati both within and without the city, conversely, found Alessandro insufficiently patrician. They focused on his illegitimate birth and went so far as to attempt to meet with Charles V when he visited Naples in 1535, to ask that he be replaced by his cousin Ippolito. Ippolito did indeed support the exiles, but died in 1535. The French also welcomed such dissent in hopes of reasserting their own influence on the peninsula.

Alessandro's death came not at the hands of any faction but of his own cousin, whose precise motives and goals remained unclear. Lorenzino de' Medici (known as Lorenzaccio) stabbed Alessandro and fled the city on the evening of January 6, 1537.[10] Alessandro left no legitimate heir. The papal representative, Cardinal Innocenzo Cibo, hoped to benefit as guardian by promoting the succession of Alessandro's five-year-old illegitimate son. The Quarantotto, however, identified the closest legitimate heir, following the 1532 constitution, as Cosimo. They approved him on the 9th, though with only the vague title of head (*capo e primario*) of the republic, and the next day circumscribed his powers closely. Charles's representative confirmed Cosimo as capo in June after consultation with ottimati as well as exiles. A group of exiles took up arms, and in fact had already undertaken some

[8] Ibid., 152–53; Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200–1575*, 461–64; Eric W. Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries, 1527–1800: A History of Florence and the Florentines in the Age of the Grand Dukes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 1–10.

[9] Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200–1575*, 464–65.

[10] On Lorenzino, the event, and his own assassination eleven years later, see Stefano Dall'Aglio, *The Duke's Assassin: Exile and Death of Lorenzino de' Medici*, trans. Donald Weinstein (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

military action earlier in the spring. Cosimo, with Florentine and imperial troops, defeated them decisively at Montemurlo in early August. The rebel leaders were executed, some publicly, or imprisoned. Filippo Strozzi would die in December in the Fortezza da Basso, probably by his own hand. Shortly after the victory, Charles granted Cosimo the title of duke.[11]

Cosimo had hoped to marry Alessandro's widow Margarita. That hope was thwarted when Charles, after some consideration, instead had her marry the pope's grandson, Ottavio Farnese, the duke of Parma. The marriage that Cosimo did contract to Eleonora di Toledo, daughter of the viceroy of Naples, was certainly far happier. After celebrating the wedding in 1539 they moved into the Palazzo Medici. By all accounts they were a devoted couple and produced eleven children before her premature death. She would be struck down by malaria in late 1562 outside Pisa, along with two children, Garzia and Cardinal Giovanni.

Cosimo and Eleonora did not stay long in the Palazzo Medici. The widowed Margarita claimed and won her right to part of Alessandro's property by the terms of her marriage contract, and that included their residence, the Palazzo Medici. Thus, Cosimo paid rent to live there.[12] Still worse, her property was under the control of her father, Charles V, whose power over the city Cosimo was working to minimize. Therefore in 1540 they turned to the old city hall, now known as the Palazzo Vecchio, and moved into the rooms that had long served as the residences of the priors while they had served their terms.[13] The renovations that accompanied this move, as well as those that followed, have been studied extensively by art historians. The work of Andrea Gáldy has been especially valuable in establishing the specifics of where family members resided and when, in showing the development of Cosimo's collections, and in tracing the gradual shaping of the ducal court.

Eleonora's dowry money purchased in 1549 a permanent residence that more than compensated in grandeur, the Palazzo Pitti.[14] The work

[11] On Strozzi's life before his final years as well as Florentine politics in the first decades of the century, see Melissa Meriam Bullard, *Filippo Strozzi and the Medici: Favor and Finance in Sixteenth-Century Florence and Rome* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980). On Cosimo's transitions, see Domenico Zanrè, *Cultural Non-Conformity in Early Modern Florence* (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 7–32.

[12] Andrea Gáldy, *Cosimo I de' Medici as Collector: Antiquities and Archaeology in Sixteenth-Century Florence* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 4–5.

[13] Gáldy, "Moving House–Moving Courts: How Palazzo Pitti Became the Main Medici Residence in Florence," *Medicea* 4 (2009): 38–59.

[14] Gáldy, *Cosimo I de' Medici as Collector,* 10.

needed to make it habitable went on for some time. In the intervening years, the family and growing court divided its time between residence in the Palazzo Vecchio and their various villas outside the city. Even after the move to the Pitti, the Medici retained the Palazzo Vecchio apartments for some time; Cosimo's son and heir Francesco and his wife Giovanna of Austria lived there after their marriage in 1565. They also continued to make use of the Palazzo Medici.

In his early years as duke, Cosimo faced a number of challenges both domestic and foreign. The first priority for Florentines in general was Florence's liberty to govern and undertake actions in its own name, that is, the survival of the state itself. Representatives of both the emperor and the pope resided in the city, and imperial troops remained in the Fortezza. The Habsburg backing was not without advantage. It offered Cosimo and the city a level of security and a respite from the warfare and violence of previous decades, particularly from French military threats; yet the civilian and military presence were clear signs of the limits that both empire and papacy placed on the city's independent action. Cosimo, increasingly able to negotiate from a position of strength, combined personal influence and more formal negotiations to remove them. Finally, in 1543 Charles, in need of troops elsewhere, accepted a payment from Cosimo to remove the soldiers at the Fortezza. At that point Cosimo was in practice independent, though he was obliged to operate within an imperial orbit. He would continue throughout his lifetime to keep papal and imperial interests in balance. French military concerns would effectively end when he annexed Siena in 1559, and family marriage alliances helped to smooth relations. In any case, European powers north of the Alps would find their attention engaged from midcentury onward with religious wars and succession problems of their own.

The Citizens

So too, life within the city regained stability after Montemurlo. Many of the city's administrative structures had continued to operate without significant interruption. Cosimo's government also established new ones, and added administrative offices and oversight for the Tuscan *dominio* as well.[15] Both within the city and in the larger region, Cosimo needed the continued goodwill of the office-holding patricians. Although their powers shifted from legislative toward administrative ones in comparison

[15] Jonathan Davies, *Culture and Power: Tuscany and Its Universities 1537–1609* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), 37–46.