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The Civic Virtue of Women in Quattrocento Florence

A Dissertation Presented

by

Christine Contrada

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The Graduate School

Christine Contrada

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the
Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this dissertation.

**Dr. Alix Cooper – Dissertation Advisor
Associate Professor, History**

**Dr. Joel Rosenthal – Chairperson of Defense
Distinguished Professor Emeritus, History**

**Dr. Gary Marker
Professor, History**

**Dr. James Blakeley
Assistant Professor, History
St. Joseph's College, New York**

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School.

Lawrence Martin
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

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Fifteenth century Florence has long been viewed as the epicenter of Renaissance civilization and a cradle of civic humanism. This dissertation seeks to challenge the argument that the cardinal virtues, as described by humanists like Leonardo Bruni and Matteo Palmieri, were models of behavior that only men adhered to. Elite men and women alike embraced the same civic ideals of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Although they were not feminists advocating for social changes, women like Alessandra Strozzi, Margherita Datini, and Lucrezia Tornabuoni had a great deal of opportunity to actively support their own interests and the interests of their kin within popular cultural models of civic virtue. This, in turn, earned these women much praise at the time. By exploring interpretations of each virtue and illustrating case studies of merchant and aristocratic women's activities, this dissertation points to a larger Florentine culture that set forth the path to a virtuous life for both men and women. This path challenges the historiographical cliché that Florence, because of its patriarchal culture, was a particularly difficult place to be a woman. While highlighting the uniqueness of women's experiences, this dissertation argues that oppression was more reflective of a woman's economic position than of her sex. New interpretations of letters, prescriptive literature, and wills reveal the ways in which the humanist cultural climate affected both men and women. Seen in this light, the active engagement of both sexes in Renaissance humanist culture emerges on a larger historical canvas.

Dedication Page

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I. Introduction

Inspiration

The position of women as the agents of powerful husbands, even in circumstances when women are constricted by patriarchy, has a long history stretching from the earliest civilizations to contemporary contexts. It was just such a contemporary context that further inspired me to assess the place of women as individuals in civic culture, and not to view those women who lived in patriarchal societies as the agents of men. In 2007 Jehan Al Sadat, the wife of assassinated Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat, spoke to 2,000 members of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society in Nashville, Tennessee.¹ I was enthralled to hear, first hand, how this Egyptian woman has managed to bring property and divorce rights to women in that modern nation for the first time. Sadat may be seen as a feminist because she brought a sense of political identity into the lives of women in a pervasively patriarchal culture. Granted, the elite women discussed in this dissertation about Renaissance Florence were separated from modern women's rights by half a millennium. Fifteenth-century women were not, of course, modern feminists; they did not advocate social changes for other women or clamor for equality. However, they did share much in common with a woman like Sadat. She is, like they were, most immediately recognized as her husband's wife. As such, her accomplishments have not received the same level of recognition as those of her late husband. Her name gives her, as did theirs, a ready stage, but she is much more than a mere continuer of her husband's legacy. She does indeed continue to espouse his vision, but she is more than a sounding board for his past pursuits. With her mission rooted in her husband's legacy, Sadat's soft-spoken approach has allowed her to keep her husband's ideology in the limelight while she "quietly," but quite boldly, uses her name to advance the cause of equality for women in Egypt. She has made her husband's legacy her own by using her atypical and powerful status to advocate for her own program. As radical as her aims are, she uses her

¹ Jehan Al Sadat, "Keynote Address", Phi Theta Kappa International Convention, held at the Gaylord Opryland Resort, Nashville, Tennessee, 7 April 2007.

husband's legacy as a shield to deflect criticism while she proposes ideas threatening to patriarchal hegemony in Egypt. As I considered her success, I found myself reflecting on the privileged women of Renaissance Florence I had been studying. Did they also utilize such a shield? Did they use this shield to better advocate for themselves and their families while achieving civic virtue and the praise of their community?

I have found time and time again that they did. The "program" of fifteenth-century elite Florentine women was obviously influenced by a civic brand of Renaissance humanism that permeated Florentine society, well beyond a select group of male elites. These women were first and foremost "Florentine" in their pursuits, as they were part of this larger civic culture. What that entailed, in the context of their pursuit of the civic virtues, will be discussed in some detail in this work.

Like Sadat, the women in my study also utilized the strength of their positions as mothers, daughters, and wives within a patriarchal society. In the case of these fifteenth-century women, they displayed an active interest in the four civic virtues that permeated Renaissance culture and society well beyond their most obvious influence in the male-orchestrated political sphere. As I found myself gripped by Sadat's carefully planned and humble speech, the overlap between her ideals and her husband's legacy were impossible to separate. She is the first to acknowledge that his legacy gave her a stage on which to promote her own initiatives to a receptive audience. I could not help but find my Florentine subjects on a stage partially constructed by men, although their stage was unmistakably decorated with the humanist culture of their own age.

The Virtuous City

The Italian Renaissance was a time when the building of a virtuous, ideal city was the goal of urbane and political men. This epoch was marked by rapid political change. By the end of the fifteenth century, the ideal of constructing the medieval walled city of Christine de Pizan was outmoded, especially in Italy.² Cities began to expand out of their

² Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of The City of Ladies*, trans. Sarah Lawson (New York: Penguin, 1985). In this work, Christine de Pizan discusses the virtues that would prosper in a city of educated women.

walls and away from fortified castles and towers. Unlike Northern Europe, Italy had developed away from the feudal medieval political topos of a king who first and foremost acted like a “good Christian”.³ A “vacuum” of central leadership was abandoned in favor of leadership that espoused civic virtues consistent with a more cosmopolitan outlook geared toward achieving, expanding, and retaining power.⁴

Renaissance Italy saw a number of republican experiments reminiscent of those which thrived in antiquity.⁵ Five cities on the Italian peninsula stood out as powerhouses in the fifteenth-century: Florence, Venice, Milan, Rome, and Naples. Of the five, only two, Florence and Venice, were independent republics. Florence, our focus, was a city of 40,000 permanent residents that was not crafted on models of medieval lordship, but instead was more heavily influenced by humanism’s renewed interest in the political writings of the classical world. The Florentines lived in a world more closely aligned with the cosmopolitan Roman republic than with the city-states of the Hellenic world.⁶ Far from the idealism of the classical republicanism espoused in Plato’s work, Florence was a republic much influenced by one family that came to dominate the politics of the

³ The jurist Bartolus of Sassoferrato (1313-1357) is a good example of this anti-imperial sentiment. Bartolus Sassoferrato, *Bartoli Commentaria in Tres Libros Codicis, Doctissimi Viri Dio* (Lugduni, 1549).

⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (New York: Penguin, 2003). This treatise speaks to how one goes about retaining political control through rather “devious” yet pragmatic guidelines. Leonardo Bruni, *In Praise of Florence: The Panegyric to The City of Florence*, trans. Alfred Schepers (Amsterdam: Olive Press, 2005). In this 1403 work Bruni also spoke against monarchies, describing how monarchies are detrimental to virtue, nobility and genius. Bruni was the primary example Hans Baron used in his seminal work *The Crisis of The Early Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966). Baron was the first to coin the phrase “civic humanism” to describe the quattrocento Florentine republic which combined civic traditions of the medieval commune and classical humanism. Quentin Skinner continued to explore this ideology in *States and Citizens: History, Theory, Prospects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵ This statement refers to Athenian democracy and republican Rome, both of which appeared to thrive although Rome was riddled with class conflict between the plebeians and patricians and Athens was drawn into conflict due to problematic imperialistic tendencies. Baron, *Crisis*, 47.

⁶ The population size comes from the Florentine Catasto of 1427. While there were 120,000 residents of Florence in the 1330s this number would be slashed in half by the plague of 1348. This plague reoccurred many times throughout the early modern period. Florence would not have a population as high as it did in the 1330s until the nineteenth century.

city.⁷ This fifteenth-century city was a vibrant illustration of the visible “gusto” of Medici power politics.

It was in this bustling city that elite Florentine men and women adhered to, and perpetuated, a new brand of Medicean civic virtue.⁸ This form of virtue developed under the influence of the Medici and was more akin to the ideology of the Roman Republic of Cicero’s day than to Pericles’ Athens. The privileges of citizenship for free adult males were recognized, but the rights afforded to citizens were limited in favor of allotting the small ruling class more autonomy and power than a twentieth-century democracy would allow.⁹ Roman virtue focused on liberty as it was achieved via civic activity.¹⁰ An example of a prominent fifteenth-century Florentine who identified with the traditions of Republican Rome was Angelo Poliziano. He wrote to Piero de’ Medici that “The triumvirs Gaius Caesar, Marcus Antonius, and Marcus Lepidus, who was also a high priest, established the colony of Florentina . . . we know that colonies of the Roman people were something like miniature replicas of Rome.”¹¹ The legacy of Rome even influenced the civically minded clergy of Florence. Giovanni Caroli (1428-1503), the Dominican theologian and author, said that the Florentines were descendants of the Romans, and he used Roman models to discuss reforming the Dominican order.¹²

⁷ Plato did not discuss more modern inclusive republicanism, but instead is elitist and speaks a good deal of governmental control. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁸ The term “virtue” will be defined more clearly later in this chapter.

⁹ The Florentines declared themselves to be “the second Rome”. The inscription above the main entrance to the Palazzo Vecchio is an example of this republican sentiment.

¹⁰ Quentin Skinner, *The Renaissance: The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Quentin Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Skinner discusses Roman political philosophy in the context of its influence on Renaissance ideology.

¹¹ *Deduxer igitur Florentiam coloniam triumviri Caius Caesar qui deinde Augustus, Marcus Antonius, et Marcus Lepidus, etiam pontifex maximus . . . scimus autem populi Romani colonias quasi effigies parvas eius et stimulae fuisse.* Angelo Poliziano, *Letters Volume I*, ed. Shane Butler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 8-11.

¹² Amos Edelheit, *Ficino, Pico, and Savonarola* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 123-203.

Like Republican Rome, Florentine society was plagued by class struggle.¹³ The leadership of powerful merchants and bankers gave Florence the economic foundation to rise to international prominence and extend its political arm as far as its business interests. The Florentines of the quattrocento lived in a rich city that was dominated by the notoriously power-hungry Medici family, which sought greater social control to assure its position of dominance in the city.¹⁴ This drive for political dominance is not unique, but the Medici were strikingly successful in expanding the prominence of Florence on the international stage of business and politics.

As Florence grew from a medieval town to an imperialistic dukedom, humanism was the ideology trumpeted loudly by the Medici.¹⁵ Humanistic rhetoric, which promoted individuality and individual achievement, should not hide the reality that the collective was alive and well in Renaissance Florence. The idea that personal impulse should be directed to the common good was one embraced by men and women of the ruling class.¹⁶ The “common good” was embodied in civic virtues. An excellent example of the synthesis of the classical and Christian world can be seen in the construction of and adherence to these models. These virtues were guidelines of good behavior. Without such a code chaos, arguably, could have ensued. Such rebellious calamity had been experienced in Florence’s Ciompi revolt (1378) and was certainly in recent memory.¹⁷ One fear that the Medici had was that the interests of the individual would be superseded by the needs of peace for the collective. Consider for a moment the

¹³ Amaury de Riencourt, *Sex and Power in History* (New York: D. McKay Co., 1974), 234. The Ciompi Revolt (1378) is a particularly explosive example of Florentine class struggles in the wake of the plague and a moment when for a brief moment a democratic government was instituted in the city.

¹⁴ William Connell, *Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 9.

¹⁵ A valuable introduction to Renaissance Florence that has a particular focus on political and social history is Gene Brucker, *Renaissance Florence* (New York: Wiley, 1969).

¹⁶ Florence was not a democracy. In the republican government the names of elite families consistently reappear in the Signoria and other government offices. And while considering limitations of the system, it is also useful to note that those living in the contado had no representation in Florence’s fifteenth-century government.

¹⁷ Papers from the conference have been collected in Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, *Il Tumulto dei Ciompi: Un Momento di Storia Fiorentina ed Europea* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1981).

harmonious “Ideal City” of Alberti.¹⁸ There is not a soul to be found in Piero della Francesca’s 1470 illustration of Alberti’s vision, but the feeling of tranquility and harmony is a central and undeniable theme in both the written and visual depictions of this city. Alberti, a founder of humanism, wrote this favorite manual to life for the Medici. This harmonious, classically inspired vision was shared by Cosimo il Vecchio, Piero, and Lorenzo.¹⁹ Lorenzo de’ Medici illustrated his desire for tranquility when he wrote to Galeazzo Sforza, the Duke of Milan, on August 6, 1474 that he had consulted with the citizens, who shared his fear that a conflict between the pope and the Florentine merchants would send the people to war.²⁰ War, of course, would make trade difficult. To this same end, Piero wrote to his wife Lucrezia about the desire for well-being. He noted in a letter that Giovanni Tornabuoni, her brother, was preparing to go to Rome and that they had hope that peace, the “harmonious city,” would be achieved.²¹

Defining a Question and Subject

The public and private activity of such powerful men as Cosimo, Piero, and Lorenzo de’ Medici has already been discussed in great detail.²² What this dissertation will assert is that the virtuous city was the vision of the women of Florence’s ruling class as well as that of the men. This may be due to the fact that construction of identity as an upper-class Florentine was set in contrast to the “other”: the foreign and the poor. Socio-economic status, not only gender, was the defining characteristic of citizenship in

¹⁸ Palazzo Strozzi, *The Renaissance Man: Leon Battista Alberti and The Arts In Florence between Reason and Beauty*, Florence: Italy, 1 July 2006.

¹⁹ It certainly was the “vision” of the Rucellai. The Palazzo Rucellai was a study of antiquity. Its capitals are modeled on those of the coliseum and the doorways adapted from those found in Trajan’s market. Palazzo Strozzi, *the Renaissance Man: Leon Battista Alberti and the Arts In Florence Between Reason and Beauty*, Florence, Italy, 1 July 2006.

²⁰ *che io solo voglia mettere questo popolo in Guerra* Archivio di Stato di Milano, SPA, Firenze, 287. Also found in Lorenzo de’ Medici, *Lettere II 1474-1478*, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein, (Firenze: Giunti-Barbera, 1977), 171-2.

²¹ *et prospere et bene in modo che abbiamo buona speranza della pace. Giovanni tornabuoni, piacendo a Dio, partire domain per a Roma: sieti aviso ; non ti curare di scrivere so tu non puoi. Né altro.* Archivio Mediceo Innanzi al Principato, 1 Oct 1467 Filza 21, c, 53.

²² In volumes such as Gaetano Pieraccini, *La Stirpe de’ Medici di Cafaggiolo* (Firenze: A. Vallecchi, 1924).

Renaissance Florence. On every socio-economic level of Renaissance Florence, female subservience was assumed. However, due to economic and social means, the women in this study did a noteworthy job of balancing their private interests and the public welfare. Their history will show how the pursuit of obligation to the commune and family advantages was a preoccupation of the later fifteenth century. And yet, these women have been left out of the story of Renaissance Florence's civic culture and politics. My goal is to insert the domestic sphere into the history of the Florentine republic by asserting that women in Florence made conscious choices to adhere to civic virtues and thus actively contributed to the health, i.e. the peace and stability, of the Florentine republic.

The fifteenth-century subjects of this work were not feminists in the more modern sense of that label.²³ They did not assert that women were treated equally or differently than men or even claim "full humanity" for women, as Christine de Pizan did when she exclaimed that "there is not the slightest doubt that women belong to the people of God and the human race as much as men and are not another species or dissimilar race, for which they should be excluded from moral teachings."²⁴ We will see how these women did not claim justice as the tool to reject ancient traditions in which women were inferior to men in a patriarchal society. "Feminists" who advocated for actions to overcome gender limitations had always been a small minority. More common, yet frequently left undiscussed, were the women who operated inside patriarchy rather than rejecting it. While feminism was born of opposition to traditions, these women were not making arguments to overcome their inferior status. They instead sought the same civic virtue as men in this society with great and deliberate determination.

²³ As the descriptor "feminism" was not used until the 19th century, Christine de Pizan is often considered a protofeminist for expressing these attitudes.

²⁴ Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsler, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe From Prehistory to the Present* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 333; Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Sarah Lawson (New York: Penguin, 1985).

The women of the Florentine Renaissance were quite unlike Christine de Pizan, who did seek changes in women's status.²⁵ Christine is more like other proto-feminists, regardless of a specific time and place, than women like Lucrezia Tornabuoni, Alessandra Strozzi, and Margherita Datini, who were not isolated from their own culture by radical ideas. Among these radical ideas De Pizan insisted on in the *City of Ladies* (1405) was the notion that marriage was harder on women than men and that it was necessary to overcome doubts about women's worth.²⁶ Her challenge was against the established traditions that elite Florentine women identified with and promoted. This focus has seemingly caused women who thrived inside this patriarchal culture to find themselves left out of much historical inquiry. De Pizan's inflammatory notion that female virtue was universal, not exceptional, was certainly a challenge to fifteenth-century social and cultural norms.²⁷

Although there has been, in the past few decades, a proliferation of secondary literature dealing with gender construction in late medieval and early modern Europe, much of the literature has been presented in such a way as to separate the history of women from that of men.²⁸ The distinction between the "history of the powerful" and the "history of the weak," while it has been quite fruitful in bringing the story of women to the forefront of recent historical scholarship, is a problematic construction. It places a stark public/private barrier between gender roles of elite Renaissance Florentines that, I hope to show, they themselves crossed fluidly. The powerful did not crush the weak. Women might have been at the bottom of a patrilineally-based hierarchy, but they still had the ability and the desire to act in ways that emphasized good "citizenship" within the boundaries of patriarchal laws and traditions. They did this without protesting in the public forum. What has been coded as "feminine" has been discussed as diametrically

²⁵ This work was being circulated around the French court and influenced Christine to write her own catalogue.

²⁶ Anderson, 342-3.

²⁷ Boccaccio discussed the exceptionalism of female virtue in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, ed. Virginia Brown (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

²⁸ Natalie Tomas, *The Medici Women: Gender and Power in Renaissance Florence* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

opposed to the qualities of republican “citizenship.” I intend to bring the histories of men and women together to establish a new view of a city that has previously been depicted in a way that highlighted its gender stratification. My plan is to shed light on how the city functioned as a larger, more cohesive society. Femininity and masculinity in recent discourse have been discussed in a nuanced enough fashion that they are no longer automatically seen as diametrically opposed, although their shared “space,” in terms of cultural identity, has yet to be fully explored.²⁹ The question is not a new one, of course. Even Socrates rhetorically asked whether “both men and women, if they are to be good men and women, must have the same virtues of temperance and justice.”³⁰ The proposed answer here is that they indeed did.

I will argue that women of the elite class in fifteenth-century Florence actively pursued the humanist school’s ideals of “civic virtue,” but without trumpeting their reasons in written record. There are too many examples of virtuous behaviors for this pursuit to be coincidence. Because fifteenth-century Florentine women did not speak loudly of the motivations behind their actions, the alignment of their actions with humanist rhetoric seems to have escaped the notice of Renaissance studies. In this study their activities will be given a new set of labels identifying their behavior within the model of the civic virtues.

The first step, before discussing these women’s activities, is to define a more concrete subject so that we can explore their patterns of activity. Who were these women and how does one lift the veil of 600 years of romanticized lore to find the “real” woman?³¹ These women are more elusive to us than their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons. The challenges are to find the three-dimensional individual and capture a life,

²⁹ Thomas W. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender From the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

³⁰ Plato, *Laches, Protagoras, Meno, Euthydemus*, trans. W.R.M. Lamb (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1924), 273.

³¹ The famous Jacob Burckhardt himself presented his work as attempting to lift a “veil,” imposed by the Middle Ages, to find the individual in Renaissance Florence. See his *The Civilization of the Renaissance In Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (London: Penguin Press, 1990).

not the rosy glow of an idealized portrait, and to recognize virtue only when it is specifically a motivator for action.

Before introducing the women who will serve as case studies, it is helpful to offer an example of this powerful dichotomy between idealism and reality. Take for example one of the Florentine women who has been most discussed and commemorated, but has lost much historical clarity. Beatrice Portinari is so wrapped in Dante lore that she is more myth than woman.³² If she left a written record, nothing survives. Beatrice, described as the “bestower of blessings” who is as make-believe as an allegory, comes to symbolize Florence to Dante in his exile.³³ Love for a city is analogous in Dante with his love for Beatrice. She, like Florence, “is never mistaken for another.”³⁴ No city could ever replace Florence for Dante, who traveled from court to court, exasperated by his exile.³⁵ Florence without Beatrice was a Florence without justice or peace, not simply Florence without this “woman”. In the medieval and classical world one’s identity was based, in part, on one’s city. If one was out of it, one was nothing. For Dante, lost in a tangled wood, Beatrice was the beacon light of his home and the place of his memories. She is admired, yes, but a muse is as unrealistic as an allegory.³⁶

So, the ideal woman in the mind of Florence’s great poet and tortured genius was a “vision to behold,” but not a reality. Such an idealized portrait will not serve as evidence of actual behavior. Instead of idealizing Beatrice, we will make use of the fact that Florence’s historical record is littered with the sometimes heroic and often tragic stories of women. Even if the “idealized woman” was often emulated through conscious choice, there was no simple life to follow on the path to virtue. The interest in idealism is

³² Dante Alighieri, *L’Inferno*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam, 1983); Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Bantam, 1983).

³³ Dante Alighieri, *La Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

³⁴ Alighieri, *La Vita*.

³⁵ Alighieri, *L’Inferno*.

³⁶ Beatrice lived during the first half of the fourteenth century long before the establishment of Medici hegemony, but she illustrates this point of idealism quite nicely.

everywhere (as we saw earlier in Alberti's "Ideal City"), but such a fantasy is not the woman of this story.³⁷

Rather than recasting the much-discussed idealized portraits of illustrious women, I have selected women who led powerful lives in the secular world. Alessandra Strozzi, Lucrezia Tornabuoni, Clarice Orsini de' Medici, Nannina de' Medici Rucellai, Margherita Datini, and Contessina de' Medici displayed a drive to attain a model of civic virtue. These women were of an elite social status and thus occupied an environment and culture in which civic virtue was being discussed and defined by prominent men. They were admired for their behavior, which displayed their pursuit of the four virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. What we will find, via contemporary evidence, is that their quest for virtues was a priority in a variety of personal and familial situations. Lucrezia Tornabuoni and Alessandra Strozzi, for example, found themselves in very different circumstances. They were both members of families that ranked among the upper echelon of Florence's elite, but, as we will explore in latter chapters, the Medici dominated fifteenth-century politics while the Strozzi found themselves exiled from the city. Despite the difference in their circumstances, their efforts to achieve virtue offer ample evidence of a common goal. This adherence to such behavior is not just a given considering their position as mothers, daughters, sisters and wives of great men. Some of their peers, like Clarice de' Medici, were less successful in being recognized as virtuous women.³⁸ An important question will be, "why?"

As a point of clarification, Renaissance virtue (from the Latin word "vir" meaning man) has often been associated with manliness and the active life, from Cicero to Machiavelli. One of my goals is to establish these women's lives as indeed belonging to this "active" category. Women's behavior was more than just a reflection of social norms; indeed their virtue and morality contributed to the perceived "health" of the Florentine republic. We will latter consider the fiery sermons of Bernardino and Savonarola that attest to the belief that the republic was unhealthy as long as women were

³⁷ Idealism, the best of all possible worlds, lives, and governments, is a theme often found in Hellenic philosophy that was popular in the Medici circle.

³⁸ Clarice Orsini, from Rome, was the wife of Lorenzo il Magnifico.

sinful. There *was* no “separate spheres” ideology in Renaissance Florence, because public and private life were inextricably tangled. When private morality was volatile, the public reacted because it was in the home where the heart of Florentine civics lay. Unlike the Athenian model of a republic, where women of the ruling class were sequestered in the home, Alessandra Strozzi and Lucrezia Tornabuoni were very influential in the public world without being “revolutionary.” As the powerful preacher San Bernardino said, women’s behavior needed to be virtuous in order for there to be a harmonious and healthy republic. Petrarch said much the same thing in *Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul* when he noted that “nothing is beautiful without the due measure and proportion of its parts.”³⁹ Although women did not hold offices in the republic, I will argue that men and women were both contributing and active members of the same civic body, and that both sought civic virtue in fifteenth-century Florence.

Humanism and Civic Virtue in Florence

In order to understand how women embodied civic virtue, it is necessary to understand how humanists in Renaissance Florence understood this concept. The meaning of civic virtue received much attention during the Renaissance.⁴⁰ The theme of virtuous government, for example, was the central focus of Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s striking fresco cycle of *The Good Government* (1338-1340) in Siena’s Palazzo Pubblico. The subject matter was focused on the four cardinal virtues, which Lorenzetti has depicted allegorically enthroned and thus ruling here on earth, while the other three Christian virtues hover in an otherworldly position overhead. It became increasingly emphasized during the Florentine Renaissance to focus on the four natural, “worldly” virtues. These civic virtues--Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance--were the

³⁹ Petrarch, *Remedies For Fortune Fair and Foul: A Modern English Translation of De Remedies Utriusque Fortune*, trans. Conrad H. Rawski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

⁴⁰ According to Hans Baron, the crisis in the summer of 1402 (Milan versus Florence) marked the growth of this Florentine civic spirit that blended classical and Christian ideology. Baron, *Crisis*, 28-46.

surviving virtues of antiquity and they would become the focus of civic behavior in fifteenth-century Florence.⁴¹

Although the focus of my work is not to define all of the idiosyncrasies of the ideals influential in Renaissance Florence, it is important first to establish, in some detail, this set of civic virtues that appealed to Medicean Florence. Only then can we take these virtues as a set of ideologies that women in Florence embraced as partakers in a larger “Florentine” identity that included them. Many notable women acted in the pursuit of Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance. These mothers, sisters, wives, widows, and daughters seem to be in search of this same set of civic virtues as their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons. Although women in Florence had little opportunity to contribute to the intellectual discussion of the humanist school, they moved in an elite circle of men who did, and their actions mirror this “virtuous life.”

The pursuit of specific civic virtues was seen by humanists as a way to achieve human excellence. To emulate “virtue” also meant that one’s behaviors would be directed toward the goal of achieving happiness. Of course, what constitutes “happiness” is historically relative, but achieving individual contentment does seem to be a consistent theme in discussions of a state of “perfection.” From the Greek *arete* to the Latin *virtú*, excellence pertaining to a quality of human beings was a characteristic of a person’s disposition. Classical Ciceronian virtue, as we will see, was popular in republican Florence and was seen as most often found in an active life. This stands in stark contrast to the ideology of Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas, humans would only become truly happy when they beheld God.⁴² Happiness on earth was incomplete as it was a temporary and lesser “*felicitas*” and not lasting “*beatitudes*” (next world happiness).⁴³

⁴¹ Siena and Florence had similar traditions. Coluccio Salutati, the Chancellor of Florence from 1375 to 1406, argued that because the two cities had systems of republican self-government, they should enter into a coalition against the despotic Visconti. Baron claims that civic humanists were indeed trying to make such a confederation between city-states although historians have reevaluated Florence’s motives and seen them as imperialistic. Baron, *Crisis*, 387-403.

⁴² Thomas Aquinas, *The Cardinal Virtues*, trans. Richard J. Regan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005).

⁴³ *Ibid.*

And although Aquinas was read in Renaissance Florence, the concept of what a virtuous life was changed from medieval interpretations. A virtuous medieval life was predominantly one of study, contemplation, and spirituality. The “movers and shakers” of the Renaissance were more like their peers during antiquity in the sense that they were interested in lasting fame instead of being indifferent to earthly struggles like medieval people who focused so intently on the “next world”. There was an interesting combination of these two extremes in Medicean Florence.⁴⁴

Dominant notions of what constituted a virtuous life during the Florentine Renaissance seemed to swing, like a pendulum, through ideological phases away from a contemplative focus and back to one.⁴⁵ Civic virtue during the fifteenth century commenced with a late medieval scholastic focus on intellectual contemplation amongst the ruling aristocracy of late medieval Florence. Even though much of Aquinas’s thought and scholastic thinking in general was as antiquated to humanists like Lorenzo Valla as the medieval city of Christine de Pizan was to the Medici, that ideology still served as the medieval foundation on which the ideas of antiquity were assembled.⁴⁶ When Thomas Aquinas wrote *Summa Theologia*, he was bringing together the study of Aristotle with that of Christianity to instruct readers of the proper moral behavior that would bring one to salvation. Aquinas (like Aristotle and St. Augustine) adamantly rejected the idea that human happiness rests in material goods.⁴⁷

A few decades into the quattrocento, however, a citizen class of active republicans was being discussed widely by the 1430s. Palmieri, for example, was trumpeting moral philosophy from Cicero’s *De Officiis* in his own *Della Vita Civile* (c. 1435). For Palmieri “virtue” was no longer the contemplative variety that Aquinas suggested, but was instead

⁴⁴ Florentine humanism both reacted to and influenced humanism in Venice, Milan, Ferrara, and Rome.

⁴⁵ I am looking at general trends from the mid-fourteenth century through the early sixteenth century rather than focusing on the differences between individual thinkers.

⁴⁶ Girolamo Mancini, *Vita di Lorenzo Valla* (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, Editore, 1891).

⁴⁷ Aquinas labeled three kinds of virtue: intellectual, moral, and theological. Intellectual virtues were achieved via intellectual activity. Moral virtues consisted of characteristic readiness to act in particular matters as practical wisdom dictated. The three theological virtues were faith, hope and charity, the cornerstones of Aquinas’ prescriptions for a virtuous life. Thomas Aquinas, *Virtue: Way To Happiness*, trans. Richard Regan (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1999).

seen as active. As he stated in the prologue of *Vita Civile*, the best kind of life is that which is lived by a virtuous citizen in a good government.⁴⁸ This idea was similar to the advice offered in many of the newly discovered Greek and Latin texts, including those written by Plato and Cicero.⁴⁹ Using these texts, as well as his experience in Florentine politics, Palmieri declared that the moral life of a citizen was based on the four cardinal virtues of prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice.⁵⁰

Mid-quattrocento Renaissance humanism was not a creation of the Medici. As Hans Baron has asserted, humanism “bore the impress of a time when Florence had not yet become a Renaissance principality, but was still a free city-state.”⁵¹ Humanism had moved from theoretical ruminations to enjoining an urbane civic spirit amongst citizens who were devoted to the city.⁵² Salutati was one of the first to advocate the active life that Cicero described. In a 1393 letter Salutati commented that “although solitary life is considered safer, it is not so; for to engage in honest activity honestly is as holy and perhaps more so than to give oneself to the solitary life.”⁵³ Poggio also expressed to Salutati in a letter that he preferred antiquity to modern times.⁵⁴ This is a testament to the

⁴⁸ Matteo Palmieri, *Libro della Vita Civile composto da Matheo Palmieri Cittadino Fiorentino* (Venezia: Giovanni Andrea Valvassori, 1535).

⁴⁹ The use of these new texts was advocated by Angelo Poliziano as the “rescue of virtuous studies”. Angelo Poliziano, *Letters: Volume I*, ed. Shane Butler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 33.

⁵⁰ Key to the shift in focus from contemplative to active virtue is the recognition that scholasticism lasted much longer in universities than in the palazzi of Renaissance Florence. Renaissance students of virtue, like Ficino, often interpreted Plato, while Aquinas and other scholastics tended to focus more closely on the treatises of Aristotle. Aristotle, however, was not simply dismissed or “replaced” by Plato. Brunetto Latini’s *Book of Treasure* in 1260, displaying the influence of Aristotle’s ethics, argued that a republic was the best form of government. Latini was the first to use the Aristotelian classification of politics to argue for a republic in Florence. James Hankins, *Renaissance Civic Humanism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 56.

⁵¹ If humanism was indeed a child of the Middle Ages, it seems to have matured under the stresses of the threat of Visconti expansion from Milan in the 1390s. Baron, *Crisis*.

⁵² Even the myth of the founding of the city of Florence was altered by 1450 to focus on the settlement of Sulla’s retired generals in the Arno valley and not the army camp of Julius Caesar, since Caesar marked the end of the Roman Republic. Baron, *Crisis*, 56-7.

⁵³ Translated in Anthony F. D’Elia, *The Renaissance of Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 25-8.

⁵⁴ Holmes, 35. Salutati, *Epistolario IV*, ed. Francesco Novati (Roma: Del Senato, 1911), 126-45.

attraction that mid-quattrocento Renaissance humanists had to classical republican rhetoric.⁵⁵ Florence continued on as a republic in name only and remained a tightly controlled oligarchy, much to the irritation of republican idealists like Parenti. The civic virtue that was so popular in Florence reflected an idealized state more so than it reflected the reality of Medici hegemony.⁵⁶

By the second half of the fifteenth century, the Platonic Academy of Lorenzo de' Medici constructed civic virtue as a mix of contemplation and activity.⁵⁷ The rapid recovery of power by the popes, who were no longer dependent on the Florentine banks, made this possible. Financial stability gave the popes patronage abilities which enabled them to bring classical philosophy into line with Catholic teachings.⁵⁸ Humanists in Rome and Florence were impacted by this papal interest.⁵⁹ Popes like Niccoló embraced humanism as a tool to further legitimize their power in accordance with the fifteenth century's intellectual and cultural environment. The popes were not the only ones to

⁵⁵ Palmieri trumpeted such classical ideology when he said that "he who seeks fame in the ability of his ancestors is a pitiable creature. A man who deserves honor should offer himself, not his genealogy." Baron, *Crisis*, 7-8.

⁵⁶ The hope of humanist Marco Parenti was that imitation of civic virtue would flourish in a free city following the death of Cosimo de' Medici in 1464. He begins his memoirs by saying "we began at the death of Cosimo de' Medici in the belief that in the future it would be our task to write about the affairs of a free city and of men who would want to become better citizens because they were tired of the servitude of previous times. In this I have not succeeded. I wanted for the time that this liberty would come, and it approached, but did not succeed entirely, and so was completely lost." Mark Philips, *The Memoir of Marco Parenti: A Life in Medici Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 3.

⁵⁷ While early humanists liked to separate the secular and the sacred, Ficino would help to bring them together and reconcile Platonism and Christianity; he claimed that to separate philosophy and religion was an impiety. Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology, Volume 1, Books I-IV*, trans. Michael J.B. Allen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁵⁸ Raphael's *School of Athens* graced the papal apartments with the images of the intellectual giants of the classical age. Raphael, *The School of Athens*, fresco, 1510, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City.

⁵⁹ Valla is a good example of how the pope's purse brought Christianity front and center into what had been a humanist political rhetoric had earlier been driven more clearly by the tenets of classical, albeit pagan, societies. That Valla was brought to Rome by Pope Nicholas V who founded the Vatican Library and made Valla an apostolic secretary in 1447. This is even more significant considering that Pope Eugenio IV had a rocky relationship with Valla due to Valla's insistence that the *Donation of Constantine* was a forgery. Lorenzo Valla, *La Falsa Donazione di Costantino: Contro il Potere Temporale dei Papi*, ed. Gabriele Pepe (Torino: Tip. F. li Pozzo, 1952).

manipulate humanism to support their authority. The Medici would shift mid-fifteenth-century humanism in new directions to legitimize their authority. Medici patronage of the Platonic Academy at Lorenzo's villa at Careggi took some of the thunder out of the "civically active" version of humanism in favor of Lorenzo's interest in philosophy and literature.⁶⁰ Members of the Academy helped to push humanism into dynamic classical and religious frameworks.⁶¹

Through its development, humanism continued to be defined as a set of scholarly interests that drew on the knowledge of antiquity and used that knowledge to improve the situation of man on earth.⁶² The achievements of those active in civic society were certainly honored, and Valla argued an important point to illustrate this, namely that these elite Florentines seemed to embrace being citizens because they were free to choose virtue. This "choice" meant that they surpassed the monks who lived cloistered lives and took vows of chastity outside the temptations of the secular world.⁶³ This notion speaks to the point that activity continued, in some capacity, to take precedence over the contemplative.

Then, by the end of the quattrocento, Machiavelli and Savonarola defended the republic of the pre-Medici years by discussing active republican civic virtue.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Cristoforo Landino marked this shift back to considering the virtues of a contemplative life when he said it is thoughts "that have the flavor of eternity, not deeds, that outlive men" Baron, *Crisis*, 133.

⁶¹ Marsilio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Angelo Poliziano and Lorenzo Valla are examples of individuals from this school who often used the writings of the church fathers to reconcile antiquity with Christianity.

⁶² Clearly there was no one version of republican virtue. The Medici supported humanists like Palmieri who were most interested in Neo-Platonism. Not all humanists found virtue in Medici leadership. Thinkers like Cavalcanti had an anti-Medici streak and used Aristotle to discuss the virtue of poverty. He used "humility" to highlight the right and ability of the old aristocracy to better rule Florence. Regardless of how humanists felt about Medici hegemony, the Neo-Platonism school blended Aristotle, Plato, and Christianity. Paul Oskar Kristeller and Michael Mooney, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

⁶³ Kristian Jensen, "The Humanist Reform of Latin and Latin Teaching", *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 63-81.

⁶⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Julia Bondanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Girolamo Savonarola, *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola: Religion and Politics, 190-8*, trans. Anne Borelli (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

Machiavelli, for example, would argue against contemplative Neo-Platonism as a basis for action and social obligations. While Machiavelli found great value in Republican Rome in his *Discourses on Livy*, his later treatise *The Prince* seemed to advocate that a strong autocrat would offer Italy the leadership needed to fight the armies of the North.⁶⁵ The debate over Machiavelli's political ideology based on the discrepancies between *The Prince* and *The Discourses* aside, this political scientist did witness Florence turning away from being a republican commune to a principality, and that is where our story will end.⁶⁶

Adding to the confusion and turmoil that turned late fifteenth-century Florence on its head was Savonarola. With his threats of hellfire, brimstone, and damnation for those individuals that focused on the pagan *Carpe Diem* of worldly pleasures and successes, he pushed Florence to religiosity from the secularism of the early Renaissance in the 1490s. Earlier in the century, during the topsy-turvy struggle of the Medici for power and the threats of Milanese expansion, the past had looked appealing. Now, in contrast, the Florentine republic struggled and new threats from the monarchies of Northern Europe led intellectuals to turn away from the advice of classical authors. A generation of humanists, who had adamantly sought classical models, were dying. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola died at the young age of 31 on the same day that the French army entered Florence in November of 1494. His death, as well as that of Angelo Poliziano, who had died only a month before, marked the end of a contemplative, philosophical trend in the humanistic school. He represented a kind of humanism that was open to a wide range of philosophy (like Aristotle). Unlike Valla, he had pursued philosophy with a view that knowledge should come from all sources. His personal library, which he gifted to the monastery of San Marco, testifies to the rich collection of "sources" that he used.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Niccoló Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. George Bull (New York: Penguin, 2003).

⁶⁶ For a seminal work which does compare these texts and discusses the evolution of Machiavelli's ideology see Frederico Chabod, *Machiavelli and the Renaissance* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1958).

⁶⁷ Pico della Mirandola, *Oration of The Dignity of Man*, was critical of humanists who would not accept philosophy. The oration asserts that philosophy is an essential study that is the basis for religion and that different beliefs should be studied (Jewish, Islamic, and pagan included) to understand the core of Catholicism. He even credits scholasticism for its pursuit of truth,

The dominant intellectual opinion in Florence seemed to swing back to a more contemplative humanism under the Medici dukedom of Cosimo I (r. 1537-1574).⁶⁸ In many ways the installation of the Medici dukes, beginning with Cosimo I, marked the end of the spirit of this active, classically-inspired civic humanism. Republican sentiment was not welcomed in the court of this Duke. As evidence of this aversion to the Florentine Republic, it was during Cosimo's reign that Machiavelli, the former Secretary of the Florentine Republic, was imprisoned and tortured in 1512. Granted, Machiavelli discussed both republican conviction and support for a principate.⁶⁹ But it was Machiavelli's active pursuit of political life that rang most loudly in the ears of the new dukedom. By the end of the fifteenth century citizens' pursuits of an active political life were no longer appreciated by these crowned hereditary dukes.

It is important to mention that during these swings, the prominent humanists gathered by the Medici, including Coluccio Salutati, Niccolò Niccoli, Poggio Bracciolini, Marsilio Ficino, Angelo Poliziano, and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, did not bend to the will of their patrons. And although they did not depend on the support of Cosimo il Vecchio or his heirs, it seems that they were more than happy to have Medici support. Perhaps the humanists discussed classical models of restraint with their Medici patrons to promote the survival of the republic. These humanists will be addressed here as a group whose individual ideas are far from identical, as they all interpreted the classical texts in their own way, and yet shared a common inspiration – antiquity - which connected them.⁷⁰ Some of these men, like Poggio, scoured the dusty libraries of Europe's monastic houses and churches in search of classical texts. He used these texts to create an

although he does admit that humanist rhetoric would make it more convincing. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Introduzione dell'Apologia di Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola* (Roma: Grilli C., 1894). Pico was also buried at San Marco. This was probably motivated by his close relationship with the Friar Savonarola.

⁶⁸ Hans Baron discusses the developments and changes of humanism in Renaissance Florence in his collection of essays *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

⁶⁹ Machiavelli, *Livy*; Machiavelli, *The Prince*.

⁷⁰ George Holmes, *The Florentine Enlightenment, 1400-1450* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). Holmes argues, convincingly, that this common literary inspiration was enough of a connection to make the period a distinct intellectual movement in Florence and the papal state.

idealized vision of republican Rome which served as a model for civic engagement.⁷¹ Rome, as fifteenth-century humanist Paulo Antonio Soderini said, “was superior to all other mortals in everything.”⁷² It was interpretations of classical texts that would be the backbone of fifteenth century humanism and definitions of civic virtue in Renaissance culture.

Sources

Defining femininity has been a recurrent topos since the Greeks, so there is an abundance of written material to consider. Although this dissertation will rely heavily on letters written by fifteenth-century women, much of the material which was influential to Renaissance humanists was written during antiquity so we will start there. Kristeller reminds us that “philosophy, just as the sciences or the arts, has its own specific tradition, and there are essential points in the thought of each modern philosopher that are more adequately understood in relation to his predecessors in antiquity or in later times than to the vague ideas of his own non-philosophical contemporaries.”⁷³ Renaissance humanists, in particular, certainly are best understood by looking at the classical texts they adapted and the larger culture that these adaptations affected.

The Greeks contributed the satirical poems of Semonides and the philosophical tracts of Aristotle, which were the often-cited source for defining women’s biological and intellectual inferiority to men.⁷⁴ In the Hellenic, Hellenistic, and Roman worlds, women were most often described as being lesser creatures. Medieval authors also sought to define the “species of women” via the rhetorical medieval game “Quid est Mulier.” Christine de Pizan also encouraged the debate on the place of women in her much discussed *Querelle des Femmes*.⁷⁵ Many ancient texts relating to issues of gender were

⁷¹ Holmes, 13.

⁷² Amos Edelheit, *Ficino, Pico, and Savonarola* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 138.

⁷³ Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*.

⁷⁴ Amorignus Semonides, *Females of the Species: Semonides On Women* (London: Duckworth, 1975). Aristotle, *De Partibus Animalium I and de Generatione Animalium*, trans. by David M. Balme (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁷⁵ Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women’s Writing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

recovered in Western Europe during the fifteenth century. The impact of influential texts, like Cicero's *De Finibus*, on Renaissance political ideology and the perception of the status of women in the society was quite profound. In this *De Finibus*, Cicero noted the importance of women: "the family as a whole is bound together by the ties of marriage and parenthood gradually spreads its influence beyond the home, first by blood relationships then by connections through marriage, later by friendships afterward by the bonds of neighborhood, then to fellow-citizens and political allies and friends, and lastly by embracing the whole of the human race."⁷⁶ Cicero thus illustrates how civic identity was seen as beginning in the home of one's parents.

Like these classical traditions, the Christian teachings of the Middle Ages and Renaissance placed women in a very difficult position. Now women were considered the daughters of Eve. Biblical tradition associated Eve with the fall of mankind because it was Eve who had succumbed to temptation and ate the apple in Eden. Because of this tradition, women were seen as lacking in intelligence and punished for their sin by the pain of childbirth. Thus, it is not surprising that notable women were praised by their male biographers for having overcome their sex. There is a certain amount of admiration in these proclamations although these women were always still "women." They were women, though, that were *acting* like men. What we will see throughout the course of this study is that such women were not just placed on pedestals; rather they can be seen as actively climbing on to them with more will power than just simply exceptional circumstance and, in this patriarchal society, they were admired for it.

One important source of biographical information is the medieval and Renaissance catalogues of women's lives. The format of many women's biographies was often that of the catalogues of women like Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris*.⁷⁷ The lists contained both Christian and pagan heroines. Although boring to the modern reader for their dry repetitiveness, these kinds of authoritative lists of evidence held "truth" for the

⁷⁶ Cicero, *De Finibus*, trans. H. Rackham (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), V, 65-6.

⁷⁷ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Forty-Six Lives: Translated from De Claris Mulieribus*. trans. Henry Parker Baron and Herbert G. Wright (London: Oxford University Press, 1943).

Renaissance reader. Since the focus of these catalogues was on the women of the past, biographical details could be constructed with some “creative” liberty.⁷⁸

Women were also singled out in the fiery sermons of San Bernardino and Savonarola, so there is an element of recorded oral history that supports my argument that there were those who believed that unless women behaved properly, earthly civilization would be doomed to failure. San Bernardino proclaimed that women’s nature was more prone to sinful behavior than that of men, but it is noteworthy that in his view, the health of the city rested on bringing women into the fold of good behavior.⁷⁹ This places them very clearly into the larger civic culture.

Because I am searching for agency and action on the part of women, letters are an essential source information for this study. The disparity between experience of women and the presentation of the image of women by men had been discussed since Christine de Pizan in her *Book of the City of Ladies*. Since letters were usually penned in the course of some action, they give us the opportunity to see Renaissance women “at work.” Alessandra Strozzi, Lucrezia Tornabuoni, and Clarice de’ Medici leave rare and rich epistolary collections.⁸⁰ Their letters, both received and sent, are frequent and numerous. The Archivio di Stato has the bulk of letters to and from the Strozzi (and those in their circle) collected in the *Carte Strozzi*. This is a rich source because it contains an assortment of letters written for and by Alessandra Strozzi.⁸¹ The *Medici avanti il Principato* collection contains the letters of Lucrezia Tornabuoni de’ Medici as well as those written by Contessina, Clarice, and Nannina de’ Medici. This illustrates the frequency with which elite women in Florence sent and received personal correspondence.

An important methodological question is to what extent the sources are available to really reconstruct these women’s lives. The women to be discussed in this study are

⁷⁸ Petrarch, *De Viris Illustribus*, ed. by Guido Martellotti (Firenze: Sansoni, 1964); Boccaccio, *Forty-Six Lives*.

⁷⁹ Bernardino da Siena, *Le Prediche Volgari*, 7 vols., ed. Ciro Cannarozzi (Florence: Libr. ed. Fiorentina, 1934).

⁸⁰ There are also a smaller number of letters penned by Nannina de Medici.

⁸¹ Folio CXXXI.

not simply to be seen as a series of vignettes; there is a more cohesive and conclusive element reflected in the common theme in their activities. These women were political more through their life choices than through their words. Women in these letters did not blast through barricades placed in front of women's agency in this patriarchal society. Rather these barricades remained standing, and the quiet crossing by elite women went unnoticed. Their actions were not gender transgressions, but rather illustrations of how these women's space was negotiable because of their elite status.

These transgressions are apparent in another valuable kind of letter. Letters written by elite men, either to female kin or to other men discussing women, offer valuable illustrations of women's activities. Two rich bodies of source material exist in the letters of Marco Parenti, wherein he describes the marriage prospects of his brother-in-law, Filippo Strozzi, at great length, and the epistolary collection of Lorenzo de' Medici, who engaged in frequent and candid correspondence with both his wife and his mother.

Letters are especially important in the study of Florentine women because, unlike Venetian women like Isotta Nogarola and Arcangela Tarabotti, women in Florence did not leave published tracts like Tarabotti's *Paternal Tyranny*, which dealt specifically with the limitations which burdened women in the early modern patriarchy.⁸² The fifteenth-century Florentine women who did publish, however, do provide an important source. An example of secular women's writing from the circle of elite Florentines is Lucrezia Tornabuoni's *La Istoria della Casta Susanna* and other sacred poems, which show how Tornabuoni had an obvious sense of the cultural and social life of her day.⁸³ She also left an extensive collection of private letters which also illustrated her activity in the Medici circle.⁸⁴

Another valuable body of evidence is private and public material culture. My study works with limited hard historical data and uses material objects as a useful source

⁸² Arcangela Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁸³ Lucrezia Tornabuoni, *Sacred Narratives*, ed. and trans. Jane Tylus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁸⁴ Lucrezia Tornabuoni, *Lettere*, ed. Patrizia Salvadori (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1993).

of evidence.⁸⁵ Both secular and sacred, these material artifacts, including marriage chests, birth trays, frescos, and portraits, are a historical testament to women's existence at the center of the republic. A large percentage of high art relating to women's lives has been collected in the galleries of Florence, such as the Uffizi and the Bargello, but many paintings and sculptures are still located in their original religious or civic locations. The allegories of virtue connected to the ideologies of the republic are abundant. More than more than just showing idealism, they illustrate models which the women of this study were expected to follow. Botticelli's *Fortitude* (c. 1470), which exhibits resilience, strength, and courage, was one of seven allegorical depictions of the virtues. The others, *Faith, Hope, Charity, Temperance, Prudence, and Justice*, were painted by Piero del Pollaiuolo and publicly displayed in the Court of Mercanzia in the Piazza della Signoria.⁸⁶ Portraiture is also a window into men's perceptions of elite women in the fifteenth century; as Leonardo da Vinci wrote on the reverse side of his portrait of Ginevra de' Benci, "Beauty Adorns Virtue."⁸⁷

Finally, there are moral and political tracts like Matteo Palmieri's *Della Vita Civile* which set a context for establishing the prominence of civic virtue in Florence. Female humanists outside of Florence engaged in humanistic dialogue. Isotta Nogarola and Cassandra Fedele are two of the non-Florentine women who advocated for women's rights as opposed to their less rebellious Florentine peers.

These letters, documents, and manuscripts provide evidence with which to establish the existence of Florentine civic pride in men and women alike. The fact that the archives in Florence are full of the stories of women stands in contrast to the reality that the lives of these women have traditionally only been discussed *outside* of traditional

⁸⁵ Some examples of material objects of daily life can be found in Andrea Bayer, *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008); Marta Ajmar-Wollheim et al., *At Home in Renaissance Italy* (London: Victoria and Albert Publications, 2006).

⁸⁶ Sandro Botticelli, *Fortitude*, tempera on wood, c. 1445, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. This is the only virtue in this series that was painted by Botticelli, and not Pollaiuolo. This was Botticelli's first commission and stands out in comparison to the gothic-influenced style of the other six virtues.

⁸⁷ Leonardo da Vinci, *Ginevra de' Benci*, oil on panel c. 1474, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

civic Florentine history. Their voices speak to us clearly from wills, letters, narratives, and trappings of material culture. This dissertation is not focused on quantitative social history, but rather on cultural history. Because of this focus, advice literature, philosophical materials, material culture, epistolary collections and other creative literary sources have been useful.

Historiography

In the historiography of Renaissance Florence, women have been presented predominantly as living their domestic lives entirely outside of the male-dominated public world. In order to bridge the gender gap which continues to divide Florentine social history, I will contribute to this discussion of public and private space by arguing that quattrocento women in the secular world had more in common with the men in their lives than has previously been discussed. This will create a clearer picture of the common culture that men and women shared in this urban space.

Until the 1980s, few historians explicitly studied the experience of women during the Renaissance. There is a long Renaissance historiography that must be considered before we explore the topic of “Renaissance women’s history.” It is necessary to start with the most influential work in the historical literature of Florentine Renaissance studies. That ground-breaking work, first published in 1860, is Jacob Burckhardt’s *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*.⁸⁸ Burckhardt saw the Renaissance as a period in which, owing to the development of the notion of the “individual,” women did indeed receive more freedoms and had more privileges and opportunities than had been available to them in the Middle Ages.⁸⁹ Although Burckhardt has come under much criticism in the last 150 years, he still remains influential and often cited. In recent years, there has been a historiographical trend to reconsider the merits of his arguments. Burckhardt did try to look at “the bigger picture” of a larger Renaissance when he said that women also

⁸⁸ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (London: Penguin Group, 1990).

⁸⁹ Burckhardt, 50. This argument has been refuted, for example, by Thomas Kuehn, “Understanding Gender Inequality in Renaissance Florence: Personhood and Gifts of Maternal Inheritance By Women,” *Journal of Women’s History* 8 (1996): 58-80.

experienced a Renaissance. And, although he did not consider the limitations of a patriarchal society with a strong misogynistic tradition, his assertion that elite women not only experienced the Renaissance, but also contributed to its ideology, does, I will argue, contain some validity. This is a cornerstone to my assertion of women's engagement in the humanist culture.

Histories of the Renaissance period written during the first half of the twentieth century were predominantly political, while later economic studies highlighted the wealthy and powerful city-state of Florence while it was at the height of its power under Medici dominance. There are a few exceptions to note, however, of histories from this time which did discuss women in Renaissance Italy. When Yvonne Maguire published *The Women of the Medici* in 1927, for example, practically nothing regarding upper-class Florentine women existed in English.⁹⁰ Based on letters in the state archive written by women, she came to the conclusion that women were most clearly recognized as the wives of wealthy men.⁹¹ This dependence certainly moves away from the individualism that Burckhardt asserted. The 1930s through the 1950s saw little published in the area of social and women's history of the Italian Renaissance, amidst a slew of economic, political, and military studies, although Ruth Kelso's *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, published in 1956, offered groundbreaking scholarship based on primary French and Italian sources.⁹² A comprehensive account of Renaissance views of the "ideal" woman, this lengthy volume was in many ways directly contradictory to Burckhardt because of its acknowledgment that women were excluded from the freedom and opportunities characteristic of the period. In the process of breaking down Burckhardt's egalitarian vision, Kelso presented the history of the "other sex" as

⁹⁰ Italian compilations of Lucrezia Tornabuoni and Alessandra Strozzi's letters were published already. Lucrezia Tornabuoni, *Lettere*, ed. Patrizia Salvadori (Firenze: L.S. Olschiki, 1993); Alessandra Strozzi, *Lettere di una Gentildonna Fiorentino del Secolo XV*, ed. Cesar Guasti (Firenze: G.C. Sansoni, 1877).

⁹¹ Yvonne Maguire, *The Women of the Medici* (London: G. Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1927).

⁹² Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine For the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956).

something different: one of a subservient identity associated with limited opportunities and suppression.

The 1960s and 1970s saw the contributions of an active generation of American social historians, including Gene Brucker's 1969 work, *Renaissance Florence*, and Richard Goldthwaite's *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence*, published a year earlier.⁹³ These works highlighted the economic and political world of men before the struggles and social tensions of the 1960s helped to shape the feminism of the 1970s. A book such as Francis William Kent's *Household and Lineage in Renaissance Florence* (1977) presented an example of historians' growing interest in women's roles in the household in a familial context.⁹⁴ This work demonstrated a move toward illustrating some of the agency women had in this domestic position.

In the 1970s and 1980s there was a notable rise in the number of women entering the historical profession, many of whom published works which explored women's place in history. Joan Kelly's scholarship is the pillar on which many of today's feminist Renaissance historians build. She was very influential as part of the generation of historians who first developed the contemporary study of women by introducing the relationships between the sexes as a topic for historical discussion. In her groundbreaking essay "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" (1977), Kelly helped to set the stage for reinterpreted feminist Renaissance studies by claiming that women had no "Renaissance" during the period typically classified as such, pointing out the very limited opportunities for women to control their destinies.⁹⁵ Her question was not merely rhetorical, and the seminal article sparked a fire of responses. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber's *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* contributed to this discussion by expanding Kelly's thesis to paint a very bleak picture of women's subjugated position

⁹³ Gene Brucker, *Renaissance Florence* (New York: Wiley, 1969); Richard Goldthwaite, *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence: A Study of Four Families* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

⁹⁴ Francis William Kent, *Household and Lineage in Renaissance Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

⁹⁵ Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?", in Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, ed. *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

under the control of their fathers and husbands.⁹⁶ Although Klapisch-Zuber did recognize that the reality on the streets and in the homes of Florence may have afforded women more agency than *ricordanze* might indicate, it was up to later works to highlight the nuances of women's actual experiences during the Renaissance outside of the constraints of legal documents and misogynistic humanist texts. Kelly's scholarship continued in 1982 with her bold assertion of the existence of "a 400-year-old tradition of women thinking about women and sexual politics in European society before the French Revolution."⁹⁷

The 1980s also produced a fruitful vein of scholarship which began to look at discussions of virtue in contrast to Florentine behavior in the realities of daily life. Ian Maclean's *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in The Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (1980) explored philosophy in Renaissance texts and how it defined the role of women.⁹⁸ Rudolph Bell's *How to Do It: Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians* (1999) looked at the "how to manual" as popular literature.⁹⁹ This question of the "ideal" woman, in comparison with the reality of those whose stories we have, has been a driving force in a good deal of research that has also addressed the overlapping of popular and elite culture.

Women's history came of age in the 1980s and 1990s when studying the lower classes became a fundamental focus of historical inquiry.¹⁰⁰ At this time there was a substantial rise in the popularity of studying history "from the bottom up" in order to understand how both men and women of different social and economic strata identified

⁹⁶ Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual In Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

⁹⁷ Joan Kelly, "Early Feminist Theory and The 'Querelles des Femmes' 1400-1789," *Signs* Vol. 8., No. 1 (Autumn 1982): 4-28.

⁹⁸ Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in The Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medieval Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁹⁹ Rudolph Bell, *How to Do It: Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁰ Marx and the Annales school had focused on the peasantry, but study of the lower classes more generally intensified in the 1980s.

with the city of Florence.¹⁰¹ Gene Brucker's 1986 micro-history, *Giovanni and Lusanna: Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence*, as well as Judith Brown's *Immodest Acts*, also published in 1986, explored the lives of individuals outside of the "typical" patrician experience.¹⁰² Brucker's narrative looked at a twenty-year affair which culminated in a lawsuit, in which Lusanna won her case that she and Giovanni were, in fact, secretly married, while Brown presented the case of a Florentine nun in conjunction with Renaissance views of female homosexuality. Such biographical studies had not traditionally been a focus of historical enquiry because their subjects' circumstances were not seen as "typical," although it could be argued that these stories are as much a product of Florentine culture and society as more "mainstream" lives. More recently Margaret King's *Women of the Renaissance* (1991) looked at both ordinary and extraordinary women of all classes.¹⁰³ It is the contextual stories of all of these women, both those in usual and unusual circumstances, that show the commonality of the Florentine experience.

Recent work has continued to study the lives of men and women of all classes. Elites like Alessandra Strozzi have received a great deal of attention in works like Ann Crabb's *The Strozzi of Florence: Widowhood and Family in The Renaissance* (2000).¹⁰⁴ This work focuses on Strozzi's ability to help her children attain social and economic success and illustrates an "attack" on Kelly's focus on the rigidity of the social system. A reconsideration of Kelly continues in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, edited by Judith Brown and published in 1998, centered on 20 years of arguments against Kelly.

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 144.

¹⁰² Gene Brucker, *Giovanni and Lusanna: Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence* (California: University of California Press, 1986); Judith Brown, *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹⁰³ Margaret King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

¹⁰⁴ Ann Crabb, *The Strozzi of Florence: Widowhood and Family Solidarity in The Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000). Strozzi is not the only "elite" Renaissance woman to receive renewed attention. Italian scholarship like Marcello Vannucci, *Le Grandi Donne del Rinascimento Italiano: da Simonetta Cattaneo a Isabella d'Este, da Lucrezia Borgia ad Artemisia Gentileschi: Un'affascinante Storia Tutta al Femminile* (Roma: Newton and Compton, 2004) has also highlighted the biographies of the Medici women and their elite peers.

Others, like Samuel Cohn in *Women in the Streets: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy* (1996), however, have supported the notion that women were very limited in terms of their agency and that sex and violence are evidence of a dark side of the Renaissance and a decline of the status of women in the late fourteenth century.¹⁰⁵ This “decline” does stand in some contrast to another trend in the historiography of the 1980s that had been re-exploring women rulers of the sixteenth century.¹⁰⁶ These monarchs --Catherine de Medici, Elizabeth I, and Mary Queen of Scots-- stand in stark contrast to the position of women of the ruling class in Florence. The only women to sit on thrones as sovereigns in this city were those in allegories, and thus the scholarship on Florentine women has not had the opportunity to discuss women in positions of explicit power.¹⁰⁷

It is to the historiography of Renaissance women that I will contribute. I find much validity in Kelly’s claim that women did not have a “Renaissance,” but feel it important to note that neither did most men for that matter. If it was a dark time for Florentine women, then it was a time of social darkness for most non-well-to-do male Florentines as well. This historiography still begs the question of whether women had an agency beyond being their “father’s daughter” or their “husband’s wife.” Women of the Florentine elite played a substantial role in the configuration of society. One should not see Florentine law as a concrete system of norms because it is ambiguous and varies in practice.¹⁰⁸ My focus will be on this “practice” of behavior and its development in urban space. Ritual and civic interaction were the building blocks of a cohesive society in the minds of Florentines. This civic identity has not yet been fully explored in terms of its application to the women of this city. It is time, however, to bridge the gender gap which

¹⁰⁵ Samuel Cohn, *Women In The Streets: Essays on Sex and Power in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

¹⁰⁶ Rachel Judith Weil, *The Crown has Fallen to the Distaff: Gender and Politics in the Age of Catherine de’ Medici* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

¹⁰⁷ Anderson, *A History of Their Own*. Women leaders are a theme in this text that is organized around women’s place and function in society.

¹⁰⁸ A work that deconstructs the dark image of the subjugation of “the other voice” is Thomas Kuehn, *Law, Family, and Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

has become a traditional approach in feminist scholarship. My goal in this dissertation will be to move beyond the dichotomy of the history of men as opposed to the history of women that exists in this historiography. I seek to construct an exploration of an overarching Florentine mindset based on a widely recognized set of civic virtues.¹⁰⁹ It was suggested by participants at the Renaissance Society of America's 2005 Plenary Discussion that women's history has passed its apex. Perhaps a more inclusive history, which showcases similarities across gendered lines, will bring women's studies into a new phase.

Why Florence?

The prosperity of Renaissance Florence does not mean that it was a city at ease. As Horace noted, "it is a difficult task to endure prosperity."¹¹⁰ Life in Renaissance Florence could be particularly difficult for women. A theme in Italian Renaissance historiography has been that historians who studied women in Renaissance Florence focused on the idea that Florence was one of the worst places to be a woman.¹¹¹ So why, then, focus on the activities of Florentine women? It is because I seek to contribute to this historiography by asserting that women belong in the public story rather than sequestering them into the domestic sphere. Their "worth" (morals and virtues) was judged by the same society that judged the worth of men. Civic identity during the Renaissance was visible to the public and judged by the public, so it is time to put women back into the larger urban history of Florence. One way to explore the activities of women is to pull together episodes and examples from a variety of fifteenth-century lives. The availability of sources has made the lives of "notorious" Florentine women more readily available in published texts than ever before. Series like "Other Voices" are bringing Italian texts to English language audiences for the first time and studies about

¹⁰⁹ There are at least four historiographical schools of Italian Renaissance intellectual history based on the works of Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, Hans Baron, and Eugenio Garin.

¹¹⁰ Petrarch, 5

¹¹¹ David Alan Brown, *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Felice della Rovere (c.1483-1536) and Maria Celeste (Virginia) Galilei (1600-1634) have opened new sources of information about women's activities.¹¹²

Since Florence has been so heavily studied, is this city a viable candidate to be the focus of yet another history? Yes. Of all the Renaissance Italian cities, Florence has one of the most developed early modern historiographies.¹¹³ This is one reason why Florence is the perfect candidate for my approach. Order, and the adherence of the bulk of the population to a common focal point, created political security for families like the Medici.¹¹⁴ The Florentines adherence to the civic virtues of justice, temperance, prudence, and fortitude was what they saw as the defining characteristic of their civilization that made them "great." Their interpretation of classical and Christian virtues, set into a republican framework, made these virtues typically Florentine. Baron argued, convincingly, that civic humanism was a phenomenon that arose out of a particular Florentine condition.¹¹⁵ The Florentines were not "copy cats" of antiquity nor any other contemporary government. Instead, they provide a rather unique case study in gender relations.

What also makes Florence worth writing about is that there are parallels to humanistic culture in other Renaissance Italian cities like Venice. Florence is often seen as the quintessential example of the Renaissance revival of classical (Roman) republican ideology, while it has also been cited as the Renaissance city where women were most repressed and sequestered. If female adherence to civic virtue can be found here, one can hypothesize that it can also be found elsewhere, because humanist culture communicated commonalities across northern Italy throughout the fifteenth century.¹¹⁶ Much of women's experience here can be found in other Italian cities. The primary and secondary

¹¹² Caroline P. Murphy, *The Pope's Daughter: The Extraordinary Life of Felice della Rovere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Dava Sobel, *Galileo's Daughter: A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith, and Love* (New York: Walker & Co., 1999).

¹¹³ Rome also has a rich historiography as does, more recently, Venice.

¹¹⁴ Consider the Ciompi revolt.

¹¹⁵ Hankins, *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, 73.

¹¹⁶ This may be because of the legalistic obsession with record keeping in Florence. For example, over 100 *ricordanze* (daily household ledgers, memoirs, and chronicles) exist in the records of Renaissance Florence.

sources for Florence are plentiful enough to develop this argument using rich case studies. The role of women in republics in a broad geographical and chronological framework can be utilized to show trends. For example, similarities can be seen in the way women in the Roman Republic were sequestered and yet held to high moral standards.¹¹⁷ Such a wide framework will help put these women's experiences into a historical context.

Outline

The chapters will not follow a chronological organization; rather, they will be focused topically around the four cardinal virtues. This work will focus on the civic virtues demonstrated by women of the ruling class in Florence from when the Medici bankers, led by Cosimo the Elder, took control of the Florentine Republic in 1434 until the expulsion of the family in 1494.¹¹⁸ Some liberty will be taken with these because this golden century of Medici rule was more of a "long fifteenth-century"; Florentine society reflected a focus on reconstructed republican virtues both before and after these dates as well. Christianity has seven virtues that run counter to the seven deadly sins. The four cardinal virtues were adopted from the pagan world and are my focus here because these are the cornerstones of civic ideology. The four cardinal virtues (from the Latin word *cardo*, or hinge) are prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude; these will structure the chapters. Each chapter will discuss how humanists sought to define the virtue after which it is named, and will use case studies to illustrate the activities of women whose actions embodied these virtues as essential themes in their lives.

This first chapter has introduced the notion that women were part of a larger Florentine civic culture. Chapters two through five each focus on adherence to a different civic virtue. Chapter two will explore women, like Lucrezia Tornabuoni, acting with prudence. Chapter three will focus on women like Clarice Orsini de' Medici

¹¹⁷ Consider Augustus and the exile of his daughter Julia. Elaine Fantham, *Julia Augusti: The Emperor's Daughter* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹¹⁸ The Albizzi struggled against the Medici for control of Florence. R. J. Crum, "Severing the Neck of Pride: Donatello's Judith and Holofernes and the Recollection of Albizzi Shame in Medicean Florence," *Artibus et Historiae* 44 (2001): 23-30.

displaying temperance. Chapter four will explore the virtue of justice, and chapter five will look at the strength of women like Alessandra Strozzi as an example of a woman who sought fortitude successfully. A concluding section will assess this variety of case studies to establish both the intense drive of Florentine women to achieve these virtues, and their successes in this endeavor as well as some of their shortcomings. Overall, we will see how women actively engaged in the pursuit of civic virtue.

Argument

As I seek to establish the activities of women more firmly in the broad scope of Renaissance history, I will argue that the Florentine women I discuss were truly like the men of their day in one regard - namely, in their display of civic virtue. Renaissance Florence was not a modern society in the sense of moving toward gender equality, so of course the agency of these women was limited by the patriarchal overtones of the epoch. As the feminist scholar Rosalind Petchesky has argued, “if we understand that patriarchal kinship relations are not static, but like class relations are characterized by antagonism and struggle, then we begin to speculate that women’s consciousness and their periodic attempts to resist or change the dominant kinship structures will themselves reflect class relations.”¹¹⁹ Regardless of their sex, women were first and foremost “Florentine” in their behavior. The relationship between men and women in patriarchal societies was *not* always antagonistic, and fifteenth-century Florence does seem to be a time and place during which these elite women and men lived amidst a collective sense of culture amongst the elites. They were part of this “collective,” and thus shared a feeling of solidarity that superseded even stark gender divisions.

Women worked within the ideology of a patriarchal world and acted in ways that showed their associations as Florentines and members of kin groups. In this way they differed from Venetian women who were more assertive in their belief that they felt displaced. Perhaps this is why Venetian women were more likely to focus on the

¹¹⁹ Sheila Rowbotham, Sally Alexander and Barbara Taylor, “The Trouble With ‘Patriarchy,’” in *The Feminist History Reader*, ed. Sue Morgan (New York: Routledge, 2006), 54.

limitations of their sex.¹²⁰ The Florentine women in this study led a quiet but successful struggle to achieve civic virtue. Building on 30 years of feminist scholarship, if we acknowledge the role of these women, it changes the depth of our perceptions of the fifteenth century and takes us beyond the stories of great men to see a more complete, more accurate Renaissance experience for men *and* women living in Florence. Lucrezia Tornabuoni and many of her elite peers should no longer be limited to the view that they are the *donna di*, “the woman of” a father or husband.¹²¹ They used these privileged positions to forge their own identity and agenda in pursuit of civic virtue.

It would be impossible – and a significant oversimplification – to assert that the women studied here are statistically representative of the entire Florentine population. Studies like Richard Trexler’s *The Women of Renaissance Florence: Power and Dependence in Renaissance Florence* have highlighted women on the periphery of the city’s society, namely those in convents, prostitutes, and widows.¹²² These numbers far surpass those of women of the elite. Since the 1970s, those studying the history of women have established that some women were trendsetters and path-breakers pushing to be heard. It is now time, however, to give those who chose to be part of mainstream culture a much closer look. The role that they played as advocates of civic virtue in Florence was fundamental to their society. They were part of the crowd, and not the few notables that were advocates for reform. Their temperate behavior merits study, revealing a series of often-ignored, but important choices. As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich so astutely commented, “If well-behaved women seldom make history, it is not only because

¹²⁰ Isotta Nagorola, *Complete Writings: Letterbook, Dialogue on Adam and Eve, Orations*, ed. Margaret L. King and Diana M. Robin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Arcangela Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, trans. by Letizia Panizza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹²¹ G. Levantini-Pieroni, *Lucrezia Tornabuoni: Donna di Piero di Cosimo de’ Medici* (Firenze: Successori Le Monnier, 1888), 7. This work is a good example of pre-feminist biographies of Tornabuoni because it defined her in her husband’s shadow. The author also dedicated the book to his wife, “mia Lucrezia, spero di non avere sbagliato le mie indusioni” (my Lucrezia, I hope to have not wronged my efforts).

¹²² The numbers of women who were non-elite wives comprise the largest number. Richard Trexler, *The Women of Renaissance Florence: Power and Dependence in Renaissance Florence* (Asheville: Pegasus Press, 1998).

gender norms have constrained the range of female activity but because history hasn't been very good at capturing the lives of those whose contributions have been local and domestic."¹²³ In order to create a more complete view of fifteenth-century culture and society in Florence, historians must attempt to understand these individuals and not only focus on those women who did the unexpected. The daughters, wives, mothers, and sisters of this class represent an important segment of the mosaic that has been missing from the group portrait of the fifteenth-century elite in Florence. It is not possible to separate political, social, religious, and intellectual history; together these form a larger Florentine identity that was shared by elite Florentine men and women.

¹²³ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 227.

II. Prudence

Our exploration of women's active pursuit of civic virtues begins with the virtue of prudence. In the fifteenth century, Ficino among others praised prudence as a characteristically Florentine virtue: "prudence and right opinion was the beginning of moral virtue."¹²⁴ A key to understanding this culture, as Kristeller announced in 1944, was that humanists were not "philosophers with a curious lack of philosophical ideas and a curious fancy for classical studies, but rather as professional rhetoricians with a new classicist ideal of culture, who asserted the importance of their field of learning and to impose their standards upon other fields of learning and of science, including philosophy."¹²⁵ These ideas were not confined to an intellectual program, but engaged the larger culture.

One example of striking visual evidence that displayed the importance of civic virtue illustrates the medieval foundation for Renaissance Italy's perspectives of what the ideal city was and how the community could benefit from such virtuous behavior. Ambrogio Lorenzetti's (1290-1348) telling fresco cycle of *The Good Government* (1338-1340), painted in Siena's Palazzo Pubblico, focused on the cardinal virtues. Lorenzetti depicted the virtues as allegories, enthroned, and thus ruling here on earth, while the three theological virtues hover in an otherworldly position overhead. Achievement to attain these "worldly" virtues appears to have garnered increasing popularity during the Renaissance in locations like the Dominican monastery of Santa Maria Novella.¹²⁶ Prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance were the surviving virtues of antiquity and the object of much interest on the part of humanists. In this Florentine representation the

¹²⁴ Marsilio Ficino, *The Gardens of Philosophy: Ficino on Plato*, trans. Arthur Farndell (London: Shephard-Walwyn Publishers, 2006), 15-6.

¹²⁵ Paul Oskar Kristeller and Michael Mooney, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 563.

¹²⁶ Aquinas also recognized the centrality of prudence when he said "prudence has both the character of virtue that other intellectual virtues have and the character of virtue that moral virtues have" as prudence is "related both to the private good of individuals and to the common good of a community." Prudence and justice are most apt to be applied to the common good. Thomas Aquinas, *Cardinal Virtues* trans. Richard J. Regan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005), 3- 6.

virtues hovered in an image that would have been seen by students and monks alike. This displayed the ability of humanist ideology to influence both clerical and secular culture. The view that Renaissance ideology represented a focus only on secular influence is too narrow if one considers the influence of biblical texts on Marsilio Ficino's *De Christiana Religione* and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Apologia*.¹²⁷ As is the case with a study of any of the virtues, it is impossible to separate interest in humanist philosophy with an interest in theology.¹²⁸ This melding of ideologies is reflected in the behavior of elite men and women who rejected some aspects of medieval scholastic tradition in favor of Biblical texts and Greek and Latin sources.

There is little doubt that the Medici men were admired for displaying the virtues, including prudence, defined by humanism. In one example, in a letter (circa 1464) from Marsilio Ficino to Lorenzo de' Medici, Ficino reflected on the life of Cosimo il Vecchio. Ficino gushed that Lorenzo's grandfather was "a man prudent above all men, pious toward God, just and most charitable toward men, temperate in living, diligent in his care for his family, and still more so in the affairs of the republic; a most honorable man he lived not only for himself but for the good of his country and his God...he was as acute in reasoning as he was prudent and strong in governing."¹²⁹ This model was also influential on the values of later generations of Florentines. Piero de' Medici said of his father Lorenzo that he was a man of "great prudence and still greater kindness, he was the most eminent and the richest citizen our city has possessed for many years."¹³⁰ Acting with wisdom, altruism, and caution, while gazing into both the past and the future, were seen as cornerstones of prudence in the lives of these elite and powerful Florentines. The deliberate effort to plan for the future, for oneself, but most importantly for the future of

¹²⁷ Marsilio Ficino, *Fiorentino della Cristiana Religione*, ed. Niccolò di Lorenzo della Magna (Firenze: Niccolò di Lorenzo della Magna, 1474); Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Introduzione dell'Apologia di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola* (Roma: Grilli C., 1894).

¹²⁸ Amos Edelheit, *Ficino, Pico, and Savonarola: The Evolution of Humanist Theology 1461/2-1498* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 78.

¹²⁹ Janet Ross, ed. *Lives of the Early Medici: As Told in Their Correspondence* (Boston: Gorham Press, 1911), 76-7. I have modified the translation to modernize the language.

¹³⁰ Ross, 77-8.

the one's kin, was a way in which this virtue manifested itself in the lives of men and women.

Prudence was much discussed in fifteenth-century Florence. A bold visual representation of this virtue can be seen in Antonio del Pollaiuolo's (1431–1498) allegory *Prudentia*.¹³¹ With a firm gaze and austere, seated pose, she grasps a mirror in one hand while she firmly holds a serpent at bay with the other. The mirror symbolizes recollections of the past and learning from these events with an eye toward the future. The serpent may be symbolic of humanity's learning of the truth in the Garden of Eden. Prudence has been personified in similar ways since antiquity.¹³²

Renaissance interpretations of the virtues, including that of prudence, the ability to make morally discerning choices, certainly seem to reflect those of the ancient republican model that the Florentines were seeking to revive in the fifteenth century.¹³³ When adapting classical models for quattrocento interests, Renaissance Florentine humanists often varied the ranking of the virtues from that of classical authorities. Humanist interpretations often trumpeted the active value of prudence. This was in direct contrast to many scholastic interpretations of the virtue which, because they were focused on the pursuit of a contemplative spiritual life, often stated that those with prudence “despised the world and all that is in the world in contemplation of what is divine, and to direct all the attention of the soul to divine things alone.”¹³⁴ In fifteenth-century Florence, prudence became, once again, a political virtue that was considered a key facet of successful leadership and civic duty. Men and women were encouraged to embrace

¹³¹ Piero dei Pollaiuolo, *Prudence*, tempera on panel, 1470, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

¹³² Prudence was addressed by many classical philosophers including Aristotle and was discussed in the active sense by Cicero. The behavior of one of Athens' most beloved rulers, Pericles, was also venerated by Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. He is praised for understanding unexpected losses and rallying the Athenians to continue the fight. He also illustrates how prudence partially allows one to find a balance in complex political situations. Robert Hariman, *Prudence: Classical Virtue, Postmodern Practice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). Also interesting to note is the possible explanation for the feminizing of republican virtues to “tame them.” John W. Chapman and William A. Galston ed., *Virtue* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 326.

¹³³ Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*.

¹³⁴ Macrobius, 121. Prudence, for Thomas Aquinas, including applying knowledge to human action. Aquinas, *Cardinal Virtues*, 1-29.

prudence in an effort “to devote themselves to their commonwealths, protect cities, revere parents, love their children, and cherish relatives.”¹³⁵ This definition fits into the first of four types of categories for the four virtues.¹³⁶ Political prudence meant that “one must direct all his thoughts and actions by the standard of reason, and wish for or do nothing but what is right, and have regard for human affairs as he would for divine authority. In prudence we find reason, understanding, circumspection, foresight, willingness to learn, and caution.”¹³⁷ This virtue, which was supposed to control passion, jockeyed with justice for the primary position as the most highly ranked of the four civic virtues. As Cavalcanti’s treatise stated, prudence was the principal virtue by which it was necessary to govern the republic. Without prudence, no other virtue can carry any weight because they all follow from prudence.¹³⁸ Although Cicero, Plutarch, and Plato had all asserted the prominence of justice, Niccoló Machiavelli and Francesco Guicciardini would come to focus on the superior status of prudence as the republic of Florence transformed into a hereditary dukedom.¹³⁹ This shift in ranking shows that by the end of the fifteenth century, civically minded Florentines had clearly adjusted the classical model to fit the demands of contemporary circumstances. In his frescos in *Il Collegio del Cambio* in Perugia, Pietro Perugino paired prudence and justice by placing them side-by-side in a single lunette.¹⁴⁰ In this representation prudence holds the scepter of power to illustrate

¹³⁵ Macrobius, 121.

¹³⁶ The significance of Macrobius in his contributions to scholasticism are discussed in the introduction to the translation of *The Dream of Scipio*.

¹³⁷ Macrobius, 122-3.

¹³⁸ Cavalcanti wrote *Adunque perché la prudential è la principale virtù che più a bisongia a colvi ch’ à governo della republica proseguiremo I suoi ordini senza li quail null altra virtù si puo hoerare conciosia cosa che tutte l’altre virtù succedono da questa*. Ricardiano 2431, p. 118. The notion that all the other virtues spring from prudence can also be found as a cornerstone of Epicureanism. Epicurus, *Epicurea: The Extant Remains*, trans. Hermann Usener (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926).

¹³⁹ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Re Publica De Legibus*, trans. Clinton W. Keyes (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928). Keyes makes an argument to explain Cicero’s indebtedness to Plato’s *The Republic*. *De Re Publica* was lost until 1820 when it was discovered in the Vatican library (Keyes, 9), but the ideas of Cicero were known in the works of Macrobius amongst others.

¹⁴⁰ Pietro Perugino, *Prudence and Justice With Six Antique Wisemen*, fresco, 1497, Collegio del Cambio, Perugia.

the significance of this virtue to those who rule. Below her, in a line of illustrious men who have achieved this virtue, are Fabius Maximus and Socrates. This lunette pairs the two virtues that jockeyed for the position of most important virtue amongst humanists throughout the century.

Although prudence was also a virtue for philosophical schools that focused on contemplative virtues, it was the active application that humanists in the mid-fifteenth century focused on. Epicurus explained that “prudence is a more precious thing even than philosophy; for from prudence sprung all the other virtues, and it teaches us that it is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently and honorably and justly.”¹⁴¹ Cicero, whom we discussed earlier as a supporter of the elite status of justice, attacked the Epicureans’ model because of their contemplative approach. He called the Epicureans *homo demens* (madmen) because they wanted to retreat from society rather than play an active role in it.¹⁴² Florentine humanists often seemed to agree with this attack on the contemplative in favor of active service to the state. One such example of an attack on the monastic ideal can be found in a 1401 letter Salutati wrote to a Camaldolite monk at San Miniato al Monte: “while you serve only yourself and a few fellow brothers I try to serve all of my co-citizens. . . God is near a man who engages in worldly work . . . students work like the peasants planting trees to grow for their grandchildren.”¹⁴³ Salutati finds much merit in the present and future if one follows the *vita activa* as a prudent guideline to living well in a larger community.

These distinctions of the Renaissance variety of prudence can be explored in Macrobius, in his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, which discussed Cicero’s interpretations of Plato. This influential text offered definitions of virtue that illustrated how elite Florentines may have interpreted virtue based on two of their often-cited

¹⁴¹ Epicurus, *Epicurea: The Extant Remains*, 119. Other philosophers who were influential to the Renaissance tradition, like Aquinas and Aristotle, believed that you cannot have prudence without fortitude and temperance. The dependence of one virtue on the others seems to be common in much of this philosophical tradition.

¹⁴² Cicero, *De Re Publica*, 13-14. Cicero spends a good deal of Book 1 fighting against Epicureanism by citing a problematic lack of patriotism. Ibid., 13-109.

¹⁴³ Coluccio Salutati, *Epistolario III*, ed. Francesco Novati (Roma: Forzani e C., 1896), 541-2.

classical sources.¹⁴⁴ Prudence was certainly seen during the Renaissance as a driving force behind political action. Cicero, who defined prudence as choosing between good and evil, said “it is not enough to possess virtue as if it were art of some sort, unless you make use of it.”¹⁴⁵ The powerful families of fifteenth-century Florence also idealized prudence as an active virtue, at least until Machiavelli, at the end of the century, discussed his disillusionment that Princes’ ability to stay in power was not always realized by idealistic behavior but rather through shrewd manipulation.¹⁴⁶ Idealism or not, it was always about “appearances” and appearing to be prudent whether one actually was or not.

Renaissance Florentine perceptions of prudence can be defined as action governed by rationality to control passions. This definition was discussed by authors like Petrarch in his *Rerum Memorandarum Libri*. Petrarch’s ideas were rooted in Cicero’s description of the virtue as found in *De Inventione* which focused on the importance of memories of the past to understand the present in anticipation for the future.¹⁴⁷ Cicero mirrored Stoic ideology which held that reason was something that man could use to understand natural law in the world around him and that there was a unity of knowledge and virtue because of this. As Macrobius had declared in a secular context, aligning himself with the Ciceronian view that I discussed earlier, “to have political prudence one must direct all his thoughts and actions by the standard of reason, understanding, circumspection,

¹⁴⁴ The commentary was most likely written before 410 according to Charles Haskins, *Studies in the History of Medieval Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), 88. This was the most important source of Plato’s ideas during the Middle Ages. An important argument that resonates through the first four chapters is that although Cicero utilized Plato’s argument to design the ideal government, they have different approaches.

¹⁴⁵ *Nec vero habere virtutem satis est quasi artem aliquam, nisi utare.* Cicero, *De Re Publica*, 14-15. Renaissance humanists did have access to Epicurus. Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Iter Italicum* (New York: Leiden, 1997); Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, trans by H. Rackham (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1931), V, 67.

¹⁴⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. by George Bull (New York: Penguin, 2003).

¹⁴⁷ *Ea est prudentia. Quae nichil est aliud, ut a Marco Tullio diffinitur, nisi ‘rerum bonarum et malarum scientia’ . . . Hec posset minutius, sed trifariam breviassima partitione diducitur in preteritorum memoriam presentium intelligentiam et providentiam futurorum.* Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Inventione*, trans. by H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

foresight, willingness to learn, and caution.”¹⁴⁸ In order to anticipate the future, prudent acts required memory, intelligence, and foresight. This virtue integrated the others; one was thought to need justice, fortitude, and temperance to make the right decisions to live well. Justice, fortitude, and temperance were components of and followed from prudence.¹⁴⁹

It was these pursuits, of using reason and forward thinking, which gave elite quattrocento women, both publicly and privately, the ability and the drive to secure the future of their kin. If one studies the behaviors and actions of these women, the ways in which they were affected by the fixation of their elite class on prudence are quite evident. The cornerstone of humanist ideology was the idea of a republic, founded on prudence and controlled by the humanist-educated elites, as the only option for a suitable government. A despot would produce corruption and servitude; not citizens. Citizens in the republic sought to steer clear of tyrannical governments. The Florentines, affected by this humanist rhetoric, embraced the idea of raising their sons in a way that prepared them to serve in the republic and their daughters in a way that would make them successful wives and mothers in support of the same institutions. These women followed the broader Renaissance trend of giving attention to prudence as a strategic virtue. For women the way to do that was to actively ensure the prominent position of their male kin on the public stage. There was little doubt amongst contemporaries of the Medici as to the influence of that family on the republic. Pope Pius II boldly declared “nothing is denied to Cosimo, he is arbiter of peace and of war and the moderator of the laws. Not so much a private citizen as the lord of the country.”¹⁵⁰ Cosimo’s leadership style was in vogue during the fifteenth century. He talked of the republic rather than stating his own power boldly. He wrote to Pius II that “you write to me not as a private man who is

¹⁴⁸ Macrobius, 122. Josef Pieper discusses the special relationship with the other virtues in *Four Cardinal Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965). He argues that prudence is not possible without the other virtues and that the other virtues cannot be realized without prudence. With prudence comes the knowledge to act in pursuit of the other virtues.

¹⁴⁹ The focus on prudence as a combination of the four cardinal virtues is why this particular chapter is of a length that surpasses the discussion of other virtues.

¹⁵⁰ Ross, 58.

satisfied with the mediocre dignity of a citizen, but as though I were a reigning prince ... to procure you a vote of assistance from our city, well you know how limited is the power of the private citizen in a free state under a popular government. Never the less, I am ready to exert my influence, such as it is, in this direction, and I will do so to the best of my ability.”¹⁵¹ Generations of Medici leadership in the fifteenth century, from Cosimo, to Lorenzo, to Piero, mastered this brand of prudent leadership and held control of Florence firmly behind a veil of republicanism. Virtuous men and women in this family gained the Medici support in the *popolo*.

Evident from this description is how prudent behavior meant making the right decision in practical matters in the name of what was good for kin and the state while considering the long-term implications of activities. Elite women in Medici Florence certainly had an important role in matters of both “life and death.” They acted not only for themselves, but also for the good of male relatives active in the republic. This was precisely why Cosimo was honored by Ficino in a 1473 Latin letter as the man who “revealed Republican Florentine glory” to his son Lorenzo, and why Lucrezia de Medici’s abundance of prudence was duly praised by Paola Malatesta di Mantova.¹⁵² There was a parallel in the behavior of men and women who asserted themselves as decision makers with an eye toward the well-being of Florence.

The behavior of women that we will explore in this chapter shows them to be focused on considering marriage arrangements, remembrance of kin after death via patronage of the arts, and the education of their children. As Alberti noted, prudence was all about planning. “In civil affairs and in the lives of men we give more importance to

¹⁵¹ Ross, 66-8.

¹⁵² *nostro foras Cosminaus speldor ille multis quotidic modis, lumen ad revelationem gentium Latinarum et Florentine reipublice gloriam.* Marsilio Ficino, *Lettere: Epistolarum Familiarium Liber I*, ed. Sebastiano Gentile (Firenze: Olschki, 1988), 54; G. Levantini-Pieroni, *Lucrezia Tornabuoni: Donna di Piero di Cosimo de’ Medici* (Firenze: Successori Le Monnier, 1888), 21-2. *per fermo valorosa vuolsi reputare la donna che non manca di prudenza nelle cose grandi e al tempo stesso non trascura le minime. E tale fu, o Lorenzo, la illustre madre tua, che con saggio consiglio sapeva sbrigare le più gravi faccende e venire in soccorso de’ cittadini nelle clamità.* Plut. LIII, Cod. XI.

reason than to fortune, to prudence than to chance.”¹⁵³ These women certainly made a consistent effort not to leave the present or future position of their kin to something as unreliable, and dangerous, as chance.

This concern for planning can be seen, for example, in the ways that women of the well-to-do merchant class in Florence like Margherita Datini (1385-1410) and Alessandra Strozzi (1407-1471) studiously marked dates on their correspondence. This sense of time is evident in their letters, which were carefully dated in accordance with the merchant tradition. The letters begin with the typical notation “in the name of God” and were followed by a month, day, and year. This class had a desire to keep track of their correspondence and a special interest in numbers, the passage of time, and the organization of correspondence. They were clearly planning for the future quite carefully. Also typical of her class Datini skipped the salutation of the letter. Merchants most likely skipped this formality in an effort to appear more egalitarian. She also followed the convention of starting a new paragraph with a large script letter as well as concluding with the phrase “God protect you” (*Dio/christo ti/vi guardi*). Her efforts at full literacy were not perfect, but it was an obvious goal. Literacy was perceived as an important skill to Margherita since she learned the skills to pen some of her own letters.¹⁵⁴

One woman who was particularly noteworthy for her spirited pursuits of prudence, a woman who acted toward human fulfillment within this humanist, merchant framework, was Lucrezia Tornabuoni de’ Medici (1425-1482). The daughter of the elite Francesco Tornabuoni and Nanna Guicciardini, she married Piero de’ Medici on June 3, 1444. Lucrezia was admired for her education, spirituality, poetry, and for the influence she had on her headstrong son Lorenzo. Her contemporary, Niccolò Valori, praised her eloquence as a rarity and she was consulted both by her husband and son about political

¹⁵³ Leon Battista Alberti, *I Libri della Famiglia*, ed. Ruggiero Romano and Alberto Tenenti (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1960); George Holmes, *The Florentine Enlightenment 1400-1450* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 144.

¹⁵⁴ Ann Crabb, “‘If I Could Write’: Margherita Datini and Letter Writing, 1385-1410,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 no. 4 (2007): 1196-9.

questions.¹⁵⁵ Lucrezia is quite fascinating to historians, thanks, in part, to the rich epistolary record she left. These letters offer details of her biography as well as those of other members of the Medici circle in the mid-fifteenth century.¹⁵⁶ It is striking how clearly informed she was about the contemporary political matters which affected her circle and the many contacts that she made with the literary men of her time like Angelo Poliziano.

The agency that secular elite women had in pursuing these virtues can be seen in the actions and words of Lucrezia Tornabuoni. She, like many women of the civically active class, is very visible to historians. Although Lucrezia presented herself as being deeply devoted to her religious convictions, and genuinely appears to have been so, she illustrated very nicely the Renaissance balance between seeking long- and short-term stability and fame for self and kin within the framework of devout Catholicism. After a discussion about caring for the houses at the Bagno a Morba and other family investments, she thanks God in her expressed expectations to be well enough to travel back to Florence for the vigil of Saint John because she never expected to live so long (*che cosi a Dio piaccia, che non credo mai tanto vivere*).¹⁵⁷ She continued to focus on family matters within this extension of grace.

Building Projects

One of the ways in which Tornabuoni was able to secure memory of the past for recognition in the future was by taking an active role in the commissioning of building projects. Often these projects were commemorative; death in Renaissance Florence was certainly a time for judging both virtue and vice in the life of the deceased.¹⁵⁸ As Leon Barrisra Alberti stated, “it was a custom among our ancestors to praise deserving citizens

¹⁵⁵ Niccoló Valori, *Vita di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, ed. Angela Dilon Bussi (Palermo: Sellerio, 1992).

¹⁵⁶ Most of these letters are located in the “Mediceo avanti il Principato” at L’Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

¹⁵⁷ Tornabuoni, *Lettere*, 88.

¹⁵⁸ John McManamon, “Continuity and Change in the Ideals of Humanism: The Evidence from Florentine Funeral Oratory,” in *Life and Death in Fifteenth Century Florence*, ed. Marcel Tetel and Ronald G. Witt (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 69.

who were virtuous models of Christian morality.” It seems to have been of primary importance that men like Cosimo de Medici were buried without overt “honors or pomp.”¹⁵⁹ Looking at the list of cloth purchased for both men and women mourning at Cosimo’s funeral would lead one to conclude that the display of wealth at the burial of the Pater Patriae was moderate.¹⁶⁰ In truth, Medici hegemony would be recognized in the funerals of the dukes in the sixteenth century. Cosimo and Lorenzo forbade state-funded funeral spectacles in their honor. Although there was much private recognition of their deaths, prudence was a theme in their desire to avoid mourning as a public spectacle. Women were fundamental planners in taking steps to create a memory of these great men for their service to the greater Florentine people. Margarita Datini, for example, was a trustee of Francesco’s charity fund *Il Ceppo* that was devoted to caring for orphans. The organization would remain active until 1954. This longevity is partially a testament to her success.

Funeral orations in the second half of the fifteenth century did not overly praise the deceased for renouncing worldly goods. Instead, they highlighted the praiseworthiness of acquiring a fortune and putting it to good use. Alamanno Rinuccini said of Palmieri, who died in 1474, that he “realized how much riches contribute to a dignified civic life” thus for a brilliant life, for fame, ever-increasing honor [he built] magnificent buildings in the city and in the country ... as well as for foundations honoring God” while he still “otherwise made frugality and civic modesty his goal.”¹⁶¹ Hans Baron astutely noted that humanism and Renaissance art flourished in Florence before the patronage of the Medici. Thus patronage of projects like the Innocenti foundling hospital, built in 1419, owed much to traditions of the Middle Ages when Florence was not a principality, but rather a free city-state. The Medici did contribute

¹⁵⁹ As quoted in Ross, 78. McManamon, 68-69, also noted that in order to avoid public spectacle at Medici funerals, the eulogies for the likes of Lorenzo di Giovanni de’ Medici as written by Niccolò Niccoli were put on paper and circulated rather than being spoken.

¹⁶⁰ Ross, 80-1.

¹⁶¹ The funeral oration for Matteo Palmieri can be found in Ferdinando Fossi ed., *Monumenta ad Alamanni Rinuccini Vitam Contexendam Ex Manuscriptis Codicibus Plerumque Eruta* (Firenze: Ex typographia F. Moucke, 1791), 123.

heavily to projects in the second half of the fifteenth century, but they stepped into a framework of the larger culture that already existed, one that already had a framework for the cardinal on civic virtues.¹⁶²

Elite families of Florence who were influenced by the humanist school sought to immortalize themselves and their achievements for the ages.¹⁶³ Patronage might support commemorative structures (tombs or chapels), religious buildings, or buildings for the secular public good such as hospitals or orphanages. Preservation of civic legacy was sought through building projects around the city. Lucrezia herself was clearly depicted as a central figure in Ghirlandaio's frescos on the choir of Santa Maria Novella. The scene depicts a portion of the life of Saint John the Baptist and was commissioned by Lucrezia's brother Giovanni Tornabuoni after her death. Because Lucrezia was immortalized this way, it is obvious that the link to her natal family, and thus her "past," continued to be a strong connection even beyond her life. Such scenes immortalizing great Florentine men and women were quite common in quattrocento Florence. Sons *and* daughters were immortalized in works such as Ghirlandaio's fresco in Santa Maria Novella's Tornabuoni Chapel.¹⁶⁴ As Poliziano said in fond praise of fellow humanist Jacopo Antiquario (1444-1512), "your destiny is immortality. You have grabbed it by the hair on its brow."¹⁶⁵ History has fondly remembered the Medici and other elite Florentine families as multi-generational patrons of the arts. Patronage bought the Medici what their monetary wealth could not. By beautifying the city, they legitimized their

¹⁶² Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 3-6.

¹⁶³ For a discussion of the models of female patrons in the ancient world, see Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins, *Beyond Isabella; Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy* (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2001), 318-21. In this article, Valone discusses Dido of Cathage as the archetype of the female patron for the humanist tradition. Valone also goes on to discuss medieval and Renaissance women in Rome commemorating their husbands via funerary monuments. *Ibid.*, 321-8.

¹⁶⁴ Domenico Ghirlandaio, *La Capella Tornabuoni*, Fresco, Santa Maria Novella in Florence, 1486-1490.

¹⁶⁵ *Te Aeternitas Manet. Sincipitio Capillo Eam Praehendisti*. Shane Butler, ed., *Poliziano Letters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 197.

position in Florentine politics. Men and women used their fortunes to commission art, architecture, and scholarship on a grand scale rarely seen before or since.¹⁶⁶

Anticipation of death also reverberated through the words Renaissance biographers attributed to Cosimo de Medici. According to Vespasiano da Bisticci's *Vite di Uomini Illustri del Secolo XV*, Cosimo said to his wife "when you propose to go into the country, you trouble yourself for fifteen days in settling what you will do when you get there. Now that the time has come for me to quit this world and pass into another, does it not occur to you that I ought to think about it?"¹⁶⁷ Death in Renaissance Florence was laced with religious overtones and the medieval preoccupation with the potential of reaching "salvation". It was also evident that interest in accomplishing great things before one's death, insuring that one's memory would survive in a positive light, highlighted the resurrected pagan ideal of fate and fortune.

The human loss that Lorenzo de' Medici expressed at the death of "not only a mother, but the only person to whom I could turn" found him inconsolable. He admitted to Elenora d' Este that "it is true that we ought to submit patiently to the will of God, but in this case my heart refuses to be comforted."¹⁶⁸ The strength of the relationship between mother and son was quite evident in this poignant display of grief. It was often his "prudent" mother who advised one of the most powerful rulers of the Renaissance. In typical Medici fashion, to downplay jealousy, a modest funeral was held for Lucrezia at the Medici parish church of San Lorenzo. The ambassador to Ferrara noted the event's lack of ostentatiousness when he described it as "*fu seppelita senza dimonstrazione e pompa alcuna*" (without ceremony or pomp).¹⁶⁹ Lucrezia's death was considered a public event. Poets and humanists celebrated her with eulogies and letters of condolence to her son Lorenzo. In his *Eulogy on the Death of Lucrezia Tornabuoni*, Ugolino Verino

¹⁶⁶ Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1987); Richard A. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and Demand For Art in Italy, 1300-1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

¹⁶⁷ Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Renaissance Princes, Popes, and Prelates; The Vespasiano Memoirs, Lives of Illustrious Men of the XV Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 234.

¹⁶⁸ Ross, 244-5.

¹⁶⁹ Gaetano Pieraccini, *La Stirpe de' Medici di Cafaggiolo* (Firenze: A. Vallecchi, 1924), 137.

said that Lucrezia was “the everlasting pride of the Medici” and that “now in heaven she prays for the peace and harmony of her fellow citizens.” The passage *Ut foelix iunctos teneat Concordia cives* highlights his use of *cives* to identify this woman as a Florentine citizen.¹⁷⁰ A citizen who was duly praised, by Francesco da Castiglione (the Canon of San Lorenzo) for being a companion to Lorenzo in administering affairs of the republic and showing concern for citizens from any level of society.¹⁷¹ In fact, he recorded that the entire city turned out at the funeral to share in Lorenzo’s grief and to honor Lucrezia with a large procession.¹⁷²

Women likewise mourned the loss of their male kin with similarly prudent civic displays. This spending to immortalize deceased family members was a key facet of the projects of many of the Medici women. Among the Medici women, Contessina de’ Bardi, Lucrezia Tornabuoni, Ginevra Alessandri, Maddalena Cibo, Lucrezia Salviati, Eleonora di Toledo, and Bianca Cappello all participated in the commission of painting, sculpture, and architecture.¹⁷³ Strength of character aside, these women were able to work within the patriarchal system since few legal codes completely blocked women from utilizing their inheritance.¹⁷⁴ Much spending of inheritance seemed to be focused on the creation of funerary monuments.¹⁷⁵ Civic memory, as it had been for the Romans, was devoted to revitalizing the importance of monuments. *Beyond Isabella* is a collection of articles that explores the role of women as patrons of both lay and religious art and seeks to show that they were more active in Renaissance Italy than has previously been recognized.¹⁷⁶ One of the goals of this dissertation is to acknowledge that many women, as well as the

¹⁷⁰ Ugolini Verino, *Epigrammata*, liber VI, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pluteo 39, 40, c. 58 r-v. Vereno also wrote the verses on her tomb.

¹⁷¹ Franciscus Castilionis, *Viro Laurentio Medici* (MCCCCLXXXII) Plut. LIII, 11.

¹⁷² Ibid. *vidisti in eius funere universam undique vicitatem covenisse et amplissimam exequiaz pompam ampliare*

¹⁷³ Reiss, 125.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 317-8.

¹⁷⁵ Wills are discussed in Lauro Martines, *The Social World of Florentine Humanists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963). Wills are an important source in Philip Gavitt, *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence* (Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1990) and many can be found in the ASF *Archivio Notarile Antecosimiano*.

¹⁷⁶ Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins.

often-cited Isabella d'Este, were patrons. Women were able to use financial resources to support such projects; they were not exceptions to the rule when they acted as patrons. This form of civic patronage is a clear example of prudence because of the key role the activity played in the making of the familial memory and legacy.

Female consumers were often part of group patronage projects or they found themselves in the position of widow, which afforded them more circumstantial agency as individual patrons. Patronage certainly emulated the values of civic virtue and women were willing and active participants in this pursuit of good civic behavior. It is also obvious that they were not blocked from doing it. This is the case when one explores the building of Mainardo Cavalcanti's funerary monument in the Cavalcanti chapel and sacristy of Santa Maria Novella. Mainardo, who was a marshal of the queen of Naples, expressed his desire to have such a sacristy built in his will (dated January 25, 1379). It was the executrix of his will, his widow, Andrea Acciaiuoli, who would follow through to have the project built and saw to electing a chaplain to officiate at its altar.¹⁷⁷ Her will, deposited on June 6, 1411 in Florence, discussed her involvement and her desire to be buried with her husband and sons in the sacristy.¹⁷⁸ She acted in the same way as a male executor of a will would have. A similar situation, the process of building a project to honor a dead relative, can be followed at the Church of Santa Trinita. In this case, Messer Palla Strozzi followed through on the wishes of his father Onofrio to be interred in the family sacristy.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Authorization to elect the chaplain is discussed in the following text: "*qui clebret in altari sacristiae conventus, quam ipsa domina uxor domini Mainardi de Cavalcantibus construxit.*" Stefano Orlandi, *Necrologio di S. Maria Novella: Testo Integrale dall'Inizio (1505-1665)* (Firenze: L.S. Oschki, 1955), 577.

¹⁷⁸ In the text of her will it was written *Nobilis domina domina Andrea filia quondam Jacobi de Acciaiuolis de Florentina et uxor quondam magnifici militis domini Maynardi de Cavalcantibus de Florentina . . . In primis recommendavit animam suam omnipotenti Deo eiusque matri Virgini gloriose, corpus autem suum quando eum (!) de hac vita migrari contigerit sepelliri voluit ubicumque contigerit eam mori in sepulcro filiorum dicte domine Andree posito Florentie in capella dicti quondam Maynardi et filiorum, que capella posita est in sacristia ecclesie Sancte Marie Novelle de Florentia.* Ibid., 578. Her will is located in the ASF Notarile Antecosimiano C-705.

¹⁷⁹ Orlandi, 578-9.

Both men and women commissioned furnishing and decoration for the sacristies. Some of the decoration was most likely commissioned by the deceased, like Mainardo, who was inspired by the Angevin tombs in Naples. But the larger request of 1,000 masses to be said for her soul at the sacristy after her death shows a personal commitment to the space, beyond just making it her husband's final resting place. She adorned this chapel throughout her years of widowhood until her death. Her will donated an additional 200 florins in 1411 to commission *ut pingatur dicta cappella* which boldly personalized the chapel with images of saints venerated by herself and her family.¹⁸⁰ The same trend could be seen in the male patronage of the Medici, who commissioned such projects as Rogier van der Weyden's 1450/1451 oil painting *Virgin with the Child and the Four Saints*, which contained images of the family's patron saints Cosmas and Damian.¹⁸¹

These commissions speak to the Renaissance notion that individual achievement and excellence should be rewarded with worldly fame and honor through monuments and thus "memory." Thus it should not be surprising that during the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries in Italy, wealthy families endowed chapels in or adjacent to major churches or in separate buildings in the examples just mentioned. Bankers like the Baroncelli, Bardi, and Peruzzi families built such commemorative chapels. Especially noteworthy in terms of their scope and artistic achievement were the Medici Chapel (Old Sacristy) at San Lorenzo (1520), the Brancacci Chapel at Santa Maria del Carmine (1425), and the Pazzi Chapel at Santa Croce (1441). These buildings and the art adorning them were expressions of piety and places where commemorations could improve family members' chance for salvation. Ever since the creation of Purgatory as a "holding tank" on one's way to salvation, men and women had contributed to projects which might limit a relative's time in this way station. Women's wills, like that of Lena Mancini (1474), show how they made the decision to have prayers said both for themselves and their deceased husbands after their deaths. Even women who were widowed multiple times,

¹⁸⁰ Orlandi, 587-91.

¹⁸¹ Rogier van der Weyden, *Virgin with the Child and the Four Saints*, oil on canvas, 1450/1, Stadelches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt.

like Giovanna Albizzi (d. 1488), wrote in her will that she wanted to be buried with her second husband in Santa Maria Novella. She selected which husband to be buried with.¹⁸² The actions of these elite men and women seem to give weight to Philippe Ariès' theory about the conflict between the spiritual and the temporal concerns; in an effort to act "virtuously", these women balanced the concerns of both worlds.¹⁸³ This may help to explain the growth in the number of perpetual masses that were being said by the end of the fifteenth century.¹⁸⁴

Planning for the future also included building the urban landscape. The ideal city was a vision of Leonardo Bruni and was the subject of his treatise in *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis*.¹⁸⁵ Palmieri also discussed the physical setting of the city in *Vita Civile*, as did Alberti in *De Re Aedificatoria*.¹⁸⁶ Alberti, who mirrored some of Bruni's ideas, wrote this first Renaissance treatise on architecture between 1444 and 1450. Alberti drew on antiquity to divide the citizenry, much like Plato had, so that there were buildings for the state, the chief citizens, and the populace. This treatise was a conscious move in ideology from the unplanned haphazard building in a walled medieval town to an organized bureaucratic experiment. Planning for a more successful future inspired these idealistic and hopeful treatises to highlight the great things that humanity could accomplish. Women also had an influence in many of these acquisitions and building projects which showed their interest in long-term planning, including the development of the Bagno a Morba.

Lucrezia de Medici's earliest surviving letter discussed the baths of Petrilo. She wrote to her husband Piero in Florence about its healing powers: "I had a letter from you advising me what to do about the baths. I have already settled to do all you say in your

¹⁸² There are many women's wills in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze *Conventi Religiosi Soppressi* archives. These women are discussed in Sharon T. Strocchia, *Death and Ritual In Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 198-200.

¹⁸³ Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Knopf, 1981).

¹⁸⁴ For the increases between 1427 and 1478, see table in Strocchia, *Death and Ritual*, 205.

¹⁸⁵ Leonardo Bruni, *Laudatio Florentine Urbis*, ed. Stefano U. Baldassarri (Impruneta: Sismel, 2000).

¹⁸⁶ Matteo Palmieri, *Libro della Vita Civile Composto da Matheo Palmieri Città Dino Fiorentino* (Venezia: Giovanni Andrea Valvassori, 1535); Luigi del Fonte, *La Città di Leon Battista Alberti* (Firenze: Alinea, 1982).

letter and whatever master Giovanni orders: nothing will seem fatiguing or irksome to me for regaining my health.”¹⁸⁷ Her letters show a continued interest in the healing properties of these baths and her desire to secure ownership of the Bagno a Morba. These sulfur springs are located just south of the hill town Volterra. The baths were well known and frequented by other Medici.¹⁸⁸ Lucrezia purchased the baths at Morba for the Commune of Florence in 1477.¹⁸⁹ She witnessed their healing powers first hand and shared this knowledge with her kin. In 1467, Contessina de’ Medici wrote to her daughter-in-law Lucrezia that she received her letter “by which I learned your art better.”¹⁹⁰ Sharing these baths with her family, Lucrezia worked to support the health of her kin.

Piero Malegonnelle (Vicar of Pomerance) praised the purchase of the baths as one of great merit. He said of her acquisition of the Bagno a Morba that “it is only my duty to congratulate you, not so much because of your satisfaction, as for the good of what otherwise would never have risen again to its ancient reputation.” He also offered the practical advice that it is “necessary to try and conduct as much water as possible” and he proceeded to offer his assistance in this matter. The following letter from Piero Malegonnelle is extremely detailed as to water levels and cistern building.¹⁹¹ Her agency as a supervisor of this project and how this role was welcomed is clear from these letters and is seen as an important investment for the future.

Doctor Oliverio also wrote to Lucrezia from the Bagno a Morba about the location and condition of the springs that she had the foresight to purchase. The doctor diligently reported to her that sulfur and alum were excellent “for scabies and for asthma, it is a dissolvent, heals all ills in the body and pains in the joints and the nerves

¹⁸⁷ Ross, 50-1. *Vego ti se’ purgato et vaitene in villa, che mi piace; et confortoti a stare sano et non ti dare mani(n)chonia, ché tornerò quartita. Al maestro Giovanni faremo onore e buona chonpagnia, perché llo merita.*”

¹⁸⁸ Including Cosimo il Vecchio see Ross, 55.

¹⁸⁹ *siamo giunti al bagno [a morba] a salvamento e sani . . . pella prima giunta v’è stanze da archimisti e cimice che paion chapperi, e testimony Lionardo e lano che fur primi sguigi.* Ross, 113. MAP XXXIV

¹⁹⁰ Ross, 117.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 184-6.

... amongst many other virtues.”¹⁹² Lorenzo and other Medici continued to use Morba as a haven at which to heal from illness.¹⁹³ Lucrezia used funds to make a prudent purchase that was praised by her contemporaries.

Like Tornabuoni, Alessandra Strozzi also planned for the future of her family by expanding and handling property holdings.¹⁹⁴ Alessandra used her position in upper-class society to the advantage of herself and the Strozzi family by preserving property holdings in Quaracchi until she sold them profitably in 1465. She sold them because she was seeking to improve the property holdings of her family in Florence by encouraging her son to use the money to buy neighboring buildings in town. This is only one example of how she worked to improve the Strozzi’s social standing in adverse political, social, and economic conditions.¹⁹⁵ Filippo, her son, would continue to expand their urban holdings by building the grand Palazzo Strozzi (1489-1491).¹⁹⁶ One of his biographers, his son Lorenzo Strozzi, said that his father’s greatness was defined as *prudente, limosiniere, amatore*.¹⁹⁷ Lorenzo said that the difficulties of this great achievement by his father were compounded by the difficulties of architectural design.¹⁹⁸ Yet, he built one of the most beautiful *palazzi* in the city. Filippo demonstrated honor, glory, and magnificence when he built public and private buildings, including his home, and contributed to the convent of Lecceto, the monastery of the Selve, the brothers of San Marco, and a chapel in Santa Maria Novella.¹⁹⁹ For Lorenzo Strozzi, an important

¹⁹² Ibid., 235-6.

¹⁹³ Testament to this can be found in diplomatic correspondences that Lorenzo received from the likes of Niccolò Michelozzi discussing problematic relationships with the pope. Ross, 265-6.

¹⁹⁴ More of Alessandra Strozzi’s biographic information will be discussed in the “Fortitude” chapter.

¹⁹⁵ The position of the Strozzi, who had been politically active, changed when they opposed the rise of the Medici. Matteo was not an outspoken member of this resistance but supported the Strozzi and it was this kinship tie that led to his exile. Crabb, *Strozzi*, 43. Gregory, 41 and 93.

¹⁹⁶ Lorenzo di Filippo Strozzi, *Le Vite degli Uomini Illustri della Casa Strozzi*, ed. Francesco Zeffi (Firenze: Salvatore Landi, 1892), 72-74.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 65.

¹⁹⁸ *Ma I muratori e architettori augmentavano ogni suo disegno; il che a Filippo era grato, quantunque egli dimostrasse tutto il contrario, dicendo che lo sforzavano a quello che non voleva, ne poteva fare.* Ibid., 71.

¹⁹⁹ *È dimonstra nell’onorate e gloriose imprese, e specialmente nelle fabbriche de’pubblici e privati edifizzi; si puo dire che Filippo non solo magnificamente operasse, ma superasse la*

connection between his father's building projects and the virtue of his legacy was that he provided peace and security for his children.²⁰⁰

When Giovanni Rucellai wrote that in the fifteenth century “men do two important things in this life: the first is to procreate, the second is to build,” he highlighted the significance of and the connection between kin and property.²⁰¹ Preservation of status and property went hand in hand, so these two aspects of life were inextricably entwined. Women like Tornabuoni and Strozzi were participants in the foresighted virtue that Rucellai described. While they have served as case studies for us, these women do not stand alone in this role. The *Ricordanze* of Neri di Bicci contains notes on at least 24 female patrons of material arts. At least ten of them were women who lived in the secular world, who acted as patrons in association with a court-appointed male guardian in some cases (due to legal constraints), but they were recognized by Neri as patrons in their own right.²⁰²

Women patrons were not always showered with praise as Lucrezia was for her purchase of the baths. What Lucrezia did was seen as a “prudent” purchase by many of her contemporary circle. Such purchases were not always praised if they were considered ostentatious. Alfonsina Orsini de' Medici was scorned at the time of her death by Bartholomew Masi. In his diary, Masi noted that she died “with little good grace because she cared about nothing but accumulating money.”²⁰³ Amongst her spending, Alfonsina contributed to building projects at the Dominican convent of Santa Lucia in Via Sangallo. This included rooms at Santa Lucia for her personal use.²⁰⁴ A personal stake in projects was not unique, but the lack of documentation to show that she had any plans for a tomb monument to commemorate her deceased husband Piero was. This does stand in contrast

magnificenza d'ogn'altro fiorentino; perche oltre al palazzo tanto mirabile e sontuoso che un gran principe e non privata persona dimostra esserne stato. Ibid., 61-76.

²⁰⁰ *Mostrasi chiaramente ancora per il testamento, di quanta prudenza ei fosse: che non contento di avere retti e custoditi I figliuoli mentre visse, provide dopo la morte ancora, per quanto gli fu possibile, alla pace e unione loro Ibid., 74.*

²⁰¹ Reiss, 37.

²⁰² Reiss, 51.

²⁰³ Ibid., 125.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 128.

to more typical patterns of female patronage and seems like a possible reason for scorn on the part of Masi who saw a lack of prudence, and evidently a self-serving element in such a decision on Alfonsina's part.²⁰⁵ However, Alfonsina was praised by her son-in-law Filippo Strozzi for being a collector of Roman antique statuary, a wise choice because of the value of antiquity to humanist culture.²⁰⁶ Purchasing pieces of art from antiquity was certainly valued by humanists as a virtuous pursuit rather than a frivolity. Filippo also wrote of his mother-in-law and her political activities to Lorenzo (Alfonsina's son). "Her ladyship is always busy – whether writing to Rome or to you there or giving audiences because of which the house is always full; such attendance results in good press for the state encouragement for friends and dread for adversaries. She exercises that authority which for any other woman would be impossible and for few men easy."²⁰⁷ This was certainly a noteworthy accomplishment that contributed to the ties between kin.

Overall, after having looked at these patronage projects, it is clear that women made private bonds of kinship and civic identity very public within the confines of limited access to inheritance and fortune. Although Isabella d'Este (1474-1539) has often been the one highlighted as the great female patron of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century for her contributions to the city of Mantua in her husband's absence, patronage can be seen outside the courts of northern Italy in the merchant families that dominated politics in the Florentine republic.

Marriage Arrangements

Traditionally, fifteenth-century Florentine marriages were viewed as civic unions in which the bride was "given" to her spouse.²⁰⁸ This choice of verb assumes that women

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 128.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 131-2.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 131-2

²⁰⁸ It was not until after the Council of Trent that the church sought to reestablish its authority over the institution of marriage.

had no power to dispose of their own hand in marriage.²⁰⁹ There was, however, a good deal of female activity in the process of selecting a spouse. This agency was not so much in the hands of the bride herself, but that of an older generation of women, be it her mother or mother-in-law. It was not “prudent” to be unmarried if one had not taken religious vows. Antonia Pulci (1452-1501) was one of the few that did not take either of those well-traveled paths. This feminist playwright refused to remarry, despite the urging of her brothers, and instead committed to a religious life in the secular world (*pinzochere*). She lived with difficulty as a widow, hand to mouth at times, by using her dowry and the money she earned from her plays. She was viewed with fear and suspicion because, as a widow who had not remarried, she had little male supervision. Having no “supervision” was a rather precarious position for a woman to be in and it put Pulci on the offensive to defend her virtue. Lucrezia Tornabuoni and Alessandra Strozzi were among those who ensured that this “unsupervised” position (they, like 26% of widows in Florence, lived with minor children) was not the circumstance of their daughters.²¹⁰ Much of this desire to marry off daughters was likely due to preservation of the honor of the kinship line with legitimate heirs. Preservation of that honor was essential to promote success for future generations in this society.

There is ample evidence in Florence that elite women were powerful forces in arranging the marriages of sons and daughters. Alfonsina de’ Medici, for example, was noteworthy for arranging a marriage between her daughter and Filippo Strozzi. She formed an important connection between these two powerful families. Mothers clearly influenced the marriages of both male and female children in a distinct and timely way. Alessandra Strozzi is a great example of a mother’s dedication to this end. She showed off her agency when she told her son Filippo that “if she hadn’t taken this decision she [her daughter Caterina] wouldn’t have been married this year.”²¹¹ She told her son later

²⁰⁹Isadora del Lungo, *Women of Florence*, trans. Mary C. Steegmann (London: Chatto and Windus, 1907).

²¹⁰ Antonia Pulci, *Florentine Drama for Convent and Festival* trans. James Wyatt Cook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Crabb, *The Strozzi of Florence*, 48.

²¹¹ Gregory, 30-1.

that it was his turn to marry. “Get the jewels ready and let them be beautiful, because we have found you a wife.”²¹²

A focus of Renaissance humanism was fame on earth and this drove many decisions when selecting spouses. The potential for human achievement in the here and now made the pursuit of worldly fame not only possible, but honorable. This was a clear break with the medieval focus on ensuring eternity rather than a secular legacy.²¹³ In order to gain access to the political stage, a goal of the newly rich upper class of Florentine merchants and bankers was to establish a legitimizing network of aristocratic family trees via marriage. Families like the Medici and the Strozzi certainly did this and the marriage that Alfonsina was fundamental in arranging attests to the desire to legitimize the power that the Medici wielded in Florence. The Medici were often viewed as self-serving and power-hungry by Florence’s old aristocracy so this effort to legitimize their claims to political power through familial alliances with the aristocracy was a deciding factor in marriage arrangements.²¹⁴

The women who helped to orchestrate these unions sought to display prudence in the marriage arrangements for their children. These women had a good deal of agency in one of the most important civic decisions made in Florence. Marriage created blood connections and these connections had a crucial economic and political impact on the two families involved.²¹⁵ For example, Lorenzo was a partner in a bank at Lyons and Leonetto de’ Rossi, the husband of Maria de’ Medici (Lorenzo’s sister), was the manager. Thus, the marriage of Maria to a business partner was a business arrangement between

²¹² Ibid., 150-1.

²¹³ One of the possible reasons for this shift toward making the most out of one’s time on earth is that after the plague of 1347-1350 much of Europe’s remaining population turned toward an attitude of celebrating/enjoying their time on earth because it was limited. Samuel K. Cohn, *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²¹⁴ Giovanni Cavalcanti, *The Trattato Politico-Morale of Giovanni Cavalcanti (1381-1451)*, ed. Marcella Grendler (Geneve: Droz, 1973). This Florentine aristocrat attacked the Medici from the perspective of being displaced from the power structure of Florence. Prudence is discussed on page 118 of this work.

²¹⁵ Gene Brucker, *The Society of Renaissance Florence* (New York: Wiley, 1969), 28-41.

these families.²¹⁶ Family lineage and the namesake of elite Florentine families assured those with an elite family name a prominent role on the political and economic stage of Florence. In helping their sons to select brides, most obviously seen in letters full of advice, these prudent women illustrated clearly how others might respond regarding a potential union, as well as how others might determine objectives highlighting both the interest of the individual and that of the kin line. Although mothers did not make the official choice in the selection of their sons' spouses, in practice they had a very influential role during the process of selection. Both Lucrezia de' Medici and Alessandra Strozzi were vocal advocates for the women their sons chose. In the case of Lorenzo it was Clarice de' Orsini and in the case of Filippo it was Fiammetta Adimari, and both of these girls were lobbied for by the mothers of these men.

Marriage was primarily an economic transaction with enormous social and political repercussions so it was, on paper, a male-dominated process. In this society it was the most significant event in a young woman's life. A marriage affected the two families involved since it was an endeavor in which both parties sought to establish both honor and profit in the union. Relatives made the most reliable allies, a marriage brought dowry, and it defined a family's perceived wealth and reputation in society. These arrangements were not to be taken lightly. Even within the patrician class, some families were seen as more honorable than others so the choice was a rather complicated one. If the bride was flawed, be she ugly, old, or of a lower social status (Alessandra stated that a wife should "not be silly, a sniveler, or feather brained"), the dowry would be increased in an attempt to "marry up" into a better economic position.²¹⁷ For example, Alessandra's dowry was increased because of the weak political position of her aristocratic family for over 150 years. This large dowry, in the amount of 1,600 florins, was meant to attract the politically successful Strozzi family. Also making Matteo Strozzi a desirable candidate for a husband was the fact that the Strozzi *casa* consisted of

²¹⁶ Ross, 309. Of course, the idea of marriages to solidify partnerships between men is not a new fifteenth-century construct. Consider the marriage of the daughter of Augustus' daughter Julia to the aging general Agrippa as a stark example of such political drives.

²¹⁷ Gregory, 2-3,159; Crabb, *The Strozzi*, 21-23.

a rather large 40 households, so the kinship network would be far-reaching throughout the city and beyond.²¹⁸

Marriage was discussed in memoirs and diaries to highlight the dowry exchange that took place between families. Gregorio Dati discussed his second wife Ginevra Brancacci (whom he married in 1393) in his *Memoirs*. “She should have a dowry of 900 gold florins and that, apart from the dowry, she should have the income from a family farm which had been left her as a legacy by her mother, Monna Veronica.”²¹⁹ Although he has little else to note about her until her death in 1411, he does say that she died in childbirth “after a lengthy suffering, which she bore with remarkable strength and patience.”²²⁰ When women died in childbirth, there does not seem to have been a good deal of surprise or a focus on grief. Perhaps this is because it happened all too frequently. It seems, from the way he discusses the topic, prudent women were seen to put themselves at risk in order to perpetuate the family tree. Thus their deaths, as Dati espoused, were recognized in terms of their courage in the face of known risks. It is true that the majority of these women had no choice but to bear children, but the fact that they were recognized for their prudence is significant to show that this virtue was truly ascribed to women.

Marriage as a process to select a viable life “partner” was addressed in the diary of Bartolomeo Valori. He discussed why he chose to marry a woman because “I knew [her] well, for up to the age of twelve we were practically raised together.” Lorenzo de’ Medici himself served as the marriage broker in the union that seemed to promise more than a union based on “business.” Since the couple had been raised together, it was hoped that the marriage would be more pleasing to both parties and thus it will be a lasting, prudent relationship.²²¹

Women served as part of the marriage process in many capacities, including that of arbiters of garment choices. “The women have decided that Caterina’s dress will be

²¹⁸ Crabb, *The Strozzi*, 26-26.

²¹⁹ Brucker, *Society*, 29.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

made of blue silk and that the gown will form part of the dowry; this was a wise decision.”²²² Clothing was a way to display wealth. This was an important decision that impacted the public’s perception of the status of the bride and groom and was not simply making a “fashion statement.”

Oftentimes the role of women in arranging marriages was even more fundamental. Lucrezia Tornabuoni played a key role in the match of her adoring son Lorenzo to Clarice de’ Orsini of Rome. They follow Salutati’s discussion of Florentine identification with its Roman roots via parallels between the two republics.²²³ Not surprisingly, Lorenzo, with the help of his mother, chose a Roman woman of the powerful landholding *baroni* class to marry. Apparently, several brides had been proposed for Lorenzo. Clarice de Orsini was suggested first by his maternal uncle Giovanni Tornabuoni. Giovanni, the brother of Lucrezia, was head of the Medici bank in Rome and treasurer of Pope Sixtus IV. This marriage would be a further connection between the Medici and the Roman aristocracy. Lucrezia insisted on seeing the girl with her own eyes and had the following to report to her husband back in Florence.

On the way to Saint Peter’s on Thursday morning I met with Madonna Maddalena Orsini sister to cardinal Latino Orsini, with her daughter who is about 15 or 16 years old. She was dressed in the Roman fashion with a *lenzuolo* in this dress. She seemed to me handsome and fair and tall but being so covered up I could not see her to my satisfaction. Yesterday the maiden had on a tight frock of the fashion of Rome without the *lenzuolo*. We talked for some time and I looked closely at the girl. As I said she is of good height and has a nice complexion, her manners are gentle though not so winning as those of our girls, but she is very modest and would soon learn our customs. She has not fair hair because there are no fair women; her hair is reddish and abundant, her face rather round but it does not displease me. Her throat is fairly elegant, but it seems to me a little meager ... her bosom I could not see as the women are entirely covered up but it appeared to me of good proportions. She does not carry her head proudly like our girls but pokes it a little forward. I think she was shy indeed I see no fault in her save shyness. Her hands are long and delicate and short. I think the girl is much above the common though she cannot compare with Maria Lucrezia and Bianca.

²²² Ibid., 34.

²²³ Ronald G. Witt, *Coluccio Salutati and His Public Letters* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1976).

Lorenzo has seen her and can find out whether she pleases him. Whatever thou and he determine will be well done, and I shall be content.²²⁴

Lucrezia was a keen observer. She has given the stamp of approval in this letter and the Orsini's property at Monte Rotondo and their three castles also made the union with their family desirable. In anticipation of the future, a marriage to the Orsini would give the *nouveau riche* Medici ties outside of Florence to the powerful and long established Roman aristocracy. With his mother's consent, Clarice and Lorenzo were married during the summer of 1469.

Lucrezia was obviously well versed in Florentine perceptions of Roman women. Her description of Clarice is similar to the one written in Alberto Averardo de' Alberti's letter to Giovanni de' Medici. He writes from the *urbe delacerata* (ruined city) and said, rather matter-of-factly, that Roman women were "generally handsome in face; all the rest is uncommonly dirty; the reason, they tell me is that they all cook. They seem agreeable, but one seldom sees them."²²⁵ This illustrates that Lucrezia was also influenced by the same stereotypes as her male peers in Florence and thus was profoundly impacted when judging this girl by the cultural standards of her class.

Lucrezia's voice in her son's marriage was only one component of their close relationship. Poliziano also remarked that Lucrezia had a great hold over her son. He told her, "(I) beg you to find out what are Lorenzo's intentions . . . it will be easy for you and I shall always be at the beck and call of Lorenzo . . . I commend myself to you and I pray you to commend me to Lorenzo."²²⁶ Poliziano's fidelity to his patron is apparent here, but what is also clear is Lorenzo's attention to the advice of his mother who was very well versed in contemporary affairs in and outside of Florence.²²⁷

²²⁴ Lucrezia to husband Piero 27 March 1467 in Lucrezia Tornabuoni, *Lettere*, ed. Patrizia Salvadori (Firenze: L.S. Olschiki, 1993), 62.

²²⁵ Ross, 47.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

²²⁷ For letters addressed to Lucrezia from Papino di Artimino which discuss political events in Naples and Venice in detail, see *ibid.*, 237-239.

Clarice did not seem to be as much of a confidante to Lorenzo as his mother was.²²⁸ In fact her correspondence often pleaded with him to write more often; “If it’s not too much trouble please write to me.”²²⁹ And after her death, as with his mother’s passing, he certainly mourned. Lorenzo lamented to Pope Innocent VIII that his wife’s death was “so great a loss, and such a grief to me for many reasons . . . the deprivation of such habitual and such sweet company has filled my cup and has made me so miserable that I can find no peace.”²³⁰ He did not however lament that he had lost a confidante and advisor, as in the case of his mother. Messer Aldrovandini, ambassador to Florence for Duke D’Este, wrote to the duke that Clarice “died three days ago, but I did not send the news at once as it did not seem to me of much importance.”²³¹ He was invited to the funeral, along with other dignitaries. Part of the reason that Lorenzo showed grief but seems to move on relatively quickly, at least in his letters, is that his son Giovanni was appointed to the position of Cardinal in 1489 and this happy news softened his mood.²³² Not all of the women of this class were viewed as models of virtue to the point where they were admired as prudent confidantes.

Another mother who acted in an effort to act with prudence was Alessandra Strozzi. She was born in Florence in 1407 to a small but elite family lineage. Like Lucrezia she was privileged, but not necessarily atypical of her sex. Unlike Lucrezia, whose family was at the pinnacle of Florentine politics, she was a widowed mother trying to reestablish the respectability of her family name after their exile from Florence.²³³ Alessandra Strozzi did not remarry or enter a convent, but like “26 percent of widows, 37 percent in the elite, and 39 percent of Strozzi widows” she lived as the head of her

²²⁸ Ibid., 171.

²²⁹ Ibid., 162.

²³⁰ Ross, 296-7.

²³¹ Ibid., 297.

²³² Ibid., 297-8.

²³³ Excerpts from Francesco Barbaro, Leon Battista Alberti, and Baldassare Castiglione that illustrate some aspects of what an idealized Florentine woman was pictured as by the elite classes can be found in Kenneth R. Bartlett ed., *The Civilization of The Italian Renaissance* (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1992), 140-174.

household with minor children.²³⁴ This supports the assertion that she was not atypical in a position that afforded her a significant amount of self-determination.

Her life leading up to her husband's exile was typical of an elite Florentine woman. In 1422, at the age of fourteen, she was married to Matteo Strozzi, a 25-year-old merchant of good birth and modest wealth. Over the course of their thirteen-year marriage, Alessandra and Matteo had three daughters and five sons. Only two daughters (Caterina and Alessandra) and three sons (Filippo, Lorenzo, and Matteo) reached adulthood. Her husband Matteo was exiled with his family to Pesaro because he was a political opponent of the Medici family.²³⁵ When he and three of their children died of a plague in 1435, Alessandra returned with her four surviving children to Florence, where, nine months later, she gave birth to her youngest son, Matteo.²³⁶ She remained in Florence until her death in 1471, dedicating herself to establishing financial security for her children through marriage arrangements and assisting her sons in their business endeavors. From this period of her life--her widowhood--we have a surviving collection of 73 letters, written between 1447 and 1470, to her sons living in exile in Naples and Bruges.²³⁷

In these letters, on many occasions, Alessandra raised concerns and, acting as a guardian over her children, often suggested possible scenarios including some on the topic of marriage arrangements. She focused, in her letters, on both the dowries of her daughters and the marriages of her sons. For example Alessandra proclaimed to her son Filippo, in her earliest known surviving letter dated August 24, 1447, that the most

²³⁴ Crabb, *Strozzi*, 48.

²³⁵ The Medici disliked the Strozzi because when Cosimo di Medici and his supporters were exiled in 1433, the Strozzi were members of the opposing faction. Just one year later, in 1434, the pro-Medici faction came to control the *Signoria* and the electoral system was changed to promote their continued control. The Medici banished more than a hundred men from Florence for political reasons, including Matteo Strozzi. Alessandra's birth family, the Macinghi, improved their standing in the political arena under the Medici rule, putting Alessandra between her husband's family and that of her birth. Because of her devotion to the well-being of her children, she seems to have eventually "chosen" to lend her support to the former. Crabb, *Strozzi*, 43-45.

²³⁶ Alessandra, who gave birth to 8 children between 1426 and 1436, provides an example of the high birthrate among wealthy women, who would often employ wet nurses. These consecutive births were used to ensure the lineage of an elite family. King, *Women*, 12-18.

²³⁷ Gregory.

pressing news she had to share with him was the marriage of Caterina, his sister. From her discussion of events, one can see that she was quite capable of arranging such a union as well as being accepted by the prospective husband and his family in this role. She was involved in the dowry negotiations about which she was quite calculating and prudent, coming to the conclusion that, “everything considered, I decided to settle the girl well.”²³⁸

In terms of her sons, Alessandra did not comment on the need for them to marry until 1464, and then she continued to spend considerable time focused on these marriages for the rest of her life.²³⁹ Elite men in Florentine society did not marry until an older age than women, as they were busy building wealth and thus social prestige in the hopes of attracting a wife from the best possible lineage and with a large dowry. Regarding her sons who survived into adulthood, Filippo and Lorenzo, Alessandra appeared to be tolerant over their long decision-making process. She was happy over Filippo’s decision to marry, although this complicated her desire to leave Florence. She felt it was her duty to stay in Florence until the marriage was arranged.²⁴⁰ Again, this is an example of her putting the good of her children and the future of her lineage first, above her own self-interest. This is more than life’s choices, but rather an example of a habit of caution in practical affairs. Her detailed discussion of the calculations that were made in choosing a wife for her son showed her understanding of a complicated system. Not any bride would do, even if Alessandra was stuck in Florence. She wanted the best match for her sons – a bride who had the best possible social status, wealth, a large dowry, a young age, and beauty.²⁴¹ Not only was she successful in securing lucrative arrangements, but she understood the realities of a system in which “he who marries is looking for cash.”²⁴²

²³⁸ Gregory, 30-1.

²³⁹ Gregory, 102-9. For more information in regards to Alessandra’s relationship with her sons vs. her daughters, see Gregory, 11-3. More general information in regards to the childhood roles of daughters and sons as well as their transition into adulthood can be found in Klapisch-Zuber, 94-116.

²⁴⁰ Gregory, 141.

²⁴¹ Gregory, 140-5.

²⁴² *però che, chi to’ donna vuol danari.* Gregory, 31.

What she saw as happiness for her children was focused more on financial security and respectable relationships than imprudent, careless love.²⁴³

In terms of planning for the future, where did the allegiance of these women lie? The legacies that these women established tended to center around loyalty to the families they married into. One logical explanation for this would be their children's place in this kinship line. This would serve to dispel the myth of the "cruel mother."²⁴⁴ Wealthy women continued to foster relationships with both their natal and marital families. Alessandra's letters show how loyal she was to the family lineage established by marriage even after she became a widow. If she had wanted to promote the legacy of her birth family, she would very likely have remarried and reinvested her dowry in a new relationship to foster a new alliance for the Macinghi. The 1427 *catasto* does show, however that Strozzi was far from alone in not seeking a second marriage. One in four adult women in Florence was a widow, as opposed to one in ten in the countryside. Women were either reluctant to remarry or it was difficult (or a combination of these factors).²⁴⁵ Many women were pressured to return home if widowed at a young age so that they could be used in forming another family alliance, thus leaving their children behind. Alessandra Strozzi did not remarry. This allowed her to devote a good deal of her attention toward seeing her children successfully married. While some Florentine sons, like Giovanni Rucellai, resented the inconstancy of mothers who abandoned them as cruel, others expressed their gratitude to mothers who had endured personal hardships to devote themselves to their children's well being.²⁴⁶ Alessandra is an example of the latter, as can be seen in her sons honoring her memory by giving the church of Santa Maria Ughi a richly brocaded vestment decorated with the Macinghi and Strozzi arms upon her death at the age of 63.²⁴⁷ A "cruel mother" would have left with her dowry, and

²⁴³ *ed io, considerato tutto, diliberai acconciar bene la faciulla.* Gregory, 28-37.

²⁴⁴ The cruel mother who "abandons her children" for remarriage is discussed in Richard Trexler, *Dependence in Context in Renaissance Florence* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994), 171-2.

²⁴⁵ David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 216-7.

²⁴⁶ Brown, 29.

²⁴⁷ Crabb, *Strozzi*, 209-10.

abandoned her children to financial ruin. Alessandra, however, was a woman with pride in the prestigious lineage into which she had married and she wanted her sons to live in “the most beautiful house in the quarter.” She clung to this house as a status symbol through financial struggles for her male descendents who, she hoped in the future, would return to the city.²⁴⁸

Further evidence to show women carefully straddling relationships in both their birth and marriage families with an eye to future success can be seen in the *Ricordi* of Lorenzo il Magnifico. In January of 1450, he noted that his surviving three siblings were “Giuliano my brother . . . Bianca wife of Guglielmo de’ Pazzi, and Nannina, wife of Bernardo Rucellai.”²⁴⁹ For Lorenzo, even though they were married, his sisters were still kin and thus described that way. A powerful example of the connection between brothers and sisters can be seen in the joint patronage of Bernardo Salviati and his sister to fund an altarpiece with the family coat of arms.²⁵⁰

Based on the role of these women in planning for the future, there is no doubt that even the most powerful of sons recognized the role of their mothers in their adult lives. As Lorenzo lamented to the Duke of Ferrara, “my most dear mother Madonna Lucrezia: who today quitted this life. I am more full of sorrow than I can say, as besides losing a mother, at the mere thought of whom my heart breaks, I have lost the counselor who took many a burden from off me.”²⁵¹ We have contracts that indicate joint patronage for projects by Alfonisna Orsini de’ Medici and her son Lorenzo. So beyond these vignettes a pattern representative of symbiotic partnership was well established to illustrate many instances of cooperation between mothers and their children.

Children

Women in this society were often praised for their prudent activities as mothers. Piero Malegonnelle addressed a letter of praise to Lucrezia Tornabuoni with the very

²⁴⁸ *la piu bella casa di questo quartiere*. Gregory, 6-7.

²⁴⁹ Ross, 151.

²⁵⁰ Reiss, 57-8.

²⁵¹ Ross, 240-5.

telling salutation “honored as a mother.”²⁵² In a patriarchal society women were often recognized for their contributions as “mothers the hope for the future that please God we may find you well and with a boy in your arms.”²⁵³ Notions like these accompanied well wishes.

Motherhood even vaulted the position of women into one that was more virtuous than that of men in the minds of humanists like Henricus Cornelius Agrippa (c. 1486-1535). His *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* was most likely given as a lecture in Latin to an all-male audience at the University of Dôle in 1509 and published in 1529.²⁵⁴ He said that

Christ has not chosen to be the son of a man, but of a woman, whom he has honored to the point that he became incarnate from a woman alone. For Christ is called son of man because of a woman, not because of a husband. This is an extraordinary miracle, which causes the prophet to be astounded, that a woman has encircled a man as a protection, since the male sex has been engulfed by a virgin who carried Christ in her body.²⁵⁵

He was comparing a woman bringing Jesus, and thus salvation to the world, to men who brought the law of “wrath and curse” upon the earth due to original sin. He goes on to be so bold as to assert that Christ, “born into our world in the greatest humility, to the more humble male sex and not the more elevated and noble female sex, in order to expiate by his humility the arrogant sin of the first father.”²⁵⁶ This was a rather exalted view of women and the role of motherhood, but similar notions about the worth of women can be found in Bartolommeo Goggio’s 1487 *In Praise of Women*, Mario Equicola’s 1501 volume *On Women*, and Galeozzo Flavro Capra 1525 treatise *On the Excellence and*

²⁵² Ibid.,184.

²⁵³ Agolo Poliziano wrote to Clarice de Medici. The boy who was born was Giovanni (Pope Leo X) Ross, 177.

²⁵⁴ Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of The Female Sex*, trans. Albert Rabil (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

²⁵⁵ Agrippa, 64-5.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 63-65.

Dignity of Women.²⁵⁷ The dangers of the pursuit of motherhood offered a realistic window into the day-to-day realities of pursuing this virtuous task of motherhood.

The reality of life for children and their parents in Renaissance Florence was that the city had a very high infant mortality rate, due to recurrent plague and less than adequate care (which can, in part, be connected to elites sending their children out of the city to wet nurses).²⁵⁸ The high proportion of truncated households is evident in the *catasto* of 1427. Due to the shortage of children, they were valuable. Lucrezia de' Medici, for one, was certainly obsessive about the health of her children. When her son Giovanni was sick, she wrote to her husband Piero "several letters on the same day so that should one go astray thou will have news of Giuliano."²⁵⁹ The very real threat of plague may explain why Strozzi's letters to her sons were obsessed with arranging and celebrating marriages that might lead to children and lineage preservation. Her enthusiasm could also be felt when she discussed the marriages of her daughters. Her involvement was unlike the patriarchal treatises of Alberti's *On the Family* and Palmieri's *Vita della Civile*. These activities are more than good mothering and are representative of a higher pursuit of virtue because of the enthusiasm and dedication that these women displayed, even in the face of adversity.

Writing to her daughter-in-law Ginevra, Contessina de' Medici said that "the boy is well and has cut two teeth, and I think will get accustomed to these wet nurses in such a way . . . night and day we see after him. It seems to me that having cut his teeth and the evenings being warm he will do well."²⁶⁰ The interest and involvement of Contessina illustrates that the notions of a "cruel mother," the detached mother that Klapisch-Zuber described, may not be the norm.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Cassandra Fedele, *Letters and Orations*, trans. Diana Maury Robin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), xix.

²⁵⁸ Philip Gavitt, *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence: The Ospedale degli Innocenti 1410-1536* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 226.

²⁵⁹ Ross, 69.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 58-9.

²⁶¹ Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

Daughters were a welcomed addition to these merchant houses and often vied with their brothers for attention and affection. Although *The Courtier* stated with blatant misogyny that “when a woman is born, it is a defect or mistake of nature,” the birth of a daughter was often celebrated.²⁶² When Manno Petrucci’s daughter was born in August of 1430 he bought 5 soldi worth of confections and hosted a feast to praise her birth.²⁶³ Based on this, one can see that her birth was not a disappointment and not ignored, but instead celebrated. *The Courtier* reflected the ideals of the court, while this letter reflected a very different view: that the birth of daughters was viewed with a prudent eye because of the contributions women made to extending kinship lines to anchor merchant families. Yes, a dowry would be needed to secure a marriage, but although this Italian society has often been cited as a clear example of one that did not display the same joy at the birth of male and female children, this is an issue that is far from being so black and white. Marco Parenti wrote to Filippo Strozzi in April of 1469 after the birth of his second child and daughter that “you should rejoice at this one being a girl as much as if it were a boy. That is, you will begin to draw advantage sooner than with a boy. That is, you will make a fine marriage alliance sooner than if it were a boy.”²⁶⁴ The birth of either a son or daughter marked an important investment in the future.

Familial bonds for both boys and girls were established in childhood. When little Piero wrote to his father in 1479 to remind him how hard he had been pursuing his studies while his other siblings were playing, he discussed the exploits of his brothers *and* sisters. Namely “Giuliano fights and thinks of nothing else, Lucrezia sews, sings, and reads; Maddalena knocks her head against the wall, but without doing herself any harm; Louisa begins to say a few little words; Contessina fills the house with noise ... nothing is wanting to us save your presence.”²⁶⁵ Lorenzo sweetly wrote a letter to his daughter

²⁶² Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser, *A History of their Own: Women in Europe From Prehistory to the Present* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 337.

²⁶³ Louis Haas, *The Renaissance Man and His Children: Childbirth and Early Childhood in Florence, 1300-1600* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 56-7.

²⁶⁴ Natalie Tomas, *A Positive Novelty: Women and Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Victoria, Australia: Monash Publications in History, 1992).

²⁶⁵ Ross, 219-20.

Contessina promising her, many times, that he would return from the baths of Spedaletto and “be back soon and stay with you.”²⁶⁶ Contacts between male and female members of the nuclear family were particularly close during the formative years and may help to explain the lifelong attachment of these women to both their natal and marital families.

Daughters were known to continue to carry bonds with their birth families even as married adults. Bianca de’ Pazzi wrote to her mother Lucrezia about her sister Nannina. All three of these women resided in different homes, but continued to hold strong ties to each other. Nannina also developed a close relationship with her sister-in-law Clarice (the wife of her brother Lorenzo). Matteo Franco writes, in a letter to the chancellor of Lorenzo de’ Medici, that when Nannina heard she missed Madonna Clarice and Lorenzo, she showed “despair, and great sorrow at not having seen Lorenzo, or even having been able to talk to Madonna Clarice. When Madonna, hearing this several times lamented the bad luck of these two women missing each other.”²⁶⁷ There were certainly multi-generational, multi-household connections among these women.

In the impressive and much discussed fresco by Gozzoli in the Palazzo Medici Riccardi, the three daughters of Piero il Gottoso (the daughters of Lucrezia and sisters of Lorenzo) – Maria, Bianca, and Nannina – are a part of the Medici-inspired procession of the magi. The three are mounted on white horses among other members of the Medici family. Their association with their natal family was powerful enough to withstand marriage and physically leaving their natal home. Recognition of the extended kinship was a prudent decision to extend the Medici name and associations to future generations; this net of kinship lines was ever-widening for the family. Within the framework of the very real threat of death by plague, Contessina de Medici and Cosimo de Medici reflected the same concern when writing to their youngest son Giovanni in Rome. Contessina wrote “most dear son . . . [it is] necessary to write because we hear of the plague . . . return as soon as you can. You know how anxious Cosimo and I are about your stay in Rome. Your brother [Lorenzo] is also anxious.”²⁶⁸ His father wrote to him less than a

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 311.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 268.

²⁶⁸ Contessina de Medici to her son Giovanni in Rome, 24 Feb. 1449. Ross, 87.

week later and said that if his son was seeking to attain indulgences, he should “do so with all possible speed for although you say that the death of the bishop of Volterra has not changed matters other letters I have seen declare the contrary; a prolonged stay there is not advisable.”²⁶⁹ Although her husband’s advice was more forceful, Contessina, like her husband, was clearly telling her son that “remember above all to have care of yourself, and if you need (to go) away from here let me know.”²⁷⁰

Mothers in Florence, like Alessandra Strozzi, were concerned not only with survival, but also with legitimacy. The Florentine obsession was akin to the Athenian one due, in part, to the prospect of offspring serving in their representative governments. Birth parents determined if one would be a member of the citizen class. Spartan women, in contrast, had more freedom because the citizenship of their children focused more heavily on their physical ability to serve the warrior state, rather than lineage. For the Florentines, however, like the Athenians, “blood” made you a citizen.²⁷¹

Alessandra was quite practical in her understanding of the marriage system and how it could be complicated by illegitimacy. When commenting to Filippo about the bastard daughter of Jacopo Strozzi (a cousin of her husband Matteo), Alessandra was aware that because of his daughter’s illegitimate status it was better to marry her into a home where she would be loved and well provided for rather than attempt, possibly in vain, to marry her to a man of the same social standing, especially since she had defective eyesight.²⁷² The rationale behind this was that she could not have been put into a wealthy household, as the dowry to compensate for her illegitimacy would have been enormous.²⁷³ More than motherly advice, this was certainly prudent advice which was influenced by higher-order social concerns.

The birth of a child was marked with visions of the future for these elite Florentine mothers. Fame and achievement was a popular ideal in humanist scholarship.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 52-3.

²⁷⁰ Ross, 47-48.

²⁷¹ A defense of the city-states via a comparison of them to Athens and Sparta was made by the chancellor of Florence, Benedetto Accolti, in 1460. Baron, *Crisis*, 346.

²⁷² Crabb, *Strozzi*, 88.

²⁷³ Gregory, 76-7.

The hopeful anticipation of good fortune in the future for Lorenzo de' Medici was an integral part of the imagery on the childbirth tray associated with his birth. The image of the *Triumph of Fame* was an obvious choice for this child whose procured position foretold of his leadership of Florence.²⁷⁴

As this section has shown, although the high mortality rate amongst children was a harsh reality that even the most elite portions of Florentine society had to deal with, there was no shortage of men who thoroughly praised their prudent mothers and, in turn, examples of mothers who had affection for children were common, while detachment was not.²⁷⁵ Contessina de' Medici lamented to her son Piero "It seems to me a thousand years until your return . . . I do not know how long your absence will last which is grief to me."²⁷⁶ This certainly stands in contrast to the construction of Zuber's "cruel mother" (that we discussed earlier), who would be chastised by her sons for abandonment. This helps us to paint these women as much more active agents in their children's lives. The unlikelihood that Tornabuoni or Strozzi would abandon children to seek a second marriage was very clear if one looked at the long-term contact that they had with children of both sexes and the networks that they built across both their birth and socially constructed families.

Education

As family members moved toward maturity, advice from fathers and mothers to elicit prudent behavior continued. Piero de' Medici, for example, wrote to his son Lorenzo to "act as a man and not as a boy," Alessandra Strozzi told her son Filippo much the same when she said "you're old enough to behave in a different sort of way from how you have been; you've got to sort yourself out and concentrate on living properly." They were planning for the future by establishing sentiments of adult responsibilities in their

²⁷⁴ Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, "The Medici Tornabuoni Desco da Parto in Context," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* Vol 33 (1998): 137-151.

²⁷⁵ This is nothing, new of course, as even Saint Augustine praised his dead mother.

²⁷⁶ Ross, 62.

children.²⁷⁷ Ficino, one of the philosophers closest to the Medici, noted that prudence, which came from wisdom, was the beginning of the moral virtues and thus often took on the name of all moral virtues.²⁷⁸ This was a moral beacon that Ficino found consistently in Plato and applied to his ideology of a virtuous life.

In order to garner the tools to achieve fame and familial strength, upper class families emphasized humanist education as an essential component of coming of age in this society. As Ficino observed from his reading of Plato, “prudence comes through teaching and long practice.”²⁷⁹ The humanism of Petrarch and Boccaccio had a greater impact as the fifteenth century progressed and the elite circle of Florence embraced a stronger emphasis on the merits of a humanist education; Cosimo, the patriarch of the Medici family, was trained in Greek and Latin by Nicola di Pietro and Roberto de Rossi.²⁸⁰ This educational program focused on both his individual potential and larger civic responsibility.²⁸¹ To ensure that mankind could accomplish great things, it was advocated by the likes of Poliziano and Bruno that one needed a humanist education. The goal of a humanist education was active civic virtue. Though, as Joan Kelly has argued, this program was in large part denied to women, their role in the education of their children exposed them to this learning.²⁸² Elite women in Florence may not have been singled out to learn classical virtues, but they had access to the ideas that flowed freely through communication and education in their homes.

There is no doubt that the men of the elite Florentine circle were great enthusiasts of the humanist education program and were great patrons of learning. Cosimo de’

²⁷⁷ Ross, 93-94; Gregory, *Lettere*, 68-9.

²⁷⁸ Ficino, *Gardens*, 15-6.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁸⁰ Gaetano Pieraccini, *La Stirpe de’ Medici di Cafaggiolo, Volume I* (Firenze: Nardi, 1986), 22. It is also noted in this text that Cosimo had epistolary correspondence with some of the greatest scholars of his day including Guarino Veronese, Leonardo Bruni, Carlo Marsuppini, Poggio Bracciolini, Antonio Pacini, Gentile Becchi, Cristoforo Landino, Lapo di Castiglionchio, Niccoli, and Marsilio Ficino.

²⁸¹ Florentine humanists built their educational pursuits on the foundation of the oldest public schools in western Europe which were founded in the thirteenth century.

²⁸² Joan Kelly, “Early Feminist Theory and The ‘Querelles des Femmes’ 1400-1789,” *Signs* Vol. 8., No. 1 (Autumn 1982): 4-28. Although Joan Kelly was not a major scholar, she did publish a paradigmatic article.

Medici was the model of a cultivated humanist. He set up the first public library in Europe and within thirty years of its founding, he and his descendents spent vast sums of money filling the library with manuscripts and books.²⁸³ The reason why Cosimo and his circle collected knowledge was because humanism fixated on the idea that one's character was best developed via education in grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. Lorenzo, Cosimo de' Medici's son, was a connoisseur of books. In fact, he eagerly wrote to the Duke of Este in order to borrow a rare copy of Dion's history (*de Romanis histories*).²⁸⁴ Poliziano excitedly penned a note to Lorenzo in 1491 that he "found some good books . . . none of which we have in Florence. I also found a Greek scribe in Padua and arranged with him at a ducat for every fifteen pages."²⁸⁵ No doubt Lorenzo was quite pleased by this find.²⁸⁶ Ficino dedicated his commentaries and translations of Plato's dialogues to Lorenzo de' Medici. He praised this "magnanimous Lorenzo" under whose direction "may all prosper greatly who earnestly seek from Plato the most detailed regulations for the upbringing of the young." Ficino was the culmination of a long line of philosophers who introduced Plato as living in harmony with Christianity and not an abstract political theory.²⁸⁷

The education of women in the Medici circle was acceptable to the patriarchs, though it did not lead toward much epistolary debate or attention. Although these women were being educated, and often literate, nowhere did I come across a defensive argument like that of the proto-feminist Christine de Pizan, who pushed for the education for women with the bold statement in 1405 that "the mind has no sex."²⁸⁸ Literacy for women in Florence was often garnered without efforts to argue for its legitimacy.

²⁸³ Fred S. Kleiner and Christin J. Mamiya, *Gardner's Art Through The Ages* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 2005), 591.

²⁸⁴ Ross, 273.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 323.

²⁸⁶ The collection of knowledge was aided by Gutenberg's development of the first movable type press around 1445. By 1464 there was a press outside of Rome in Subiaco.

²⁸⁷ Ficino, *Gardens*, vii-5.

²⁸⁸ Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, trans. Sarah Lawson (New York: Penguin, 1985).

Alessandra and Lucrezia wrote letters to their sons, often for utilitarian purposes, including to converse about pressing political, personal, and economic situations. They both used the mercantile (*mercantesca*) script and form to write their own letters. Although Lucrezia's are less visually neat (slanted lines and ink blotches) than Alessandra's, Alessandra has more "mistakes" dividing or joining words that she "heard" and tried to write than Lucrezia does. From detailed studies of the letters written by these women, historian Ann Crabb has come to the conclusion that about the same attention was paid to Alessandra's education as to Lucrezia's.²⁸⁹ By the fifteenth century the distinction between Florence's merchant and aristocratic classes had grown hazy. Class mobility had allowed for merchant and patrician families to intermarry (which was the case in Alessandra's marriage to a merchant). The common education of these two women is a case in point of similar social experiences within the elite classes of fifteenth-century Florence. The ability of these women to write letters help to document their efforts to plan both their own futures and the futures of their kin.

Margherita Datini, a well-to-do merchant woman, left 22 autographed letters, one of which was signed in 1388 (when she was 28). This suggests that she was partially literate throughout her marriage. Her mother, Dianora Bandini, was also literate. Although Margherita frequently used scribes to write letters, it seems that she did achieve a higher level of literacy. This is based on the fact that we have letters written in her hand.²⁹⁰ Women and men alike used scribes to write letters. Dictation was seen as a separate skill from letter writing. Francesco wrote 182 surviving letters to his wife and only 43 of those are signed, so it is not that women letter writers lacked agency or ability to dictate their desires any more than men did, based on a comparison of their scribal practices.²⁹¹ Margherita had great pride in her mental abilities, even at the young age of

²⁸⁹ Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb, *Women's Letters Across Europe, 1400-1700* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 35-6.

²⁹⁰ Ann Crabb, "'If I Could Write': Margherita Dantini and Letter Writing 1385-1410," *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 (2007): 1170-1206.

²⁹¹ Francesco Datini, *Le Lettere di Francesco Datini alla Moglie Margherita (1385-1410)* ed. Elena Cecchi (Prato: Societa Pratese di Storia Patria, 1990). This volume contains the surviving letters written to Margherita by Francesco.

26, when she told Francesco that she “would never have anyone compose my letters.”²⁹² To keep order in the home, Margherita Datini used her ability to read and write to that end. This was an active personal pursuit that allowed her to read letters as they arrived for her, and decide what to send or respond to based on their content.²⁹³

The education of Lucrezia, Alessandra, and Margherita stood in some contrast to the experiences of Isabella d’Este. They had elementary educations and attained partial literacy. Theirs was a common struggle to acquire a utilitarian skill so that they could communicate personally with kin away from the company of their husbands. Granted, Lucrezia Tornabuoni only leaves us six surviving autographed letters. Perhaps this was because she was not separated from family and scribes often enough to have the need to pen them herself. As a co-regent of her court in Mantua, Isabella d’Este had a very different experience. Her education prepared her for the necessity of frequent correspondence. Isabella wrote 12,000 surviving letters (including many to her father and husband). Of the surviving letters that we have, the earliest was written when she was nine.²⁹⁴

It seems that these elite Florentine women garnered more of an education than their contemporaries in northern, scholastically-influenced Europe. Humanism did differentiate between the schooling of girls and boys.²⁹⁵ Boys were encouraged to develop reason and expectations to shape their world while women were encouraged to be chaste and obedient, that they should follow the lives modeled after the virtuous Lucretia and Penelope of antiquity.²⁹⁶

²⁹² Margherita Datini, *Per la Tua Magherita: Lettere di una Donna del’300 al Marito Mercante: Margherita Datini a Francesco di Marco, 1384-1401* (Prato: L’archivio di Stato di Prato, 2002). January, 23, 1385/6.

²⁹³ April 20, 1402 and May 1402.

²⁹⁴ Content of these letters can be explored in Couchman and Crabb, 135.

²⁹⁵ Germanic medieval traditions made some women more educated than men, so in fact it is the Christian/Classical legacy which contributed to the Renaissance in Italy that did not encourage the education of women. Joan Ferrante, “The Education of Women in the Middle Ages in Theory, Fact, and Fantasy,” in Patricia H. Labalme, ed., *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 9-11.

²⁹⁶ Anderson, *A History of Their Own*, 29-30.

Although literate and exposed to the culture that was filled with humanist ideology, these elite Florentine women were not active humanists contributing directly to intellectual discussions. While there has been a trend in women's history toward intellectual history, the focus of much of this historiography has been on women that have contributed volumes of humanistic discourse. Fox-Genovese noted this trend in the late 1980s when she said that "the history of ideas of womanhood and gender relations as well as on the history of women's development of a distinctive discourse about themselves and their worlds, offers a new prism through which to consider the origins of modern feminism in particular and of women's thinking in general."²⁹⁷ Similarly, while women like Isotta Nogarola, Laura Cereta, Costanza Varano, Cassandra Fedele, and Alessandra Scala were discussed during the Renaissance for their attainment of a Latin education, male humanists tended to make them into "mythical" women who overcame the limitations of their sex to become something "else"; they were not viewed in the minds of their male peers as typical woman.²⁹⁸ This might explain why a disproportionately large number of highly educated women in Renaissance Italy, like Nogarola, spent their lives in academic silence, ostracized as adults. In some cases they perceived themselves to be hated by both men and women as if their act of pursuing scholarship and devoting their lives to study made "the donkeys tear me with their teeth and oxen stab me with their horns."²⁹⁹ In contrast, Lucrezia, Alessandra, and Margherita's quests for literacy were not revolutionary and did not label them as having qualities that defined them as "others." These women in Florence prudently accepted their positions in society and literacy helped them function well in their advisory roles. Their elite positions afforded them the opportunity to garner a utilitarian education and, unlike their Venetian sisters, they did not complain about the lack of opportunities afforded them.

²⁹⁷ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Culture and Consciousness in the Intellectual History of European Women," *Signs*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Spring 1987), 529-47.

²⁹⁸ Lisa Jardine, "O Decus Italiae Virgo: The Myth of the Learned Lady in the Renaissance," *The Historical Journal* 28 (1985): 799-819.

²⁹⁹ Labalme, 5.

Women of economic means did have a Renaissance and some found themselves in circumstances where they contributed to its development because they were made privy to a rebirth in classical education. The well-known Christine de Pizan advocated to give women agency. When reading the letters of Lucrezia and Alessandra it certainly seems that one can find this agency in practice. These women used their educations to secure their futures and those of their families. That might have been uncommon, but not extraordinary, and certainly fit in well with this larger humanist culture.

If women were educated as “men,” they were indeed viewed as extraordinary. The Florentine humanist Angelo Poliziano wrote to Cassandra Fedele, a highly educated woman of the Venetian middle-class, to compliment her learning. It is clear from his choice of language in this letter that he did not regard Fedele as a “woman.” She was a girl (*puella*) and a maiden (*virgine*).³⁰⁰ She was compared more clearly to the mythical women of antiquity like Sappho and Cornelia (the mother of the Gracchi brothers) than to her contemporaries. She was an “oddity,” “no more common than if violets were to sprout straight from ice.”³⁰¹ Although he does say that she was an example of how “this sex was not condemned by Nature either to slowness or dullness”, he was worried that, like an Amazon, she desired to fight a war with men.³⁰² What she did have as a noteworthy virtue was *castissimam contempe*, her chaste countenance.³⁰³ For Poliziano this seemed to merit a comparison between her and the much-admired Pico. He went so far as to say that she might “already be alongside him” in his learning.³⁰⁴

However, after this praise, Poliziano came back to a recognition of the limitations of Fedele’s sex on her intellectual pursuits, stating that “when you leave your parents’ home, may the sort of guide and companion come your way who is not unworthy of your talent so that the flame of innate genius that now, almost entirely of its own accord has first glimmered, may subsequently blaze forth, either helped by constant blowing, or fed

³⁰⁰ Angelo Poliziano, *Letters* ed. Shane Butler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 188-93.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 191.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 193.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

by constant fuel.”³⁰⁵ As a woman she could not engage in intellectual pursuits “alone.” Women achieving the virtues that humanism prescribed were viewed as women to be praised, while those that were active humanists were seen as stepping outside of their gender roles.

Fedele was not pursuing the study of humanism alone. In fact, Alessandra Scala, the daughter of Florentine chancellor Bartolomeo Scala, was Poliziano’s student. Bartolomeo Scala himself was a part of the Medici circle and his daughter was educated to read and write Greek. When she reached adulthood, Alessandra Scala, like Cassandra Fedele, chose to marry. This was a controversial decision indeed because no longer was her knowledge of Greek a girlish charm, but a challenge to the norms of a woman’s domestic role. Fedele wrote to her about, “your being undecided whether to dedicate yourself to the Muses or to a husband” and said “I think you must choose the path for which nature has suited you.” Marriage was the choice Fedele referred to and she grounded this in Plato’s maxim “that every road taken is taken for the sake of the traveler’s ease.”³⁰⁶ These women humanists were seeking an education and then, noting the restrictions, married. Proto-feminists, like Isotta Nogarola, who advocated that women had to stay single if they wanted to pursue academic study, would be the ones to challenge social norms.

While Poliziano questioned the female humanist Fedele’s “strength” and her ability to be more than a girlish anomaly, the Medici women showed him a different kind of agency in the educational program. Rather than seeking an education for themselves, these literate mothers sought to exert their influence in the education of their children. Poliziano, humanist and the tutor of Lorenzo de’ Medici’s children, wrote that Clarice, Lorenzo’s wife, was active in the education of her children.³⁰⁷ Clarice displayed virtues similar to those of the mothers of antiquity. Cornelia, daughter of Scipio Africanus and mother of the Gracchi, was depicted as a learned woman, holding a book and reading, in Domenico Beccafumi’s 1519 painting. The inscription reads *Eliquo natos alui Cornelia*

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 193.

³⁰⁶ Fedele, *Letters*, 31.

³⁰⁷ Poliziano, 209-10.

Craccos/ qui Poenos domuit Scipio me genuit. “I nourished my children – the Gracchi with eloquence/Scipio, who conquered the Carthaginians, begot me.” This educated woman was a model mother and daughter.³⁰⁸ She used her education in a role that mirrored the behaviors of a virtuous mother, not a woman trying to act like a man.

The educational program, which was significantly impacted by the advice of women like Clarice, was successful in training children to be adept at Latin at a young age. With a focus on a Latin education, it was evident that the future of the Medici was being planned around the discourse of civic life. Piero de’ Medici, age 6, was proud to report to his father in a letter that “although I do not as yet know how to write well, I will do what I can. I shall try hard to do better in the future. I have already learnt many verses of Virgil, and I know nearly the whole of the first book of Theodoro by heart.”³⁰⁹ A Latin education was quite valuable and useful. Latin was not a dead language in fifteenth-century Italy. It was a common language of communication when Italy was home to many distinct dialects. Giovanni Pico told Angelo Poliziano in a letter that “wisdom shines more brightly in Latin.”³¹⁰ While young Piero learned Latin and Greek, Lorenzo’s daughters were also educated to be literate at a young age. In fact, Lucrezia de’ Medici, the daughter of Lorenzo and Clarice, wrote to her namesake, her grandmother Lucrezia, a very articulate letter when she was 7 years old.³¹¹ Her prudence was praised by Fra Cristofano d’Antonio di Mast to Lucrezia. He noted that she was “obedient, like the wise little person that she is.”³¹²

The relationship between this brother and sister was, interestingly enough, academically competitive. Piero de’ Medici wrote to his father in Latin of himself having a contest with his sister Lucrezia to see who could write best. Because of his skill at writing in Latin, he asked for the pony his father promised him.³¹³ He did get the pony

³⁰⁸ Cornelia is discussed in Letizia Panizza, ed., *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society* (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), 249-53.

³⁰⁹ Ross, 212-3.

³¹⁰ *quam quod Latine ipse beneficio tuo luculentius saperet.* Poliziano, *Letteres*, 20-23.

³¹¹ Ross, 180-1. The letters are in the Strozzi Series 1 Filza 335, 150, 157, 158, 156, 153.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 172-3.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 217-8.

for his efforts and told his father “I owe you and I send you many thanks for such a fine gift, and I shall try to repay you by becoming what you wish.”³¹⁴ With such a large gift it was apparent that, in his father’s eyes, Piero had accomplished much.

To get back to the idea of mothers playing a substantial role in the educational process, it is evident from many letters that the male scholars who educated the Medici children of both sexes had a great deal of contact with the children’s mothers and found themselves under their watchful eyes.³¹⁵ They seem to have entered a domestic space in which their usual agency was limited by the concerns of these mothers. Poliziano, for example, wrote to Lorenzo de’ Medici subtly lamenting that Clarice did not like him. Poliziano was troubled by this to the point where he apologized for writing letters to Lorenzo “under the influence of anger; the want of patience is my great fault.”³¹⁶ Even from within this tense relationship, he answered Lorenzo’s questions about his family’s health in Pistoia (Lorenzo was in Florence at this time) and it is obvious that he sought to comfort Lorenzo with news of the health and happiness of his wife and children.

Clarice obviously had a great deal of agency over the education of her children when she later commanded Poliziano to leave Cafaggiolo in 1479 due to a circumstance he tells Lorenzo de’ Medici “is too long to write.”³¹⁷ Poliziano implored Lorenzo, pleading that he be allowed to come to Florence and explain himself.³¹⁸ In the meantime, Martino della Comedia (who was the tutor of the Tornabuoni family) replaced Poliziano.³¹⁹ Child-rearing practice, as discussed by Alberti, reflected the home as a stage on which the rehearsal for life’s later performance of civic obligation is played out. A large part of this was the formative education that took place in the home. After all, humanism was centered on the notion of using a humanist education to accomplish “great things” in life. Poliziano, even though challenged in his role as teacher by Clarice, remained in the close family network. When Clarice was sick with consumption in 1488,

³¹⁴ Ibid., 221.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 208-9.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 208-9.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 217.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 217.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 218.

it was Poliziano who accompanied Piero de' Medici (the son of Clarice and Lorenzo) to meet his future bride Alfonsina Orsini.³²⁰

Another woman who had a watchful eye over the tutor of her children was Nannina Rucellai, the daughter of Lucrezia de' Medici. She wrote to her mother Lucrezia, in a whirl of emotion, that Bernardo Rucellai, her father-in-law, had dismissed the tutor in the midst of the plague with no money. Exasperated, she told her mother in July of 1479 that "nothing could be more displeasing to me" and lashed out with a fiery comment against patriarchal Florence: "who so wants to do as they wish should not be born a woman."³²¹ She did manage, however, within the boundaries of said patriarchal society, in which she was married to a close friend of her brother Lorenzo, to work within her means to secure a safe haven for the tutor Vincenzo. She wrote that she would provide him money for clothes from "my own pocket," along with asking her mother to ask her brother to give him a place to stay until the plague let up.³²² She sought pleasure in the idea "that I have someone who is willing to oblige me; there are others who do the reverse." Nannina was certainly frustrated by her limitations to aide the tutor, but she successfully found other means to accomplish her goal and bring the situation to a prudent and successful end without stepping out of her "gendered" role.

Alessandra Strozzi also played a pivotal role in determining the direction of her 11-year-old son Matteo's education. In a letter, she told her oldest son Filippo that she had taken his brother "away from learning arithmetic and he's learning to write. I'll put him at the writing desk and he can stay there this winter."³²³ Strozzi sought a merchant education for her sons. This education included good penmanship, accurate placement of words on the page, and good composition. We saw that Margherita Datini also sought

³²⁰ Ibid., 288.

³²¹ *che non ne potrei avere maggiore dispiacere, o pure non si vole nascere femina che vuole fare a suo modo.*" MAP LXXX, 70.

³²² As evidence to show the close relationship between Giovanni Rucellai and Lorenzo de Medici, consider their 1471 trip to Rome with Bernardino Rucellai where it has been argued that Lorenzo was "brought into Antiquity." C. Acidini and G. Morolli, *L'Uomo del Rinascimento: Leon Battista Alberti e le Arti a Firenze tra Ragione e Bellezza Catalogo della Mostra (Firenze, 11 Marzo-23 Luglio 2006)* (Firenze: Mandragora, 2006).

³²³ Gregory, 33.

this level of literacy for herself. This was not the classical education of humanists, but rather something that women like Strozzi and Datini saw as utilitarian, not only for themselves but for their sons as well. It was a key portion of the education of their fathers and husbands and for ordinary women (*comune donna*).³²⁴

These women were a strong force in the educations of their children, which was a responsibility clearly advocated by humanists like Francesco Barbaro.³²⁵ Among his sources for his conclusions about marriage was Saint Augustine. The purpose was the procreation of children, but he also highlighted the need for peaceful relations between man and wife. Management of the household and the education of children was the chief responsibility of the wife.³²⁶ When choosing that wife, Barbaro focused on the ideology that marriages among aristocrats in Venice should be restricted to that aristocratic class in order to produce offspring to continue to fill offices in the republic. Thus the continuance of the republic depended on these marriages. So while nouveau riche Florentines like the Medici used spousal selection like a stepladder to the legitimacy to rule held by aristocrats, the Venetians sought to keep their aristocratic class closed.³²⁷ For Barbaro, the chief factor in selecting a wife was beyond political and economic alliances; she must have personal virtue including moderation and a sense of duty to raise children to serve the republic. The women raising these children to be literate were often literate themselves.³²⁸ These mothers played an active role that went beyond simply protecting their children from harm. The educations that these mothers were seeking to promote reflected a much larger, more long-term, civic commitment.

Lineage Survival

Another issue to bring up in regards to this continuity of family lineage is that of the health and survival of the next generation. We have already considered preservation

³²⁴ Crabb, *If I Could Write*, 1191-2.

³²⁵ Francesco Barbaro, *De Re Uxoribus*, ed. Attilio Gnesotto (Padova: G.B. Randi, 1915).

³²⁶ Barbaro.

³²⁷ Historians have often discussed how stable the Venetian republic was because of this closed class of leadership in the Council.

³²⁸ Crabb, *If I Could Write*, 1183.

of mind; this section focuses on preservation of body. Alessandra often seemed to be concerned for the well-being of her children, but beyond being worried about them personally, she often cited financial underpinnings. Alessandra described her daughter Caterina as being too thin. This was undesirable in the search for a prospective spouse, so this would raise her dowry. There was also concern that Caterina was pregnant so soon after she was married, because her death would not only bring a personal loss but the loss of her mother's money, as her dowry would stay in her husband's family.³²⁹ Alessandra was not being callous here, but her concern for economic fallout from the possible death of her daughter was obviously of great concern as her daughter was connected to both her natal and husband's family.

As much as being prudent with such earthly (in this case monetary) concerns was important, the deeply rooted spirituality of the Renaissance also came out in Strozzi's letters.³³⁰ The somber mood of her letters, beginning in 1465, often found Alessandra lamenting the lack of control that she had over events in her life, such as the failed marriage negotiations for her sons, crop failures, the plague, rampant political gossip, the deaths of loved ones, and the precarious positions of their surviving families. However, it does appear, based on the goals of family preservation and financial success, that Alessandra, in a modesty that is typical of fifteenth-century correspondence, did not give herself enough credit for her calculated contributions to these efforts. Alessandra spent most of her adult life (beginning at the age of 29) as a widow, trying to secure a future for herself and her children. A theme that runs through many of these later letters is her frustration that her sons needed to marry, but that it was difficult for them to find suitable matches in exile. As the decision to marry was one that her sons alone could make, and

³²⁹ Gregory, 41, 51. Was this really Alessandra's money? Most likely yes, as widows could separate their dowries if their husbands had debts (as Matteo did). When women married, they carried wealth out of their families of birth to the households of their husbands. For the duration of her marriage, a woman retained the title to her property. If she was able to claim her dowry through legal means, she used this money to provide for herself and her children. A widow was not obligated to pay off her husband's debt with it.

³³⁰ This represents, of course, a break with Burckhardt who argued that the Renaissance was a secular age. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (London: Penguin Group, 1990).

the Medici control of Florence was working against them, she may have realized the limitations of her ability to secure the lives of her children. Although Alessandra lamented that “all our hopes in this world come to little, and we can only hope in God,” she never stopped trying to be prudent and to dictate her own future even in the face of this adversity.³³¹

Because her family was less than favorable in the eyes of the Medici, it was necessary for Alessandra, in order to secure a more stable future, to seek alliances in other places. A circle of “friends” was something that the Medici tried to secure through political alliances like those they made in the fifteenth century with the Sforza in Milan.³³² Having pushed the Albizzi and other “older” elite families aside, they wanted to secure a position of prominence more firmly through networks on the international political stage. The Sforza had leapt from being mercenary captains to rulers of Milan in 1450. By the early 1470s the Medici chose to side with the Venetian-Milanese alliance against Naples, where there were strong anti-Medici currents. Such a circle of allies was key to preserving their position in Florence.

Women were keen observers of politics. This demonstrates understanding of the past and anticipation of the future in ways that reflected the attainment of “prudence” quite clearly. When observing factionalism between Niccolò Soderini and the Medici, Alessandra Strozzi astutely observed that “the people now feared that they would be worse off as a result of Niccolò’s term in office.”³³³ She continued to follow the anti-scrutiny campaign orchestrated by the Medici and told her son in 1466 that Piero de Medici, in order to combat dissent, was going through the city “with honey in his mouth and a knife in his belt.”³³⁴ A key to political might in Florence was financial stability, so it is not surprising that Alessandra arranged to have her sons train as merchants under the

³³¹ Gregory, 173, 179-183.

³³² Paula C. Clarke, *The Soderini and the Medici: Power and Patronage in Fifteenth Century Florence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

³³³ Alessandra to Filippo 22 Nov 1465. Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi, *Lettere di Una Gentildonna Fiorentina del Secolo XV*, ed. Cesar Guasti (Firenze: G.C. Sansoni, 1877).

³³⁴ Alessandra to Filippo 10 Jan 1466. *Ibid.*

wing of her brother-in-law in Naples so that they could return to Florence prepared to take a role on this volatile political arena.³³⁵

Frugality

One final element of prudence to mention is financial. There is much evidence that these elite women paid careful attention to domestic expenses. Such frugality was forward-thinking because it preserved wealth for future generations. Contessina de' Medici wrote to her son Giovanni in December of 1450 that "although I told you we paid too much for the pigs, I want you to send us a pig or roe for Christmas, if they are offered to you, if we have to buy them we will not have them."³³⁶ The gifts of friends were much appreciated and noted, such as those of Messer Rosello, who "writes that he is coming to pass Christmas with me and has sent Cosimo a fine cloak of Polish fashion of marten and sable, a pair of gloves, and a tooth of a fish a foot and a half long."³³⁷ Frugality was a fundamental component of acting with "temperance" as well, so we will come back to the monitoring of expenses in the next chapter. The significance of "saving for a rainy day," in this case future kin, highlights prudence's fixation on preparing for what is to come.

It is evident from the above discussions that far from promoting feminist rhetoric in a public demonstration for rights in fifteenth-century Florence, women's behavior was a significant testament to and a contribution to the humanist culture of that society. As Lucrezia Tornabuoni made clear in her *Sacred Narratives*, Esther acted with virtue because she knew when it was an appropriate time to speak.³³⁸ According to the dominant humanist school, the world of politics was not an acceptable place for fifteenth-century women to "speak" in a publicly civic context. These women were not vocal in the republic, but they did speak loudly in the context of patronage, marriage arrangements, and child rearing, which were all fundamental in preserving the health of

³³⁵ There is a discussion of their apprenticeship and how appreciative Fillipo should be of this tutelage in her earliest surviving letter (dated August 24, 1447). Gregory, *Selected Letters*, 35-7.

³³⁶ Ross, 53.

³³⁷ Contessina de' Medici to Giovanni de' Medici at Volterra Dec. 18, 1450. Ross, 53.

³³⁸ Lucrezia Tornabuoni, *Sacred Narratives*, ed. Jan Tylus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

the republic. These women consistently put public interests above private ones. Bartolomeo Valori, one of the most powerful patriarchs of Renaissance Florence, modeled the distinction between private identity and political ideology by suppressing his private interests to focus on familial and economic obligations.³³⁹ As we have seen, these women certainly did that.

We have seen their efforts even when faced with adversity. Widows like Alessandra Strozzi wrote of their financial difficulties, although it was clear that she was quite capable of managing the family finances without much assistance. When talking of the 240 florins that the Strozzi owed to the commune, she did not ask her son Filippo for assistance. Instead she wrote to him “I must tell you that I owe them” and admitted that she had been “persecuted by no less than four Offices trying to recover” the money. She goes on to explain how she had “reached an agreement to pay them all” in installments. Not only is her financial wisdom apparent here, but so is her political knowledge. She showed this knowledge and went on to discuss her hope that taxes would decrease if the relationship between Florence and the King of Aragon improved.³⁴⁰ She had one eye on the moment and another on the future.

Conclusions

What is virtuous can have multiple interpretations and there is no guarantee that they will fit together harmoniously into any one life. This is true of “prudence” as it is of any virtue. Renaissance interpretations of virtue continued the tradition of Aristotle, Cicero, the Stoics, and Thomas Aquinas, who agreed that human beings were not born with an equal capacity for virtue. Traditions agree that “the virtue of a good person and that of a good ruler are the same” and that men were those who are best fit to rule in antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance.³⁴¹ Obviously we are not looking to see that women (or men for that matter) could ever fully achieve an allegorical state of being.

³³⁹ Mark Jurdjevic, *Guardians of Republicanism: The Valori Family in the Florentine Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 110-2.

³⁴⁰ Gregory, 33.

³⁴¹ Aquinas, *Cardinal*, 7.

What we can assert, based on the evidence in this chapter, is that these women made a bold and deliberate effort to plan for the future. They planned not only a future for themselves but for the memories of their spouses, the secured positions of their children, and the prosperity of their family lineages inside of the Florentine Republic. As is evident from their success and the positive responses to their agency, efforts made by women to pursue these matters were not only tolerated, but expected of them.

Although fifteenth-century Florentine women had little or no official access to a humanist education, they certainly seem to be influenced by it since they consciously acted in ways which drew on knowledge of this tradition to display great foresight and to select, and more importantly to fight for, what they perceived to be the best course of action. As we have seen, Clarice de' Medici, Lucrezia de' Medici, Nannina de' Medici, Alessandra Strozzi, and others used such reasoning to navigate a course of action through contingent matters created in large part by the political climate of Florence. This climate, at times, was quite challenging and dangerous. Bianca pleaded with her mother Lucrezia to persuade Lorenzo to “take more care, for I hear he has no fear at all [page torn] on all sides, and also to beware of his enemies.”³⁴² Her anxiety showed the clear understanding these women may have had of the precarious position that a powerful family held in fifteenth-century Florence. If these were the women “behind” great men they were certainly not sitting still and this is not something that is only seen by historians in hindsight. In Galeazzo Flavio Capra's *Della Eccellenze e Dignità delle Donne* (1525), this humanist and secretary to Francesco Sforza recognized the ability of women to achieve “prudence” within their nature.³⁴³ And Lorenzo de Medici's biographer Niccolo Valori wrote that Lorenzo showed Lucrezia both the love that a son owes his mother and the respect due a father (*in tutte le azioni non solo materno amore ma paterna osservanza*

³⁴² Ross, 224.

³⁴³ Galeazzo Flavio Capra, *Della Eccellenza e Dignità delle Donne*, ed. Maria Luisa Doglio (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2001), 83.

li portava).³⁴⁴ Prudence was a mark of achievement and distinction in this culture for both men and women.

³⁴⁴ Niccolo Valori, *Vita di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, eds. Angela Dillon Bussi and Anna R. Fantoni (Palermo: Sellerio, 1992), 26.

III. Temperance

While the humanist Leonardo Bruni, in his *Laudatio*, praised the Florentines for having a natural propensity toward being prudent to the extent that he had no need to discuss it, he dove deeply into a discussion of the temperance that he did not think that the Florentines had yet achieved. He argued that in a free city, citizens must avoid intemperance and maintain a well-tempered government for a city of orderliness, elegance, and unity.³⁴⁵ Our discussion of temperance will continue the theme running through this dissertation that discontinuities are common in the experience of elite Florentine women and the circumstances of their lives. This will continue to be juxtaposed against their adherence to the virtues of humanism and the notion that the virtue of temperance was necessary for civic well-being. The modern perception that empowered women in history were inherently “wild” women who challenged social norms, and thus stood out from the crowd, was a notion that humanism’s interest in a temperate life challenged. In order to see the agency of the women in this study, I suggest that we need to look much closer at the lives of women that in the past have been found boring in their predictability. Because they did not challenge social norms, these women have not been studied as being empowered. Thus, they rarely have been discussed by historians in the feminist discourse that has favored focusing on either more radical women or those in obvious positions of leadership.³⁴⁶

Our discussion of temperance will continue to shift how we view men and women’s culture; namely that women articulated beliefs that coincided with the intellectual life of the age. The ideology in which these elite women’s actions were grounded continued to be humanist perceptions of civic virtue (as we saw with prudence), which represented a break from the cultural norms of the thirteenth century.³⁴⁷ Women’s interest in temperate behavior shows how they both shared and contributed to the

³⁴⁵ Leonardo Bruni, *Laudatio Florentine Urbis*, ed. Stefano U. Baldassari (Impruneta: Sismel, 2000).

³⁴⁶ R. J. Knecht, *Catherine de’ Medici* (New York: Longman, 1998).

³⁴⁷ Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960).

intellectual climate of their day that focused on the importance of attaining this virtue. Kristeller discussed how fifteenth-century humanism had “spread out of the limits of the *studia humanitatis* to become a more pervasive force in Renaissance culture.”³⁴⁸ And indeed, if we look through this lens at larger society, humanism does seem to be so much more than a philosophical system. Humanism was a cultural and educational program that could be found in the fifteenth century in the behavior of both sexes.

Defining the Virtue

Temperate individuals acted with self-knowledge and self-restraint. Both classical and medieval ideas influenced the rhetoric of temperance in fifteenth-century humanists. One foundation for fifteenth-century interpretations of this virtue can be found in the Hellenic tradition. According to Plato, in his influential discussion about virtue in book four of *The Republic*, temperance was one of the excellences for the betterment of soul and state. With *sophrosyne* (meaning moderation) would come balance and harmony, because it provided “the order or controlling of certain pleasures and desires.” If this was achieved, Plato said that one would then find “a man being his own master.” When he asks if justice could be found “without troubling ourselves about temperance,” Plato’s answer was no.³⁴⁹ The rule of passion over reason would be moral slavery.³⁵⁰

Humanist rhetoric, like that of Plato, also gave much merit to temperance as “the wholesome preserver of prudence” and we, too, shall address this virtue as an integral

³⁴⁸ Paul Oskar Kristeller and Michael Mooney, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981) 28-29.

³⁴⁹ Plato, *The Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 11. Kristeller gives much credence to the commitment of Renaissance humanists to Plato in *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*. He concludes in the fifth chapter of this volume that humanism and Aristotelian scholasticism were not two ideologically opposed schools but that they coexisted in the *studia humanitatis*. *Ibid.*, 85-105. Because much of Plato and Aristotle’s work survived, they both had much influence on Renaissance ideology. *Ibid.*, 32-3.

³⁵⁰ As discussed by Bruni in Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt ed., *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 124.

part of good civic behavior.³⁵¹ Temperance, or moderation, was a part of every other virtue.³⁵² Temperance, the only one of the cardinal virtues to be the subject matter of one of Plato's 25 dialogues, was not only to be studied, it was to be practiced.³⁵³ The Greeks, including Homer, had praised the patience and soicism of Penelope and Andromache as they awaited the return their husbands.³⁵⁴ There were women in fifteenth-century Florence, like Alessandra Strozzi, who would be similarly praised while their husbands were in political exile.

Renaissance Florentine interpretations of temperance were also rooted in the Roman understanding of *temperantia*. Temperate behaviors were those that displayed moderate indulgence of the appetites. The bounds of reason, it was felt, should be used to govern the appetites or pleasures of the senses so that one behaved with modesty. A Latin thinker who contributed significantly to the rhetoric of the fifteenth century was Cicero. Cicero was widely popular amongst fifteenth-century humanists in the Florentine school.³⁵⁵ He did much to make the Greek concept of *sophrosyne* a Roman construct. Using the Latin words *pudicitia* (chastity) *modestas* (moderation), *frugalitas* (frugality) and *verecubdia* (modesty) to elaborate on the concept of prudence was quite common in Cicero and in the writings of humanists. Cicero linked temperance to foregoing pleasures.³⁵⁶ These concepts were a part of Cicero's pro-republican rhetoric.³⁵⁷ When discussing their republic, the Florentines certainly utilized the work of Cicero to help define their civic experiment, but they also incorporated, at times conflicting, medieval ideology.

³⁵¹ Marsillio Ficino, *Gardens of Philosophy: Ficino on Plato*, trans. Arthur Farndell (London: Shephard-Walwyn Publishers, 2006), 85.

³⁵² Thomas Aquinas, *The Cardinal Virtues*, trans. Richard J. Regan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005), 124-5.

³⁵³ Ficino, *Gardens*, 183.

³⁵⁴ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1961).

³⁵⁵ David Marsh, *The Quattrocento Dialogue: Classical Tradition and Humanist Innovation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

³⁵⁶ Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, trans. H. Rackham (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), V, 67.

³⁵⁷ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. J.E. King (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 38.

This moderate view of temperance was notably different from the ideology of Thomas Aquinas, who said that pleasurable things should only be used “insofar as the needs of this life requires their use.”³⁵⁸ Aquinas discussed gluttony at some length as a very serious sin, while humanist ideology moved away from this connection between any intemperance (be it food, drink, or sex) and venial sin.³⁵⁹ Aquinas went on to say that temperance was less valuable than justice and fortitude because the latter concerned the good of the community. This stood in contrast to the interest of the Florentine elite to treat the pleasures of life with moderation. Bruni, for example, said that temperance was important because it was moderation in relation to corporal pleasure.³⁶⁰ Moderation was key to achieving the balance between temporal and spiritual concerns that successful merchants and bankers sought. In 1441, Lauro Quirini wrote about this balance to Bruni. He noted that the two extremes of temperance and intemperance were problematic so one must try to seek the mean between the vices.³⁶¹

As we discussed in the introduction, by the second half of the fourteenth century, humanism was well on its way to becoming the dominant intellectual trend in Florence. These intellectual shifts, away from scholasticism, could be clearly found in Petrarch. He was a cultural hero before his death in 1374. His fame and fortune were based on his exploration of classical rhetoric in an effort to find standards and guidelines for his own generation; this included searching for standards of temperance.³⁶² This virtue encompassed chastity and modesty. Pollaiuolo discussed the “moderation” of desires in his 1470 depiction of temperance; the allegory shows water being poured into a bowl of wine to dilute the alcohol. Temperate individuals were models of those who acted with self-knowledge and self-restraint. Perhaps out of the misery of plague-stricken Florence

³⁵⁸ Aquinas, *Cardinal*, 123.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 136-142.

³⁶⁰ Bruni, *Laudatio*.

³⁶¹ Leonardo Bruni, *Leonardi Bruni Arretini Epistolarum Libri 8 ad Fidem Codd. Mss. Suppleti, et Castigati et Plusquam 36 Epistolis, pars secunda* (Firenze: Beranrdi Paperinii, 1741), 140-2; Lauro Quirini, *Lauro Quirini Umanista Veneziano del Secolo XV*, ed. Arnaldo Segarizzi (Torino: Clausen, 1904),

³⁶² Benjamin G. Kohl, *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists On Government and Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 18-21. Petrarch is depicted in this study as being the beacon of a new secular spirit.

the idea of enjoying oneself because of the threat of utter destruction led to the acceptance of ancient, more pagan traditions that focused on the here and now. Embracing the active life and worldly goods and apologizing less for achieving great wealth and status was a temperate balance which resounded through this notion of *carpe diem*.

The *modestia* and *temperantia* of Cicero and the Hellenic *sophrosyne* of Homer focused on sound mind and on the importance of behaving within one's "station" (be it class or gender).³⁶³ Petrarch reminded the Renaissance thinker of the worldly caveat that one should live well and enjoy the here and now.³⁶⁴ There were limits, of course, to how far "worldly" ideals permeated Catholic Florence in the fifteenth century. For example, following the plague, Boccaccio trumpeted that what mattered was not how long one lived, but *how* one lived morally.³⁶⁵ San Bernardino, a popular Franciscan missionary from Siena, attacked the hedonistic focus of the citizenry. On a superficial level it appears that his attacks were directed at women because of the "nature" of their sex. For example, he advocated that "women, love your husbands better than they love you" for the following reason: "for her own tired virtue."³⁶⁶ However, it was the lack of focus on the Christian eternity and interest in engaging in earthy delights that enraged him in regards to the behavior of either sex. It was "pagan" and sinful to live in the here and now and it certainly did not show "self-restraint."³⁶⁷ His examples were often found in the behavior of women, but it is not because they were "women." The fiery speeches of Savonarola that lambasted the Florentines for their "vanities" did much the same. This

³⁶³ According to a letter written by Boccaccio, he had at least some basic access to Homer's texts (which had been translated into Latin). Boccaccio discusses his interest in Homer in Edward Hutton, *Giovanni Boccaccio: A Biographical Study* (New York: J. Lane, 1910), 195-7.

³⁶⁴ Petrarch, *De Viris Illustribus*, ed. Guido Martellotti (Firenze: Sansoni, 1964), 30. For a discussion of the medieval estates see Jill Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

³⁶⁵ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

³⁶⁶ San Bernardino of Siena, *Two Sermons on Wives and Widows*, ed. Paul Halsall, 1996. (online), available from <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/bernardino-sermons.html>. 20 August 2009.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

can be interpreted to illustrate that women were part of, and thus representative of, this larger humanistic culture that had come under the scrutiny of conservative religious leadership because it did not advocate scholastic temperance.

Another integral aspect of “temperance” was patience in the face of adversity. As we have seen earlier, Alessandra Strozzi stoically, and seemingly patiently, awaited her husband’s return in an effort to safeguard her children. This is nothing new and in fact can be found in classical texts that the humanist school would have applied to defining virtue in the fifteenth century. As discussed earlier, the Greeks (including Homer) praised the wait of Penelope’s waiting for the return of her husband. She was presented as complex and powerful. Homer depicts a woman who, in the face of hardship, was a good and faithful wife.³⁶⁸ This theme was also boldly presented in Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s allegory of temperance in the Palazzo Publico (1340).³⁶⁹ Temperance, a female figure, held an hourglass. It was that patience during a time of adversity that earned women the respectable titles of devoted wives.

Temperance was not necessarily a virtue gendered toward women because of the value ascribed to their passivity. It is true that Plato, who was widely studied by the Platonic Academy in Florence, attributed the following to his teacher Socrates: “A modest silence is a woman’s crown.”³⁷⁰ Surviving literature suggests that elite women of quattrocento Florence were certainly more modest, in this sense of being “quiet,” and less vocal than some of their Venetian contemporaries like Isotta Nogarola, who clamored for recognition of women’s virtues.³⁷¹ This “silence” was an attribute discussed by male humanists when describing their own behavior as well. As Pico told Poliziano, “we [Pico’s peers, humanistic, educated men] adore silence; nothing comes out of our mouths

³⁶⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey*, book 19.

³⁶⁹ Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Temperance*, fresco, 1338, Palazzo Publico, Siena.

³⁷⁰ Diana H. Coole, *Women in Political Theory: From Ancient Misogyny to Contemporary Feminism* (Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 31.

³⁷¹ Isotta Nogarola, *Complete Writings: Letterbook, Dialogue On Adam and Eve, Orations*, ed. Margaret L. King and Diana M. Robin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

that we have not chewed on thoroughly.”³⁷² Thus, this reserved demeanor was a model for the educated citizen for both the behavior of men and women in this republic. Basically, think before you act. In truth, far from silent, the elite men and women of Florence did seem to mull over their words and actions with much attention to detail in their correspondence. They could be assertive, yes, but were careful not to overstep temperate bounds. Boccaccio introduced a model for women letter writers in his *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* (1344) based on Ovid’s models of expressing “truth” in letters.³⁷³

While temperance required one to mull over such decisions, it would be a leap to say that such behavior would quell all passions. Bruni assured his readers “that excitement and violent emotion are sometimes useful and certainly appropriate.”³⁷⁴ Civic humanism had re-politicised the virtue of temperance: sacrifice for the sake of one’s fellow citizens and city.³⁷⁵ This would push one to get riled up for all the right, civic reasons. Temperance was so important because temperance (*sophrosyne*) was the wholesale preserver of prudence.³⁷⁶

Thomas Aquinas had noted in the thirteenth century that temperance was less excellent than fortitude and justice because it was concerned with the behavior of “one”, not community. The definition had changed. Individuals were now, in the fifteenth century, called upon to serve republican experiments and then make temperate choices based on a larger sense of community.³⁷⁷ Although Renaissance historiography has moved away from Burckhardt’s notions of individualism, humanists like Ficino invested

³⁷² This philosophy comes from Epictetus. *silentium amemus, nequicquam evomatur non concoctum* as found in Angelo Poliziano, *Lettere*, ed. Shane Butler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 22-3.

³⁷³ Giovanni Boccaccio, *L’Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta Con le Chiose Inedite*, ed. Vincenzo Pernicone (Bari: G. Laterza, 1939).

³⁷⁴ Leonardo Bruni Aretino, *Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften*, ed. Hans Baron (Wiesbaden: Sandig, 1969), 34. *Iuvant enim interdum et certe decent stimuli quidem et motous animi vehementiores . . .*

³⁷⁵ Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition From Medieval to Modern Thought, Volume One* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

³⁷⁶ Ficino discusses the importance of Plato saying this in his commentary on “Charmides”. Ficino, *Gardens*.

³⁷⁷ Aquinas, *Cardinal*.

in the utility of individuals pursuing temperance for larger causes.³⁷⁸ In order to ground these traditions, fifteenth-century humanists went to a variety of classical sources (both Plato and Aristotle, as well as Cicero) when it came to finding a definition of temperance that was useful for the social web of wealthy merchants and titled, often wealthy, nobility.

Frugality in the Home

With the virtue of temperance more clearly defined, let us consider the example of “frugality” as a defining aspect of this virtue and a concern of fifteenth-century women. The city of Florence, with its fifteenth-century building boom and beautification projects, appeared to be anything but “frugal.” In contrast to fourteenth-century ideals of voluntary poverty firmly espoused by the mendicant orders (most notably the Franciscans and the poor Clares) to avoid the sin of avarice, the Florentine elite were quite lavish in their display of wealth. Wealth that was well managed was a vehicle to better achieve virtue in the fifteenth century. Florentine statesmen left records (*ricordi*) of their itemized spending in which they show a balance of obligations and payments to both family and state, the private and the public, in the interest of preserving their families now and in the future.³⁷⁹

Attaining temperance came to be interpreted as circumstances that did not require a life of poverty. Instead, it was living with moderation that became the ideal. The Franciscans in Florence had carried the *paupertas voluntaries* to the masses since the thirteenth century. Both Aquinas and Dante (and later Petrarch) had presented Christian and Stoic arguments for poverty to medieval Florence. In his *Epistolae Familiares*, Petrarch did reflect ideals of Franciscan poverty, but two generations later there was a sudden intellectual transformation, sparked by the economic growth in the city, that

³⁷⁸ He discusses Socrates’ notion that the practice of temperance should be particularly encouraged in the young, those who are noble, and those who are beautiful. Ficino, *Gardens*, 83-9.

³⁷⁹ Archivio di Stato, *Acquisti e Doni*, vol. 7, p. 51. Matteo Palmieri, as an ambassador of Naples(1454), dedicated these records to his family.

shifted the minds of Florentines.³⁸⁰ Poverty was not as central a virtue as it was during the Middle Ages. “Virtues” were being redefined to reflect the ideals of the thriving merchant culture.

The wealthy merchants and bankers of fifteenth-century Florence would have been sinners in the eyes of Thomas Aquinas. He said blatantly, in *The Cardinal Virtues*, that one should not lend money at interest or seek any other advantage measurable by money.³⁸¹ Money should be only a means of exchange for those like Aquinas, whom we have already seen as very influential on the medieval mind, but for families like the Medici money became the means to accumulate power.

Due to the activities of merchants and bankers, Renaissance Florence experienced a booming economy. The city lavishly displayed its wealth. Robert Lopez defined the fourteenth century as an “economic revolution”; these merchants became the “fifth element” of the universe.³⁸² Civic pride extended from them into the urban fabric and manifested itself in urban beautification, but merchants were worried about moral contamination as they had been during the Middle Ages.³⁸³ Among the many merchants who expressed concern about the morality of merchant business were fourteenth-century contemporaries Domencio Lenzi and Paolo da Certaldo.³⁸⁴ Wills of wealthy men and women continued to be littered with donations to churches and charities throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³⁸⁵ While these men lamented bouts of famine and disease during the late Middle Ages, to the point of crying “Oh! Cruel earth, why did you not open up?”, they distinguished their position from that of the suffering masses.³⁸⁶ The action of humanists like Alberti who identified architecture as a civic activity shows

³⁸⁰ Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, 163.

³⁸¹ Aquinas, *Cardinal*, 95-9.

³⁸² Robert Lopez, *The Commercial Revolution of The Middle Ages 950-1350* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1971).

³⁸³ Richard Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 75-8.

³⁸⁴ Their writings can be found in Vittore Branca, *Merchant Writers of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1999), 37-50.

³⁸⁵ Coenti Religiosi Soppressi, Conv. Sopp. 102, vol. 106 (two large folders of loose papers). This record is for Santa Maria Novella.

³⁸⁶ Branca, *Merchant*, xviii.

how it became more honorable to “give back” to the community as a means to rectify one’s personal moral corruption caused by wealth. Francesco Datini’s perceptions of this civic duty were made very clear in the wording of his will. In the Italian translation, written by Lapo Mazzei in 1410, Datini stated that “the granary and house should not be placed under the control of the church ... they always remain for the poor of Jesus Christ for their perpetual nourishment and remuneration for the poor of Prato.”³⁸⁷ And indeed he was so memorialized with a posthumous sign over his door which read *marchantale de’poveri di Christo del quale el Chomune di Parto e dispensatore*, “Merchant of Christ’s poor of which the council of Prato is the Bestower.”³⁸⁸ Temperance was very much a balance and Datini certainly showed both temporal and spiritual concerns.³⁸⁹

Although building projects were a display of wealth, Renaissance architecture for private homes was not ostentatious. The rough palace fronts were designed to avoid jealousy and show humility. The Medici, for example, wanted to project such modest appearances. They controlled Florence but they sought, via a well-planned public relations campaign, to convince the citizenry that civic virtue was alive and well amidst this Medici hegemony. They did not live in the Palazzo Vecchio (the seat of government) and their new home, the Palazzo Medici Riccardi (1444), had a rough, less than noteworthy exterior. It was a mix of old and new designs so as not to draw attention to the reality of the power this family wielded over the republican city.³⁹⁰

A bold example of the Medici keeping the semblance of the old republic in Florence can be seen in later architectural choices. Vasari redesigned the interior of the Palazzo Vecchio for Duke Cosimo I with a lavish touch. However, the exterior was left as the austere medieval brick façade of 1313, which was in place when this building did indeed house a republic and not a duke. The exterior was altered very little in order for

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Inscribed around the door of the Datini home in Prato.

³⁸⁹ A source that further speaks to this balance is Conv. Sopp. 102, vol. 326, which contains wills dated 1421-3.

³⁹⁰ Vasari discusses how Cosimo il Vecchio rejected the design of Filippo Brunelleschi in 1445 because it was so lavish that it would arouse envy amongst the citizens, and instead chose Michelozzo di Bartolomeo’s more austere design. Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1987).

Cosimo I to emphasize the continuity of Medici power with the values inherited from the city's republican traditions. By allowing the patricians to continue holding their traditional offices, the Medici were able to hold rebellion at bay. The façade of a republic, and how that moderated tempers, has been cited as a significant factor in what kept the illusion of a republicanism alive in Florence. Duke Cosimo I did not dress in a flashy manner (like the French kings of the seventeenth century did at Versailles) and continued the display that the Medici ruled behind the façade of a republic. Rather than living in a palace as signori, they dwelt in private residences like citizens.³⁹¹ The Medici lived outside of designated government buildings until Cosimo I was made Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1569. And they certainly did not live in poverty. Seneca's perspective fit very well with the situation of the Medici. In chapters 21 through 23 of *De Vita Beata*, he discussed how a "wise man has better means to developing his intellect in wealth than in poverty."³⁹² Wealth for the well-to-do aristocrat Seneca and for the banking Medici was a way to exercise virtue. "The wise man does not deem himself undeserving of the gifts of Fortune. He does not love riches, but he would rather have them ... he does not reject the riches that he has but he keeps them and wishes them to supply ampler material for exercising his virtue."³⁹³ In other words, this meant spending one's wealth in moderation for the good of self, kin, and state.

This new view of "wealth" stood in contrast to the Franciscan San Bernardino telling anxious merchants that, in an effort to avoid damnation, they should be buried in the habit of one of the mendicant orders and devote revenue to charity.³⁹⁴ The humanists

³⁹¹ There are notable exceptions during which the Medici were challenged, including the Pazzi conspiracy. The members of this conspiracy were executed and their families exiled from Florence, so the Pazzi actually served to solidify Medici hegemony in the city when they failed to kill Lorenzo. Although this failed plot put the Medici in control of Florence, the Medici had a focus on moderation of appearances that mirrored much of the humanist rhetoric of the day. Wealth was not inherently sinful in the minds of the urban elite if one used that money to achieve virtuous ends.

³⁹² Seneca, *Moral Essays II*, trans. John W. Basore (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 154-7.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 154-5.

³⁹⁴ Denys Hay, *The Italian Renaissance and its Historical Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 130-1.

seemed hesitant to promote the collection of wealth, but did not disregard its potential power and usefulness. Petrarch and Salutati advocated stoic existence. Leonardo Bruni, on the other hand, went to the works of Aristotle (particularly his *Economics*) to say that “possession of external goods affords the opportunity for the exercise of virtue.”³⁹⁵

When discussing avarice, Leonardo Bruni spoke of a moderate balance between wealth and poverty. He wrote “What about avarice? Is it not a difficult passion to bridle? There is a virtue called liberality that combats this species of immoderation. It is a certain mean between getting and spending, removed on the one hand from sordid avarice, and equally from thoughtless prodigality... The liberal man is midway between these two: he understands where, when, and how much to take in and pay out, and by following reason and by practice he soon forms a habit of so acting.”³⁹⁶ Bruni spoke of a balancing act that Florentine men and women sought to achieve.

Restraint did not necessarily include poverty, but did include this idea of supporting an urban community that provided for itself and its public projects.³⁹⁷ The Milanese humanist Pier Candido Decembrio (1392-1477) wrote in a letter that “poverty cannot be removed by words, any more than can other sufferings and evils; words are ‘futile’ ... do you think you can feed your children with words and endow your daughters for marriage with castles in the air? Possessions are powerful.”³⁹⁸ Such wealth was used to fund projects like the Ospedale degli Innocenti.³⁹⁹ In the case of spending, Bruni suggested that “magnificence is a more elevated form of liberality having to do with enormous expenditures – for example, when someone builds a public theater, or sponsors the Megalensian Games or gladiatorial show, or a public banquet. These acts, and acts of this sort which surpass the powers of the average private person, have a certain aura of

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 131-132.

³⁹⁶ Leonardo Bruni, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts* ed. Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, and David Thompson (Binghamton, 1987), 275.

³⁹⁷ For a discussion of how expensive the communal expenditures were (including the cost of a large standing army), see Anthony Molho, *Florentine Public Finances in the Early Renaissance 1400-1433* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1971), 9-21.

³⁹⁸ Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, 240.

³⁹⁹ Philip Gavitt, *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence: The Ospedale degli Innocenti 1410-1536* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990).

greatness about them and are spoken of, not simply as liberal, but magnificent.”⁴⁰⁰

Lorenzo came to be honored with the title “magnificent” in part because of his spending on public, civic-minded projects.⁴⁰¹ These public projects were not just a way to flaunt wealth, but rather seen as a humble service to the community. Wills, those of both the men and women buried at Santa Maria Novella, spoke of large donations to the church for various projects along with private bequests to specific family members.⁴⁰² The large fortunes of families were going to both secular and sacred concerns; this was the balance that humanism suggested. In 1383, the wife of Carlo Pazzi bequeathed money to the institution of the Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova, but also to a cardinal. These bequests would help secure both eternity and one’s memory as a civically minded Florentine.⁴⁰³

A focus on using wealth well was a theme in Poggio’s powerful humanist prose. In the dialogue, Loschi’s argument was that the pursuit of money was an essential ingredient of urban civilization and that civilization would quickly collapse if it depended on pious recluses:

Go through the whole city - if you meet anyone who wants no more than he has, you have found a phoenix. Don’t mention to me the boors amongst those hypocrites hanging about the market place who get their living without sweat or labour under the guise of religion, preaching to others the poverty and contempt for property which is their own rich fortune. Our cities will not be maintained by those idle and bewitched men who live in repose, but by men who are devoted to the upkeep of the human race. And if everyone of those neglected to produce more than he needed for his own use we should all, apart from anything else, have to till the soil. If everyone sows only what he needs for his own household, see what confusion will follow. People will be denied the use of the best virtues: mercy, charity, generosity, liberality ... All the splendor of the cities would be removed, divine workshop and its embellishments lost, no churches or arcades built, all the arts would come to an end ... what are cities, commonwealths, provinces, kingdoms, but public workshops of avarice.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ Bruni, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 276.

⁴⁰¹ Another similar demonstration of temperance can be seen in Leonardo’s diplomatic skill, which let him avoid war with the other major Italian city-states.

⁴⁰² Conv. Sopp. 102, vol 106 Fol.

⁴⁰³ Conv. Sopp. 102, vol 105 Fol.

⁴⁰⁴ Poggio, *Opera*, 12-3.

According to Poggio, the cities would fall into ruin if not for wealth, wisely spent. This was an attack on the extreme poverty of the mendicants. Wealth afforded one a path to virtue that otherwise would have been impossible. The Medici were generous in their donations to Florence. They were acting as “civic” mendicants and humanists found great virtue in charitable pursuits that seemed to be civically inspired.⁴⁰⁵

In this role of contributing to and supporting the public good of Florence, the Medici sought to achieve what Poggio described in *De Infelicitate Principum*. He asserted that happiness was derived from the private exercise of virtue; he attacked the illusion that popes and kings must be happy because of the power and splendor in their lives. Poggio had contempt for their way of life because it was devoted to self-gratification, and he felt that the cultivation of virtue was a private matter best pursued in private while avoiding worldly ambitions.⁴⁰⁶ A powerful example of the fact that the Medici were recognized for their dedication to the city could be found in a letter that Francesco Sforza wrote to Cosimo de’ Medici in 1438. In an effort to foster diplomacy, he told Cosimo to “take the course that seems best to the Magnificent Commune, only let me know.” He is noting that neither he, nor his rivals in Florence, would focus on self-gratification. He goes on to say that “what I once said I say again, that my wishes are those of that Magnificent Commune. I only wanted to give my opinion.”⁴⁰⁷ This was an opinion based, at least he says, on public interest.

Moderation was a theme not only in public leadership roles, but also prevalent in the notion of managing the domestic space long term. A temperate household was one that was financially well managed. Margherita Datini wrote from Florence to her husband (living in Pisa) on February 27, 1385 that they would be “better off together than one here and one there. This is true for many reasons: Because of the expense since it is true that we spend double here and there, even if that does not matter much when you are

⁴⁰⁵ George Holmes, *The Florentine Enlightenment 1400-1450* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁰⁷ Ross, *Lives*, 39-40.

flourishing.”⁴⁰⁸ She recognized and supported the reality that spending to support two households was financially wasteful and she seems to have been frustrated by it.

Not only was Margherita lamenting the financial extravagance of their living situation, but she wanted to care for her husband, who seemed to be suffering from illness and lived in a city where *l'aria cattiva* (the air was foul). Her opinion on the matter of their separation and his residence in Pisa was quite clear even with the occasional caveat that he “is wise and will know what is best.”⁴⁰⁹ She saw her role as bringing stability and frugality to the home while her husband deals with the political/public matters that make him anxious. She asked him “to try avoiding getting too depressed” even if others have wronged him. The theme that “all of us are well/ make sure to take care of yourself too” was common in these letters.⁴¹⁰ The preservation of the well-being of both of them was important to the household.

Key to the survival of the household were moderation and financial management. Margherita’s knowledge of household fiscal management and her activity in the home were apparent in a letter to her husband dated March 1, 1384. It was a detailed “packing list” for food items, including beans, nuts, and figs, that she was sending him from Florence.⁴¹¹ Margherita was quite firm when she spoke frankly to her husband beyond just lists of needed household items. She called Bartolomea, a household servant, a “devil,” saying that she had not changed much and they knew this, so she was closely monitored. She also boldly told her husband that, although he told her he was leading a virtuous life, he “inflicts tribulations first on his soul and then on his body.” Although he “thinks he can manage to behave honorably by first making money and by then dedicating himself to a virtuous life,” if he waited any longer to lead a virtuous life it would be impossible. She asked him to listen to her out of love.⁴¹² More often she

⁴⁰⁸ Margherita Datini, *Per la tua Margherita: Lettere di una Donna del' 300 al Marito Mercante: Margherita Datini a Francesco di Marco 1384-1401*, CD ROM (Prato: L'Archivio di Stato di Prato, 2002).

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., cod 1401881.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 1401883.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 1401891.

⁴¹² Ibid., 1401885.

became irritated with him and compared their relationship to other couples like Guido, “who can not be compared to other men. He treats his lady wife as a lady, not like some innkeeper’s wife.”⁴¹³ One can conclude that she hoped she would be treated with the same dignity. When she was not Margherita lamented that her husband saw her as “unfit for anything else”, leaving her to “scrape up the bitter dredges.”⁴¹⁴ Margherita certainly has a vision of how the household would best be managed under her supervision and knew not only the significance of her role, but the respect that it demanded.

After marriage a wife was expected to continue to adhere to societal “guidelines” of temperance.⁴¹⁵ Alessandra Strozzi serves as another case study in household “frugality” in the context of management. She played an active role beyond simply paying the family’s bills. Not only did she manage the finances of her home, but she was a landlord of agricultural land who could be ruthless if necessary. She demanded a half share of the yield from the land. If farmers were not able to work, she kicked them off the land, as she did to an elderly couple, writing to her son Filippo that “if these two people do not die, they will have to go begging. I can do no more than is possible.” In many ways this seems harsh, but one can see that she was making tough decisions that she saw as supporting the best interest of her own family.⁴¹⁶

Like male humanists, who did not deny the pleasures of enjoying earthly life in moderation, Alessandra discussed her happiness over the gift of foods, like roe, given by her son Filippo, and she reported that she shared them with Caterina (her daughter).⁴¹⁷ She shared financial advice for her sons in almost the same breath as she discussed the management of her own home.⁴¹⁸ She did not hesitate to hold 200 florins for “her needs.” In fact, financial matters seemed to occupy much of her thoughts, from selling property to complaining of heavy taxes, down to minute concerns like candle wax and

⁴¹³ Ibid., 1401849.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 1401849.

⁴¹⁵ Francesco Barbaro, *De Re Uxoribus*, ed. Attilio Gnesotto (Padova: G.B. Randi, 1915).

⁴¹⁶ Gregory, 35.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 63

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 73.

problems with a debt to the pork butcher.⁴¹⁹ These are the topics they discussed in order to better manage the home.

Margherita, like Alessandra, was no zealot for temperance, though they both sought a balance of frugality and living well. Margherita told her husband to see if some undergowns in the Sicilian style could be found by the onset of summer, although he should “make sure they are pretty, because I don’t want Sicilian ones just to save more . . . I want them neither too small nor too big, medium sized, but dignified and beautiful.”⁴²⁰ Frugality was not poverty, but rather a balance between living well and living moderately.

Temperate spending concerned more than the individual. Mothers like Strozzi were obviously very concerned that their sons spend money wisely. Alessandra Strozzi insisted in a letter to her son that the young man “understand because you’re no longer a boy . . . above all, do be careful with money; you must, because you’re in a worse position than you realize.”⁴²¹ She did not shelter her adult son from the realities of the family’s financial problems, but implored that he live his life knowing that his activities had an impact on the family’s fortune.

Although women had a great deal of decision-making power when it came to household issues, men dealt with the value of temperance in this context as well. Bruni addressed the following to Cosimo de’ Medici in his Preface to Book I of *The Aristotelian Treatise on Economics or Family Estate Management*. “Wealth is indeed useful, since it is both an embellishment for those who possess it, and the means by which they may exercise virtue.” He went on to say that wealth “is also of benefit to one’s sons, who can by means of it rise more easily to positions of honor and distinction . . . therefore for our sakes, and even more for the love of our children, we ought to strive as far as we honorably can to increase our wealth, since it is included by philosophers among the things that are good and considered to be related to happiness.”⁴²² Embracing

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 93, 125.

⁴²⁰ Datini, *Per la Tua Margherita*, cod. 1401836, busta 1089.

⁴²¹ Gregory, 35.

⁴²² Bruni, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 305.

wealth as a vehicle to achieve virtue was a theme in the financial decisions of the men and women of Renaissance Florence. Alessandra, in the process of managing her finances, told her children about the importance of balance in their economic activities. She told her son Filippo “it’s better to have less money than to offend God, who sits in judgment over us. Our life in this world is short, we have to try to make sure we live in peace in the next life, which lasts forever ... I’m reminding you about it because you’re my flesh and blood.”⁴²³

Women’s activities in the home could be quite obvious examples of interest in the virtue of temperance. Margherita Datini (1385–1421) indeed managed her home in the absence of her husband, who was often away from Prato in neighboring Florence. In his absence, she wrote that she would have written to let him know of the illnesses of those in the home “but I have filled in for you with these people that you know are here, always saying that you have a great deal to do there.” Margherita took on this active role with much fervor. In his unpolished letters to his wife, Francesco Datini was neither prosaic nor romantic. His letters were long lists of what needed to be carried out.⁴²⁴ Indeed the goings-on in the household were so important that she discussed them in copious detail. Attention to issues like visitors and household supplies was an obvious concern to both Margherita and her husband and records of these things span many pages of parchment.⁴²⁵ As Signore Datini wrote to Messer Paolo da Certaldo, “it is a fine and great thing to know how to earn money, but a finer and greater one is to know how to spend it with moderation and where it is seemly.”⁴²⁶ With diligence, Margherita and Francesco Datini worked in unison toward this same goal.

To this end, Margherita Datini was not just her husband’s helper. She was quite bold in her opinions and went so far as to chastise her husband for sizable spending and his ceaseless and unhealthy preoccupation with business and the ostentatious building of

⁴²³ Gregory, 104-5.

⁴²⁴ Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato: Francesco di Marco Datini* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), 179.

⁴²⁵ For an example see Datini, *Per la Tua Margherita*, Codice 1401777 busta 1089.

⁴²⁶ Origo, 280.

his palace.⁴²⁷ She also defended her sex.⁴²⁸ She ran this home with him and the significance of communication and the importance of letters in a merchant household were a constant.⁴²⁹ She also asked that he “spare the lame excuses for his long absence” from the home and told him that she had spent the money that she had. With a firm tone she wrote, “I’ve spent them. Send me more.”⁴³⁰ Her tone is very matter-of-fact and down-to-business; this is what needed to be done to keep the household running smoothly.

The Datini home was in a constant flurry of activity in which financial management was a focal point. Margarita worked through pain (*doglie*) until after dark, not taking dinner until 8:00 in the evening.⁴³¹ Her husband constantly asked for reports about the goings-on of the household from his wife who had intimate involvement with spending in the home. On June 5, 1395, she went into detail about the use of linen cloth for 20 shirts and who made these shirts. She went so far into detail, in fact, that she mentioned chastising the tailor for cutting away too much cloth and noted how much thread was used. She boldly, and seemingly with some irritation, said “I make every effort to give you a detailed account of everything but it really upsets me when you interrogate me needlessly about trivialities, making it clear that you have no faith in me ... I will wait and see [when you return] Sunday or Monday or Tuesday. I will arrive with these women and you can have it out with me in person.” Although she was irritated by her husband’s three-month absence, and not knowing when he would return, it seemed that this irritated tone was also directed at his overzealous interest to pursue frugality in the home while she considered herself quite capable of dealing with household management.⁴³² Although most of the letters dealt with food and subsistence issues, an

⁴²⁷ Ann Crabb, “‘If I Could Write’. Margherita Datini and Letter Writing, 1385-1410” *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 (2007): 1170-1206.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1173-4.

⁴²⁹ Vittore Branca, ed., *Merchant Writers of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1999).

⁴³⁰ Datini, *Per La Tua Magherita*, cod. 1401913, busta 1089.

⁴³¹ Her “pains” were most likely a gynecological illness and were frequently mentioned in letters in her circle. *Ibid.*, cod. 1401910, busta 1089.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, cod. 1401912, busta 1089.

example of how Margherita had enough agency to make fundamental decisions about the running of that home can be found in her statement that she gave a bushel of flour to the wife of Nannino because she, “left miserably poor because the day after her husband’s departure she has no bread,” asked Margherita for help. Margherita made this decision, even though her husband had not answered her.⁴³³

Her agency in running a home with moderation was apparent, but this kind of discussion was not always between women and men. It is interesting to note that men talked to other men about household management as well and it was not considered a “female concern.” The domestic space was one that raised the cares and concerns of both men and women. Benetto Dei, for example, wrote a detailed letter to Lorenzo di Piero de’ Medici in Florence in 1466 to let him know that he was sending five pairs of partridges and described what they should be fed with.⁴³⁴ Margherita communicated similar messages; her partial literacy did not seem to be a hindrance to get these points of communication across.⁴³⁵ She used scribes often to write to her husband even though she had an active role in the dictation of her letters, including her request that scribes stay closer to her original dictation.⁴³⁶ She did not use the *ars dictaminis* writing style of composing letters in the High Middle Ages; rather they were written in the vernacular and not interested in the hierarchy between writer and recipient. Merchants wrote to other merchants with a sense of being approximate equals and it is interesting to learn that, as a woman, Margherita used the style of her socio-economic peers.⁴³⁷ She spoke to her husband this way, merchant to merchant.

Her financial role in the home could also be seen in her position as one of the executors in Francesco Datini’s will. “Francesco ordered that the aforementioned Madonna Margherita, along with Luca [his partner], Barzalone [his-son in-law], and Lionardo [a partner] . . . be the executors and agents of the aforementioned things, that

⁴³³ Ibid., cod. 1401793, busta 1089.

⁴³⁴ MAP VII 438

⁴³⁵ Crabb, *If I Could Write*, 1174-5.

⁴³⁶ Datini, *Per la Tua Margherita*, Cod. 1401778, busta 1089; Crabb, *If I Could Write*, 1176.

⁴³⁷ Jan Couchman and Ann Crabb, *Women’s Letters Across Europe, 1400-1700* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2005), 1-18.

the debtors pay and that the goods be purchased with the monies that shall be derived from the said payments . . . these four persons were fully informed of Francesco's wishes in almost everything.⁴³⁸ His wishes were that his estate support a hospice where "they should not raise any altar, nor turn it into an oratory or any type of ecclesiastical place."⁴³⁹ Margherita played an important role in the distribution of his wealth. Women's testaments often contained evidence of distribution of donations, so she was not alone in this role of executrix.⁴⁴⁰

Using wealth well, a topic of so many letters between the Datini, was viewed as a virtuous skill. Some of the most revered humanists, like Matteo Palmieri, were praised for using wealth well. The biographer Almanno Rinuccini said that Palmieri's life was devoted to careful husbandry to provide "a brilliant life, for fame . . . for magnificent buildings for his personal needs as well as for foundations in honor of God."⁴⁴¹ It was to this civic goal that well-to-do men and women of fifteenth-century Florence aspired.

The Temperance of Marriage

The activities of women also showed how marriage was perceived as a prudent and temperate life choice in fifteenth-century Florence. The merits of a religious versus a secular life were certainly a topic of discussion for Renaissance humanists, and both were considered when making arrangements to settle sons and daughters into marriages or into religious houses. Even at its apex, the Renaissance was far from being a secular age. The merits of a secular life as opposed to one spent in a state of religious devotion was a topic often deliberated, quite vehemently, by humanists like Caldiera and Barbaro.⁴⁴² Women also had secular and sacred paths in life. While many women did choose to enter religious houses, most others entered into marriages.⁴⁴³ In this patriarchal

⁴³⁸ Vittore Branca, ed. *Mercanti Scrittori: i Ricordi nella Firenze tra Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Milano: Rusconi, 1986), 136.

⁴³⁹ Branca 137-8.

⁴⁴⁰ Conv. Sopp. 102, vol. 326, Fol 1, 20.

⁴⁴¹ In Hans Baron, *Franciscan Poverty and Civic Wealth as Factors in the Rise of Humanistic Thought* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1938), 20.

⁴⁴² Francesco Barbaro, *De Re Uxoribus*, ed. Attilio Gnesotto (Padova: G.B. Randi, 1915).

⁴⁴³ Margaret King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

society these “choices” were often determined by men and not the female dependents themselves. Margaret King highlighted the rapid increase in the number of female religious communities between 1427 and 1552. Women like Antonia Pulci could take their vows even if they were of more moderate means.⁴⁴⁴ This marked a departure from the Middle Ages when, by and large, the cloistered life was only an option for aristocratic families. The significance of this increase in religious communities to this dissertation is to illustrate that for all the Renaissance tendencies toward secularization, a life of cloistered temperance devoted to God was a popular option for some, although many more were married and lived a temperate life in the secular world.⁴⁴⁵ Although not all humanists agreed that marriage was necessarily the better of the two, praise of marriage and its virtues was certainly more common than those who attacked the institution. Elites in Renaissance Florence engaged readily in the diplomacy of joining families.

Marriage was often praised, but the choice was a complex one and it was not always viewed by all humanists as the most virtuous of choices. Catherine di Messer Vieri entered a convent at the age of 11, but fled the convent in adulthood to marry and have children. Salutati acknowledged how her learning exceeded that of other women but in the same breath told her to return to the convent. He scolded her: “return to your husband, your beloved, your king! ... leaving your depraved path of passion.”⁴⁴⁶ And when referring to her desire to marry he said, “although you call it marriage you cover a crime with this name.”⁴⁴⁷ In other words, adultery. At the letter’s conclusion, he wished her happiness in her cloistered life.⁴⁴⁸ This was the exception as humanists often praised

⁴⁴⁴ Antonia Pulci, *Florentine Drama for Convent and Festival: Seven Sacred Plays*, ed. James Wyatt Cook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); King, *Women of the Renaissance*, 83. *Pinzocherre*, single holy working-class women of fifteenth-century Florence, are discussed by David Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria: Women and Work in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

⁴⁴⁵ Although the *catasto* does not contain data about the number of nuns in Tuscany, there is census information for the overall size of the secular female population. Herlihy, *Tuscans*, 133-44.

⁴⁴⁶ Kohl, *The Earthly Republic*, 115-8

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

marriage. Also the circumstance here is that Catherine fled a convent that she had already joined. Her choice had already been made.

Boccaccio may have written about the pleasures, trials, and tribulations of love in the *Decameron*, but he looked at marriage as a great danger to a man who pursued learning. He lamented Dante's unhappy fate when he said "what obstacles women are to studious life."⁴⁴⁹ For Boccaccio, Dante was drawn into a world of domestic concerns that destroyed civic life and scholarly pursuits. Salutati seemed to give Vieri much the same advice.⁴⁵⁰

Most humanists, however, praised marriage. Supreme pleasure, according to Petrarch, for a married couple would be a husband and wife sharing the supreme intellectual pleasure of studying together in their library.⁴⁵¹ This view differed from that of Boccaccio (a contemporary and a good friend of Petrarch), who seemed less than convinced of marriage as a fulfilling life in and of itself. Leonardo Bruni disparaged the choice to not marry as selfish and went so far as to assert that it would be going against one's civic duty not to marry. He cited Cato, Cicero, and Aristotle (among others) as all having had families. Man, as a civic animal, must marry, as that union represents the condition of the state.⁴⁵² This marked a man's active commitment to the state and his investment in that institution. Cicero, after a thousand years of being shelved by bookish medieval scholars, became popular with the Florentine humanists. Cicero was no longer interpreted as he had been by St. Jerome as defending chastity and solitary life. Jerome quoted Cicero stating that a man "cannot devote yourself to a wife and philosophy at the same time." Cicero's promotion of civic spirit was not explored by those who promoted the ideal medieval monastic life. Instead, his civic spirit would be embraced by civic-minded Florentine humanists who saw marriage as necessary for a virtuous, active, moderate life.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁹ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron* trans. G. H. McWilliam (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

⁴⁵⁰ Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, 17-9.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 18-9.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 106-7.

A number of instructions were devised to ensure that marriages fulfilled their potential for happiness. The instructions of good marriage also caused concern amongst humanists like the Venetian Francesco Barbaro, for example, wrote *On Wifely Duties* to advise Ginevra Cavalcanti, the young bride of Lorenzo il Vecchio (the brother of Cosimo), on the behavior of a proper wife. While Barbaro talked about the political motivations in considering a union, he stated that it was a woman's personal virtue that should be the most important consideration in the selection process. Personal virtue was more important than beauty or great wealth. It would not be a moderate choice to select a bride based only on the size of her dowry. Wives should be companions to their husbands and allow them to pursue worldly concerns while they themselves managed the household as their number one duty. This included managing daily household tasks and, most importantly, the bearing, nursing, and training of children. Barbaro's manual was very popular. More than 50 manuscript copies of *De re uxoria* exist in Italian libraries, while Italian, French, and English translations were printed by the seventeenth century. Barbaro's influence was vast and seemingly mainstream. His emphasis that the family was the basic unit of the state and society seemed to have struck a chord in Renaissance Florence.⁴⁵⁴

While this displayed a worldly/sacred dichotomy during the Italian Renaissance, the focus here is on women of elite status inside the republic and on determining their activity securing and promoting marriages in the name of civic duty. It is noteworthy that while humanists did not always frown on the merits of a religious life, they more often discussed the worth of marriage and judged it to be better than the celibate life. Even Salutati reversed his opinion and elevated marriage in 1393 when he said that "holiness in the affairs of the world edifies many because it is available to many and because it furnishes an example to many and brings many along with it to the gates of heaven."⁴⁵⁵ By remaining in the secular world, citizens could benefit the larger community. While the number of holy women was rising in the fourteenth century, the Renaissance was reaching a creative peak in Florence and many elite women pursued the religious

⁴⁵⁴ Kohl, *The Earthly Republic*, 179-87.

⁴⁵⁵ D'Elia, *The Renaissance of Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 25.

experience through their writing and remained married, or widowed.⁴⁵⁶ They achieved a balance between secular and religious life that men in this society did not seem able to attain. Such a balance between secular and sacred straddled both sides of the argument as to which life was better. Women like Lucrezia Tornabuoni and Antonia Pulci wrote spiritual works with great intensity at the same time they were married and raising children.⁴⁵⁷

Marriage was praised in more than 300 surviving humanistic wedding orations from the fifteenth century.⁴⁵⁸ This ideology privileged marriage over celibacy as a more virtuous life. This varied wildly from the ideology espoused by St. Jerome and St. Augustine that was popular during the Middle Ages. Jerome, who favored chastity, wrote that virginity was natural while wedlock only followed guilt.⁴⁵⁹ Augustine's tone when discussing marriage was more forgiving than Jerome's. Augustine did agree that "consecrated virginity is rightly preferred to marriage" but he expressed the ideology that "the union, then of male and female for the purpose of procreation is the natural good of marriage."⁴⁶⁰ Humanists like Alberti were much bolder in their support of these unions.

Like many ideas that humanists utilized in the fifteenth century, this view was grounded in classical ideals with an eye toward Christian teachings as well. The ideology of marriage as a state of virtue, a position that enabled one to perform a civic duty, was

⁴⁵⁶ Daniel Bornstein and Robert Rusconi, eds., *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁴⁵⁷ Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil, *Teaching Other Voices; Women and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 1-22.

⁴⁵⁸ Anthony F. D'Elia, *The Renaissance of Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 2-3. There is a lengthy appendix in this study which lists wedding orations in the Italian Renaissance written by humanists.

⁴⁵⁹ Saint Jerome, *On Marriage and Virginity, Letter XXII to Eustochium* ed. Paul Halsall, 1996, (online) available from <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/jerome-marriage.html> 21, August 2009.

⁴⁶⁰ Saint Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence* ed. Paul Halsall, 1996, (online) available from <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/aug-marr.html>, 21, August 2009. Aquinas in *Summa Theologica* also highlights the vaulting of celibacy over marriage. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Daniel J. Sullivan (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952).

adhered to by both Plato and Aristotle.⁴⁶¹ This “secular” motivation for marriage stood in stark contrast to the Christian ideology of temperance based on Paul’s statement in Corinthians 7: 6-9 to the unmarried and to widows, “it is a good thing if they stay as I am myself; but if they cannot control themselves, they should marry. Better to marry than burn with vain desire.” Paul suggests that if one cannot commit to a celibate life, at least monogamy might prevent the sin of lust. Marriage as a religious institution and as a sacrament continued to be the foundation of the praise that Brother Cherubino of Siena gave marriage in his fifteenth-century text *Regole della vita Matrimoniale*.⁴⁶² Humanists tended to focus on the praise of the secular benefits of the institution.

There are potentially many reasons why marriage was highlighted as the best choice in the fifteenth century when considering the influence of these two viewpoints. High infant mortality rates, due in part to recurrent plagues, had contributed to a high proportion of truncated households and fewer surviving children. This made children more desirable. This desire for many children can be seen in letters like those of Strozzi to her sons.⁴⁶³ Her obsession with arranging and celebrating marriages, and the children that such a union would produce, seems a common Florentine preoccupation. Fondness for female grandchildren is evident in a letter dated 1469.⁴⁶⁴ Strozzi endured all sorts of financial trouble to secure a dowry for her daughter because she saw the long-term merit in the decision to marry her well and not send her to a convent.⁴⁶⁵

Based on these wedding orations and letters, it has been argued that, rather than being a union of love and passion, marriage was an institution through which Florentine fathers and mothers sought to secure the best possible social status for children and thus

⁴⁶¹ For a thoughtful discussion about the ideology of marriage from antiquity and the Middle Ages in relation to its impact on fifteenth-century ideology see D’Elia, 11-34.

⁴⁶² Frate Cherubino, *Regole della Vita Matrimoniale* (Bologna: Commissione per i Testi di Lingua, 1969).

⁴⁶³ Gavitt, 226. The truncated families can be seen in the 1427 *catasto*. David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and Their Families: A Study of The Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁴⁶⁴ Gregory, 201-7.

⁴⁶⁵ Gregory, 29-36.

strengthen the family's position in the political and economic arenas of Florence.⁴⁶⁶

This argument also cites the differences between the Venetians and other Italian courts and highlighted the significance of marriage beyond its status as a political union. The Venetian elite married within a small oligarchical class, so there was more discussion of partnership and love. Marriage arrangements in Venice did not have a pattern of linking merchants and bankers to aristocracy, while elite Florentines focused on the utilitarian uniting of kinship lines to unite new wealth with established aristocratic households.⁴⁶⁷

The uniting of kinship lines between the Orsini of Rome and the Medici of Florence was obviously a motivating factor when Lucrezia Tornabuoni persuaded her son Lorenzo to marry a Roman aristocrat. Clarice de' Medici was a modest choice, as she was not the wealthiest of potential brides, but instead provided the family with a clear link to the Roman aristocracy. When describing the wedding, Marco Parenti wrote a letter to Filippo Strozzi about the Medici's provision of extravagant amounts of food and livestock and the impressive adornment of participants as seen in their clothing and jewels. Parenti told Strozzi that "nothing was ever seen like it save for some jewels of great value worn by some great lords." He also notes that a stage had been erected in the street for dining and the size of the crowd. More than 200 people dined at the principal tables alone.⁴⁶⁸ Temperance at a marriage did not mean the pursuit of poverty for the elites of Florence. In fact, they appeared to be quite comfortable showing off that wealth at such a celebratory occasion. For the historian, it can serve to illuminate the perceived importance and celebratory nature of an event. This celebration superseded the norm of valuing more temperate displays of wealth.

Fathers and mothers in Florence spoke to the importance of these unions and both were involved in the planning for such important pairings. The Medici, like other Florentine families of a newly rich status, give us many examples of a new leadership in Florence who made shrewd marriage decisions as soon as they were financially able to

⁴⁶⁶ This thesis is central to a study of three hundred humanist wedding orations in D'Elia, 1-9.

⁴⁶⁷ Joanne Ferraro, *Marriage Wars in Late Renaissance Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁴⁶⁸ Ross, 130-4.

entice aristocratic parents to offer their children into these unions. These marriages were “temperate” discussions in the sense that they set aside possible immediate material gains for a distinguished family tree. Piccara de’ Bueri was the wife of Giovanni di’ Bicci and the mother of Cosimo di Lorenzo. The Bueri family was old nobility in Florence and a marriage in to this family would not promote immediate wealth as much as the long-term stability of a firmer social standing in the city for the banker Medici. This shows that the Medici had the temperance and foresight to think ahead and secure their family tree over the enticing prospect of immediate financial gains.

When humanists discussed love in these unions, they were often influenced by classical philosophy in which marriage was a temperate/civic choice, but love between men and women in these unions was a topic of discussion as well. Interest in Plato made this a logical topic of debate for those who read works such as his *Symposium*.⁴⁶⁹ Marsilio Ficino, who translated Plato’s *Dialogues* and a study of Platonic theology into Latin, seems to have coined the phrase *amor platonicus* or Platonic love. This referred to chaste, yet passionate, love that because it was not overwrought with lust, contained much wisdom and was more satisfying. Although he noted that the object of love should be beyond the body, he did not condemn marriage but saw this contemplative love as being optimal.⁴⁷⁰ While the ideal of Platonic love was discussed amongst humanists, circumstances in which these civically active merchants and bankers found themselves made strategic marriages necessary for their success in a Florentine society that was shifting from aristocratic dominance but still held onto the importance of family lineage.

The Medici obviously wanted a piece of the proverbial socioeconomic pie in Florence. So the popular belief of Thomas Aquinas, that virginity is better than marriage because of the divine good virgins could contemplate, was not useful to support the building of a network of kinship lines.⁴⁷¹ The Medici did not adopt Aquinas’ scholastic rhetoric. They improved their social position both by taking power away from the old

⁴⁶⁹ Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nahamas (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989).

⁴⁷⁰ Ficino, *Commentary on the Symposium*, trans. by S.R. Jayne (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1944).

⁴⁷¹ Aquinas, *Cardinal Virtues*, 142-6.

family trees of Florence, like those of the Pazzi and Albizzi, or by rooting their own line into these elite families, like the Tornabuoni and the Bardini, via marriages. And as Petrarch suggested, they seemed to “decide between what is best for your household, fatherland, friends, estate, reputation, and pleasure and what is best for your own health and salvation . . . the good of the many should be preferred to the good of the individual” on a case-by-case basis.⁴⁷² Marriages were not designed around the happiness of “individuals” but rather for the creation of kinship lines and for asserting what the Medici thought was “best” for Florence – their control.

Alessandra Strozzi discussed the motivating factors in the selection of a marriage partner for one’s children. As a devoted mother in widowhood, Alessandra wrote to her son Filippo in 1447 of his sister Caterina’s engagement to the son of Parente di Piero Parenti. His association with the name of his father exemplified the significance of the larger family, not just the individual her daughter was marrying. From there Alessandra immediately launched into a discussion of the financial well-being of her soon to be son-in-law as well as the 1,000 florin dowry which he would be given. The dowry, she explained to her son, is partly yours and partly mine” (*e questi danari sono parte de’ vostri e parte de’ mia*). Her agency in both the process and the decision making is obvious. In this letter it does not appear that Alessandra is asking her son’s approval for her decision. She is merely explaining its merit. Alessandra also showed her understanding of the financial/kinship significance of the marriage process. She said, quite bluntly, that “he who marries is looking for cash” and, quite pragmatically, that “I couldn’t find anyone who was willing to wait for the dowry until 1448” and that “we’ve taken this decision for the best because she was sixteen and we didn’t want to wait any longer” for fear of making the bride less desirable. Alessandra’s agency and understanding of the situation were trumpeted in the bold “everything considered, I decided to settle the girl well.”⁴⁷³ She made what this society would consider a very moderate decision. She did not place her daughters in convents or simply pick the

⁴⁷² Petrarch, *De Rebus Familiaribus, Liber XXII, Epistle 1*, published as *Le Familiari*, Vol. 4, ed. V. Rossi (Florence: Sansoni, 1942).

⁴⁷³ Gregory, 28-31.

wealthiest possible husband. Instead, she put in a great effort to marry them well and maintained their ties to their natal lineage.⁴⁷⁴ The continuity of these relationships was evident in the wills of mothers like Mona Lapa Lambertuccio, who had written in her testament that she was leaving money to her adult daughter as well as brothers of the church of Santa Maria Novella.⁴⁷⁵

Alessandra's views of marriage, like those of the humanists in her social circle, were distinct from the arguments found in St. Bernardino's loudly vocalized scholastic ideas in support of marriage. While he said in a sermon that "you, woman receive the ring from your spouse, which ring you bear on your finger, and you set it on that finger which has a vein running straight to the heart ... Paul says in the fifth chapter of his epistle to the Ephesians ... 'husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the Church.'"⁴⁷⁶ Bernardino, representing the church, talked about marriage that increased the virtue of both men and women, but discussed no civic context for these unions. Those like Cosimo il Vecchio, and others influenced by humanism, sought virtue for more pragmatic, more worldly ends - ends that would enhance their positions as citizens in Florence.⁴⁷⁷ Humanists vocalized a focus on marriage as a civic union moving far from the scholastic rhetoric of St. Bernardino.

For all of their praise of marriage, humanists noted that marriage was not without human challenges. In a letter to Giovanni d' Amerigo Del Bene, Francesco di Jacopo Del Bene stated that

It is true that Dora, whom I have always considered a sensible woman, has been behaving in a way that recounts neither to her nor to our dignity. She has not wished to join in any part of the affair. Her attitude is so bizarre and so melancholy that she cries all day and says that your daughter [Antonia] will never be married and that you don't care. She says the most shocking things that I have ever heard, and she has made your whole family miserable. I am very annoyed by

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Cov. Sopp. 102, vol. 105, Fol. 135.

⁴⁷⁶ Saint Bernardino of Siena, *Two Sermons on Wives and Widows, Vol. 1*, ed. C.G Coulton (New York: Macmilian, 1910), 216-29. Modernized.

⁴⁷⁷ Marco Parenti, *Lettere*, ed. Maria Marrese (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1996).

her conduct, and it would please me if you wrote to comfort and correct her, so that she will be content with this affair, and not vexed.⁴⁷⁸

There does seem to be a level of exacerbation in the tone of Giovanni d’Amerigo Del Bene when discussing the unhappiness of Dora. The goal of the home as a peaceful setting could not be secured until she was made happy and thus action must be taken to pacify her. “Temperance” and peace would not be found until she was happy.

Bartholomew Scala, secretary of the Florentine Republic, wrote encouragements to Lorenzo de’ Medici (who was on a diplomatic trip to Naples) “if there is peace you will see how the city will flourish.”⁴⁷⁹ This was analogous to peace in the home, a microcosm of the state. Peace in the home seemed essential in the fifteenth century as the private courtyard replaced the public *loggia* of the late medieval republic.

Humanism influenced the fifteenth-century discussion not only of the unions themselves, but the relationship between husbands and wives. Tornabuoni did make an interesting note of the partnership (which did not mean equality) that developed between men and women when she explored the lament of Adam and Eve in her Canzone *Della stripe regale, e nato il fiore*. “And they stand still knowing not what to do: ‘what life is this? What works are now ours? Will we know what to do to stem his wrath?’ They ask each other, “for we have few friends, Only each other with whom to lament How foolish desire, Made us lose so much.”⁴⁸⁰ The attention that Tornabuoni gave to the standing of Adam and Eve as husband and wife in the comment “whatever pleases you, pleases me” strongly suggests the importance of a partnership between spouses.⁴⁸¹ They, like her, worked together for the good of each other and their immediate family.

Marriage partnerships for the Medici marked a relationship not only between individuals, but between families because to wield political force in Florence, they had to face their new economic status. No fancy family tree of illustrious, landed ancestors

⁴⁷⁸ Brucker, *Society*, 35.

⁴⁷⁹ Ross, 235.

⁴⁸⁰ Lucrezia Tornabuoni, *Sacred Narratives*, ed. Jan Tylus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 284-6.

⁴⁸¹ Ross, 50.

could be cited as a source of legitimacy for their control of Florence. The key to their legitimacy was the creation of a family tree that began to link the Medici to families with aristocratic lineage. Although the women to be married did not have much “power” of choice in this process in terms of being able to choose their own husbands, it was obvious from the significance of these unions that legitimate children and thus female chastity was essential to the dream of Medici hegemony. This made temperance, and more specifically chastity, a virtue of great significance to a family who funded much humanist rhetoric. The Medici had to focus on their contemporary strengths and the virtue that they displayed in the present or in the immediate past in order to legitimize this position of civic power. Women like Lucrezia de’ Medici and Alessandra Strozzi, as we have seen, were extremely influential in the process of marrying their children, both male and female children alike, when those decisions were of pivotal and undeniable importance.

Humanism did mark a shift to worldly concerns and it was obvious that fifteenth-century humanists were at home in the active life, with their worldly goods. They did not apologize for their wealth or status, nor, as evident from the previous discussion, obsess over the secular advantages of marriage. The wealthy merchant Francesco Datini wrote on the first page of his ledger “in the name of God and of profit.” This is a strikingly good example of the centrality of both secular and sacred concerns in merchant ideology.⁴⁸² Alessandra showed this same sentiment when she told her son Filippo that his soon-to-be-wedded sister Caterina would be wearing “a gown of crimson velvet for her made of silk and a surcoat of the same fabric, which is the most beautiful cloth in Florence ... when she goes out she’ll have more than four hundred florins on her back.”⁴⁸³ Her marriage to Marco Parenti would find Caterina in a beautiful silk crimson dress and a headdress of peacock feathers because sumptuary laws could be sidestepped on this day.⁴⁸⁴ The proactive behavior of adorning brides at the outset of marriage in extravagant clothes and jewelry, decorating the nuptial chamber lavishly, and arranging

⁴⁸² Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato: Francesco di Marco Datini* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), vii-viii.

⁴⁸³ Gregory, 31.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

expensive wedding festivities cost both the new husband and her kin great expense. While these practices were sometimes chastised by humanists who believed that this “vanity” discouraged men from marriage and might have been a reason that the population had not recovered after the plague, lavish dress would continue to adorn these brides through the century. Women like Alessandra Strozzi saw it, meanwhile, as an affirmation that she had chosen the proper spouse for her daughter.⁴⁸⁵ Strozzi was a testament to the fact that by the mid-1400s, humanism split with the Franciscan sentiment of poverty popular during the Middle Ages. Some level of moderation was the norm when it came to elite Florentines discussing expenditures. Margherita Datini, for example, stated clearly that the ceremony of marriage should be one of temperance, “that she {Caterina Guicciardini} came to live in our house simply and without ceremony.”⁴⁸⁶ For Dati, and other elite Florentines, it was all about appearances.

Wealth, when used moderately, was an important connection to achieving virtue. Some humanists, like the Venetian nobleman Francesco Barbaro, discussed the virtues of the individual attached to the dowry. He wrote *De Re Uxoriam* for the marriage of his friend Lorenzo de Medici (the brother of Cosimo) and told him that “besides the dowry the wealth of a patrician woman is in her gifts of character and physical beauty.” It was more about using the dowry to provide the education that humanists saw as one of the greatest of deeds than it was about the accumulation of wealth for wealth’s sake. He went on to note that “riches enabled us to give our children the best education and that this was an advantage to those under our care”.⁴⁸⁷ Other humanists like Palmieri trumpeted that wealth must be used well. In *Vita Civile*, he said that the charitable man and the patron of the arts must have money to spend and the temperate man must prove himself in the face of temptation.⁴⁸⁸ Marriage, wound up in economic concerns, was a

⁴⁸⁵ Julius Kirshiner, “Li Emergenti Bisogni Matrimoniali in Renaissance Florence”, in William J. Connell, ed., *Society and individual in Renaissance Florence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 79-81.

⁴⁸⁶ Brucker, *Society*, 31.

⁴⁸⁷ Francesco Barbaro, *De Re Uxoriam* ed. Attilio Genesotto (Padova: G.B. Randi, 1915), 227.

⁴⁸⁸ Palmieri, 63 and 151. fol. 26v and 74v-75r.

decision that merchant men and women made very carefully with an eye toward the future.

So, why the obsession with finding moderation? Temperance, of course, spoke of Renaissance concerns about the future, and how to properly plan for it. This planning allowed families, under the guidance of women like Alessandra Strozzi, to wade through times of adversity and to assert themselves in the future. If one looks at the future of the business relations of the Strozzi during the seventeenth century, it becomes apparent that the planning paid off and the family garnered close ties to the popes.⁴⁸⁹ In the web of fifteenth-century Italian politics, power came from solidifying and supporting such relationships for future kin.

When women like Lucrezia Tornabuoni suggested to their sons whom they should marry, temperance was an obvious concern. Lucrezia noted that Florentine women focused on beauty over health. This focus on beauty is the same sentiment as that of Alberti's ideal of the woman as child bearer.⁴⁹⁰ This goes along with Franco Sacchetti discussing how Florentine women caught their death of pneumonia in the process of being obsessed with appearance. For Lucrezia, Florentine women were not up to her standards because she was looking for physical health in potential mothers. It was not simply an issue of appearance. So, she looked to Rome for a daughter-in-law. She looked at the physical, not the mental, capacity of Clarice. Lucrezia wrote to Lorenzo that Clarice was not as impressive, physically, as Maria, Lucrezia, or Bianca (his sisters), but that she was related to an aristocratic family that boasted cardinals amongst its ranks.⁴⁹¹ It was common for elite Florentine women and men to look down their noses at these "foreign" men and women. Alberto Averardo de' Alberti wrote to Giovanni de' Medici that Roman men looked like cowherds and the women were uncommonly dirty.⁴⁹² However, these things were overlooked in the case of Lorenzo and Clarice because it was a strategic marriage between these families. It does not appear from letters between

⁴⁸⁹ Bib Ricc Cod. Car. in Fol. 1979, 2710 .

⁴⁹⁰ Leon Battista Alberti, *I Libri della Famiglia*, ed. Ruggiero Romano (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1960).

⁴⁹¹ Ross, 108-9.

⁴⁹² Ross, 47.

Clarice and Lorenzo that this was the happiest of marriages. Clarice was constantly lamenting his absence and the fact that he did not write often.⁴⁹³ Lorenzo's mother's wishes for the long-term success of the family were, however, no doubt met since he had eight children with Clarice. Lorenzo had long-term affairs with Lucrezia Donati and Bartolomea Nasi, which were known to many including Alessandra Strozzi, who discussed the affairs saying that "perhaps a beautiful wife is of more use to us than the help of Ferdinando in Naples."⁴⁹⁴ A bit sharp, but it is evident that Alessandra was well aware of the civic significance of the Medici/Orsini union.

Not all women in this elite social circle had as much influence over their own destinies, or anyone else's for that matter. Clarice and Lucrezia are very different and a good case in point. Lorenzo mourned the death of his mother, but he was not with Clarice when she died at the age of 38. He wrote to Pope Innocent VIII that Clarice's death was not reported to him earlier because Lorenzo thought "it was not an important matter."⁴⁹⁵ This may not be as callous as it sounds, but, from their many surviving letters, Clarice does not seem to have been a confidante to Lorenzo the way this mother was. Lorenzo was not the only humanist to praise his mother. Contemporaries of Lucrezia said that she was a woman who brought glory, fame, and honor to the female sex.⁴⁹⁶ When Luigi Pulci dedicated the *Morgante Maggiore* to her, he praised Lucrezia as a woman "famous in our century, who distinguished herself among others," and as a woman admired for her good deeds and the evil that she had avoided during her life.⁴⁹⁷ She was greatly admired by her son, who lamented to Elenore d' Este when Lucrezia died in 1482, "I am in despair as I have not only lost my mother, but my only refuge from many of my troubles and relief in much toil."⁴⁹⁸ It was Lucrezia, the most influential woman in Lorenzo's life, who hand-selected Clarice for her son.

⁴⁹³ One example of these laments is found clearly in a letter from Clarice to Lorenzo (1479). Ross, *Lives*, 218-9.

⁴⁹⁴ Franco Cardini, *The Medici Women* (Firenze: Cardini, 1997), 23.

⁴⁹⁵ Maria Grazia Perins and Laurie Schneider Adams, *Lucrezia Tornabuoni de' Medici and the Medici Family in the Fifteenth Century* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), 143.

⁴⁹⁶ Med. Laur. Pluteo 39, 40, c. 58r.

⁴⁹⁷ Perins, 141-2.

⁴⁹⁸ Cardini, 14.

We have spent a good deal of time looking at spouse selection and the role of women in that process, but the discussion of marriage and temperance can also be connected to temperance in dealing with relationships between men and women outside of marriage. Christoforo Landino, the teacher of Lorenzo de Medici, told his humanist student about an unfortunate situation in the Signoria. A member of the Platonic academy had kept a young woman for two days in his room and was immediately discharged from the Signoria. The man was not starving, he had an old mother and three little girls, and his wife was pregnant (lamented Christoforo). Because of this situation the herald has become the laughing stock of all and Lorenzo's help was requested in quieting the issue.⁴⁹⁹ Not showing temperance, in conjunction with sexual relationships outside of marriage was recognized in this situation as a mistake that both men and women were guilty of and one that could hold dire social consequences. Fidelity had both a religious significance in the lives of Renaissance people as well as a legal significance; both fornication and bastardy were considered offensive in Florence (as well as across much of Europe).⁵⁰⁰ Those who did not break the law were not part of the record, but the behavior of both men and women of this class often show "proper" behavior based on their parameters, and when that is not the case, it was the embarrassing, immodest situation of passions gone awry that we found here.

Alliances

There are other temperately selected social relationships in this tumultuous political climate to consider. Personal letters, like the ones exchanged between Lucrezia and her daughter-in-law Clarice Orsini, illuminate dynamics of the relationship between elite women in Florence.⁵⁰¹ But there are also politically inspired letters from and to women rulers that are a significant part of the Medici *Avanti il Principato* archive.⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁹ *Ridurrai in vita uno huomo a te devotissimo uno huomo a te devotissimo et nei quale farai tanto guadagno quanto lui varra.* ASF MAP XXI 16 .

⁵⁰⁰ Thomas Kuehn, *Law, Family, and Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁵⁰¹ The letter is dated 30 August 1472. MAP XXVIII, 480.

⁵⁰² Ippolita Maria d' Aragona duchess of Calabria to Lorenzo de Medici. Ross, 236.

There is ample evidence that these women were taken seriously by men in positions of power, like Lorenzo di Medici who wrote to Elenora d' Aragon d' Este in Ferrara.⁵⁰³ And Bianca Maria e Galeazzo Maria Sforza of Milan was called an *illustrissimi et excellentissimi domini dominime* in a 1466 letter.⁵⁰⁴ The connection of these women to temperance is the notion that they sought productive, “respectful” working relationships with their peers in the tense political alliances of the fifteenth century.

Margherita Datini left a surviving collection of forty-seven letters to and from women. These have not been studied in great depth, but they help to paint her agency into a much larger social network of extended kin and also relationships outside of kinship lines.⁵⁰⁵ These were social networks of both elite men and women.⁵⁰⁶ Renaissance temperance was often visible in a secular context that showed the activity of women in the world and their worldly concerns. Margherita had a friendly relationship with Lapo Mazzei, a notary who served as a religious counselor to both herself and her husband.⁵⁰⁷ Mazzei wrote to her husband about the other relationships she fostered, such as her meetings with a cardinal at Santo Spirito.⁵⁰⁸ The creation of larger social networks also entailed men like Antonio Pucci forming relationships with her. Antonio, a Medici partisan, displayed his loyalty to Medici aims in a letter written to Lucrezia Tornabuoni in 1472.⁵⁰⁹ He addresses the letter to *magnifice domine Lucretie de Medicis sue honorandissime, etcetera Florentie*. Lucrezia's significance as a magnificent and honorable Florentine is recognized in such a byline. Elite men and women in Florence contributed to the harmony of the state by fostering pragmatic diplomacy with other

⁵⁰³ Ross, 244.

⁵⁰⁴ Bianca Maria e Galeazzo Maria Sforza duchi di Milano, Firenze, 9 giugno 1466.

⁵⁰⁵ Strozzi's alliances stretched beyond Florence to kin in Naples. Gregory.

⁵⁰⁶ Lorenzo de' Medici, *Lorenzo de Medici: Selected Poems and Prose*, ed. Jon Thiem (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

⁵⁰⁷ Crabb, *If I Could Write*, 1181.

⁵⁰⁸ Lapo Mazzei, *Lettere di un Notaro a un Mercante del Secolo XIV: Con Alter Lettere e Documenti*, ed. Cesare Guasti (Firenze: Succorsori Le Monnier, 1880), 113. *el libro di monna Margherita non si puo avere: io ne sono ito due volte a Santo Sprito; che colui e (line) legato e incatenato per lo Cardinale di Firenze per due anni, non restarndo mai di scrivere.*

⁵⁰⁹ MAP XXIV, 347 (26 dicembre 1472); Lucrezia Tornabuoni, *Lettere*, ed. Patrizia Salvadori (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1993), 110.

cities. Lorenzo was a great statesman and peacekeeper. His recognition of diplomacy as a significant force in Medici foreign politics helped to earn him the title “magnifico.” Lucrezia’s correspondences were often international and she promoted this same idea of harmony and moderation with cities like Volterra.⁵¹⁰

Alliances with members of other families reflected the desire to cement the ties of kinship units inside the urban communities. Margherita Datini wrote to her husband that she had close ties to his godmother and aunt while he was outside the city and assured him that she would “tell you my opinion in person” when he returns to the city. She had the ability to pursue these relationships in his absence. She also discusses the need for Monna Dianora to send power of attorney to Francesco for the purpose of having him sell her house. Margherita reassured her husband that he did not need to worry about these women: “I watch them more assiduously than you do yourself.”⁵¹¹

Restraint of Vanity

The fifteenth century sermons of Saint Bernardino served to expose the complicated prescriptions of virtuous behavior within the context of sumptuary laws.⁵¹² While these laws set limitations on what women could wear, these laws did not simply “target women.” These regulations were an illustration of larger concerns in the city about increasing wealth, and how that came into conflict with a resurgence of the ideals of Christian poverty amongst some who were connected to the church.

We have seen that the fifteenth century was a time of economic gains for the elite of Florence, but, partially in response to this, it was also an age of reform, a call to piety, and it saw a mendicant revival in the Catholic Church. This religious fervor was illustrated by the renewed interest of the Florentines in the enforcement of sumptuary laws. These laws, although difficult to enforce, sought to limit the lavish, public display of wealth in women’s dress. The ability to purchase expensive finery was a by-product

⁵¹⁰ MAP XXIX, 215 (26 Marzo 1473); Ibid., Tornabuoni, *Lettere*, 112.

⁵¹¹ Datini, *Per la Tua Margherita*, Codice 1401881.

⁵¹² Renaissance sumptuary laws were more strict than their medieval counterparts.

of the Florentine financial boom and the subsequent desire of men to show off their status by dressing their wives in expensive fabrics and adorning them with jewels.⁵¹³

Men also displayed their wealth by dressing themselves “in the finest clothes in beautiful cloth of rose color, or violet, or black, and every color of silk and rich lining.”⁵¹⁴ Such vanity was a sign of virtue for the community to see. Florentine textile merchants and bankers were seemingly aware that, like the Ciompi said, “strip us totally nude and you would see us as equal.”⁵¹⁵ The elites of Florence sought distinction, not a social leveling, and ostentatious clothing amplified the distinctions between Florentine classes. Alberti noted the importance of appearance when he said “I will not say [that poverty] wholly hinders a man, but it keeps his *virtù* hidden away in obscure squalor. It is thus necessary that virtue should be supplemented by the goods of fortune. Virtue ought to be dressed in those seemly ornaments that it is hard to acquire without affluence and without an abundance of the things that some men call transient and illusory and others call practical and useful.”⁵¹⁶ Elite women were not simply dressed by men, but they discuss how such finery was an important social display in a society that did not reflect the values of republicanism as a more democratic institution. As Sasseti said, honorable women “always bring honor to our house.”⁵¹⁷ Although it has been argued that a woman’s personal identity needed to be submerged in the sociocultural strategy laid out for her and then internalized, what seems a sweeping oversimplification since we have already seen

⁵¹³ For an in-depth discussion of spending, see Richard Goldthwaite, *Wealth and Demand for Art in Italy 1300-1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). For a discussion of how much of their earnings Renaissance Florentines spent on clothing, see Carole Collier Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, and Fine Clothing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 95-144.

⁵¹⁴ Mark Phillips, *The Memoir of Marco Parenti: A Life of Medici Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 68-69.

⁵¹⁵ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Le Istorie Fiorentine*, bk. 3 (Florence: Salani, 1965), 182. Also quoted in Frick, 1-3.

⁵¹⁶ Leon Battista Alberti, *I Libri della Famiglia*, bk. 3, ed. Ruggiero Romano and Alberto Tenenti (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1969) 268.

⁵¹⁷ Paolo Sasseti is quoted in Julius Kirshner, *Pursuing Honor While Avoiding Sin: The Monte delle Doti of Florence* (Milano: Giuffrè, 1978), 6.

many examples of how elite women in Florence were more than just pawns in a patriarchal society.⁵¹⁸

To say that women were “chameleons” playing a public role but unchanged underneath or to say that they were “mannequins” dressed by the patriarchy does not account for the fervor with which women engaged in dressing themselves and other kin in these luxurious fabrics.⁵¹⁹ Nor did displaying wealth go against temperance because of a balance of public and private interests. There did seem to be three different “faces” of adult elite Florentines. These roles were the public woman, the private woman, and the public man. All three were described by Alberti as he advocated distinct varieties of dress.⁵²⁰

Florentines, in the early fifteenth century, were encouraged to spend their money well, in the form of public display. As Caroline Walker Bynum has suggested, clothing was seen as “the mark of civilization,” not just finery for finery’s sake.⁵²¹ In truth, part of the disapproval of the practice of women flaunting such expensive clothing was due to a deeply rooted negative attitude toward the opulent dress of women, who were seen as a weak sex, vulnerable to fall into sin.⁵²² It would seem logical to see this as yet another illustration of Florentine misogyny, but in truth it was not women who were the primary target of this attack. Rather it was their husbands who were viewed as spending this money on personal displays of wealth that did nothing for the “public good” and simply showed them flaunting their wealth ostentatiously. Florentine civic identity was molded, in part, by Franciscan ideals of charity. These ideals promoted temperate behavior through the late Middle Ages, but new wealth and a desire to display that wealth influenced a change in fifteenth-century Florentine men and women who increasingly

⁵¹⁸ Frick, 80. Susan Mosher Stuard, *Gilding the Market: Luxury and Fashion in Fourteenth-Century Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

⁵¹⁹ Frick.

⁵²⁰ Alberti, *I Libri della Famiglia*, 290-1.

⁵²¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, “Shape and Story: Metamorphosis in the Western Tradition”, *The 1999 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities*, Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington D.C., 22 March 1999. <http://www.neh.gov/news/archive/19990322b.htm>

⁵²² David Alan Brown, *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2001), 30.

showed off their worldly success. Spending money on clothing would be considered a temperate choice because it specifically secured how successful a family seemed to outsiders.

Elites in Florence were attacking long-standing traditions when they focused on dressing well. Franciscans had, since the thirteenth century, criticized the worldly desires of the Florentine elite, but the Florentines had standards of moderation and dressed selectively. In a list of expenses for cloth for Cosimo de' Medici's funeral (d. 1464), it is clear that the only woman who spent a large amount on clothing for the event was Madonna Contessina (his wife). The other Medici women, including Lucrezia and Maria Nannina, obtained eight yards of cloth (which is similar to the amount of 6 yards allotted to maids and servants).⁵²³

Although he often attacked expensive clothing, even the traveling mendicant San Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444) did not simply proclaim the avarice of usury. This would have put elite Florentine bankers on the defensive.⁵²⁴ Spirituality was reflective of social, political and economic situations in material life.⁵²⁵ Bernardino, in a strategic move to cater to this economic reality, used a combination of practical concessions to the worldly situations of the city-state, an emotional delivery of his message, and an accessibility of language via the vernacular in a conversational style. He knew his audience and fostered the support of many humanist supporters and loyal merchants who identified with his message. In his sermons, St. Bernardino praised women who brought their daughters to hear him as wise and women did comprise a sizable part of his audience. He proclaimed that although the church was professing the importance of avoiding merchant malpractice, it was quite aware of merchants' positive role in the well-

⁵²³ Ross, 80-1.

⁵²⁴ Other social reformers like Poggio chastised him for this leniency. John W. Opper, "Poggio, San Bernardino of Siena, and the Dialogue on Avarice," *Renaissance Quarterly* 30 (Winter 1977): 564-587. For bibliographic information about Bernardino of Siena see David Farmer, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 56-7. His sermons, as recorded by audience members, can be found in Bernardino da Siena, *Le Prediche Volgari*, 7 vols., ed. Ciro Cannarozzi (Florence: Libr. ed. Fiorentina, 1934).

⁵²⁵ Daniel R. Lesnick, *Preaching in Medieval Florence* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 103-4.

being of the Florentine economy by bringing goods from far-off places.⁵²⁶ A liberal Franciscan view, in which the role of merchants was not sinful although they did not live in poverty, was embraced by Bernardino's audience and the positivity of this message helped him to draw crowds numbering in the thousands.⁵²⁷

Bernardino addressed the women who often comprised a majority of his audience. In fact, he often addressed them directly amidst public ritual and spectacle that included "bonfires of the vanities" in which objects considered opulent were thrown onto burning pyres.⁵²⁸ These women were not without agency in combating excessive, sinful displays of wealth. They were not simply dolls to be dressed by their husbands, but rather active members of these crowds. Bernardino used "reason" and calls to moderation, not threats of hellfire and brimstone, when he asked them to dress according to their class identity. He instructed "what is suitable for one, is not permitted to another."⁵²⁹ When in Florence in 1424, preaching Lenten sermons, San Bernardino chastised women in Florence for asking their husbands to buy them more clothes than they needed. Bernardino did this to maintain the social institution of marriage through reform. He lamented that "thousands of young men would take wives if it were not for the fact that they had to spend the entire dowry, and sometimes even more, in order to dress the women."⁵³⁰ In practice, according to the *ricordi* of Francesco Datini, many of Datini's expenditures were made on his own vast wardrobe. He took great pride in his appearance and the fact that he was able to show off his worldly successes through that dress.⁵³¹

When discussing clothing, the Strozzi, Datini, Medici and other elite Florentines did not dwell on the right or wrong of their expenditures. For example, Alessandra wrote to her son "*l'ho messo in ordine le camice, cioe sei; e braccia Quattro di panno lino pelle*

⁵²⁶ Opper, 564-87.

⁵²⁷ Paintings show him preaching to large crowds of both men and women. Sano di Pietro, *St. Bernardino of Siena Preaching in the Campo*, tempera on panel, 1445, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena.

⁵²⁸ The large female population of his audience can be seen in Sano di Pietro's (1406-1481) painting in the Duomo of Siena. Another common issue Bernardino raised was sexual practices in marriage; see Herlihy, *Tuscans and their Families*, 250-3.

⁵²⁹ Margaret King, *Women of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 53.

⁵³⁰ Brown, 30.

⁵³¹ Origo, 285.

mutande, che a tuo modo le fara fare,” simply letting him know that she ordered six shirts and linen cloth.⁵³² While it seems that no issue of right or wrong comes into play in this decision, morality was wielded as a vehicle of sound reasoning to institute sumptuary laws in the city. According to Bernardino, the problem with the long, decorative trains (which followed women in important processions) was that it made them look like animals “muddy in winter, dusty in summer.”⁵³³ He also compared these trains to the “tails of serpents.”⁵³⁴ By pointing out the problematic nature of the display of finery, he implied a temperate dignity that should be maintained by women. Women *could* in fact be more than weak and bestial in nature, and it was this virtue that women must take pains to display, even if merchant culture tempted them with opulence. The public appearance of these elite women was important and Bernardino noted that a virtuous woman could be recognized “by her appearance ... Concerning this I want to say of the woman who wears whorish clothing, I do not know her interior, but what we see outside seem to me filthy signs.”⁵³⁵ Alessandra wrote to her son about her desire for clothing of a moderate expense. She asked her son Filippo to send a bale of flax, along with almonds, because they were cheap there and desired in Florence. She told him “do send them because I know it will not cost much.”⁵³⁶ She also told her son Filippo, after the death of her young son Matteo, that she would make mourning clothes out of the cloth that she already had. Not only that, she informed him of her decision to pay for such moderate expenditures herself.⁵³⁷ This example speaks to a woman knowingly dressing with moderation so as to avoid the extreme that Bernardino lamented.

Margherita Datini discussed the outfits of her and her sisters for the funeral of a friend in 1393. She concluded, based on deliberation and personal judgment, that they would wear an “unlined cloak” rather than a heavy one because the deceased was not a

⁵³² Gregory, 72-3.

⁵³³ Gene Brucker, *Florence: The Golden Age: 1138-1737* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 43.

⁵³⁴ Brown, 30.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵³⁶ *Fa' di mandarmele, chè so è poca ispesa.* Gregory, 40-1.

⁵³⁷ *E questo pagherò io.* *Ibid.*, 84-5

close family members. This was clearly a moderate choice to fit the occasion at hand. This stands in contrast of course to the sixteenth-century 13-year-old bride, who was dressed in so much clothing that she could not walk to her own wedding and had to be carried.⁵³⁸ Although the spending of Florentines' spending on clothes was rather indulgent, the level of wealth spent on clothing in the court cities was much more ostentatious. Lucrezia Borgia, for example, owned some eighty-four gowns. This is in stark contrast to the two gowns that Caterina was provided by Marco Parenti at their nuptials (and in later years he would spend nothing).⁵³⁹

In the enforcement of and struggle for and against sumptuary laws, women were not simply singled out to be reprimanded because of their gender.⁵⁴⁰ The problem was that an exaggerated display of opulence in a successful merchant culture was thrown into the struggle to portray the semblance of a republic amidst very obvious class disparities and tensions even amongst the elites. Old aristocracy like the Pazzi are a good example of the families that were not happy to see the newly rich Medici in power, so much so that a plot was orchestrated by this family in 1478 to murder Lorenzo di Medici and his younger brother in Santa Maria Del Fiore.⁵⁴¹ The real issue here was much more than clothing and "showing off." It is an illustration that wealth was connected to power. Politics aside, it seems that San Bernardino spoke to men and women trying to find a path to God during the time of a strong economy, when worldly temptations seemed to abound and threaten salvation. Amidst the temptations open to the elite merchants and bankers of Florence, it was San Bernardino who spoke loudly of moderation to both men and women among a receptive Florentine public. A woman like Alessandra Strozzi knew what it was like to live well, but extravagance was not her goal. She told her son Filippo

⁵³⁸ Frick, 91.

⁵³⁹ Frick, 107-14.

⁵⁴⁰ More than 300 sumptuary laws in Italy between 1200 and 1500 are studied in Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy 1200-1500* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002). While she discusses both ancient and medieval versions of these laws (asserting that sumptuary laws were not a creation of Christianity), a focus on the Renaissance is key to her argument that sumptuary laws were difficult to enforce and often failed.

⁵⁴¹ Lauro Martines, *April Blood: Florence and the plot against The Medici* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

that she received a barrel of plums that cost 30 soldi. She lamented that this was more than these were worth and that she would have been happy with something sweet, but cheaper.⁵⁴² She would have preferred enjoying more moderate pleasures.

When women like Strozzi were in control of households, they, like men, kept everyone in the household moderately dressed, but still well-dressed. They followed the advice of Alberti, who said that “it would be no true thrift, therefore, to dress them less well.”⁵⁴³ Historian Richard Trexler stated that women displayed their husband’s wealth like “sacred dolls,” but, perhaps more accurately, they did play an active role as being the only fitting models for their families’ honor and their worldly success.⁵⁴⁴ Women like Alessandra took an active role in making sure daughters were dressed luxuriously when given the opportunity and when it was appropriate. Strozzi saw it as her duty to ensure that her daughter Caterina be married amidst great wealth and be well provided for in the long term.⁵⁴⁵ This is a clear example of attention to balancing present and future concerns.

Respect

Respect for elders and those of a superior status, both male and female, was also implicated in Renaissance perceptions of temperate behavior because it was clearly linked to self-knowledge of position and self-restraint based on one’s position in a relationship. Alessandra and Lucrezia were nurturing and “maternal,” yes, but this was often manifested in tough love. Adamant “advice” was often delivered with the plea “not to shrug off my reprimands.”⁵⁴⁶ These women knew that they could not “demand” that their grown sons do anything, so they “asked” as strongly as possible. Elites were not immune to tragedy, of course. Lucrezia and Alessandra seemed to deal tough love to children because they had to persevere to ensure their families’ survival. The health of

⁵⁴² Gregory, 134-5.

⁵⁴³ Frick, 80.

⁵⁴⁴ Trexler, *Public Life*.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁵⁴⁶ Gregory, 71.

the republic was important, but their efforts to secure a position of power for their families inside that republic was their civic motivator.

It is no surprise that children were taught in this society to respect their fathers. Contessina de' Medici, Lorenzo's patient wife, wrote to her son Piero di Cosimo de' Medici to tell the 14-year-old child to mind his father.⁵⁴⁷ Lucrezia's son Lorenzo showed her a great deal of respect in the titles he gives her in the greeting lines of the letters he writes her. He refers to her as "magnifica, genarosa, venerable." We have already discussed how Lorenzo saw his mother as a great confidante, and the respect that he had for her is evident in this salutation. Although he was a man in a patriarchal society, he showed her the utmost respect.

Strozzi often gave instruction and moralized in her letters. Daughters were key to her letters (unlike the role of mothers that Alberti and Palmieri suggested), but sons were the cornerstone of her interest because she wanted to be part of their household after they married. It was typical for a widow to go and live with adult male children and Strozzi focused on the prospect of this, especially as her sons reached an age appropriate for marriage. Her understanding of her position as a widow in this society was that she would live in the home of her son when he matured. Her planning would pay off if she had patience (a key element of temperance).

Alessandra asked her 19-year-old son Filippo, who was taken under the protective wing of his merchant uncles in Naples after his father's exile, to "consider your position and think what Niccolò has done for you and be worthy to kiss the ground he walks on. And I say this out of love for you, because you have a greater obligation to him than to your father or mother, when I think of all he's done for you, which no one else would have done. So do be aware of this and don't be ungrateful for the kindness he has shown to you and yours."⁵⁴⁸ Respect did not mean that a woman like Alessandra hesitated to assert authority over her own children.⁵⁴⁹ She used the persuasion of irony and religion

⁵⁴⁷ Ross, 15, 41.

⁵⁴⁸ Gregory, 35.

⁵⁴⁹ Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb, *Women's Letters Across Europe, 1400-1700* (Burlington, VT Ashgate, 2005).

to push for control when it was clear that they needed parenting.⁵⁵⁰ Her frustration about lack of agency to control the situation of her sons was sometimes apparent when they did not follow her advice.⁵⁵¹ Also interesting in this teachable moment with her son is that she was instilling the notion that he needed to be aware of his position in this relationship and give Niccoló the respect he deserved.

Authority seemed to be asserted when women conversed with sons and husbands but not with fathers. This showed a very clear sense of women understanding the way humanist rhetoric discussed this relationship. Petrarch wrote of a father's authority in his *Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul* that one should be anxious to listen to him (a father) and to impress his instructions upon one's mind.⁵⁵² Writing in the mid-sixteenth century, Cornelia Collonello's letters to Michelangelo are a striking example of the style in which a woman might address a father figure. All of Collonello's 28 surviving letters to Michelangelo were written by scribes.⁵⁵³ Her affection and respect for Michelangelo echoed in her text. "Like a most loving father, I have written to you twice, as I think you have seen, about the receipt that you sent me, and, as I've done the other times, I send you my thanks. As for what I can do for you, I ask only that you command me, and I beg you to come in the future, if not earlier to Casteldurante, where you will see me and Michelangelo and Giovansimone [her sons], who are as dear to you as through they were your own sons . . ." "Although Michelangelo cannot visit Cornelia and her sons, he explained with candid affection that "you should be sure of – the love I still have for Urbino, even though he is dead, and for his affairs." He felt great affection for the family of his deceased friend, even offering to take Cornelia's son Michelangelo and "keep him in Florence with more love than I have for the sons of Leonardo my nephew."⁵⁵⁴ Although Michelangelo never returned to Florence in his old age, this offer shows great care and concern to take care of Cornelia and her young sons. He seems to be reassuring

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁵¹ Gregory, 88-92.

⁵⁵² Petrarch, *Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, 225.

⁵⁵³ Located in the Archivio Buonarroti and Carteggio di Michelangelo, the use of scribes was standard practice.

⁵⁵⁴ As quoted in Couchman and Crabb, *Women's Letters Across Europe*.

her of his devotion (which she questions). He is responding to her assertion that “you command me not to send anything else (and) I am unhappy about this, because you show that the children and I, with the few resources here, are not your concern.”⁵⁵⁵ Cornelia understands both sides of a father/daughter relationship and its symbiotic nature. In this case she does not hesitate to bring this to Michelangelo’s attention.

The tone of Cornelia’s letters changed when she was married to Giulio Brunelli in 1559. A couple of weeks into the marriage, in the hand of her nephew and scribe, she showed great concern that she had not heard from Michelangelo, who was “like a loving father,” although she had written to him three times. The next month, written in the hand of her husband, the tone of the letter changed drastically to one that was standoffish. She now called Michelangelo “your lordship” and expressed anger when Michelangelo was not supportive of her sons remaining as kin in this new marriage. Her letter to Michelangelo in November of 1559 shows her continued adamant stance that he not worry about the boys. “I will do well: they are being raised with fear of God and all good virtues. Remember that they are my sons.” This is as if to say: not yours and I know what I am doing.

The formal and informal use of pronouns in Italian can make “respect” and moderate requests easier to see than in the English language. Margherita Datini used “voi” and not the more intimate “tu” form of “you” when addressing her husband (although she did use the “tu” more often in later years). Francesco used “tu” to address his wife. This is a good example of the rules of respect in this society.

The dynamics of relationships between husbands and wives was a topic addressed by Lucrezia Tornabuoni in her narrative of Esther. Lucrezia Tornabuoni gave considerable attention to describing Ahasuerus’ first wife: “Queen Vashti withheld herself from her husband and was disobedient, whence she deserved the shameful things that befell her. Oh how sad she was, and mournful because she had not obeyed her lord.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

But when repentance comes too late, it is of little use.”⁵⁵⁶ Moderation was lost here and caused the relationship to go awry.

Lucrezia also astutely noted that a wife’s behavior reflected on her husband in the public arena. Lucrezia, from firsthand experience with her own husband and son, knew that she had a “public” role, in terms of her behavior being scrutinized. When Queen Vashti in the Esther poem refused to appear at a banquet and dance naked, the king’s advisors told him that this was an insult to the king and suggested the possible repercussions of such behavior on the part of Vashti. “And thus would arise a great heresy, for women will refuse to obey their husbands and men will be unable to govern their wives. All women will speak of passion of this rebellious queen, and they all will say ‘We will make our husbands timid and meek.’”⁵⁵⁷ In fact, the temperate behavior of wives was so important that Lucrezia went on to write that “let him [the king] find another wife, more to his liking, one who will be better, more obedient, who will hold her lord in far more respect. And may this also be announced to all people; All wives and any woman who wishes to marry must be courteous, wise, and respectful, so that their husbands have no reason to leave them.”⁵⁵⁸ Women and men sought the self-restraint and moderation that would secure respectful relationships that were beneficial to themselves and their kin.

Women Authors of Poems and Sacred Narratives

The theme of temperate behaviors and the discussion of biblical women who displayed and modeled such attitudes were pervasive in poems and sacred narratives of the fifteenth century which have female authorship. While a woman like Antonia Pulci (1452-1501) most likely wrote her sacred dramas for financial reasons (much like Christine de Pizan), Lucrezia Tornabuoni was motivated by other drives.⁵⁵⁹ If not for

⁵⁵⁶ Tornabuoni, *Sacred Narratives*, 168.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁵⁵⁹ For information about Antonia Pulci’s financial background, see the introduction to Antonia Pulci, *Florentine Drama for Convent and Festival: Seven Sacred Plays*, ed. James Wyatt Cook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1996).

financial purposes, because she does not seem to have marketed her poems/narratives for publication and performance, it is more likely that she was inspired to write them by the humanist culture that smiled upon active authorship of such narratives with Christian themes as opposed to a more contemplative, private study of religious texts. Lucrezia's authorship of these texts displayed her activity in civic life, and, because she did not write these texts for financial gain, they showed moderation in relation to the pleasure of wealth and her devotion to more "virtuous" callings.

The tradition of women writing stories of women's excellence was a trail blazed by Christine de Pizan. In late fourteenth-century France, Venetian-born Christine de Pizan, who was widowed at 25 with two young children, and used her education to support herself. Her musings over a city of women in the public arena might suggest a transition between the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Although she highlighted women as having virtues typically required of women, like patience and silence, she did give them an air of militancy and power. If women came to create this city, the victory would be a David slaying a Goliath. She recognized how her own circumstances of being widowed were what enabled her to return to the scholarship of her youth. In her autobiography Christine tells us that she "was naturally inclined to scholarship from birth."⁵⁶⁰ In 1340 she was free after the death of her husband to return to the scholar's "solitary and tranquil life" which "naturally pleased (her) the most." "My own luck was being born into a house full of books with a father who encouraged me to read and write. So for about 20 years I wrote for a particular man who critiqued and praised me and made me feel I was indeed special."⁵⁶¹ As a proto-feminist Christine recognized that she challenged typical roles ascribed to women. Lucrezia Tornabuoni, on the other hand, made no such statement of challenging norms in her sacred narratives.⁵⁶² The women in Lucrezia's stories have the self-knowledge and understanding to act boldly when circumstances proposed required action.

⁵⁶⁰ Carole Levin, ed., *Political Rhetoric Power and Renaissance Women* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995), 16-17.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 16-18.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 15-37.

Lucrezia's poems were widely read by humanists like Agnolo Poliziano (in 1478). While Christine de Pizan met with often hostile criticism, Tornabuoni was given much praise for her poems and was a direct influence on even the writings of Savonarola.⁵⁶³ The women characters in the widely praised text of Lucrezia Tornabuoni were far from silent. Yes, they are described as loyal and chaste, but often they are still powerful. Herod's wife, in the story of John the Baptist, is wily, intelligent, and convincing.⁵⁶⁴ The portrayal of these virtuous, active women was not perceived as a threat to men's privileged position and instead matched ideals of what a virtuous woman should be like. In these poems, Tornabuoni displayed an interest in discussing the idea that women could successfully "meddle" in the world of men.⁵⁶⁵ Susanna, Judith, and Esther displayed agency in the business of men. Women's virtue was, in the medieval tradition, taken to mean vows of chastity, but these women were active. Judith and Esther were shown to have acted with virtue and were independently instrumental in preserving their tribes. Lucrezia noted their patient, temperate behavior. Judith, for example, was seen to have a manly heart, *d'animo virile*, because "hers was an honest and virtuous life. For three years she had lived all alone as a widow and Judith did not seek another husband."⁵⁶⁶ This made the situation of her life much like that of Lucrezia and Alessandra. Lucrezia praised this woman's temperance as she would praise the behavior of her peers.

Another character discussed by Lucrezia was Judith. Donatello's bronze Judith was in the Medici garden and Lucrezia would have seen it there.⁵⁶⁷ The statue, made for Cosimo, was inscribed with the message that "kingdoms fall through excess; cities rise up through virtue; see the proud neck being severed by the humble hand." Tornabuoni was not only interested in Judith as an individual heroine, but she also explored the political moral of the story. The first half of the story focused on the theme that "kingdoms [are] made desolate through pride." Tornabuoni mirrors the late medieval and Renaissance sentiment that, like David slaying Goliath, Judith was only able to kill Holofernes with

⁵⁶³ Domenico Coppola, *La Poesia Religiosa del Secolo XV* (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1963), 64-5.

⁵⁶⁴ Tornabuoni, *Sacred Narratives*, 216-63.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 22- 7.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁵⁶⁷ Donatello, *Judith and Holofernes*, bronze, 1460, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

the help of God and community. With this help the “fearful little widow” (*essendo vedovetta et temorosa*) displayed tenacity.⁵⁶⁸ This assistance is a key theme of temperance in this scenario. The pursuit of Renaissance individualism, as espoused by Burckhardt, has encouraged those studying the history of women in this society to look for the individual, when in fact the women themselves were interested in the collective, including using wise counsel to, as Lucrezia was said to have done, “succor the citizens in time of calamity.”⁵⁶⁹ When discussing Judith’s murder of the tyrant Holofernes, Lucrezia Tornabuoni did not focus on Judith acting alone and punishing herself for three years (like the biblical story suggested). She only referred to the situation as Judith who “lived alone as a widow” for three years and thus highlighted her temperance and patience, rather than her sin.⁵⁷⁰

Antonia Pulci and Lucrezia Tornabuoni both wrote religious verse that discussed the agency and sanctity of women. Their personalized and emotional poetry made them akin to new Italian Sapphos. Unlike Tornabuoni, Pulci openly debated the controversial “choice” that women had between marriage, uncloistered religious life, or entering a convent. She glorified the religious life less and considered the pragmatic issue of the unwanted advances of men and the dangers that contemporary women faced in childbearing and in dealing with abusive husbands. Because of the differences, not only in their motivations to write (financial need as opposed to a desire to contribute to the humanist school for its own sake), but also in the content of their writing, these women show how social class in Renaissance Florence was more of a fundamental descriptor of identity than even gender. Because she was the mother of Lorenzo and the wife of Piero de’ Medici, Lucrezia’s social stature found her entertaining foreign dignitaries such as the Sforza and Este.⁵⁷¹ These experiences show that women of the fifteenth century did not have a common experience if they were not from the same class, but if they were from an elite social class they shared some similar the experiences with the men of their common

⁵⁶⁸ Tornabuoni, *Sacred Narratives*, 123.

⁵⁶⁹ Maguire, *Women of the Medici*, 220n.

⁵⁷⁰ Margaret King and Albert Rabil, *Teaching Other Voices: Women and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 62.

⁵⁷¹ Tornabuoni, *Sacred Narratives*, 34.

class. The elite Tornabuoni did not lament the limitations of her status as a woman because she did not feel the limitations of that sex as Pulci had. Humanism, as we saw earlier, dictated marriage as the proper choice for a moderate and productive life. Neither of these women came to the defense of women who were oppressed like Arcangela Tarabotti (1604-1652) would eventually seek to do in *Parental Tyranny*.⁵⁷² Tarabotti, unlike like Lucrezia who supported humanist ideology, saw it as stifling to women.

The previous argument is not to say that Pulci did not have exposure to humanism. Humanism was a common thread in many intellectual pursuits and examples of cultural production in fifteenth-century Florence. It has been asserted that she read a recent Italian translation of Virgil's Eclogues (translated by her brother-in-law Bernardo Pulci) as well as the work of her husband and she certainly did bring Epicurean doctrine into her plays (that Greek school ran through much fifteenth-century humanist debate).⁵⁷³

Lucrezia Tornabuoni showed her exposure to the humanist school promoted by the Medici with her discussion about the attractiveness of marriage as the way to a temperate life that avoided the extremes of pleasure or pain. She was far from radical in taking this stand. Pulci was more "radical" for advocating a challenge to the pervasive value of the elite in Florence that marriage was a standard of virtue. Lucrezia took a much more moderate stance and continued to support marriage as temperate and virtuous life. Tornabuoni asked the question addressed by the humanists of her day – how could one practice a Christian life well in a Renaissance city, and how could one balance active and contemplative lives? Tornabuoni discussed how Judith, Susanna, Esther, Tobias, John the Baptist, and Jesus were in conflict with their communities and thus on the margins because their bold actions were far from moderate. Tornabuoni lived her life virtuously and modestly in a secular space. It is clear from these narratives that she knew the differences between model biblical lives and her own circumstances.

Amongst the many male humanists to seek the virtue of a temperate life, Salutati was deeply interested in Christianity and used his rhetoric to try to make others virtuous

⁵⁷² King, *Teaching Other Voices*, 75-85.

⁵⁷³ Antonia Pulci, *Florentine Drama for Convent and Festival: Seven Sacred Plays*, ed. James Wyatt Cook (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 24-5.

Christians and humanists. He also sought to justify the role of pagan classics in Christian education. He found moral, natural, and theoretical truths in ancient poetry. Poets, for Salutati, were the most “virtuous of men.” He went so far as to argue that such poetry was directly inspired by the Holy Spirit.⁵⁷⁴ He also firmly advocated an active life which led to public displays of charity. A balance of the secular and sacred was the path to temperance and peace for Salutati as well.

Charity

The trecento humanists advocated poverty, much as the Franciscans did. Boccaccio and latter Salutati declared that the greatness of Ancient Rome was founded on poverty and the simple life. With quattrocento riches came decadence. San Antonio (1389-1459), the Bishop of Florence, and San Bernardino of Siena (1380-1441), spoke out against the intemperate sin of usury.

By the fifteenth century, Bruni’s view of economics (1419) advocated the advantage for riches and the defense of wealth in public life. This was the same year when ground was broken to build the foundling home the Ospedale degli Innocenti. Restraining the worldly pleasures of wealth and instead spending for charitable causes was not only a display of temperance, but served to better the community. Bruni’s *Poggio Bracciolini De Nobilitate Florence* (1440) defended goods and wealth as aids to the practice of active virtue – *civiliis vita*. Matteo Palmieri also focused on this theme in his *Della Vita Civile*. Riches marked one’s ascension to this new public virtue at the end of the fifteenth century.⁵⁷⁵ One can see, when considering the patrons of these intellectuals, how the Medici were building a case for their own economically privileged position.

Humanists like Palmieri, who were supported and paid by the Medici, advocated using wealth in a way that served the public good. On the other hand, Cavalcanti’s

⁵⁷⁴ Benjamin G. Kohl, ed. *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 81-118.

⁵⁷⁵ Giovanni Cavalcanti, *The Trattato Politico-Morale of Giovanni Cavalcanti, 1381-1451*, ed. Marcella T. Grendler (Geneve: Droz, 1973), 60-78.

political heroes were self-sacrificing men who sacrificed personal wealth and adopted a state of poverty to preserve the common good. He thought the republican government of Florence was a Medici façade that hid the selfish interest of a few.⁵⁷⁶ Cavalcanti's conservative/Aristotelian ideology that the individual and common good were to overlap was on the outside of quattrocento Florentine humanism. Rather than challenging the fortunes of the new elite in the city, humanists like Palmieri asserted that the betterment of self could also benefit the city in the process. Humanists, like Palmieri, talked of the betterment of self and the city benefiting in the process.⁵⁷⁷

Men and women engaged in charitable activities in fifteenth-century Florence. In order to curtail excessive corporal pleasure, humanists sought to spend for others. Before he died, Piero de Medici gave Lucrezia, his wife, the authority to distribute to charity the income from some of the Medici properties. Not only that, but she invested family capital in real estate and financed artisans. Much of her property went to charity (nuns in poor convents, dowry funds for poor girls), and although these gifts no doubt helped the Medici to increase their popularity, in her letters she discusses these gifts as examples of how what was good for the Medici was good for the Florentines. It is cited in Franco Cardini's introduction to *The Medici Women* that Florentines called her "the refuge of the needy."⁵⁷⁸ She sacrificed the pleasures of wealth to use this money to make civic contributions and to secure community good will for her family.

Another way in which women displayed the restraint of corporal pleasure was by making donations to churches and a variety of charitable institutions around the city of Florence. Branching out beyond one's neighborhood church was something that both men and women of means did frequently. Piero de' Medici and his wife Lucrezia were

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ Cavalcanti, 218-20. *Quanta humitá fu in questo huomo si excelente che'era tanto più splendente nela republica quanto fusse piu ablobioso quell fornaio nel suo mestiero ornota, quanta humilta fu in questo huomo si excelente ch'era tanto piu splendente nella republica quanto fusse piu oblobioso quell fornaio nel suo mestiero.*

⁵⁷⁸ Cardini, 14.

patrons in their neighborhood churches (San Marco and San Lorenzo), but they also made donations around the city, even to altra'Arno churches like San Miniato al Monte.⁵⁷⁹

Conclusions

While self-proclaimed humanists like Laura Cereta and Isota Nogarola were attacked as threats to social norms, I have found no evidence that the elite women of Republican Florence were seen as a threat by the Florentine patriarchy. Although educated, these women did not promote a concerted effort for societal change. They did not form a collective cry of oppression that would be deemed threatening. There is little doubt that Florentine leadership would have found demands for rights to be a threat to the republic, much like Aristophanes had lamented in his play *Lysistrata*. In this work, the Athenian comic playwright said that the women revolting against the Peloponnesian War were “our own fault. We taught them all they know.”⁵⁸⁰ And indeed Florentine women saw much merit and even necessity in their activities because they embraced the larger culture which they were “taught.” Unlike Venetian women, who found themselves torn between marriage and book-lined cells and who displayed much self-doubt about their choices, Florentine women knew what freedoms and privileges they did have. They used the opportunities presented by their elite circumstances to pursue moderation in their personal endeavors and in those of their families. The spirit of civic virtue, which was pervasive in fifteenth-century humanist rhetoric, was the common denominator in many of these women’s active engagements in arranging marriages, solidifying personal relationships, and displaying wealth.

⁵⁷⁹ Glenn M. Andres et. al., *The Art of Florence* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 504-7.

⁵⁸⁰ Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, ed. Benjamin Bickley Rodgers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

IV. Justice

Historians of Florence have often admired the government of the city as a unique republican experiment orchestrated by an elite ruling class. Historians like Randolph Starn have suggested that in such instances we “look beyond the aura of inevitability that historians tend to give to established authority.”⁵⁸¹ And indeed, it took great and deliberate effort among the Florentine elite to control the state. Virtues like justice became important tools for the dominant families of Florence to establish their control and then continue to assert their it over the thriving city. As we explore their pursuit of social harmony, we will see that women of elite status in Florence also found the culture of justice an adaptable tool in the establishment of their own civic identity, as well as one they could use to promote the prominence of their kin.

In Western tradition, justice has been one of the most coveted and the most masculine of virtues. Even in the context of praise in Boccaccio’s *Concerning Famous Women* and Elyot’s *The Defense of Good Women*, strength and justice are associated with masculinity. How, then, did women seek this virtue in such a heavily patriarchal society since, legally, they were bound to fathers, husbands, and brothers? The answer lies in the understanding that pre-modern constructions of justice did *not* parallel justice in the modern sense of the word. Renaissance notions of justice were achieved by those who knew and acted in accordance with their place/station in society. Pre-modern justice did not speak of equality in regard to each individual receiving what he/she is entitled to regardless of class, race, and gender. Renaissance notions of justice, when compared to the more universal ideology of the modern West, did not subscribe to equality. Different people of varying “stations” in a society had different rights and privileges.⁵⁸² Premodern

⁵⁸¹ Randolph Starn, *Contrary Commonwealth: The Theme of Exile in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

⁵⁸² The modern notion of “equality” was a development within nineteenth-century liberalism when thinkers like John Stuart Mill supported the notion that not only should men have equality regardless of social class, but that women should as well. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and the Subjection of Women*, ed. Alan Ryan (New York: Penguin, 2007).

justice was continually determined by social status. This manifested itself in the notion that the like be treated alike, that one get what he or she is due based on one's status.⁵⁸³

The foundation of what justice meant in Renaissance ideology was heavily indebted to Plato's definition of justice in *The Republic*. Plato imagined justice as being exemplified in a society when each level of hierarchy worked within the boundaries of its class and was content with this stratified positioning.⁵⁸⁴ Humanists would come to embrace this philosophy. Justice had to be applied differently to different classes of people with respect to their function in that society. This had to be done so that they might achieve harmony within themselves and within the state.⁵⁸⁵ Justice was getting what your station entitled you to. Poor people who tried to rise above their station or the rich trying to sink from their position would only make themselves needlessly miserable by threatening the equilibrium amongst the classes that justice dictated was necessary. Likewise, a woman who tried to assert herself beyond her station would do the same damage to the collective "harmony" of larger society. Plato concluded in *Women as Equal to the Men in the State* that "men and women were to have a common way of life ... common education, common children, and they are to watch over the citizens in common ... and as far as they are able, women are to share with the men. And in so doing they will do what is best, and will not violate, but preserve the natural relation of the sexes."⁵⁸⁶ This harmonious, balanced model was popular amongst the Florentine elite, since it was seen as ensuring a calm environment and the stability that would best benefit the activities of merchants and bankers. This ideal of collective harmony was easily embraced, if not promoted, by the culture of civic humanism because of its promotion of the wellbeing of the city over the desires of the individual. The letters

⁵⁸³ The earliest river valley civilizations in the West, including Mesopotamia and Egypt, developed social stratification. Hammurabi, *Hammurabi's Code*, trans. L.W. King (Kessinger Pub., 2004).

⁵⁸⁴ Plato discusses three classes which should mind their own business: the philosopher-rulers, soldiers, and workers. Plato, *The Republic*, ed. Shane Butler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

⁵⁸⁵ Electronic Text Center, *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas at the University of Virginia Library* (Gale Group, 2003. 01 March 2009), Volume 2, 654-655.

⁵⁸⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

written by Lucrezia and Alessandra displayed a contentment in regards to their position in larger Florentine society and the social order. Alessandra astutely noted the economic crisis in the city and its effects on Florentines in the wake of the death of Cosimo di Medici and told her son “it is true that things are in a terrible state,” but that they did seem to be calming down to reflect some level of “normalcy.”⁵⁸⁷ This return to normality, and the notion of the status quo, came with welcome relief.

This acceptance of the status quo on the part of Florentine women stood in opposition to the attitudes of Venetian women, like Isotta Nogarola, who lambasted the disparaged position of women from the more intellectual, liberal Venetian society.⁵⁸⁸ Considering the popularity of Neo-Platonism and Plato’s social conservatism in mid-fifteenth-century Florence, it is not surprising that this “contentment” manifested itself in the lack of revolutionary sentiment in the writings of these women. These women were inspired to promote justice by the humanist models that were so pervasive in the culture of the city. Aristotle, who said that justice was treating equals equally and unequals unequally in proportion to their difference, was also central to the development of fifteenth-century humanism.

Contributing (and at times competing) ideologies of justice were brought together in Florence. Hellenic ideology was influential in Florence, but Roman interpretations were also expressed. The legal system of Renaissance Florence had deep roots in Roman law. Justice came from the Latin *justicia*. In comparing the influences of Greek versus Roman justice, one can argue that Florence was more Roman in practice.⁵⁸⁹ Roman law was designed to be practical. Unlike Greek models that were obsessed with idealism and the perfect form, the Roman senate attempted to design universal laws that would be used

⁵⁸⁷ Gregory, 126-7.

⁵⁸⁸ The letters of Lucrezia and Alessandra have been a key source of evidence in this dissertation. Published volumes of their correspondence can be found in Heather Gregory, ed., *Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Patrizia Salvadori ed., *Lettere* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1993). Although it had a conservative oligarchy, women in Venice participated in humanist dialogue as early as the 14th century and Venetian presses would turn out the work of 16th century Italian women poets.

⁵⁸⁹ For a discussion about Greek versus Roman justice, see Eric Nelson, “Utopia through Italian Eyes: Thomas More and the Critics of Civic Humanism,” *Renaissance Quarterly* (Winter 2006), 1032-1033.

to run an empire. The principle or ideal of just dealing or right action was the first and foremost of the virtues for Plutarch. Justice ensured harmony and order. For the Romans, justice became worldly through a set of codified, universal laws designed to effectively govern the empire.⁵⁹⁰ Roman philosophy of the first century reflected a larger role for wives than that of Plato or Aristotle. Women were not equal to their husbands *but*, as Plutarch said, a wife was a moral and intellectual equal to her husband. A well-ordered home was grounded in this. For Plutarch, she had a less restrictive role than was discussed by Plato and Aristotle.⁵⁹¹ Plutarch wrote *Mulierum Virtutes* to illustrate the lives of 27 virtuous women. The virtue of men and women was based on the same model, and Plutarch used this model to support the philosophical education of both men and women.⁵⁹² In praising women who were wise as political advisers and selfless helpmates, Plutarch supported their public presence because they promoted social harmony.⁵⁹³

One of the most influential Latin commentaries on justice to inspire Florentine humanists was Cicero's. Cicero defined justice in book one of *De Officiis* as rendering each his due.⁵⁹⁴ Bound up with his interpretations of justice was *beneficentia* (generosity) and knowing when to act that way.⁵⁹⁵ Cicero, an adamant supporter of republicanism, wrote of the origins of justice that "law is the highest reason implanted in nature which commands what ought to be done and forbids the opposite. The reason when firmly fixed and fully developed in the human mind is law ... justice is natural law."⁵⁹⁶ So the virtue was nothing less than "nature perfected and developed to its highest point: therefore there is likeness between man and God" in this virtue of which

⁵⁹⁰ Electronic Text Center, *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 2, 657.

⁵⁹¹ Agnoito, 55-68; Plutarch, *Moralia*.

⁵⁹² Ronald Witt, *Italian Humanism and Medieval Rhetoric* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2001), 3-6. This work credits Salutati with introducing Greek learning to Florence. *Ibid.*, 335- 46.

⁵⁹³ Plutarchus, *Plutarch's Moralia*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949).

⁵⁹⁴ He also defines justice this way in Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, trans by H. Rackham (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1931), V, 67.

⁵⁹⁵ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947).

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

“there is no human being of any race who, if he finds a guide, cannot attain virtue.”⁵⁹⁷

Cicero discussed that the virtue of justice could be attained by the citizen class because it was the foundation on which all virtues stood, just as the citizen class was the foundation on which society stood. This ideology mirrored the Florentines’ active dedication to the pursuit of civic humanism.⁵⁹⁸ Petrarch, the father of Florentine humanism, referenced *De Officiis* as the sole guarantee of popular affection and that justice was what made people accepting of any ruler. Bruni also used Cicero’s model of *beneficentia* and avoiding *iniuria* (injury) when developing his definition of justice.⁵⁹⁹ This virtue was essential to stability and lasting leadership.

The Renaissance did not simply build on Platonism and Ciceronian theory. Humanists looked at justice through an ideological lens that was, in part, developed by four centuries of medieval Aristotelianism. This ideology adamantly renounced a single Socratic model of virtue for both men and women.⁶⁰⁰ During the Middle Ages the idea that men and women could follow a single virtuous model was not popular.⁶⁰¹ This explains why women like Christine de Pizan were seen as so radical in their challenge to find a sense of justice in the lives of women.⁶⁰² It was often a conundrum for humanists that *virtú* could be anything other than “maleness” just by the nature of the word “vir.” Historically, more often than not, the virtues were applied differently to the different sexes and this may help explain how women in Florence saw their position in the city, which we tend to see nowadays as secondary and limited, as one that was in fact wholly “just.” Maddalena Orsini wrote to her future son-in-law Lorenzo de’ Medici that “I am sure that the Magnificent Piero knows best, and that we shall never err by carrying out his

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Cicero, *De Officiis*.

⁵⁹⁹ Hans Baron *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 251-3.

⁶⁰⁰ Aristotle divided justice into two parts, one natural, one conventional. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968).

⁶⁰¹ Christine De Pizan argued that a single model of virtue was possible for both sexes.

⁶⁰² De Pizan wrote in direct challenge to the misogynistic *Romance of the Rose*. Guillaume de Lorris, *Le Rommant de la Rose*. Lyons: Guillaume Le Roy, ca. 1487.

commands.”⁶⁰³ We find little radicalism among Florentine women. They tend not to challenge the order of this patriarchal society, because in fact, they sought the harmonious social balance that humanism promoted.

The “patrician” women of the merchant elite in Florence were not labeled by their contemporaries as being part of the humanist school and thus they did not occupy the precarious space outside of social acceptability. This stood in contrast to the challenging position of female humanists. It was recognized by the earliest female humanists that such learned women were “unlike” other members of their sex. Their education made them seem fierce and a threat to the social order. One of the earliest female humanists in northern Italy, Maddalena Scrovegni (1356-1429), was praised for her chastity, a typically female virtue, rather than for how learned she was, although it was precisely this learning that was truly uncommon and noteworthy about her. Humanist Antonio Loschi (1368-1441) wrote *Domus Pudicicie* (The Temple of Chastity) as an extensive praise of Scrovegni’s embodiment of chastity enshrined in the home of her father.⁶⁰⁴ Her chastity kept her a prisoner in this “temple” inside of which she was confined and no longer a threat to larger society. By comparing her to chaste women of antiquity (Penelope, Lucretia, the goddess Diana, and the fiercest of women, the warrior tribe of the Amazons), she was described as a woman, though an anomalous one with masculine traits which were controlled, as they had been in the case of other women, by her militant devotion to the feminine virtue of chastity.⁶⁰⁵ Humanists supported the notion that justice was best preserved in the status quo of a harmonious society and this extreme praise of chastity on the part of Loschi pulled her back into the status quo which was the space occupied by Lucrezia, Alessandra, and the other elite women discussed in this study.

Humanism and its concepts of social norms, the “status quo,” in fifteenth-century Florence were undoubtedly influenced by a thousand years of medieval doctrine. Constructions of justice in Renaissance Florence were, for example, tempered by

⁶⁰³ Ross, 127.

⁶⁰⁴ A Latin transcription and discussion of Loschi’s letter can be found in Margaret L. King, “Goddess and Captive: Antonio Loschi’s Epistolary Tribute to Maddalena Scrovegni (1389),” *Medievalia et humanistica* (1980): 103-27.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 119-24.

Christianity. Italian courts reminded criminals that their earthly trial was a preview of the last judgment in heaven.⁶⁰⁶ Earthly justice was not limited by the secular implications that were central to classical interpretations of the virtue. When offering condolences and commenting on the accomplishments of Lorenzo de Medici, Cesare Borgia wrote on April 13, 1492 to Piero de' Medici that he should take comfort in Christianity's promise of eternity for Lorenzo, a man of such noteworthy *magnificencia*.⁶⁰⁷ This was the ultimate judgment of the merits of one's life, even for a man who accomplished much in this world. A primary concern of humanists was similar to that of scholastics, namely a focus on eternity and the "next" world.

To these ends there was some disagreement amongst the humanists with the conventional tiering of the virtues.⁶⁰⁸ A change in medieval ideology from classical views was marked by an increased focus on fortitude rather than justice.⁶⁰⁹ The key to civic virtues in Medicean Florence was fortitude and this trend continued to have an impact on humanist ideology.⁶¹⁰ The idea of justice as the apex of virtue was placed under scrutiny as interest in classical models developed, but some allegiance to medieval interpretations of the virtues forced humanists to contend with the hierarchy of attributes. For instance, Matteo Palmieri, one of the most influential fifteenth-century humanists in Florence, agreed with Cicero's high ranking of justice because placement there highlighted that justice was community-oriented. Justice was supreme in Palmieri's model. Because the ranking of the virtues varied amongst humanists, I would argue that justice did not necessarily exist in the fifteenth century as an ideal exalted, or

⁶⁰⁶ Samuel Y. Edgerton, "Icons of Justice," *Past and Present* 89 (Nov. 1980): 35.

⁶⁰⁷ *Considerando che e morto tanto religiosamente et Catholicae che lasciando en questo mundo gloriosa et immortal fama la sua anima hauera acquista vita eternal e per la diuina maiesta sera stata entre li sancti soi in Gloria collocata me pare debiamo conmutare la mestitia et dolore en alerezza e consolatione e congratularse con lui che habbia commutata questa vita temporale caduca transitoria e piena de afanni con vita eternal stabile e gloriosa e senza nulla molestia . . .* ASF MAP XV.

⁶⁰⁸ I would note that this likely is due, in part, to the resurgence of Plato, who devoted much more discussion in *The Republic* to justice than Aristotle did in his "Politics."

⁶⁰⁹ This is why fortitude will be discussed in the final chapter of this discussion.

⁶¹⁰ Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition From Medieval to Modern Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

unchallenged, above the rest.⁶¹¹ So although it might be difficult for women to aspire to the most “masculine” of virtues, fortitude, along with the other virtues were significant components of a virtuous life right alongside justice.

Perhaps it was the belief, amongst the citizens, that justice already existed in Florence (and hardly anywhere else) that marked it as a virtue often discussed by humanists for being something distinctly “Florentine.” This is why we have been building to this virtue, now that we have more of a sense of Florentine identity. Justice was seen to be a virtue that was a powerful unifying force amongst the Florentines. In his oration for the funeral of Nanni Strozzi, the humanist Leonardo Bruni boldly gave praise to “the constitution we use for the government of the republic designed for the liberty and equality of indeed all citizens. Since it is egalitarian in all respects, it is called a “popular” constitution. We do not tremble beneath the rule of one man who would lord it over us, nor are we slaves to the rule of a few.”⁶¹² This popular creed could also be found over the doorway of the Palazzo Vecchio, where it announced to those who entered the Florentine citizens’ notion of liberty, that Christ had been elected by the Florentine people.⁶¹³ This stood as a lasting testament to Florentine civic engagement in politics even after the republican experiment of the fifteenth century was replaced by a dukedom.

When republicanism was not a memory, before the ascension of Duke Cosimo I in 1569, it was noted by the humanist Palmieri that justice was the “queen of virtues.” A whole book of *Vita Civile*, his guide for an exemplary, civically active life, was dedicated to the highest civil good (“*sommo bene civile*”) and its role in the foundation of order in a republic.⁶¹⁴ Citizens must be committed to justice because it bound them together into a common outlook. As Palmieri explained, “the fact remains that one can do nothing in

⁶¹¹ Cicero ranked justice as the most significant of virtues and although some Renaissance humanists agreed with him, others were more focused on the merits of fortitude.

⁶¹² Leonardo Bruni, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*, ed. Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, and David Thompson (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1987), 124.

⁶¹³ Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Palazzo Vecchio 1298-1532: Governemnt, Architecture, and Imagery in the Civic Palace of the Florentine Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 96. *Jesus Christus Rex Populi Florentini S.P.Q.*

⁶¹⁴ Matteo Palmieri, *Libro della Vita Civile composto da Matheo Palmieri cittadino Fiorentino* (Venezia: Giovanni Andrea Valvassori, 1535).

earth that is dearer or more pleasing to God than to rule justly and administer the congregations and multitudes of men who are united by justice.”⁶¹⁵ The evolution of justice in fifteenth-century Florence was evident in Palmieri because he used many of Leonardo Bruni’s earlier ideas, but wrote in the civically focused Italian, rather than Latin. He, like Bruni, said it was “just” for the lowly born to depend on their personal *virtù* rather than to defer to the power of those with wealth and noble descent. “He who seeks fame in the ability of past generations deprives himself of honor and merit. He who lives off the reputation of his ancestors is a pitiable creature. A man who deserves honor should offer himself not his genealogy – though we ought always to prefer the nobility as long as their achievements are equally good.”⁶¹⁶ This was a distinct step away from medieval notions of accepting one’s place in society based on the position that one was born into. Rather, this promoted the pursuit to achieve personal greatness. Palmieri and other humanists were interested in the individual ability of great men to rise up and rule Florence. This certainly appealed to the class of merchants and bankers who had recently risen to power in the city. Humanism made conceptions of just rule more malleable and validated the rise to power of those that were capable of being just rulers.

There were other Florentines who seemed to have had little doubt about the power and dominance of justice. For Piero del Pollaiuolo, *Justice* (1469-1470) was not blind and not holding scales.⁶¹⁷ This image of justice sits majestically holding a raised sword in one hand and resting a globe on her leg with the other. This figure wielded great power over the globe with a universal concept of justice (reminiscent of the Roman model). The allegory gazes out unblindfolded. This was a personification of the ancient virtue, one that judged with the senses alert to better inform the mind.

⁶¹⁵ Matteo Palmieri, *Vita Civile*, ed. Gino Belloni (Firenze: Sansoni, 1982), 54f.

⁶¹⁶ *Chi per le virtù (line) de’ passati cerca Gloria spoglia sé d’ogni merito d’honore, et misero è certo voluti che consuma la fama de’ padri antichi. Dia exemplo di sé et non de’suoi chi merita honore, prepondendo sempre la nobiltà, quando sono pari virtù. E sapientissimi antichi che molto dilatorono gl’ imperii, spesse volti, forestieri, lavoratori et infirme conditioni d’huomini rilevorono a’ primi governi, quando in loro conoscevano spectabili eccellentie di virtù* Vita Civile, Bibl. Naz. Cod. II, IV 81, fol. 66b-67b. Also Palmieri, *Vita Civile*.

⁶¹⁷ Piero del Pollaiuolo, *Justice*, tempera on panel, 1469-1470, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Similarly, the power of justice can be seen in Giotto's and Ambrogio's paintings of *Iustitia*.⁶¹⁸ These allegories were shown as deliberately holding the pans of their scales at equilibrium, perhaps to remind the viewer that justice was not a matter of achieving individual human rights, which is a modern concept, but rather was symbolic of using human agency to achieve urban peace and of the effort it took to balance such a harmony between individual privilege and civic service. Peace, as an added classical virtue, was placed sitting in the middle of the fresco and this seems to be a testament to the prosperity of such a balance.⁶¹⁹ Justice, then, was a popular subject in art before and after Medicean hegemony. Granted, in the fifteenth-century depiction she raises a mighty sword rather than a balanced scale, but in both there is a clear focus on the goal of tranquility. This might have to be acquired by the force of a sword.

The evolution of this virtue attests to the fact that those of aristocratic descent in Florence also showed an interest in justice due to a search for the stability and good fortune of the city in which they traditionally held control. The Albizzi worried that without freedom Florence would fall to tyrants. As Rinaldo Albizzi said, "without freedom, Florence cannot survive and without Florence freedom cannot survive, because many lands will be subservient to lords and tyrants in the future."⁶²⁰ The Albizzi, as enemies of the Medici, saw their nightmare come true when the bankers, made fat by usury, used their economic influence as a springboard to take over the politics of the city. Justice, however, was not abandoned by the Medici; it came to be applied by a new ruling elite with the help of renewed interest in classical models and interpretations.

This effort to find explanations for the ideology of Florentine justice in the fourteenth century and beyond was grounded in the context of a rapidly developing political and economic climate. Florence's booming economy and its expanding territory made notions of justice appealing to citizens. The hopeful economic and cultural growth

⁶¹⁸ Giotto di Bondone, *Justice*, fresco, 1306, Cappella Scrovegni, Padua. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Allegory of Good Government*, fresco, 1340, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena.

⁶¹⁹ Edgerton, "Icons of Justice," 33.

⁶²⁰ *quod sine libertate, Florentia durare non potest ac libertas sine Florentia, cum multe patrie servabunt dominis et tyrannis*. Quoted in Gene Brucker, *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 368.

of the fifteenth century seemed a far cry from the factional politics of Dante's day and the sweeping destruction of the Black Death of 1348. Richard Goldthwaite, in *The Building of Renaissance Florence*, has suggested that the wars of the fourteenth century made the Florentines feel their city had reached a new level of virtue; the humanists staked out ideological ground for the successes of the republic.⁶²¹ Hans Baron defined humanism as a development established out of the crisis of the war between Florence and Milan.⁶²² "Liberty" became the battle cry of citizens against tyrannical governments (which is the way that Florence perceived Milanese rule). This was not the cry of pure democracy, as civic engagement in Florence was limited to the citizen class.⁶²³ It was reminiscent of the classic struggle of traditional oligarchy as the foe of republicanism that Athens struggled with during the Peloponnesian War, when in fact imperialism was the prime motivator (not this supposed ideological struggle).⁶²⁴ Florence, unlike Athens, won its war against "tyranny" and emerged with a sense that justice had been achieved in the city and that the survival of the city proclaimed the triumph of justice. Victory validated the rhetoric.

This Florentine self-esteem and sense of accomplishment were well expressed by Bruni. Bruni's history of Florence, which remained unfinished at the time of his death in 1444, was an example of a humanist attempting to link the founding of Florence with a much admired republican Rome.⁶²⁵ Bruni found much merit in the government of the senate and took issue with the rule of the emperors. Poggio Bracciolini and then Bartolommeo della Scala would rewrite Bruni's history of Florence, attempting to create a history that was comparable to the greatly admired histories of Rome. Bruni had cited

⁶²¹ Richard Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence: An Economic and Social History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

⁶²² Baron, *Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*.

⁶²³⁶²³ The citizen class of Florence was not closed to newcomers during the quattrocento, but it was limited to families that qualified for three prominent political positions in the city (*Tre Maggiori*). 2,500 males could qualify for selection to these offices representing 700 families. R. Burr Litchfield, "Demographic Characteristics of Florentine Patrician Families, Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries," *The Journal of Economic History* Vol. 29, No. 2 (June 1969): 192-3.

⁶²⁴ Thucydides, *Pericles' Funeral Oration from the Peloponnesian War (Book 2.34-46)*, 2000, (online) available from <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/pericles-funeralspeech.html>, 11 September 2009.

⁶²⁵ For background about the development of Florentine humanist historiography in the fifteenth century see 1-31.

his predecessors, like the ardent republican Livy, carefully to show the evolution of the historical genre in which Bruni is often considered the first modern historian. According to Baron, these humanists in Florence in the early fifteenth century were concerned with the city's position as a free republic, one not under the control of tyrants. They cited the nature of its institutions and an ongoing quest to preserve its hegemony in Tuscany. Bruni believed that Florence would be successful via the *populo*. This word was rarely used by Bruni to mean a general group of men, but instead was usually used to describe men organized into an active decision-making body. The term "*populo*" contained intimations of many of the important themes associated with Bruni's civic humanism.⁶²⁶ Justice was achieved through the activities of the commune that would come to be attributed to the *Florentinus populus*. *Populus* was by definition "free" and the existence of such a decision-making body was reminiscent of the Roman senate that the humanist Bruni so admired.⁶²⁷

Although we have seen that justice had a long history of being discussed as a cornerstone of virtue, there was a resurgence of interest in justice due to an intensification of civic feeling in Florence during the mid-fifteenth century. This may have coincided with the breakdown of the corporate order of the guilds that pushed citizens into giving their allegiance to the state.⁶²⁸ Civic humanism became the quasi-official culture of Florence. The ruling class's point of view had some noteworthy secular components; its program included a justification of the active life and the formulation of a new historical outlook to describe the Florentine experience as they saw it. Their vision of the city was that of the dynamic, independent republic described by Bruni.

Although their behaviors certainly showed an interest in the success of familial groups, Florentine women, like their male counterparts, did display a move toward "individualism" in these civic relationships. The sense of self was not as "modern" and

⁶²⁶ Leonardo Bruni, *Historiae Florentini Populi*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 310.

⁶²⁷ Donald J. Wilcox, *The Development of Florentine Humanist Historiography in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 211-2.

⁶²⁸ Gene Brucker, *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

all-encompassing as Burkhardt claimed when he looked at the larger-than-life statues of individuals and proclaimed that Renaissance people lost their corporate identities and became modern individuals. However, there is most definitely more of a sense of an individual's role in larger political and social groupings among men and women in this ruling class than there had been during the Middle Ages.⁶²⁹ This dedication to the larger community contributed to the desire to achieve harmony. Women of privilege in Florence did have a connection to the citizen class of the city through their activity and a sense of obligation to ensure that justice was realized in the lives of their kin and the larger city.

This sense of dedication to establishing a proper legacy for one's lineage can be seen quite clearly in Macrobius' (395-423 CE) popular text which said "Scipio, cherish justice and your obligations to duty, as your grandfather here and I, your father, have done; this is important where parents and relatives are concerned, but is of utmost importance in matters concerning the commonwealth. This sort of life is your passport to the sky."⁶³⁰ Devotion to family and community are illustrated in this sense of obligation. Cicero was interpreted in similar ways during the Renaissance. The focus on obligation to kin and community was a driving force of civic virtue.

When interpreting Cicero, Macrobius showed a distinct connection between earthly and divine justice when he noted that "nothing that occurs on earth, indeed is more gratifying to that supreme God who rules the whole universe than the establishment of associations and federations of men bound together by principles of justice, which are called commonwealths. The governors and protectors of these proceed from here and return hither after death."⁶³¹ During the Renaissance, justice would continue to be seen as this cornerstone of a city's character and personal salvation.

Macrobius was an ancient author, but his ideas were mirrored by humanists to illustrate the notion that ultimate justice was not dealt by secular hands. We are again

⁶²⁹ The Florentines' relationship with the state is a theme discussed in William Connell, *Society and the Individual in Renaissance Florence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

⁶³⁰ Macrobius, 93.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

reminded that the Renaissance experience was far from simply being a secular one for men and women. As Bianca Pazzi wrote to her mother Lucrezia de Medici about her brother “until this sickness (of Lorenzo) is past he ought to put his pleasures on one side; if he lives he will have more than now, for I trust God will recompense him for the ills he has received. The reward of a temperate choice is divine justice.”⁶³² Bianca has noted that Lorenzo will be rewarded for his service/commitment to the state over his own needs. When the Dominican friar Savonarola, quoting Plato, wrote that “true philosophy is thinking about death.” he possibly was preparing to die well.⁶³³ And yet for those, like Ficino, who found Savonarola’s execution to be a relief, it was noted that Savonarola’s death was a case of divine justice stepping in when Florentines “were clandestinely besieged and seduced by a strong horde of demons under an angelic mask” to “seduce many persons preeminent in both prudence and probity.”⁶³⁴ Savonarola was burned at the stake and this was more than the dealings of earthly justice.

Women in Florence

These points about divine and earthly justice serve to make humanism’s amalgamation of medieval and classical rhetoric more apparent because of the strong elements of both secular and spiritual justice. Women played an important role in this culture of justice. Lucrezia Tornabuoni is noteworthy as a woman who was active in arranging the best possible present and future circumstances of her family (both natal and married). Her actions were not a threat to the social order. In fact she, like other women in Florence, expanded her role within the social framework by promoting “justice” of the kind we have just discussed. Arguably the most prominent and influential woman in fifteenth-century Florence (and anywhere in Europe for that matter), Lucrezia did not challenge the social order and yet she was heard. She was recognized by her contemporaries as an ideal woman even though she was a woman without any official

⁶³² Janet Ross, ed., *Lives of the Early Medici: As Told in Their Correspondence* (Boston: Gorham Press, 1911), 224.

⁶³³ Girolamo Savonarola, *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola: Religion and Politics, 1490-1498*, ed. and trans. Anne Borelli (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 37.

⁶³⁴ Marsilio Ficino, *Apologia contra Savonarolam* found in Savonarola, *Selected Writings*, 355.

title.⁶³⁵ She blazed no trail of proto-feminism in the republic, but rather was praised by Francesco da Castiglione, a canon in San Lorenzo, because “she knew how to manage the most important affairs with wise counsel, and to succor the citizens in time of calamity.”⁶³⁶

Perhaps the best way to establish women’s roles in this culture, in which “justice” was so prominent, is to reconsider their positions in that culture to consider how much agency they did in fact have. Women of an elite socioeconomic status like Lucrezia Tornabuoni did engage in an active dialogue with male kin and others that would help to promote both the wellbeing of Florence and that of their own kin.⁶³⁷ Although Tornabuoni’s influence came from her position in the domestic space, her astute advice certainly resonated well beyond the walls of the home because of the humanists, like Poliziano, that she had contact with. Rather than demanding an audience as a humanist herself Tornabuoni was quite vocal within the social norms prescribed by the dominant culture in the city. Or at least she believed that she had achieved this. She included her input firmly into the decision her son would make to marry, writing the following to her husband Piero on April 1, 1467 on her way back from seeing Clarice Orsini, the potential bride, in Rome: “I will tell you all, as I said we shall be able to arrange matters.”⁶³⁸ As we seek to establish how women actively sought what was then viewed as “justice,” it becomes apparent that women like Tornabuoni were decision-makers who established themes of justice in literature and leadership roles. They also sought social justice in legal and economic matters. Elite women in Florence used scholastic concepts of justice and order while women in cities like Venice, who called themselves humanists, tended to seek a more modern sense of equality. Women in Florence who sought what was then

⁶³⁵ Cardinal Giovanni Albobrandini addressed a letter to her in the following way: *Magnifica e generosa donna Lucretia de’ Medici come madre honoranda in Firenze*. Tornabuoni, *Lettere*, 102-3.

⁶³⁶ Yvonne Maguire, *The Women of the Medici* (London: G. Routledge and Sons Ltd, 1927), 220n.

⁶³⁷ Giovanni Aldobrandini, Podesta, a Lucrezia Tornabuoni, Pisa, 12 gennaio 1472. Tornabuoni, *Lettere*, 102-3. MAP LXXXV, 33. Antonio Pucci, Vicario, a Lucrezia Tornabuoni, Poppi, 26 December 1472. Tornabuoni, *Lettere* 109-10. MAP XXIV, 347

⁶³⁸ Lucrezia Tornabuoni, *Tre Lettere di Lucrezia Tornabuoni a Piero de’ Medici, Ricordo di Nozze* (Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1859).

viewed as “justice” as a harmonious ideal engaged in the humanist tradition in an effort to live well in their traditional roles in which Alessandra reminded her son Lorenzo “not to shrug off my reprimands.”⁶³⁹ Women were directly exposed to the tradition and the key here is to give these Florentine women a well-deserved place in humanist ideology in practice. As in previous chapters, we see that they were far from being invisible beyond the domestic space precisely because of their constant and significant contributions in that space.⁶⁴⁰ The results of activities clearly extended far beyond the confines of the home.

Women in Venice

This praise of Florentine women begs a comparison to their little praised contemporaries in Venice. Humanism in Venice in the fifteenth century was shaped by the Petrarchan legacy that had also influenced the Florentines. “The art of living well and happily” was one that was chiseled by Francesco Barbaro (1390-1454) and others from a Ciceronean model.⁶⁴¹ Women in Venice like Cassandra Fedele, who labeled themselves as humanists, found themselves defending themselves from an onslaught of verbal attacks.

Some Florentine women who engaged more openly in a humanist dialogue seemed to receive “praise” from Florentine humanists. But that “praise” is more reflective of shock due to seemingly impossible gender transgressions. When Angelo Poliziano wrote to Lorenzo de’ Medici about Cassandra Fedele, born in Venice in 1465, he did so with great respect. He wrote “yesterday evening I paid a visit to the learned Cassandra Fedele and greeted her in your name. She is no less wonderful, Lorenzo, in the vulgar tongue than in Latin; most discreet *et meis oculis etiam* (and in my eyes)

⁶³⁹ *Ricordoti non ti getti drieto alle spalle le mie riprensioni, che sono con amore e con lagrime.* Gregory, 70-1.

⁶⁴⁰ The argument that women were not as invisible as Florentine histories may have portrayed them is made by Judith Bryce in the context of the public role of women as performers. Judith Bryce, “Performing for Strangers: Women, Dance, and Music in Quattrocento Florence,” *Renaissance Quarterly* Vol. 54, No. 4 (Winter 2001): 1074-1107.

⁶⁴¹ Benjamin Kohl and Ronald G. Witt, ed., *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 179.

handsome. I came away astounded. To you she is most partial and talked about you with such understanding *quasi te intus et cute norit*. One of these days she intends to go to Florence to see you, so prepare to do her honor.”⁶⁴² He was undoubtedly impressed by how learned she was. Most humanists seem to have viewed Fedele as an anomaly of a woman, and praised as an exception to her sex. She was not the outstanding woman that Lucrezia Tornabuoni was, but in fact something quite different. She was a woman who acted like a man. Her role was not one that supported social harmony. In fact, such an anomaly of a woman was viewed as achieving completely the opposite with such a fundamental transgression of social norms. In her efforts to gain recognition for learned females Fedele looked above her social status when she wrote letters to women in positions of political power. The female correspondents of Fedele were patrons and included the likes of Queen Isabella of Spain and Beatrice Sforza of Milan rather than peers (the exception being the poet Alessandra Scala of Florence).⁶⁴³ In her work, although she says that women would be well served by an education, there are no feminist themes of female virtue in these letters.⁶⁴⁴ Just like male humanists, Fedele praised female patrons like Isabella of Castile and Beatrice of Aragon as being models to the female sex. They were virtuous, but praised for being women, not for behaving like men.

If a woman tried to attain “virtù” this put her clearly outside of her sex and typical gender norms like entering into a marriage or convent. These norms did not have enough flexibility for an abundance of “book-lined cells.”⁶⁴⁵ Manliness was the central component of the praise (if one can call being labeled an anomaly “praise”) showered on Fedele by Eleonora of Aragon (1450-1493). The duchess of Ferrara, and patron of humanists such as Ercole de’ Roberti, said to Cassandra Fedele, “we have read your

⁶⁴² Ross, 323-5.

⁶⁴³ Cassandra Fedele, *Letters and Orations*, ed. Diana Maury Robin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 17-34.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁵ Margaret L King, “Book-Lined Cells: Women and Humanism in the Early Italian Renaissance,” in *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. Patricia H. Labalme (New York: New York University Press, 1980).

sweetest letters, which are exemplary, Cassandra, of the eloquence and learning not of a young woman but of an old man and seasoned orator. For they are filled with elegance of diction and gravity of sentiment and thought.”⁶⁴⁶ The letter continued to praise the “splendor of your virtues, your maidenly manners, and the brilliance of your learning.”⁶⁴⁷ Fedele was described as having both male (the eloquence of a seasoned orator) and female (maidenly) manners and attributes. This anomaly, so her female patron said, is an “ornament to our sex.” Obviously in this description Fedele is described as possessing qualities far from those normally ascribed to women.⁶⁴⁸ Even when they choose (or, perhaps more accurately, were “pressured”) to marry and fill typical societal niches, these female humanists, like Fedele and Scala, were still viewed as occupying threatening positions as scholars as long as they continued to act like men.⁶⁴⁹ They were women praised for being more like men, but yet there was no place in society for such a woman to safely occupy as long as she held onto that identity. They were being praised for having traits that went against their nature; for being something that they should not be able to be, men. These women would come to see themselves as outsiders. Cassandra Fedele pronounced that she had put aside the work of a woman to devote herself to manly pursuits and was taking a role outside of that typically assigned by this patriarchal society to her sex. It was clear that Fedele on the other hand embraced “masculine” pursuits when she wrote to Francesco Gonzaga of Mantua that she “abandoned feminine concerns and turned to those pursuits that pertain not only to honor during this brief life but to the enjoyment of God’s Majesty.”⁶⁵⁰ Fedele sought a more modern justice. Finding a way to pursue virtue as a woman, she tried to relinquish that identity to become more like a man if that is what it took to be recognized as a humanist. And that is how she would have liked this society to see her. Alessandra Scala wrote congratulating her for this

⁶⁴⁶ Fedele, Letters, 29-30. Letters in this translated edition used Cassandra Fedele, *Clarissimae feminae Cassandrae Fidelis, venetae Epistolae et Orationes* (Padua: F. Bolzetta, 1636).

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁹ This is the premise in Lisa Jardine “O Decus Italiae Virgo,’ or Myth of the Learned Lady in the Renaissance,” *The Historical Journal* Vol 28. No 4. (Dec. 1985): 799-819. She will not settle for anything less than women humanists being at least as recognized as minor humanists.

⁶⁵⁰ Fedele, *Letters*, 43-4.

transcendence. In 1492 she told Fedele “I congratulate you and give thanks, because you have made illustrious not only our sex but also this age.”⁶⁵¹ Scala saw her as a humanist contributing to the pursuits of a larger culture, one who was not superseding her prescribed role.

It would be up to later Italian feminists, Venetian women of the sixteenth century like Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, and Arcangela Tarabotti, to demand more radical changes – in particular, that learned women no longer be judged an anomaly. It is not surprising, from the above discussion, that this radicalism came from Venice. Perhaps there was more precedence for the agency of Venetian women due to the history of women of this city being more actively engaged in the humanist dialogue. When looking for the tradition of rhetoric that this call for change would be built on, one can consider Francesco Barbaro who, based on his studies of Greek literature and moral philosophy, including the Stoicism of Cicero and Seneca, wrote *On Wifely Duties*. In this text he advanced the idea that wives be further empowered with responsibility to care for domestic matters. Patrician wives were recognized for the major role they played by bearing and raising the future rulers of the state.⁶⁵² These reformers wanted to build on that role and the agency that women had in that “typical” role as mothers.

Learned Venetian women like Arcangela Tarabotti were more vocal, using sharp tongues to challenge established patriarchy and social norms. There is a chronological gap of 150 years between the amusement that Poliziano found in Fedele and the outrage vocalized against Tarabotti. Tarabotti brazenly wrote a Dantesque trilogy, *L’inferno Monacale*, *Il Paradisio Monacale*, and *Il Purgatorio delle mal Maritate* to bring attention to and to voice her objections to the fact that women were not being allowed to choose their own futures.⁶⁵³ Tarabotti came down in the historical record as a clear voice of protest, but voices of protest were the exception to the rule for women of the politically

⁶⁵¹ Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil, Jr., ed., *Her Immaculate Hand; Selected Works By and About the Women Humanists of Quattrocento Italy* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1983), 87.

⁶⁵² Kohl, *The Earthly Republic*, 17-8.

⁶⁵³ Arcangela Tarabotti, *L’Inferno Monacale*, ed., Francesca Medioli (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990); Arcangela Tarabotti, *Paradiso Monacale* (Venice, 1663).

active class. Unlike Tarabotti, the women we focus on here successfully enlarged their role within the social framework and thus firmly promoted the civic justice and harmony of the patriarchy. Florentine women were notoriously less vocal than their Venetian contemporaries when it came to voicing outrage against such “norms,” but following established patterns of social justice did not mean that they were docile.

The women in Florence were rebellious, but more through individual life choices than using words to try to legitimize or validate them or engaging in humanist dialogue to demand educations. They seemed to have the drive to do whatever was necessary when faced with a challenge (such as widowhood) and seemed to give little regard to a sense of a larger community of women and how these transgressions spoke to larger gender identities. If one considers elite women in Florence and Venice and looks closely at the reception of their actions by male peers, Florentine women were as adept as their more vocal Venetian sisters at individual gender transgressions. Strozzi is just one example of a woman who monitored real estate ventures and politics carefully.⁶⁵⁴ Because Florentine women in the elite circle displayed less obvious transgressions (as their agency did not take the form of a public debate or humanist treatise), they have received less attention from historians and contemporaries who seemed more tolerant of negotiating a space for their agency within women’s traditional gender roles. The rally of Venetian female humanists should not by any means be devalued as a proto-feminist rant; the words of Tarabotti and Nagorola and Fedele were truly courageous and set them apart as trailblazers and women who challenged Renaissance notions of “justice.” The all too superficial comparison that elite Florentine women instead remained silently in the shadow of the patriarchy served to devalue their very real ability to work within social constraints placed on their sex to effectively pursue the virtues of the citizen class. The activity of these women to achieve justice demands more recognition. So, women in Florence retained their identity as women while women who defined themselves as humanists in Venice were told they were acting like men because of their radicalism.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵⁴ Gregory, 41-3, 131.

⁶⁵⁵ King reminds us that there is no equivalent of a successful son provided that has left a significant historical record like Alessandra Strozzi did in Florence. There is an obsession

Justice as a Theme in Women's Literature

Justice was a central theme in the literary production of women in fifteenth-century Florence. Lucrezia Tornabuoni's *Sacred Narratives* is a good example of a focus more on spiritual texts rather than on exclusively secular themes. Less attention has been paid to the religious works of Pico and Ficino, but their attention to both secular and sacred subject matter illustrates that humanism would be better understood if the balance between scholastic and classical influence on the fifteenth-century culture to promote social harmony was more clearly established.⁶⁵⁶

Lucrezia Tornabuoni's (1425-1482) poetry was influenced by contemporary models of harmony, but she did not engage explicitly in dialogues with other humanists. This was typical of the elite women of this study. So the influence of virtues like "justice" as harmony might not be as obvious a theme in her *Sacred Narratives* as in a secular genre, but they are undoubtedly there, just as they can be found in the letters of Fedele and Nogarola.

Tornabuoni's five *Storie Sacre* were poems that discussed the lives of biblical figures including the Old Testament heroines Judith, Susanna, and Esther. Her *Laudi* and the *Storie Sacre* were a testament to how well Lucrezia Tornabuoni understood the cultural and social climate of the city precisely because she did not challenge the Florentine desire to preserve traditional (classical) concepts of social justice. Lucrezia did not address the concerns of her contemporary Laura Cereta of Brescia.⁶⁵⁷ In her writing, Cereta explored the history of women's roles in intellectual life in Europe and used these examples to attack the lack of opportunity that women had to acquire an

amongst women with power around promoting their sons and Isabella d'Este and Catherine de Medici are described as hovering and might be described as "helicopter parents" trying to push their sons toward successful careers. Margaret L. King, *Humanism, Venice, and Women: Essays on the Italian Renaissance* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 211-37.

⁶⁵⁶ Pico's Apology is a good example of this, as was Marsilio Ficino, *Della Cristiana Religione* (Roma: Niccolò di Lorenzo della Magna, 1474).

⁶⁵⁷ Laura Cereta, *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

education and the “slavery” of women in marriage.⁶⁵⁸ Both Tornabuoni and Cereta saw great virtue in the activities of women, but Tornabuoni seemed to embrace a sense of justice in her contemporary environment that Cereta did not. Tornabuoni’s dedication to this environment could be seen in her activities when she acted as an intercessor in charitable activities.⁶⁵⁹ As part of her position in Florence, she was begged to help a man seek release from prison, girls asked her for dowries, friars asked for help acquiring positions, and prioresses asked her for cloth.⁶⁶⁰

Tornabuoni was often consumed with charitable enterprises and eagerly wrote the stories of women who achieved virtues. Tornabuoni wrote, for example, in the story of *Susanna*, that Daniel trapped the elders in a lie against Susanna. In the conclusion, Tornabuoni asked her readers to “take compassion on the innocent and solace in the way justice disposed of those two. After that, Daniel was held in esteem by all people always, for he had revealed the truth of what happened to that distressed woman: he gave a judgment that was just and true.”⁶⁶¹ Daniel had the wisdom to see the virtue in the woman Susanna, who resisted the lustful advances of two judges. Justice was realized as a result. The men were killed and Susanna, who had done no wrong, was avenged.

These poems offer some evidence of Tornabuoni’s devotion to the church. Being so outwardly devout, she did not discuss women’s lives in the convent as being an unjust placement. This view that entrance into the convent was part of the status quo and beneficial to both the individual and community is unlike Arcangela Tarabotti, who later, in the mid seventeenth-century, lambasted the convents of Venice as imprisoning women unfairly.⁶⁶² Tornabuoni had a correspondence with Margherita del Pitta, a nun in the Monastero di San Matteo in Pisa, in which she conversed about the workings of the

⁶⁵⁸ These are the same issues that would be addressed by later feminist thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988).

⁶⁵⁹ Tornabuoni, *Sacred*, 71.

⁶⁶⁰ Tornabuoni, *Lettere*, 134.

⁶⁶¹ Of the many editions of the Bible published in Italian in Florence, Piero Pacini ed., *Epistole (et) Euangelii (et) Lectioni Vulgari in Lingua Toscana* (Florence: Lorenzo Morgiani and Johannes Petri, 1495), shows larger fifteenth-century interest in popular religion.

⁶⁶² Archangela Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

monastery and offered her support.⁶⁶³ Tornabuoni discussed no moral dilemma in regards to girls being sent to this institution. In her official capacity, as a Medici, she supported the convent financially. Her private view of the institution may have been more negative, because she, like Alessandra Strozzi, did not send her daughters to convents, while instead working tirelessly “to marry them well.”⁶⁶⁴ Such contributions to sacred institutions were good for the stability of the community, so it is not surprising that these women offered much support.

Recognition of men and women being active players in the fate of their own lives and justice being served based on those life experiences and one’s prescribed role in larger society motivated these kinds of decisions. As Margherita Datini frankly noted to her husband,

Francesco, I gather from your letter that you are very depressed. I want to remind you about what I said to you on another occasion, that the blessings and the pain that we have in this world we bring on ourselves. But now, for the sake of my own peace of mind, I must add a new thought. I have no other desire than to please God and to have a peaceful conscience. So it seems to me that to live a virtuous life, and preserve one’s soul, one must never hope to take advantage of someone, and every time others act in this way, one will have peace in one’s soul by doing the opposite.⁶⁶⁵

With justice came not only community peace, but also personal tranquility, and women like Datini knew this quite well. The interest of Renaissance Florentines in individualism as a building block for knowing one’s place in the community no doubt inspired this advice to her husband. As Margherita described justice, it was the virtue that was recognized by Plato and later Ficino as being fundamental to order in both the civic and the private/domestic space. Ficino wrote that Plato said it was “the work of the philosopher to understand that a single man governs both the family and the state, to be the ideal king.” Alessandra told her sons to step up to dealing with their own affairs,

⁶⁶³ PAO LXXXV, 75 (27 Dicembre 1471). Patricia Salvadori, *Lettere*, 100-2.

⁶⁶⁴ Gregory, 31.

⁶⁶⁵ Margherita Datini, *Per la tua Margherita: lettere di una donna del’300 al marito mercante; Margherita Datini a Francesco di Marco, 1384-1401*, CD (Prato: L’Archivio di Stato di Prato, 2002).

rather than relying on her, when she said “do not be surprised if I do not write often ... you will be paid back when Matteo has learned to write, but don’t expect letters from me.”⁶⁶⁶ The philosopher had wisdom, insight, justice, and the virtues – moral, domestic, civic, and kingly.⁶⁶⁷ Women had an important role precisely because of their role as protectors of domestic tranquility, not in spite of it. Harmony in the home was a microcosm for tranquility in the larger city. Alberti noted in his influential treatise *I Libri Della Famiglia* that virtues resulted in an individual being “wonderfully serviceable to many people” both in the home and in the public arena.⁶⁶⁸

The Harmonious City

The notion that justice was the foundation of a harmonious city was an ideal that civic humanism fixated on. Those who discussed these cities did not write of abstract utopias, but actual towns worthy of great praise. These were worldly places that in the writings of DaVinci, Brunni and Alberti were not compared to heavenly cities.⁶⁶⁹ They were cities of earth, no longer the abysmal centers of man’s corruption described by Augustine.⁶⁷⁰ Renaissance humanists like Leonardo Brunni looked at the polis as a foundation for fifteenth-century city-states in his *Laudatio Florentiae Urbis*. Florence, in this treatise, was the city that best idealized justice.⁶⁷¹ He looked at how well ordered, beautiful, and clearly organized the social and political structure of the city was. Much discussion about the harmonious city was centered on the physical design. The

⁶⁶⁶ Gregory 35.

⁶⁶⁷ Ficino, *Gardens of Philosophy: Ficino on Plato*, ed. Arthur Farndell (London: Shephard-Walwyn Publishers LTD, 2006), 10.

⁶⁶⁸ Leon Battista Alberti, *The Family in Renaissance Florence*, trans. Renee Neu Watkins (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1969), 79.

⁶⁶⁹ This marks a break with medieval juxtapositions following Augustine, *City of God* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).

⁶⁷⁰ Augustine, *City of God*.

⁶⁷¹ Leonardo Brunni, *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis*, ed. Stefano U. Baldassarri (Impruneta: Sismel, 2000). Just as the polis was organized around the acropolis, Florence was built around the Palazzo dei Signori and the Santa Maria del Fiore.

Florentines Alberti and Filarete discussed the architectural elements of an ideal city as a display of order and harmony.⁶⁷²

Pride in the city of Florence and recognition of the ideals that the city embodied were evident in the acknowledgement of virtuous mothers. Just as a mother would keep harmony in the home, Lucrezia Tornabuoni was recognized as the most “*madre honoranda in Firenze*.” One of the most honorable mothers in Florence, she was recognized this way in 1472 by Giovanni Albobrandini (*capitanus et potestas*).⁶⁷³ Her contribution to Florence’s tranquility as a metaphor for the “home” is quite compelling due to its suggestion that her important role in “managing” the city, as one would manage a household, should not be overlooked. Lucrezia Tornabuoni seemed to step up to that role when she wrote to the son of the architect Niccolò Michelozzi in October of 1473 and discussed his service to the commune. She addressed him as a prudent man and chancellor. His virtue made him best able to serve the state and he was recognized by Lucrezia as a great friend of the state, an “*amico optimo Florenzie*.”⁶⁷⁴ His service, like her service, did not go unrecognized.

Far from being harmonious, as idealized by Alberti, Florence was a city plagued by complex battles of factionalism, and the Medici would come to control rival families.⁶⁷⁵ For the ruling families of Florence, a just city was one that was firmly under their control and influence. They were the hands offstage controlling the marionette of the republic.⁶⁷⁶ In Florence, virtue had to be used to combat the divisions caused by the

⁶⁷² James Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace in Florence: Magnificence and Splendour in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

⁶⁷³ MAP, LXXXV, 33.

⁶⁷⁴ BNCF, G.C., 29, 36, n.1. BNCF, G.C. 36 n. 2. Tornabuoni, *Lettere*, 76-7, 82-3.

⁶⁷⁵ Dale Kent, *The Rise of the Medici: Faction in Florence 1426-1443* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁶⁷⁶ While studies of Florence in recent decades have focused on factionalism amongst families vying for power, studies of Venice have instead asserted that the lack of such obvious factionalism in this notoriously stable republic has less to do with the fact that Venetian nobles were more virtuous or civic-minded than Florentines, but rather that their political system discouraged the formation of factions.

factional reality in the political arena.⁶⁷⁷ Women of an elite social standing were no strangers to factionalism. Alessandra Strozzi was quick to note the injustice of her family's exile at the hands of the Medici and the damage that this could do to her kin. She was thankful that "even here [in Florence] there are very few better off than you are, which is a miracle" in "the burden of exile" which was deemed by Strozzi to be an unjust sentence.⁶⁷⁸

Justice on the public stage was interlaced with displays of civic ritual in Renaissance Florence. These rituals were the subject of historian Richard Trexler's influential study *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*.⁶⁷⁹ He explored the behavior of the Florentine people as actors in a complicated social drama that played out in private as well as in public in the revolution from republic to *principato*. How did one define, much less seek, justice in this environment in the midst of factional divides?

There is no synthesis yet of the different levels of the urban experience, but my contribution to this idea of civic virtues that men and women of the elite class of Florence shared does give a sense of hegemony to the mentalities of the elite class, rather than focus on factionalism. Factionalism threatened their control and Florence's ability to remain self-ruling. In 1485 the "chain map of Florence" emphasized the civic structures in the city, and those with importance in the identity of the city. Examples of this are the exaggerated Duomo and Palazzo Vecchio. The Medici had the David placed in front of the Palazzo Vecchio and orchestrated the completion of the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore so both of these locations emphasized family "gifts" to both the political and religious focal centers in the city. What was not shown in the painting was the Bargello where the Podestà, the jailer, lived. Justice was better served through fairness than laws and the gallows, or at least it was more civically minded to display it this way.

An essential pathway to the coveted harmonious city, which these merchants sought so that they could better conduct their business, was the use of diplomacy.

⁶⁷⁷ Robert Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1980).

⁶⁷⁸ Gregory, 187.

⁶⁷⁹ Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press Inc., 1980).

Lorenzo il Magnifico partially earned this title of magnificence based on his successful “*politica dell’ equilibrium.*” Guicciardini gave Lorenzo praise for his ability to be “*ago della bilancia,*” the needle on the scale. This gave Lorenzo, who we know saw his mother as an influential confidant, the ability to balance the scales of Italian politics at the end of the fifteenth century and bring Florence into its apex of prosperity.⁶⁸⁰

Leadership

Justice was often ascribed to the wise decisions of leaders. There are female leaders from the Renaissance era who were striking examples of powerful monarchs. Elizabeth I ruled England for a noteworthy 45 years, during which she ushered in the English Renaissance and established a trans-Atlantic empire.⁶⁸¹ Although quite accomplished, in order to deal with society’s expectations of her behavior as a woman, she refused to marry and rather focused on the image of the “virgin queen” who was “married” to England. Whether this was an expression of freedom of choice or decided because of a political agenda, she boldly subverted patriarchal expectations.⁶⁸² Women in the Florentine republic did not hold office or rule outright, like Elizabeth did, but they did exert a civic influence regardless. They gave direct advice to sons and it seemed to have encouraged leadership in the city to make key decisions, such as when Lorenzo de Medici took his mother’s advice and married Clarice Orsini of Rome connecting the two powerful families and their cities. Granted, this was only “advice,” but these were not small matters. The difficulties that women had seeking outright power seemed to

⁶⁸⁰ *Storia d’Italia* can be found in Francesco Guicciardini *Opere*, vol. II, ed. Emanuella Scarano (Torino: Unione Tipografico Editrice Torinese, 1981), 89. He had a vision of an alliance between the pope, Florence, Milan, Venice, and the Holy Roman Emperor.

⁶⁸¹ Although having a queen was a catalyst for theoretical discussion, it did not mean that women in England enjoyed a higher status because they had a female ruler. For a discussion of this see Carol Levin and Jeanie Watson, ed., *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 165-251.

⁶⁸² For discussions of her “subservience” see Lena Cowen Orlin, “The Fictional Families of Elizabeth I,” in *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women*, ed. Carole Levin and Patricia Ann Sullivan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

outweigh the triumphs.⁶⁸³ This was not the case for the quietly successful women we find in elite Florentine circles. When one digs under the veneer that seems to suggest that their decisions were confined to a domestic world, one finds a great deal of influence on Florence's leaders. In *Gender, Power, and Privilege* the discussion centers on how power and privilege was distributed and brokered by women and men in early modern Europe.⁶⁸⁴ The sociological exploration in this study concludes that a woman could never simply be a leader, she was always a "woman." Gender permeated every aspect of public and private life in fifteenth-century Italy, unless you presented a "challenge" that would overcome those social norms. Lucrezia de' Medici remained behind the scenes and played a less obvious role in politics than the role of her great-granddaughter Catherine de' Medici, Queen of France. But what seemed on a surface level to be just Lucrezia's "motherly advice" resonated in seminal decisions of the ruling class that had a significant political impact.

The influence that women had in court life was even more apparent. One can consider papal daughters like Felice della Rovere (married to Gian Giordano Orsini) as women of both privilege and wealth. Rovere managed their properties in her husband's absence as well as negotiating with Venice and the queen of France for her father. Lucrezia Borgia, who sought a humanist education, was a devoted patron of the arts. Castiglione praised her as the "only modern example of a noblewoman prepared to die to defend her honor."⁶⁸⁵ The rule of these women ensured the stability and success of their courts.

In the case of these politically powerful women, they were often only "powerful" and virtuous as long as they were chaste. When Boccaccio discussed the achievement of *claritas* (virtue), he noted that the chastity of a woman's body was a metaphor for the

⁶⁸³ Carole Levin, *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 1-14.

⁶⁸⁴ Penny Richards and Jessica Munns, *Gender, Power, and Privilege in Early Modern Europe* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2003).

⁶⁸⁵ Quoted in Caroline Murphy, *The Pope's Daughter: The Extraordinary Life of Felice della Rovere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 64.

state, which remained free as long as chastity remained.⁶⁸⁶ His unqualified praise centered on women who remained chaste in the interest of their husbands and sons. The virtuous suicide of Lucretia (who was protecting both the honor of her husband and herself) and Dido were again admired rather than being deemed sinful.⁶⁸⁷ Secular virtue had met Christian virtues head on here if suicide was no longer viewed as a dangerous sin.

The role of leadership that women had in the homes of the Florentine elite was not on such a grand and visible scale, but it was often the norm, and, if not seen outwardly as a duty, it was not something that required an apology. In her letters to her husband, Margherita Datini often stated that she would move ahead with household needs rather than waiting on his instructions. She wrote that firewood would be carried inside while the wool was drying by help that would “come over there whether you write or not and he will bring the things that seem necessary to us.”⁶⁸⁸ These were necessary because she deemed them to be important to the well-ordered running of the household. Having taken on a leadership role in the household, she did not wait for his answer. As was consistent with views at the time, she went on to say about other women that “since women have little judgment, those with more brains should be tolerant.”⁶⁸⁹ This seemed to be more of a plea to have her husband monitor his stress and over involvement in domestic matters than anything else. She had things under control and she was irritated with him as a “man who worries about every little thing.”⁶⁹⁰ She got to the point when she exclaimed “from now on I refuse to write to you about every little thing that happens here but, if I am not mistaken, in one of your letters that I received you told me to write to you about what was going on here, and so I did, thinking I was doing the right thing.”⁶⁹¹ Margherita often ended her letters with a line about how busy she was. That was why she

⁶⁸⁶ Levin, *Ambiguous Realities*, 35-6.

⁶⁸⁷ Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages, Volume One: Violent Against Themselves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁶⁸⁸ Datini, *Lettere*, cod. 1401863.

⁶⁸⁹ Datini, *Lettere*, cod. 140190 and 141793.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid.

closed her note unapologetically in such haste due to her well-justified managerial position in the household. She hesitated to leave “the household here to its own devices” since “one can’t follow one’s desires when others do things that would perhaps end in disaster considering how young the servants and employees I have here are.”⁶⁹² The functionality of the household was directly dependent on her leadership role.

The letters of Margherita Datini have often been discussed by modern scholars for their tedious obsession with household details, ranging from transporting wine to the problems of raising pigeons.⁶⁹³ These are managerial notes used to confirm her abilities to her distant husband even though she was obviously irritated by his extended absence. She wrote that she was counting the days since Easter (his promised return date) followed by an angry “you would be better off never to mention your return if you don’t come soon, and you would do me the greatest favor, more by sparing me the lame excuses than anything else.”⁶⁹⁴ Margherita was far from docile in this managerial role. This active role was praised in Alberti’s *Della Famiglia* in his long discussion on the duties of a wife. This discussion was not included in chapter two, which was dedicated to the topic of marriage, but in book III which is centered on the theme of economic organization in the household.⁶⁹⁵ By looking at Datini’s letters, it is clear that the extent of her agency was not only tolerated, but expected.

Legal Ramifications

Justice and legal institutions in a city were inextricably linked. The legal history of Florence has been little studied except in the work of Thomas Kuehn.⁶⁹⁶ Martines’ study of lawyers in Florence offered strong evidence for the idea that few Florentines might receive what we would call justice. “Equal rights” in the eyes of the law was an

⁶⁹² Datini, *Lettere*, cod. 1401936 and 1401865.

⁶⁹³ Datini, *Lettere*, cod. 1401913.

⁶⁹⁴ Datini, *Lettere*, cod. 1401913.

⁶⁹⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *I Libri della Famiglia*, ed. Ruggiero Romano and Alberto Tenenti (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1960).

⁶⁹⁶ Most recently Kuehn has published works delving into the subject of repudiation and inheritance in Florence and the reputation of women. Thomas Kuehn, *Heirs, Kin, and Creditors in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 126-30.

Enlightenment construct, centuries away from being discussed. He concluded that between 1390 and 1530, there were no more 4,000 Florentines who could boast of having full-fledged political rights at any one time. In fact the numbers often were closer to 2,500 men. The inner oligarchy consisted of less than 700 men from the city's most powerful families.⁶⁹⁷ This would certainly attest to rule by the "few."

It was in the laws of Florence that the patriarchy was most apparent. Men and women did not have the same rights, in the sense of sharing a legal standard. There are extreme cases of bad treatment that women were subjected to in which they benefited from the few legal recourses that existed in the justice system. One such striking example is a case in which a daughter was returned to her father's house due to physical abuse at the hands of her husband.

To the lord priors of the city of Florence with reverence and tears this petition is presented by Monna Nicolosa widow of Giovanni di Ventura ... Duccio di Agostino di Duccio de'Benegli took as his wife Monna Madelena, daughter of Giovanni (di Ventura) ... Duccio beat her and maltreated her unmercifully and wished to kill her without any cause. Giovanni was given a license by the priors to bring her home and Duccio had to provide food each year. Duccio developed an assassination plot against Giovanni and they stabbed him to death and they are using their power to forbid his land from being farmed, holding the daughter's dowry and effectively starving the family.⁶⁹⁸

In this particular case it is evident that Duccio committed crimes against both his wife and her natal family, in particular her father. Action was taken to protect the woman Nicolosa before Duccio violated the rights of any male member of the family. The Florentine legal system was interested in avoiding vendetta, such as the violence that erupted between these two families.

In an early modern society filled with violent crime, the argument presented in this case is that social justice would be best served by the state. The vendetta system and

⁶⁹⁷ Lauro Martines, *Lawyers and Statecraft in Renaissance Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 81-509. He provides an appendix listing lawyers in Florence from 1380-1530, including those that were from old families, new men, outsiders, and those who were not in the guild and did not practice.

⁶⁹⁸ Brucker, *Society*, 69-70.

unpunished acts of violence were troubling to the Florentines. Such violent behavior caused hostility and resentment toward the perpetrator by the community and thus harmony in the city would be compromised.⁶⁹⁹ Alessandra Strozzi lamented an episode during which peace in Florence was forfeited by the Medici, who were seeking revenge on those that threatened their hold on the city after the death of Piero de' Medici (December 2, 1469). Not only was Bernardo Nardi, an anti-Medicean exile, killed, but she focuses on all the confusion that this episode caused: "people running about the streets ... [they] carried all the bread they could find ... all the people have been terrified, and it seems a very dreadful thing with so many people dead and tortured."⁷⁰⁰ She, like the men who sought to overcome the vendetta system, focused on the chaos and harm done to the larger city.

Laws reflected the desire for harmony in the community.⁷⁰¹ Yes, allegiance to the family as the primary social unit was a cornerstone of Renaissance identity, but so was being a member of the commune. This community identity was displayed with great pomp and circumstance amidst the huge crowds that would gather to celebrate the feast day of Saint John the Baptist, the patron saint of the city.⁷⁰² Subject cities and the *contado* also made offerings to the celebration. Offerings were described as "an infinite number of large wax candles, some weighing 100 pounds."⁷⁰³ Women were noted to be a part of this crowd as well as men. Rich and poor alike were invited on this day to take part in the civic spirit. Harmony was the ideal of a "just" community and on this day Florence was stylized as a community open to all. Hegemony was seen as so essential that even confraternities, when they were seen as threatening the civic spirit by causing divisions and strife, were dissolved in the interest of the larger order.⁷⁰⁴

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 123-46.

⁷⁰⁰ Gregory, 217-9.

⁷⁰¹ Tomas Kuehn, *Law, Family and Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁷⁰² Brucker, *Society*, 75-8.

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴ The Benegli family is an example of one which was dissolved in the conflict. Ibid., 83.

The archives of Florence hold ample evidence to suggest that this city was not governed based on a system of “blind justice.” Successful pleas of insanity and poverty diminished one’s responsibility for committing a crime. There were also successful pleas to evade the charge of adultery, and a juvenile (age 24) who committed robbery because his parents and sisters were severely impoverished was not punished with a harsh sentence.⁷⁰⁵ Such cases were judged on an individual basis and thus justice, as we have seen it, remained dependent on both class and circumstance.

Families who had a history of good behavior in the republic received special consideration. Justice is affected by degrees of privilege.⁷⁰⁶ In the case of Chiovo di Gherardino, Machiavelli presented a case to the lord priors of Florence on behalf of Chiovo’s father and mother. The youth had committed robbery and a key to the argument supporting his case was that “moreover, Chiovo should receive some consideration for the many worthy deeds which his Machiavelli ancestors have performed on behalf of the Commune.” In fact Chiovo, whose family had promoted social harmony in the past, was only forced to pay a fine and, because of his status, was not sentenced to death or mutilation for his crimes.⁷⁰⁷

Cicero, who had an intense influence on Renaissance humanists, said firmly that “the origin of Justice is to be found in Law.”⁷⁰⁸ Lawyers in Florence played a central role in the city’s political institutions and diplomacy since the twelfth century.⁷⁰⁹ While no one would argue any sense of legal equality for even the most elite Florentine women, Lucrezia’s position afforded her the opportunity to write to the *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia* of San Gimignano in 1468.⁷¹⁰ Her tone was one of great respect as she asked for advice

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., 170-8.

⁷⁰⁶ This, of course, is not a distinctly Renaissance construct. The earliest codified laws, most notoriously Hammurabi’s, speak of social stratification affecting crime and punishment. Hammurabi, *Hammurabi’s Laws*, trans. Mervyn Edwin and John Richardson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

⁷⁰⁷ Quoted in Brucker, *Society*, 177-178.

⁷⁰⁸ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De re Publica, De Legibus*, trans. Clinton W. Keyes. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), vol. I, 19.

⁷⁰⁹ For a study of the contributions of lawyers to Florentine statecraft see Martines, *Lawyers and Statecraft in Renaissance Florence*.

⁷¹⁰ Tornabuoni, *Lettere*, 70.

as well as seeking a meeting with this “*spectabiles viri tanquam frates honorandi.*” She had respect for the power of the office because it was an office like this which preserved the calm of the city. Yet she can, in her role as a woman, converse rather freely with this powerful official in order to seek what she feels is only “fair” for her family.⁷¹¹

An Economic Balance

The topic of the robust fifteenth-century Florentine economy has fueled much discussion amongst historians. Economic historian Richard Goldthwaite focused on the city’s booming economy, but critics such as social historian Gene Brucker have challenged this rosy view.⁷¹² The range of economic studies helps to paint a picture of extremes of both wealth and poverty. This includes Kent’s focus on individual families in *Household and Lineage in Renaissance Florence: The Family Life of the Capponi, Ginor, and Rucellai*, and Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber’s statistical analysis of the larger city based on the Catasto of 1427. Regardless of whether economic harmony was realized, it was an adamant desire of the elite Florentines that their role in the economics of the city serve to promote their economic interests and the stability of the larger Florentine economy. This ran parallel to fear that they would be judged, in a secular and sacred context, for their economic successes.

Fifteenth-century complaints about taxes written by Florentines of means abound. Domenico Giugni wrote to Francesco Datini in 1401 saying that he recognized that Datini had not returned to Florence to avoid paying a heavy tax burden, but Giugni was hopeful that measures were being taken to reduce expenditures and equalize the tax burden so that “everyone plays their proper share” in support of the commune. Giugni asked that Datini “not complain.”⁷¹³ High taxes worried Florentine men and women but,

⁷¹¹ The Notarile Ante Cosimiano archive at the Archivio di Stato in Florence contains a significant number of legal records about women and their children dated from both the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. *Notarile Ante Cosimiano C/705 (A/692)* shows an increase in notarial records during the sixteenth century, but this is not an abrupt change from the records of the fifteenth that are increasingly moving to contain more women.

⁷¹² Gene Brucker, “Review of Richard Goldthwaite’s *The Building of Renaissance Florence*,” *Journal of Modern History* 53 (1981): 692-4.

⁷¹³ Brucker, *Society*, 83.

according to Giugni, were necessary for the survival of the commune. Alessandra Strozzi felt the burden of taxes when she said “the Commune is ruining me as they have already imposed this new tax,” but yet she goes on to describe how it will be paid in due time.⁷¹⁴ This is an excellent example of knowing one’s position in society and following both its privileges, and in this case, its burden for the sake of civic duty.

Petrarch concluded in *Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, when discussing the topic of usury, that one who is a usurer will “always be wretched, always covetous, and always destitute.”⁷¹⁵ Fifteenth-century humanism would move away from this view. Men and women talked about profit and financial gains because the merchants and bankers thrived on financial gain. Usury became a morally gray area for this new class of elite, non-aristocratic Florentines. They did not view economic gain as sinful, but rather quite justified based not only on their personal success but how that success helped the city thrive.

While some merchants like Lapo Mazzei (born in 1350, Mazzei was the legal counsel of the successful merchant Francesco Datini) were instructed as children, “save your soul and don’t pay attention to anything else,” it is apparent that those influenced a generation later by humanism did focus on worldly successes.⁷¹⁶ In one of her longest letters, Alessandra Strozzi discussed in detail the financial woes of two married farmers living on Strozzi land and how their inability to handle money had thrown them into a horrible financial situation.⁷¹⁷ Position in this society and social harmony were best served by financial success.

The wives of merchants were interested in the money matters of their families just as their husbands were. Margherita Datini reminded her husband “Francesco ... it seems to me that you forget about a good deal of money owed to you.”⁷¹⁸ Not only was this a

⁷¹⁴ Gregory, 66-7.

⁷¹⁵ Petrarch, *Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul: A Modern English Translation of De remedies utriusque Fortune*, trans. Conrad H. Rawski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 171.

⁷¹⁶ Lapo Mazzei, *Lettere di un Notaro a un Marcante del Secolo XIV: con altre Lettere e Documenti*, ed. Cesare Guasti (Firenze: Successori Le Monnier, 1880).

⁷¹⁷ Gregory, 195-203.

⁷¹⁸ Datini, *Lettere*, Codice 1401863 Busta 1089.

reminder of money that should be coming in, but she adds another point of micromanagement that she thinks it is very sensible not to ruin someone as these are not the acts of a good friend. This is a good illustration that women, influenced by humanism, saw a “gray” area between moral responsibility and a focus on economic advancement.

Economic justice was a topic that weighed heavily on the mind of the moralist Savonarola. He told the Florentines (in sermon XIII) that a good government must create a well-regulated city. He argued that those who govern make sure that taxes are paid throughout the city and its dominions, and are imposed on goods justly and not arbitrarily, as had sometimes been done, so that men could exert themselves for the universal good. And furthermore, take care that those taxes paid on goods may be moderate so that taxes may not be more than income. He attacks excessive dowries (over 500 ducats) and demands that the *Monte* (public debt) be preserved.⁷¹⁹ He was reactionary and trying to move the Florentines away from focusing on the economic gain that Datini discusses above. More than just a call to reconsider morality, this was about economic justice and doing what was “right” based on secular and sacred standards of behavior.

Savonarola was not the only one in Florence to find fault with economic excesses and the social pressures that they caused. Women’s role in this society, according to a deliberation amongst the *signori*, was that they were “created to replenish this free city, and to live chastely in matrimony.” Due to the burden of women’s expensive ornamentation, men were avoiding marriage. Thus it was women who were fined for breaking sumptuary laws.⁷²⁰ This behavior was seen to threaten the social harmony of the city precisely because it threatened the institution of marriage, which was so fundamental to the position that the merchant class in this society had successfully attained in the span of a few generations. In a sense, marriage was a fundamental tool in

⁷¹⁹ Girolamo Savonarola, *Selected Writings of Savonarola: Religion and Politics, 1490-1498*, trans. Anne Borelli (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 159-60.

⁷²⁰ Brucker, *Society*, 181-3. This work contains four examples of those found guilty of these crimes.

the “just” ascent of the Medici to power. By marrying into aristocratic families, they had legitimized themselves as just rulers.

When discussing the agency of women in the economic sphere, it is useful to note that women did have some control over the first name choice and transmission of names among elite Brescian families. So there were possibilities in northern Italy for women to transmit their names to posterity and their dowries to their daughters.⁷²¹ Brescian families meticulously planned to have the first-born son be the keeper of the family’s heritage by entering into a marriage decided by his father and father-in-law. Life for other sons and daughters was determined by the father to be one of marriage or service to the church. The sources note that for second sons marriage was not favored, and that it was fathers that often decided the fate of boys and girls, but looking at women like Tornabuoni and Strozzi, though, it is evident that mothers could also have a great deal of agency and that for them marriage was the preferred choice. This stood in contrast to patriarchal assumptions in an aristocratic society that women were simply pawns used to marry the entire kin into a useful socioeconomic situation.

In situations where women served as the managers of property in Florence, they were as liable to repay debts as their brothers and husbands.⁷²² Alessandra certainly had knowledge of finances as she wrote to her exiled son Lorenzo when his uncle Jacopo di Leonardo Strozzi died. She firmly directed that

if he has not left you anything, take my advice and don’t accept anything offered and if he has left you in charge you should not refuse to do it. Things to do with inheritance are very risky and can lead to a lot of trouble and aggravation and we don’t want to get involved in that. Above all make sure you do not let yourself become legally liable for anything or to anyone, no matter who wants it, because you know if you accept liability you do so personally. Do the clever thing where this is concerned and let this warning be enough.⁷²³

⁷²¹ Marriage patterns of sons and daughters is discussed in Marello Zane, “The Importance of a Name”, in *Gender, Power, and Privilege in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Penny Richards and Jessica Munns (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2003), 69-70.

⁷²² Thomas Kuehn, *Heirs, Kin, and Creditors in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 128.

⁷²³ Strozzi, *Selected Letters*, 100-1.

Strozzi was a woman who had direct experience disputing with siblings and nephews over control over her brother's estate. Even though she lost the estate, she continued to take it upon herself to give her sons financial advice.⁷²⁴ Alessandra Strozzi cautioned her son to do the right thing. Her concern was for his reputation (*buona fama*) and his soul. A combination of a secular legacy and Christian desires of eternity were combined to formulate her notions of "right" and the best possible advice considered both.

Conclusions

The late fifteenth-century attack on the Medici reflected a fear that they were tyrants who had unjustly attacked the social order in the city and taken control of the government; this was the blackest crime of all to those who supported the republic.⁷²⁵ Savonarola built a fiery case against them in his *Treatise on the Government of Florence*. He lamented that "the tyrant does not leave justice in the hands of ordinary judges in order to favor and to kill or abase whomever he pleases. He usurps funds of the community [Lorenzo borrowed from the *monte di doti*] and discovers new ways to burden and oppress them to pile up money from which he supplied his satellites and with it he also puts in his pay princes and military leaders, at times when they are of no use to the community, to give them some income and make them his allies."⁷²⁶ A tyrant manipulated not only verdicts of justice, but also the laws themselves. "All good laws he cunningly seeks to corrupt because they are contrary to his unjust government and he constantly makes new laws to suit his own aims."⁷²⁷ Savonarola summed up tyranny with an explanation of the chaos that ensues without justice. "In short, nothing is stable under a tyrant, because he rules everything in accordance with his will, which is directed not by reason but rather by passion, every citizen under him hangs by the thread of his pride, every asset is vulnerable to his avarice, all the chastity and modesty of women are

⁷²⁴ Kuehn, *Heirs*, 100

⁷²⁵ Cicero, *Selected Works*, trans. Michael Grant (New York: Penguin, 1963).

⁷²⁶ Girolamo Savonarola, *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola: Religion and Politics 1490-1498*, trans. Anne Borelli (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 191.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, 192.

endangered by his lustfulness.”⁷²⁸ The entire community, men and women, would be threatened and suffer because of these unjust actions.

The ruling class of Florence had in fact embraced the idea of creating a harmonious city but, by the end of the fifteenth century, Savonarola and his followers argued that moving away from Christian morality in the interest of classical ideals had backfired and was actually serving to destroy the city. “If tyranny is the worst form of government for every city and province then it seems to me that this must be especially true for the city of Florence ... Christians ought to frame their governments, both particular and universal, in such a way that this good Christian living is its principal result, above all else. No citizen should become excessively rich ... these citizens make themselves tyrants.”⁷²⁹ This is quite unlike the praise we have seen that humanists might give to their lives and accomplishments here on earth. Savonarola was instead focusing on divine judgment.⁷³⁰

While we have seen the successful involvement of elite women in the pursuit of “justice” for their kin, their success stories are very different from the failures of professed female humanists who tried to find social space in which they were recognized as scholars. The brief emergence of female humanist authors in fifteenth-century Italy was silenced because of the anxiety this group of female authors caused by threatening the social order.⁷³¹ There were upwards of 30 identifiable female humanists in quattrocento Italy, whose unsuccessful battles to find a place in society have been documented by King and Rabil.⁷³² A woman writing remained a point of contention in Italy, so much so that the theme of even Mary, the most venerated woman of the Middle

⁷²⁸ Ibid., 193.

⁷²⁹ Ibid., 196-7

⁷³⁰ These themes can also be seen in the publications of a contemporary cardinal. Dominicus Capranica, *Arte del ben Morire cioe Ingratia di Dio* (Florence: Bartolommeo di Libri, 150?).

⁷³¹ Susan Schibanoff, “Botticelli’s *Madonna del Magnificat*: Constructing the Woman Writer in Early Humanist Italy,” *PMLA* Vol. 109, No. 2 (March 1994): 190.

⁷³² Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr., ed., *Her Immaculate Hand: Selected Works by and about the Women Humanists of Quattrocento Italy* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1983).

Ages, writing was the subject matter of little art in the West.⁷³³ Although the virgin was often shown reading, she was very rarely depicted writing. This may serve to illustrate an anxiety in medieval and early modern Europe about learned women, even as humanism revisited Plato and his adamant support of education. This support was not applied to women. The female humanists were silenced in the name of justice as women who were not typical of what a woman was at all.⁷³⁴ Those who wrote vernacular letters to relatives (male and female) and/or religious texts were not silenced as anomalies of the social order. In fact we have seen ample evidence of their complex written legacy here. They were unlike Cassandra Fedele, who adorned herself in the humanist mantel and was “as rare, as new, as if violets took root amid ice, roses in snow, or lilies in ice.”⁷³⁵ The harsh environment meant that only the most exceptional and steadfast female humanists could find roots for a brief moment. This was unlike the activity of Tornabuoni and Strozzi that lasted the entirety of their adult lives. Tornabuoni and Strozzi displayed their attainment of civic engagement and virtue, which female humanists like Cereta only aspired to through words that would eventually be silenced because they were labeled by their contemporaries as members of an impossible “third-sex.”⁷³⁶ As we have seen, few written praises of women did not utilize the “extraordinary women theory.”⁷³⁷ Supposed praise for Isotta Nogarola suggested that if she achieved her goal as a humanist, she would cease to be a woman and instead become a man.⁷³⁸ Under cruel verbal bombardment that questioned her chastity and forced her into seclusion in 1438, she gave up her quest to be a humanist. There was no room in this society for adult female humanists once they were no longer amusing child prodigies. Joan Kelly, Anthony

⁷³³ A notable exception would be Sandro Botticelli, *Madonna the Magnificent*, tempera on panel, 1481, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

⁷³⁴ An anonymous satire circulated in Venice and Verona (signed by “Pliny”) attacked the morality of Venetian women.

⁷³⁵ King, *Her Immaculate Hand*, 127.

⁷³⁶ Margaret L. King, “Book Lined Cells: Women and Humanism in the Early Italian Renaissance,” in *Beyond their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. Patricia H. Labalme (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 75.

⁷³⁷ Sabadino’s work in praise of *Gynevera Sforza di Bentivogli* is a notable exception, *The Gynevera* celebrates women who display womanly traits.

⁷³⁸ King, *Immaculate*.

Grafton and Lisa Jardine note that women were attracted to humanism, but found no space in the movement due to its focus on training for civic engagement. The activities of elite women of Florence, however, have not been clearly connected to the humanist tradition that drove their actions. The women who sought to be engaged as active humanists in the urban centers of northern Italy were from aristocracy, not from the merchant families like the Medici that ran the city of Florence. These merchant women, via their actions, made the idealism of civic humanism a reality in their lives and not just an ideal to aspire to. These women, like Bruni, supported the notion that classical studies were “worthy to be pursued by men and women alike.”⁷³⁹

What we have focused on here is to making these elite women visible for their active engagement in the humanist culture. Foreign dignitaries who visited Florence often noted that widows and young ladies “delighted the eyes of visitors as they entered the city, for there were so many and of such excellent beauty that all eyes and hearts were captivated.”⁷⁴⁰ The merchant women of privilege who followed these models were in a situation that did not look anything like being jailed or sequestered. They were influenced by and influential on Florentine civic humanism due to the influence they had on their sons, husbands, and brothers. Petrarch, in his eulogistic oration about his mother, returned to her virtue and her influence on his life while consoling a prominent ecclesiastic who had lost his own mother.⁷⁴¹ He makes it clear that mothers certainly transmitted humanist culture by transferring knowledge of cultural norms to children in their formative years, and yet this role has been typically marginalized. We have seen that fundamental decisions such as marriage arrangements, apprenticeships, and business transactions were often inextricably linked to the astute advice of a mother or wife who was not breaching social norms, but rather embracing civic humanism.

⁷³⁹ W.H. Woodward, ed., *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 119-133.

⁷⁴⁰ Judith Bryce, “Performing for Strangers: Women, Dance and Music in Quattrocento Florence,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 54 (2001): 1074-1107.

⁷⁴¹ Giuseppe Odoardo Corazzini, *La Madre di Francesco Petrarca: Lettura fatta nell’Adunanza della Società Colombaria del di 29, Novembre 1891* (Firenze: Coi Tipi di M. Cellini, 1892), 297-317. This is also mentioned in Margaret L. King, *Humanism, Venice, and Women: Essays on the Italian Renaissance* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 230-1.

V. Fortitude

In this exploration of how the *studia humanitatis* influenced the behavior of both men and women, fortitude is the final cardinal virtue that we have yet to connect to women's civic identity in Renaissance Florence.⁷⁴² A very basic example of fortitude was a kin's strength in numbers. In the Catasto of 1427 it is clear that nuclear families lived in the same sections of the city, forming communities inside of neighborhoods and making strong social webs to protect their interests. Of the 30 entries for Medici families, only one family did not live in the San Giovanni quarter of the city. And of the 54 Strozzi households, 48 of them lived in the Santa Maria Novella quarter.⁷⁴³ With such solidarity came strength. Proximity allowed these kin to better preserve their members in a support network. Fortitude was, in part, the strength to sustain virtue in times of danger and difficulty.

The Hellenistic philosophers defined fortitude (along with temperance, prudence, and justice), as a larger collection of virtues applicable to all people seeking to live a moral life. As with the other virtues, fortitude was explicitly embraced by patrician women as well as men in Renaissance Florence. Both men and women sought to prosper here on earth as individuals and to promote the success of kinship groups as well as to be recognized in eternity for attaining this virtue. The civic virtues in fifteenth-century Florence had returned to a position of political significance to the extent that contemporary interest rivaled the prominence these virtues had when they were defined in the fifth century B.C. The image of fortitude was prominent in spaces that had both religious and civic significance, such as the baptistery in Florence, the campanile, and the tabernacles of San Michele. This image also adorned the panels painted by Antonio del Pollaiuolo (1429-1498) and Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) for the *mercanzia*

⁷⁴² Humanism was defined as an educational and social program by Paul Oskar Kristeller and Michael Mooney, *Renaissance Thought and its Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

⁷⁴³ Archivio di Stato di Firenze: Indice delle Famiglie del Catasto (1427-1429).

(marketplace), and appeared as a prominent theme in the *loggia lanzi*.⁷⁴⁴ This intertwining of the secular and the sacred would remain a key to understanding the significance of virtue to both the religious and civic identity of the fifteenth-century Florentines.

Recognition of women's ability to act with fortitude was not prominent in the Hellenic tradition. As usual the stark reality that the polis, especially Athens, was a man's world asserts itself here.⁷⁴⁵ While Plato said that women should become like men (including in service to the army), this prescriptive concept was not an illustration of the realities of daily life. It was instead Plato's attempt to illustrate the attainment of the perfect state that had not yet been achieved. Thus such suggestions of equality were only an ideal. This view would be challenged by a more pragmatic Aristotle who said that although women had virtue, men were dominant and that "neither the temperance, nor the courage, nor the justice of man and woman are the same ... men have ruling courage."⁷⁴⁶ As we have seen with the other virtues, this view seems to have been practical as it fit into the political reality, but did not reflect an exclusive interpretation of this virtue as a masculine trait. Aristotle also contributed the idea that virtue had to be chosen. For example, bravery in battle that was owed to passion, coercion, or blindness to danger was viewed as a flawed virtue. According to Aristotle, a brave man "ought to be brave not because he is coerced but because bravery is beautiful."⁷⁴⁷ Acting with strength and clarity in times of adversity would be a motivation that men and women of Renaissance Florence would discuss often.

⁷⁴⁴ This display was not limited to Florence. The Venetians, for example, adorned the capitals of the columns of the doges' palace with the seven virtues.

⁷⁴⁵ While it does not suggest equality between men and women in the city-states, an exhibit at The Onassis Institute gathered examples from material culture to illustrate how this society did "worship women" as priestesses, etc. Nikos E. Kaltsas and H.A. Shapiro, *Worshipping Women: Ritual and Reality in Classical Athens* (New York: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation in Collaboration with the National Archaeological Museum, Athens, 2008).

⁷⁴⁶ Philip A. Stadter, *Plutarch's Historical Methods: An Analysis of the Mulierum Virtutes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 4.

⁷⁴⁷ Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition From Medieval to Modern Thought*, Vol. One (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 27.

Latter Stoics (of the first and second centuries C.E.), such as Hierocles Musonius Rufus and Plutarch, would write that women were quite capable of being courageous (i.e. displaying fortitude) when they were educated.⁷⁴⁸ Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406) was given much credit for introducing this Greek learning, including Plutarch's *Lives*, to Renaissance Florence.⁷⁴⁹ Thus the possibility of women displaying fortitude was not a new or even a foreign concept to Renaissance humanists who had access to and interest in this rhetoric. In Plutarch's *Lives*, none of the books are explicitly devoted to the virtues of female lives, but there are many striking examples of women being praised for having the utmost virtue, including Cornelia Gracchi (the mother of Gaius and Tiberius).⁷⁵⁰ In *Moralia*, Plutarch devoted book three to the bravery and courage of women in many ancient civilizations (including those of the Etruscans, Trojans, Greeks, and Romans).⁷⁵¹

What were these concepts of strength and courage that these women attained? "Fortitude" came from the Latin *fortis* which referred to strength of mind and body that allowed one to bear pain and face adversity with perseverance via reason, intellect, and education. Fortitude was seen as allowing one to remain focused and active; according to Leonardo Bruni, and "the brave man (in the true sense of the word), armed with a great and unconquerable spirit, relies on himself alone and is never frightened by the mischances of humankind or the threats of fortune."⁷⁵² This steadfast focus was one that would surely benefit the merchant and banking families who were active in the Florentine Republic. They needed to have foresight to navigate the economic, political, and social ebbs and flows of the commercial city. On the lid of a wooden box from the time filled with personal items connected with betrothal, the lid reads in bold gothic script

⁷⁴⁸ Stadter, 3-5; Ronald G. Witt, *Italian Humanism and Medieval Rhetoric* (England: Ashgate, 2001), 335-46.

⁷⁴⁹ Witt, *Italian Humanism*, 343-4.

⁷⁵⁰ Plutarch, *Lives*, Vol. XI ed. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 145-240.

⁷⁵¹ Plutarch, *Moralia*, Vol. III, ed. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 471-581.

⁷⁵² Leonardo Bruni, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*, ed. by Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, and David Thompson (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies in conjunction with the Renaissance Society of America, 1987), 272.

ONESSTA FA BELLA DONNA or “integrity makes a beautiful woman.”⁷⁵³ In both prosperous and difficult times, strength of character was a focus of praise for Renaissance brides.

Renaissance Florentines had at times a seemingly obsessive search for rhetoric to support active virtue. It is not surprising then that Cicero’s ranking of the cardinal virtues became a topos of much discussion among humanists. A hallmark of Renaissance interest in classical rhetoric was marked by their obedience of Petrarch’s classic request for scholars to close Aristotle and open Cicero. This clear shift in the intellectual climate was not nearly such a clean break from the scholastic tradition as “closing” Aristotle, but Cicero would exert much influence over the ranking and significance of fortitude on humanist culture.⁷⁵⁴ Cicero defined fortitude as showing courage in the face of toil and danger.⁷⁵⁵ We saw in the previous chapter that the humanist Palmieri ranked the virtues, making *iustitia* the highest again, as Cicero had, because it was community oriented.⁷⁵⁶ However, not all humanists followed this model. Unlike Cicero, many men and women during the Renaissance were to take a particular interest in *fortitudo*. Lucrezia Tornabuoni and Alessandra Strozzi, to cite just two examples of notable women of the Italian Renaissance, certainly focused on achieving moral strength. Fortitude ended up being a fixation of Alessandra, specifically due to the troublesome circumstances in 1434 of her husband’s and sons’ political exile from Florence. There did seem to be a specific focus on fortitude in times of familial and political adversity, like exile (her sons did not return to Florence until 1466), on the part of both the men and women of this class in connection to both private and public life.

⁷⁵³ Andrea Bayer, *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), 110-1.

⁷⁵⁴ John O’Malley discusses defining the parameters of the Renaissance in these terms in his retrospective article “Paul Grendler and the Triumph of the Renaissance: A Reminiscence and Some Thoughts,” in *The Renaissance in the Streets, Schools, and Studies: Essays in Honor of Paul F. Grendler*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2008).

⁷⁵⁵ Cicero, *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, trans. H. Rackham (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1931), V, 67.

⁷⁵⁶ See the previous chapter for a discussion about justice.

When looking for models of this virtue in times of adversity, humanists sought advice from both classical scholars and contemporary practitioners. Marsilio Ficino wrote to Lorenzo de' Medici at the death of Lorenzo's father Cosimo (in 1464) that as much as classical thinkers were useful guides, there were living, contemporary models of virtue. These people were viewed as pillars of strength to model one's behaviors on. Ficino said that "certainly I owe much to Plato, but must confess that I owe no less to Cosimo. Inasmuch as Plato only once showed me the idea of courage, Cosimo showed it to me every day."⁷⁵⁷ As was typical of Roman interpretations of Hellenic idealism, there was a shift to a utilitarian perspective focused on how one might actually achieve these abstract ideals, in this case in contemporary Florentine civic circumstances.

Humanists, in their understanding of fortitude, equated it with behavior during times of adversity. In other words, in times of adversity one should sit back quietly and have the courage and strength to let things pass. According to Bruni, one should suffer grief when "humiliation is inflicted upon our country, parents, our children, and others who should be dearest to us."⁷⁵⁸ Bruni was being contrary to the Stoic philosophy of "ratio," balancing passions, when he said this. He was not suggesting that one ignore passions. This is yet another good example of Florentine identity with the larger kin group, embodied here in this idea of country and kin as large associations. Bruni offered a recognition, which ran counter to Stoicism, that emotions cannot be avoided, only moderated, so one must have the courage to deal with adversity.

Fortitude, like the other virtues that we have been studying, was achieved when balance and moderation were the means to regulate passions. While other humanists thought anger problematic, Bruni, who did not advocate unthinking rage, recognized the power of passion if utilized for a just purpose.⁷⁵⁹ In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the justification of *ira* (anger) as a stimulus to *fortitudo* contributed to courageous behavior. It is this idea of moderation and regulation, rather than avoidance, that seems to best

⁷⁵⁷ Janet Ross, ed., *Lives of the Early Medici: As Told in Their Correspondence* (Boston: Gorham Press, 1911), 76.

⁷⁵⁸ Baron, 129.

⁷⁵⁹ Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, 129-31.

describe the activities of the men and women we will meet in this chapter. Elite women used wisdom to combat what fortune threw in their paths in order to design their own fate as well as directing the larger fate of their families.⁷⁶⁰

A Typically Male Virtue

Fortitude, like justice, has not been described as a traditionally “female” virtue. This is evident in the notion that fortitude was the courage of men in battle. This was particularly appealing since Renaissance Florentines lacked, and had nostalgia for, a large civically-inspired militia fighting courageously for its own country. The idea, shared in Hellenic Athens and Republican Rome, of the citizen in arms in service to the state would be an example of the attainment of *fortitudo*.⁷⁶¹ In his oration of 1428 commemorating the Florentine patrician Nanni degli Strozzi, who had died the previous year while commanding the Ferrarese troops allied with Florence in the Milanese wars, Bruni said that valor was the virtue “which more than any other endows men with glory.”⁷⁶² Although there were examples of women in antiquity who achieved such military glory, the Amazons were abnormal in their masculinity. They were neither women nor men. So, was female attainment of fortitude an oddity at best? In Boccaccio’s *Famous Women*, only women from antiquity were highlighted for their attainment of virtue, but he was adamant to note that “some women have performed acts requiring vigor and courage.”⁷⁶³

Far from being limited to men, fortitude was recognized as a female virtue as well. Women who displayed courage and dedication to leadership roles were seen as embodying strength. Although these roles were often realized out of necessity, this did

⁷⁶⁰ Petrarch discussed combating fortune (like Seneca did with wisdom) in Petrarch, *Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul: A Modern English Translation of De remediis utriusque Fortune*, trans. Conrad H. Rawski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

⁷⁶¹ Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism*, 145.

⁷⁶² C. C. Bayley, *War and Society In Renaissance Florence: The De Militia of Leonardo Bruni* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 145-6. The *Oratio in Funere Johannis Strozze* can be found in Stephanus Baluzius, *Miscellanea*, ed. JD Mansi (Lucca: 1763), vol. 4.

⁷⁶³ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, trans. Virginia Brown (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 4-5.

not negate the civically inspired activities of these women. This virtue was embodied in those who, having negotiated courage, were good leaders because they were good decision makers. Women were often praised for having these skills. For example, Filippo Strozzi wrote in praise of his mother-in-law, Alfonsina Orsini, and her political activities to her son Lorenzo. “Her ladyship is always busy--whether writing to Rome or to you there or giving audiences because of which the house is always full; such attendance results in good press for the state’s encouragement for friends and dread for adversaries. She exercises that authority which for any other woman would be impossible and for few men easy.”⁷⁶⁴ This was not just descriptive. Elite women of fifteenth-century Florence also recognized strength in themselves. Strozzi certainly did when she followed up financial advice to her son with the comment that “let this be enough warning for you ... I must remind you not to shrug off my reprimands.”⁷⁶⁵ This concept of understanding and using one’s power this way can also be seen in the only remaining fragment of Ginevra de’ Benci’s poetry which states “I ask your forgiveness, I am a mountain tiger.”⁷⁶⁶ Her courage is obviously highlighted in this metaphor.

Fortitude also serves to illuminate the fact that women did not disappear into Renaissance marriages. The many portraits of these women were often central images on bowls and dishes. These gifts, given to betrothed and married women, form a collection known as “belle donne.” These collections of ceramics offer powerful epithets connected to their names. They were described at the time as beautiful, divine, chaste and, most importantly, unique.⁷⁶⁷ Male names rarely appear with women’s names and thus they seem to display a sense of individuality, virtue, and worth. In the Florentine tradition both bride and groom would sign a contract followed by a custom called *toccamano*, the joining of their right hands combining their pledge that they both wished for the union

⁷⁶⁴ Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins, ed. *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy* (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2001), 133.

⁷⁶⁵ Gregory, 79-81.

⁷⁶⁶ Leonard da Vinci, *Ginevra de’ Benci*, oil on panel, 1478, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

⁷⁶⁷ Andrea Bayer, *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), 76-87.

(*volò*) and promised fidelity (*fede*).⁷⁶⁸ This promise was made in front of a civil servant and rarely in a religious building. This material culture shows that a woman's strength of character was very important in these unions if the pledge was to be sustained. Fortitude was recognized as a central element of women's achievements in their development of support networks and alliances, in their educations, in their sacred narratives, and on their deathbeds. These displays of fortitude were often supported by humanist rhetoric. Men in the humanist tradition, like those in the Medici circle, saw the advantage of having women cut into the cloth of civic virtue and they took steps to support this engagement as well as recognizing its value.

Support Networks

One of Lorenzo de' Medici's most obvious, substantial, and constant pillars of strength was his mother, Lucrezia. He himself sought to embody the virtue of fortitude and discussed how he often leaned on her for support. As a patron and practitioner of humanist ideology, Lorenzo was inspired by the notion that his family continued to control Florence. We often find Lorenzo thinking of the future even while he dealt with great pain (physical, from gout, as well as emotional) at the end of his life.⁷⁶⁹ Much of the emotional duress he experienced was connected to the death of his mother Lucrezia. He lamented to the Duchess Elenora d'Aragona d'Este of Ferrara that the death of his beloved mother left him "utterly desolate ... for I have lost not only a mother, but the only person I could turn to in many vexations and who aided me in many troubles."⁷⁷⁰ Lucrezia was remembered by her son as a woman of both great character and strength, so much so that with her death he lost a pillar of strength. Surely this amount of emotion is representative of more than simply what one should say, but rather a window into how Lorenzo relied on her as a trusted confidant.

Drawing on strength to deal with the difficulties of death, Lorenzo reported that he suffered with equal gravity at both the death of his mother and his brother. He said to

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., 85-86.

⁷⁶⁹ Ross, 330.

⁷⁷⁰ Ross, 244.

the King of Spain that the death of Giuliano “at that terrible time when my beloved brother Giuliano was so cruelly torn from me in the center of the church and when I was wounded” led him to be “oppressed by such great sorrow.”⁷⁷¹ The previous deaths of those closest to him show this statesman grasping for fortitude, and one of those to provide him with the means to attain this courage was his mother. He also drew on her support after the assassination of his brother who died at the hands of the aristocracy in Florence. The aristocracy, led by the Pazzi family, feared the ascension of his banking family to power because it threatened the interests of the landed elite.⁷⁷² In this kind of way, Lucrezia played no small role in Florentine politics, since she had such obvious access to her son’s ear. Humanists, like Roman patricians, publicly honored such virtuous women after their deaths as pillars of strength who helped the city in times of adversity.⁷⁷³

Lorenzo de Medici was not the only man in the Medici circle to recognize the intelligence and strength of Lucrezia and such praise was not limited to posthumous accounts. Angelo Poliziano wrote to Lucrezia that she was sorely missed at the villa at Cafaggiuolo. The weather was cold and dreary, he lamented, and he missed her as a confidante. “I do not find my Madonna Lucrezia in her room with whom I can unbosom myself and I am bored to death.”⁷⁷⁴ The intellectual climate at the villa was not the same without her. Guidantonio Vespucci (Florentine ambassador to the papal state) wrote to Lorenzo that he would need to watch his enemies because “his mother was not there to protect him as she always had.”⁷⁷⁵

Women formed important support networks in times of political adversity. These alliances better strengthened the position of their families in such trying times. The

⁷⁷¹ Ross, 214-215.

⁷⁷² Lauro Martines, *April Blood: Florence and the Plot Against the Medici* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷⁷³ Stadter, 9. He notes that this practice is found in Camillus 8.3, Livy 5.50.7, and Cicero de oratore 2.II Plutarch in his life about Caesar 5.2-4 mentions the orations given by Julius Caesar for his aunt Julia and his wife Cornelia. Pluteo 39, cod. 40, page 75. This folio contains a eulogy to Lucrezia. *Elogium obitu Lucretiae tornabuonae*

⁷⁷⁴ Ross, 214.

⁷⁷⁵ Lorenzo de’ Medici, *Lettere, V (1481-1482)*, ed. Michael Mallett and Nicolai Rubinstein (Firenze: Giunti-Barbera, 1998), 285.

Medici dominated Florence from 1434 until they were expelled in 1494. The family would return in 1512 only to be ousted in 1527 by republican forces. They would return again in 1530, with the aid of the Spanish, to become dukes in 1532 and grand dukes in 1537. It has been recognized that the position of the Medici women allowed them the opportunity to participate in civic concerns, especially after 1512 (even more so than other women of this class), but their participation in public life in the fifteenth century has been little discussed.⁷⁷⁶ They were instrumental in cementing familial connections to old money in Florence as the Medici family shifted in and out of public favor. Lucrezia Tornabuoni's father was a diplomat who helped to conduct Florence's war against Milan in the early fifteenth century and, as a close friend of Cosimo de' Medici, Lucrezia's father helped him to return to Florence after the Albizzi pushed them out of the city. Such a showing of strength from the Tornabuoni was rewarded with the marriage of Cosimo and Lucrezia. Lucrezia, like her father would be for Cosimo, was an advisor to both her husband and son. More than being pawns in marriage, these women connected families, but could serve in advisory roles in their own right.

Women could engage in active diplomacy. In times of crisis, when male kin required much support, women like Alessandra Strozzi served as active "diplomats". Strozzi, for example, involved herself in attempts to rehabilitate her son's political position in the city. In late 1464 she courageously went to visit Agnolo Acciaiuoli specifically in efforts to promote the well-being of her sons. Agnolo wrote to Filippo to tell him about a frank discussion he intended to have with her, promising "we will do what we can to satisfy you and to make your mother happy."⁷⁷⁷

Women also played a role on the receiving end of diplomacy, when they were the ones being asked for favors and assistance. Lucrezia Tornabuoni was sent cloth by Filippo Strozzi (1465) in an effort to win her favor and have his exile revoked. This

⁷⁷⁶ Natalie Tomas, *A Positive Novelty: Women and Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Victoria, Australia: Monash Publications in History, 1992), 58-67.

⁷⁷⁷ Strozzi, *Lettere*, 350 annotation C.

request to win her favor came before her husband's death, showing her individual agency as a recognized "diplomat" of sorts between families even while he was alive.⁷⁷⁸

Education

In the domestic space, women played a significant role in preparing future leaders for public life by giving them the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to combat adversity in public life. Virtue and reason, as achieved (according to humanists like Petrarch) through education, allowed one to conquer ill-fortune with courage.⁷⁷⁹ This was an essential component of worldly happiness amongst these merchants and bankers. Alliances outside of the home were common and often noteworthy. Because mothers had so much contact with sons and daughters during their formative years, they taught their children how to conform to social norms and thus how to transmit the humanist culture. Children, both male and female, remained with their mothers, learning the language and cultural assumptions, until at least the age of seven.⁷⁸⁰ Although humanist culture was typically socialization that was transmitted by reading, by the fifteenth century, humanism had such a pervasive influence on both public and private life in Florence, at least amongst the upper classes, that the culture these women were transmitting through their interactions with their children was heavily influenced by the *studia humanitatis*. Contact in the formative years of childhood undoubtedly gave women a defining role in building the strength of character of their children, and whose connection to Florentine identity as informal education started in the home.

⁷⁷⁸ Natalie Tomas, *A Positive Novelty: Women and Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Victoria, Australia: Monash Publications in History, 1992), 60-1; Alessandra Strozzi, *Lettere di Una Gentildonna Fiorentina del Secolo XV*, ed. Cesar Guasti (Firenze: G.C. Sansoni, 1877), 398.

⁷⁷⁹ Petrarch discusses the value of humanist education in a letter to Donato Albanzani, "On His Own Ignorance," in his *Invectives*, ed. David Marsh (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 222-363.

⁷⁸⁰ See Margaret L. King's discussion of the learning of "common things" in "The School of Infancy: The Emergence of Mother as Teacher in Early Modern Times," in Konrad Eisenbichler and Nicholas Terpstra, ed., *Renaissance in the Streets, Schools and Studies: Essays in Honor of Paul Grendler* (Toronto: Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 41-85. She discusses seven as the age marking the transition from earlier to later childhood.

The role of mothers in the development of male and female children started immediately. There were humanists who made a point to note that the mother's role of feeding the infant is much more than just her providing physical sustenance to her child. In *De Re Uxoriam* (on the duties of a wife), the humanist Francesco Barbaro explained how maternal character was passed through breast milk to her child. "The power of the mother's food most effectively lends itself to shaping the properties of body and mind to the character of the seed."⁷⁸¹ This notion that mothers should nurse their children, to provide strength in the developmental process, stands in contrast to the popularity of wet nurses amongst elite members of this society. Using wet nurses allowed wives to have more children because they avoided two years of lactation. For lineage preservation, having as many children as possible was an important consideration for many elite Florentines who could afford to hire such "help."⁷⁸² The radical notion that women contributed to the "seed" of their children contradicted the Aristotelian notion, dominant during the Middle Ages, that the "seed" came only from the male. Women were seen as the soil in which the seed was planted. Barbaro, however, gave more power to the formative qualities of a mother's blood and milk than even Galen who, moving in the direction of defining the contributions of women to their offspring, had suggested that the seed came from both parents.⁷⁸³ Barbaro offered these ideas to his friend Lorenzo il Magnifico in honor of Lorenzo's marriage, though the advice was meant for a much larger Florentine audience whose notions of motherhood incorporated both classical and medieval traditions along with the contemporary concerns of a new urban middle class that was trying desperately to fortify itself on the political stage of the city.

According to Barbaro, mothers, like Lucrezia, helped their children (like his friend Lorenzo) gain knowledge of how to achieve the secular virtues of temperance, moderation, and fortitude. Mothers were in charge with the moral education of their

⁷⁸¹ "On Wifely Duties" can be found in Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt, ed., *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 223.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*, 223-224.

⁷⁸³ Galen, *Galen on the Natural Faculties*, trans. John Brock (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

children, so he discussed how mothers should be disciplinarians. They must greet ill-behaved children “not with a laugh or a kiss, but with a whip.”⁷⁸⁴ Alessandra was only one example of a Florentine woman who took this role as firm moral educator and disciplinarian seriously.⁷⁸⁵ She did not coddle her sons and instead aimed at instilling strength and respect in them. A letter to her second oldest son, Lorenzo, who was on the edge of financial ruin due to gambling and poor economic decisions, stated “you’ve got the intelligence to know right from wrong ... I gather that you have got some bad habits and lecturing you does no good at all ... I leave it to you to consider the harm and shame that comes from it.”⁷⁸⁶ And as a final comment she told him that “if you don’t mend your ways I will not be able to help you any more. Let this be enough warning for you.”⁷⁸⁷ His weakness reflected not only on himself but his family.

The influence of mothers was felt far beyond these formative years because the education in the home was often influenced by their selection of tutors. Besides being engaged in the education of their children, these women were themselves partially literate as well. As Christine de Pizan and other protofeminists argued, women could be virtuous and courageous if they had access to education.⁷⁸⁸ Although literacy among fifteenth-century women was low, literacy levels among the Medici women, in comparison, were notably high. Angelo Poliziano wrote to Lucrezia de’ Medici and said he sent back her “lauds, sonnets, and poems in terza rima, which you lent to me when I was with you the other day ... her granddaughter Lucrezia has learned all the lauds and many of the sonnets of Lucrezia by heart.”⁷⁸⁹ Generations of Medici women, like others of the aristocratic and merchant classes, had been taught to read and write, giving them more power over fortune in their own lives. In one letter Margherita Datini told her husband to

⁷⁸⁴ Kohl, *The Earthly Republic*, 225.

⁷⁸⁵ The emerging role of mother as teacher, from 1400 until 1800, is the subject of King’s “The School of Infancy” found in Eisenbichler, 41-86.

⁷⁸⁶ Gregory, 68-71.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁸ This argument will continue to be central throughout the first wave of feminism and can be found in the arguments of Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges to explain why women appear to have less virtue than men.

⁷⁸⁹ Ross, 224-5.

act with strength to take control over his fate. She wrote to him that “if you wait any longer you will never achieve this virtuous life, and if you wish to say: ‘look at the difficulties that assail me every day, in this work one cannot avoid them,’ I would reply that these are not reasons that prevent you from living a life which is good for the soul and for the body.”⁷⁹⁰ Literate women, like Lucrezia, had both a male and a female audience for their written ideas.

The education that these *nouveaux riches* Florentines received was often acquired outside of the university, where philosophy and theology continued to be stressed. Instead Strozzi took great care and interest in the more “earthly” and utilitarian education of her sons. Along with promoting tutors and the more formal bookish education that these tutors would provide, her letters to her sons contained no shortage of instruction and moralizing about dealing with good and bad times. As she wrote to Filippo in 1458, “what can not be cured must be endured.”⁷⁹¹ Her focus in teaching her sons morality was to promote them up on the economic and political ladder, since they were being raised to participate in public life. Notable women of power, like Strozzi, often made for “helicopter parents” who seemed to become obsessed with their sons even in adulthood. Isabella d’Este and Catherine de Medici were also notorious for their interest in propelling their sons toward successful careers through a humanist education.

Although maternal patterns of cultural transmission were often hard to point to directly, humanist pedagogues like Erasmus noted the importance of mothers. Vives noted their significance as well with his focus on language development.⁷⁹² These ideas were seemingly instigated by Cicero who said that the oratorical skills of the Gracchi brothers were bestowed upon them by their mother Cornelia, who reared them with her speech.⁷⁹³ Such strengths would be equally important in a fifteenth-century context and were duly noted by Alessandra and Lucrezia when it came to the education of their

⁷⁹⁰ Datini, Codice 1401885, Busta 1089.

⁷⁹¹ *bisogna avere pazienza*, Gregory 74-5.

⁷⁹² Margaret L. King, *Humanism, Venice, and Women: Essays on the Italian Renaissance* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 211-37. For Vives, see Kohl, *The Earthly Republic*, 223.

⁷⁹³ Eisenbichler, *The Renaissance in the Streets, Schools, and Studies*, 55.

children. Lucrezia proudly wrote to her husband Piero in 1458 that Lorenzo, their son, was learning the verses his master gave him and then teaching them to his younger brother Giuliano.⁷⁹⁴

Advice books to fortify children provided an occasion for female authorship. The tradition could be found as early as the ninth century when a Carolingian noblewoman, Dhuoda, wrote advice to her son about piety.⁷⁹⁵ Christine de Pizan may be seen as another example of this lasting tradition. She wrote moral instruction for her fatherless son.⁷⁹⁶ Two generations later, Alessandra Strozzi wrote similar personal advice to individual children in her correspondence with them. For fathers there was no perfect equivalent to these written forms of bestowing advice, which highlighted the reality of the difference between the experience of men and that of women in the process of raising children in this society. The *ricordi* (the records of births, deaths, and rites of passage within the family) of male merchants did promote the multi-generational success of kin, in a “meat and potatoes” listing of facts and figures, but were not as personally focused on the pursuits of any one child’s strength of character when they were so young.⁷⁹⁷

Women like Lucretia Tornabuoni and Alessandra Strozzi focused their lives on “domestic duties,” but this did not prevent their attainment of literacy. In fact literacy, even if it was only partial (how well they were able to write varied), allowed them to take strength of character, in the form of their articulated opinions, and apply it to the domestic space, as well as giving advice for activities in the public sphere on the part of their male kin. This attainment of literacy was not threatening to the gender hierarchy that existed all around them. While it has often been stressed that women were not permitted to attend universities or discuss ideas in official academies, nor did they have much ability to travel or have direct contact with publishers, this certainly did not prevent

⁷⁹⁴ Ross, 60.

⁷⁹⁵ Dhuoda, *Handbook for William: A Carolingian Woman’s Counsel for her Son*, trans. Carol Kneel (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991).

⁷⁹⁶ Christine de Pisan, *Morale Prouerbes, Composed in French by Cristyne de Pisan*, trans. Anthony Woodville Rivers (London: East and Blades, 1859).

⁷⁹⁷ For a discussion of this context and the importance of maternal decisions for offspring in contemporary societies around the world refer to King, *Humanism, Venice, and Women*, 211-37.

the Medici women from using their basic education to accomplish much, including the foundational education of their sons and daughters.⁷⁹⁸

There is no lack of sons' acknowledgement of the gift of education that their mothers bestowed on them. One such example of this praise can be found in Petrarch's eulogy for his mother, constructed to emphasize her many virtues and strengths.⁷⁹⁹ The education that these women gave their sons mirrored the mix of secular and spiritual concerns of this age. Girolamo Savonarola, like Petrarch, was heavily influenced by his mother Elena Bonaccorsi.⁸⁰⁰ Like Petrarch, Savonarola recognized the strength of his mother and the important role she played. He wrote to her affectionately and, as was the case in a letter written on January 25, 1490, it was clear that she was quite capable of doing well without him since he lamented that he had taken orders and could no longer see his family face to face.⁸⁰¹

Fortitude as a Virtue in Sacred Narratives

The strength of mothers was often reflected on by their sons, but sacred narratives, written by women about women, also discussed strong women as models of virtue. Lucrezia Tornabuoni, for example, noted at the beginning of her second narrative about the biblical figure Judith that "I was greatly impressed by her courage: a fearful little widow, she had your help, and she knew what to do and say."⁸⁰² This woman, who was forced to kill in order to liberate her people, was admired as a model by Lucrezia. Lucrezia was not a mystic, nor was she dedicated to a religious life through formal vows,

⁷⁹⁸ For a typical discussion of women's letdowns and the persistence needed to acquire educations, see Letizia Panizza, ed., *A History of Women's Writing in Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-9.

⁷⁹⁹ Giuseppe O. Corazzini, *La Madre di Francesco Petrarca: Lettura fatta nell'adunanza della Societa Colombaria del di 29 Novembre 1891* (Firenze: Col tipi di M. Cellini, 1892), 297-317.

⁸⁰⁰ Herbert Lucas, *Fra Girolamo Savonarola: A Biographical Study based on Contemporary Documents* (London: Sands, 1899); Girolamo Savonarola, *Le Lettere di Girolamo Savonarola*, ed. Roberto Ridolfi (Firenze: Olschki, 1933), 5. This collection contains a letter written to his mother Elena in 1485.

⁸⁰¹ William Robinson Clark, *Savonarola: His Life and Times* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1890), 76.

⁸⁰² *tanto m'e' piaciutto il suo ardire*. Lucrezia Tornabuoni, *Sacred Narratives*, ed. Jan Tylus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 123.

but she was a practical woman for whom marriage was no impediment to achieving sanctity in her own life. This understanding of how lives could balance spiritual and secular concerns was also a topic discussed by Antonia Pulci. There is no record that these female contemporaries had contact with each other, but it is obvious that they reflected the same humanism that was dominant in their culture. Lucrezia Tornabuoni gave copies of her sacred poems to Angelo Poliziano and Luigi Pulci. These literary giants show how the poems had an influence far beyond their dedication to her granddaughters. Luigi Pulci dedicated his own playful epic *Morgante* to this poetess.⁸⁰³

So much remains unclear about the literary pursuits of women because so little of their work survives. This makes the words that we do have resonate with even more force. A few words combined in the Greek epigram survive by the hand of Alessandra Scala that exemplify the strength some of these women perceived in themselves. We already saw the first line of a poem written by Ginevra de' Benci around 1457, "I ask your forgiveness, I am a mountain tiger."⁸⁰⁴ Benci, a woman of great strength, was admired by the most powerful men in Florence. Lorenzo de' Medici, for example dedicated sonnets to Benci, a woman who recognized her own fortitude.⁸⁰⁵ He also wrote poems in the vernacular that may have been influenced by the choice of his mother to use the Italian language when writing her own poetry.

In Praise of Strong Mothers

These women were seen as voices of "reason" who had the ears of their sons and husbands. Consider Alexander di Conio writing to Contessina de' Medici in 1471. He asked that Lucrezia's son Lorenzo consider one of his sons as a page.⁸⁰⁶ Lucrezia de' Medici's input had a significant impact on the decision that could potentially make or break Alexander's son's future. Having the ear of a powerful husband or son invited the

⁸⁰³ Luigi Pulci, *Morgante e Lettere*, ed. Domenico de Roberts (Firenze: Sansoni, 1962).

⁸⁰⁴ John Walker, *Ginevra de' Benci by Leonardo da Vinci* (Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, 1967).

⁸⁰⁵ Lorenzo de' Medici, *Lorenzo de' Medici: Selected Poems and Prose*, ed. Jon Thiem (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

⁸⁰⁶ Ross, 158-9.

pleas of those who were less fortunate and seeking to better their situations through the intervention of one of these powerful women.

Lucrezia stood out as being a powerful example of a woman recognized for her fortitude. This contributed to her to successful authorship as well as to how often she was noted to be an exemplary model of a wife and mother.⁸⁰⁷ A woman like Alessandra Strozzi, with the strength to overcome the adversity of widowhood and exile, was given much praise. Although Strozzi did not have a contemporary biographer, Alessandra de Bardi, who was in a very similar situation as Strozzi, was showered with accolades of courage and fortitude by the humanist Vespasiano da Bisticci.⁸⁰⁸ Some of the wives of this elite civic-minded class were not as successful in garnering praise, but why? An excellent example to illustrate how fundamental fortitude was in a woman's character was the case of Clarice Orsini di Medici. If a woman did not have fortitude, the relationship between her and her male kin would be much less of a "partnership", and Clarice and Lorenzo certainly did not share this type of a relationship.⁸⁰⁹ So what was it about her actions that put her in such a disadvantaged position?

Clarice, the young wife of Lorenzo il Magnifico, was certainly dutiful and subservient, but for Lorenzo and his peers, this was not enough to win her much praise. Even though she supported the union of her son with this noble and influential Roman family, Lucrezia also noted of her first meeting with Clarice that the young woman was shy to a fault, but all in all better than average.⁸¹⁰ The reality of this patriarchal society, for the merchants and bankers, was that the marriages which were successful seemed to be based more on a partnership than on a model in which the wife was overwhelmingly submissive. Both spouses needed to act with fortitude and Clarice was perceived to have a weak character. In this case, to marry an Orsini established an alliance with a noble

⁸⁰⁷ ASF MAP LXXX 77. Bernardo Bellincioni (*letterato verseggiatore* "verse writer") wrote to Lucrezia (August 22, 1479) to reassure her that the book had been very successful.

⁸⁰⁸ Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Vita della Alesandra de' Bardi Donna di Lorenzo di Messer Palla Strozzi* (Rome: Romae, 1843).

⁸⁰⁹ They were not an equal partnership, but represented the idea of male and female kin working toward the common goal of individual success and the development of a success of the kinship line.

⁸¹⁰ Ross, 108-9.

Roman family and thus promised prestige for Lorenzo's lineage and that was most important.

Clarice would never be the confidant to Lorenzo that his mother was. A Renaissance marriage, of course, was not about an equal partnership in the modern sense, but the wives who received praise in fifteenth-century Florence contributed stability to their unions and were far from being simply child-bearers. They used fortitude to support mostly domestic concerns, but those who displayed fortitude were *not* meek, and their influence radiated beyond the confines of the home. This fortitude was, rather, necessary to free husbands like Lorenzo from any domestic concerns. Clarice did not have the strength to deal with such matters in a decisive matter. Clarice, in her correspondence, had a tone that was weak and fragile, and that is why she was not held in such esteem by her husband. In contrast, Lucrezia did not adopt this tone when communicating with her son. Clarice, however, was constantly lamenting that Lorenzo was so rarely with her and that he wrote so little.⁸¹¹ She comes across as being unable to function without him. This stands in sharp contrast to an independent and seemingly stoic Lucrezia, who was more "venerated" than Clarice. She stated that she received a letter from her son, but focused on her delight of good news, rather than lamenting his absence.⁸¹² We have no indication that either Lorenzo's grandmother Contessina or wife Clarice took much interest in politics like his mother did. Of the three women, Lorenzo was closest to his mother. When his wife died, Lorenzo wrote to Pope Innocent VIII that he was surprised by how sad he was for having lost such habitually sweet company.⁸¹³ Lorenzo's lament was not nearly what it was at the death of Lucrezia, which he told Duke Ercole d'Este was the loss of a counselor who took many a burden from him.⁸¹⁴ Lorenzo was not the only one to find little reason to focus on Clarice's death and her absence. When Clarice died, the Ferrarese ambassador to Florence sent word back to Ferrara that "Madonna Clarice died three days ago, but I did not send the news at once, as it did not seem to me of much

⁸¹¹ Ross, 123.

⁸¹² Ibid., 181-2.

⁸¹³ Ibid., 297.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid., 245.

importance ... she died last Wednesday at midnight and was buried without pomp that evening.”⁸¹⁵ While Lucrezia’s funeral became a civic remembrance in which the city remembered this stoic matron, Clarice’s death brought little public mourning.

Often showing courage in the face of adversity, Alessandra Strozzi was an excellent example of an elite Florentine woman who, due to her strength of character in dealing with both widowhood and the exile of her family from Florence, was a powerful force in the history of her family and the Florentine state. She saw herself as the guardian of her children in the wake of their father’s death, and it was to that role that she dedicated most of her life. She told Filippo, in 1449, of this difficult situation that “you should always consider how hard it is for me, when I think how I was left while I was still young to bring up five children as young as you all were.”⁸¹⁶ Yet, like Christine de Pizan, she persevered through similar adversity. She continued telling Filippo that “I was still pregnant with Matteo [when his father died] and I have brought him up. Alessandra suggested that this self-defined role, that of “widowed mother,” was a burden that she chose to bear and it served to define her character. Widowhood was cited by merchants like Lapo, writing to Francesco Datini, as a virtue; writing about a holy woman, he commented that “the strength of her perfection was in her widowhood.”⁸¹⁷ While many widows were remarried, Alessandra was not and seemingly fought convention to continue to support her children.⁸¹⁸ For Alessandra it was faith in God that was often cited, in her letters, as a source of strength.⁸¹⁹ She noted that although she had “endured a thousand insults, if it has been by your permission I will be patient” and continued to hold steadfast through the mire of the patriarchy, which threatened to muddle her efforts

⁸¹⁵ Ibid., 397.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

⁸¹⁷ Stanley S. Miller, “Business and the Fear of Materialism,” *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Sep. 1952): 117.

⁸¹⁸ Lorna Hutson, *Feminism and Renaissance Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁸¹⁹ Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb, *Women’s Letters Across Europe: 1400-1700* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 38.

but instead came to praise her for her successes as a strong force in the lives of her children.⁸²⁰

Deathbed

We have been considering strength in dealing with adversity in the here and now. Courage to face the future can be connected to the experience of those Florentines who showed strength in the face of the death of kin. At the end of his life, Lorenzo was around those closest to him. His sister Bianca, his daughter Lucrezia, his eldest son Piero, and dear friend Poliziano were among them. As a sign of fortitude he did not mention his own illness, although he was dying, in a letter to his son, Cardinal Giovanni in Rome, as if not to cloud his son's ecclesiastical break into a promising adult life.⁸²¹ Lucrezia and Alessandra also did not lament their poor condition in their last letters to their sons.⁸²²

The pain and suffering of Lorenzo's last hours are the focus of a letter to Jacopo Antiquario from Poliziano.⁸²³ Poliziano focused on Lorenzo's continued strength of character in this final bout with adversity. An assurance of Lorenzo's faith and *vita* eternal was highlighted by Cesare Borgia in a letter to Piero de' Medici reminding Lorenzo's son that although Borgia was troubled at the time of his death, his father's strength would bring him to eternity.⁸²⁴

A "good death" was a subject much discussed by humanists. Cassandra Fedele used Epicurus' idea that happiness would be found after this life when she wrote to Ferdinand the King of Spain, "Why then are you so moved by grief when the death of your son has brought glory and perennial praise to your parents and your ancient clan? ... you might appear to envy him because he won respect and dignity that exceeded your authority and because he was declared a king everlasting in his virtues though born from a mortal. For he had such gentleness, kindness, and love."⁸²⁵ Humanists took comfort

⁸²⁰ Ross, 218-9.

⁸²¹ Ibid., 332.

⁸²² Gregory, 215-21; Tornabuoni, *Lettere*, 88.

⁸²³ Ross, 226-9 and 336.

⁸²⁴ *tanto me e stata molesta et trita la nouella dela morte*. ASF MAP XV.

⁸²⁵ Gregory, 18-21.

in virtue because it not only promoted well-being here on earth, but most importantly the eternal salvation that both medieval and Renaissance people sought so desperately. Alessandra shows this focus very clearly when she follows up a discussion of factional warfare in the city and destructive earthquakes with the following message to her son; “it is good to put your soul in order and to be good”.⁸²⁶

The Florentines sought strength and stability after the death of Cosimo de’ Medici. Men and women attempted to deal with the transition from his leadership with both an acknowledgement of his accomplishments and a focus on the future. While historian Lauro Martines said that Alessandra Strozzi simply gave us a woman’s perspective on his death, she in fact left us a thoughtful record of his death and the aftermath in 1464. The fact that she was a woman is not the issue at all. She sought the same preservation that is displayed by the men *and* women of her class.⁸²⁷ She told her son in a letter (September 15, 1464) that “there is no doubt that this death [that of Cosimo de’ Medici] has given many of the citizens some new ideas about how the land should be governed.”⁸²⁸ This same turmoil was discussed by Lorenzo de’ Medici in his *ricordi*. “After his death much sedition arose in the city ... our father was persecuted out of envy ... [with a change of the government in 1466] the state was reformed.”⁸²⁹ The strength of state, which both Alessandra Strozzi and Lorenzo de’ Medici lamented was threatened, was restored.

Strength of Character

We have been exploring notions of strength of character. One’s reputation was not something that only unveiled itself in the context of the end of one’s life. Character could be interpreted in many ways, some unfairly. Margherita Datini has been accused by historians of being “shrewish.”⁸³⁰ However, her written signs of bad temper seem to

⁸²⁶ *si che è buono acconciarsi dell’anima, e stare apparecchiato.* Gregory, 18-21.

⁸²⁷ Lauro Martines, “A Way of Looking at Women in Renaissance Florence,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1974): 15-28.

⁸²⁸ Gregory, 119.

⁸²⁹ Ross, 150.

⁸³⁰ See for example Gene Brucker, *Renaissance Florence* (New York: Wiley, 1969), 111.

be more of a refusal to tolerate her husband's verbal abuse and nasty temperament. She told her husband in a 1386 letter: "slap me in the eyes or on the head or wherever you will, I do not care. I always speak the truth in so far as I know it. I have said nothing to you that I haven't already said at least once a month, and when you are here I don't perhaps speak in such a forthright fashion, although every day I see you do things that make me swell twelve times my normal size with anger."⁸³¹ These words illuminate to a strong and courageous woman who was not afraid to speak her mind.

This is a significant testament to her strength and her understanding that spouses had a mutual obligation in this society to support each other.⁸³² Although she goes back and forth between voicing strong opinions and saying "I am only a woman," this does not negate her knowledge of affairs, both public and private, and her strong, informed opinions in regards to these matters. For both men and women, self-deprecation was a formality in the merchant letters of the fifteenth century.⁸³³ Obedient wives may have been the ideal, and perhaps the norm, but there are stark exceptions, such as bold women like Dora Del Bene who was once so frustrated by her husband's neglect that she signed a letter to him "*tua nimica*" (your enemy).⁸³⁴ Margherita Datini was not submissive. She expected respect for her role as wife. Her management of the household included entertaining of politically influential guests.⁸³⁵ While her activities were geared toward her husband's business interest, the success of these ventures affected both of their fortunes. Margherita's strength and agency was particularly apparent if one considers that their vast property holdings included 25 households in Prato alone.⁸³⁶

Alessandra Strozzi has also not been given the credit that she deserves for truly being a stabilizing force in her exiled family. Biographies of Alessandra tend to focus on her more "female" activities, when in fact she had an eye and an ear to the public

⁸³¹ Datini, *Per la tua Margherita*, Codice 1401887, Busta 1089.

⁸³² Tomas, *A Positive Novelty*, 14-26.

⁸³³ Datini, *Per la tua Margherita*, Codice 1401862, Busta 1089.

⁸³⁴ Francesco Datini, *Lettere di Francesco Datini alla Moglie Margherita (1385-1410)*, ed. Elena Cecchi (Prato: Societa Pratese di Storia Pateria, 1990), 55.

⁸³⁵ Datini, Codice 1401878, Busta 1089.

⁸³⁶ Fedengo Melis, *Aspetti della vita economica medievale Studi nell'Archivio Datini di Prato* (Siena: Monte dei Paschi Siena, 1962), 61-72.

activities that would affect her sons and kin. Her agency is recognized by historian Heather Gregory, who said that she was a “lynchpin of her son’s connections.”⁸³⁷ Strozzi was well aware of the political factionalism that often reared its head in fifteenth-century Florence. Sending political news to her sons with astute perceptions of the political groupings of the time kept them informed of the situation in their home city. She astutely advocated to her sons that they remain friends with the Medici and not the Pazzi, stating “according to what I have heard you should remember that whoever is on the Medici side has always done well while those with the Pazzi, the opposite; they were always ruined.”⁸³⁸ She was steadfast in her notions of a brighter future for her family and steadfast in her efforts to plan for it.

The strength of “abandoned women,” like Strozzi, was not a new construction. Medieval representations of Homer’s Penelope and other women “left behind” were sympathetic to the role of unattended women.⁸³⁹ To be abandoned meant something more than “forsaken” or even “shameless.”⁸⁴⁰ These women were deserted, but resisted closure within their natal families to stay connected to their children.⁸⁴¹ It has been noted often that widowhood reveals how truly unstable women’s status was in early modernity.⁸⁴² Only entitled to their dowry, and not guardianship of their children (at least not legally), women like Strozzi and Tornabuoni seem more than likely to have been destined to fall off the historical radar via remarriage and their disappearance into another kinship line, but their cases are quite the opposite. They show the strength that these women had to defy conventions that there was no acceptable place in secular society for single females. These women used their strength and determination to create a social space for themselves.

⁸³⁷ Heather Gregory, “A Florentine Family in Crisis: The Strozzi in the Fifteenth Century,” Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1981, p. 193.

⁸³⁸ Strozzi, *Lettere*, 255.

⁸³⁹ Suzanne Hegedorn, *Abandoned Women: Rewriting the Classics in Dante, Boccaccio, and Chaucer* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 1-20.

⁸⁴⁰ Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale contained this theme. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 42–102.

⁸⁴¹ The ambiguous meanings of abandonment are discussed in Hegedorn, xvii and 3.

⁸⁴² This topic is discussed in Andrea Bayer, *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), 13-4.

Economic Solidarity

The Archivio di Stato in Florence contains numerous examples of the long-term vision and goals associated with establishing a foundation of economic strength for future generations. The idea of using wealth to establish a lasting impact can be seen in planning for the dispersion of the wealth, among kin or charitable institutions, of a patriarch at the time of his death. Having explored the Notarile Antecosimiano in some depth, one finds consistent references to sons (even children) inheriting property and money.⁸⁴³ This money could be used to fortify the memory of the family through funerary monuments. The wife of Cristofano d'Andrea da Laterina, for example, completed and outfitted a chapel for the family after her husband's death. She played a pivotal role in the execution of his desire to strengthen the legacy of the family.⁸⁴⁴

Merchant's letters and diaries kept track of their activities, loans, sales, purchases, letters of exchange, and they often characterized people and historicized events. These documents are abundant throughout the fifteenth century (as they are in the century before and after). The letters show clearly that family interests were tied together with commercial interests that were in turn interwoven with the interests of the state. Merchant activity was complex and also focused on preserving the strength of the family.⁸⁴⁵ As a member of a merchant family, Margherita Datini was quite effective in striking a balance between humility and strength. She depreciated her knowledge, but turned around to remind her husband that these shortfalls still made her better than all his employees in looking after his goods and honor.⁸⁴⁶ She took a front seat in these affairs long-term and remained dedicated to their economic fortitude.⁸⁴⁷

⁸⁴³ Notarile Antecosimiano 639/A626, date: 1477, page 34, 57. This contains information about the son (age 9) as the inheritor of property.

⁸⁴⁴ Notarile Antecosimiano C705, date: 1411, page 229.

⁸⁴⁵ Vittore Braca, ed., *Merchant Writers of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1999).

⁸⁴⁶ Datini, *Per La Tua Margherita*, 20/1/1385/6, 31/3/1387.

⁸⁴⁷ Her letters were written between 1385 and 1410.

Wives were also engaged in planning to promote family success after their husbands' deaths. Due to the age gap between them and women in the marriages of Florentine men and women, although they were susceptible to death during childbirth, women would often outlive their husbands.⁸⁴⁸ It has often been discussed that women were not recipients of wealth or property in Florentine wills, but in women's wills, like that of Mona Tommasa, the wife of Giovanni Baretari, generous donations were made to charitable institutions.⁸⁴⁹ There are more women to be found in the *notariale* collections during the sixteenth century than in the previous century, so their economic agency was becoming more common. For example, Notarile Antecosimiano (A692/C705) which started with a reminder that religion played deeply into these secular transactions (“*in dei nomine amen*”), contains many of these wills which show that women, like men, balanced secular and sacred concerns.

Women with husbands who were still alive also had an important role in financial security. Datini reported to her husband about taxation and assessments taking place in the spring of 1394, and she also gave him advice on how to best handle the taxes.⁸⁵⁰ She lobbied for the interest of her husband (and herself) by having trusted friends meet with tax officials when she heard of possible tax relief.⁸⁵¹ Alessandra Strozzi also had intimate knowledge of tax assessments. She mentioned unfair assessments in a letter to her sons in 1447, and a few years later showed her savvy grasp of economics again by helping her sons to establish their linen cloth business by obtaining customers and materials from friends and neighbors.⁸⁵² She was a pillar of strength for her children on the precarious economic stage.

Women and men engaged in charitable pursuits. Such donations highlighted the strength of one's economic situation and the desire to offset material wealth. Dante notoriously populated his medieval *Inferno* with selfish seekers of wealth for immediate

⁸⁴⁸ Catasto, <http://www.archiviodistato.firenze.it/catastotoscano/>.

⁸⁴⁹ Philip Gavitt, *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence: The Ospedale degli Innocenti, 1410-1536* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 116.

⁸⁵⁰ Datini, *Per La Tua Margherita*, 8/2/1393/4.

⁸⁵¹ letter 35 5/3/1393.

⁸⁵² letter 1 24/8/1447 and letter 3 13/7/1449.

gratification, and in truth Renaissance merchants seemed to continue to worry about such a fate. Francesco Datini's large fortune was not transferred to an heir because Datini had none.⁸⁵³ He donated his mansion and the majority of his fortune to found Prato's *Ceppo dei Poveri* for the economically underprivileged of Prato. His life, depicted in the mural on the exterior of his home, reminded the citizens of Prato of his achievements including this gift (the frescos were painted after his death). This man, called the patron saint of capitalism for inventing the promissory note, used his economic strength to secure his place in eternity *and* his memory on earth.⁸⁵⁴ It was his wife who oversaw the building of his house and the security of his warehouse, both of which were central components of his economic health.

Women could control their own dowries during life and after their death and had the ability to make decisions about how there was to be distributed, even during the more heavily patriarchal fifteenth century. Widowhood was a common situation for women married to Florentine merchants and patricians. In 1427, 15% of all households were headed by a woman.⁸⁵⁵ The fortitude of women in these circumstances was duly noted in part because of the added complication that they were pulled between two sets of competing family loyalties (which was not the case for widowers). Both families wanted a widow's dowry. Alessandra saw herself as a member of the Strozzi household and she remained dedicated to her children.⁸⁵⁶ To prove this dedication, Strozzi discussed her plan to pay part of her youngest daughter's dowry out of her own dowry fund to keep the strain off of her son's inheritance.⁸⁵⁷ Strozzi saw this wealth as her own to do with as she pleased, and she used it altruistically to help her children enter into marriages and

⁸⁵³ His illegitimate daughter is mentioned many times by Lapo Mazzei, *Lettere di un Notaro a un Mercante del Secolo XIV: con altre Lettere e Documenti*, ed. Cesare Guasti (Firenze: Successori Le Monnier, 1880).

⁸⁵⁴ His life was made famous by Iris Origo in *The Mercant of Prato: Francesco di Marco Datini* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957). The fresco is discussed in Stanley Miller, "Business and Fear of Materialism," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (September 1952): 117-21.

⁸⁵⁵ Tomas, *A Positive Novelty*, 30.

⁸⁵⁶ For a discussion of the "Cruel Mother" who would abandon her children, see Zuber in Hutson, *Feminism and Renaissance Studies*, chapter 7.

⁸⁵⁷ Datini, Letter 9, 11/122/1450.

establish themselves in business. Widows did not necessarily drift back to their natal families, but often remained a pillar of strength for their children even after their husbands' passing.

Conclusions

In the humanist tradition, fortitude, more so than justice, was focused on this world and not the next. The goal was stability and the civic dedication of both kin and self rather than a fixation on eternity. This represents a distinctly Renaissance melding of classical and scholastic traditions. This combination was at the heart of the praise that Salutati gave Petrarch's eloquence. Petrarch was preferred by Salutati over pure ancient philosophy because "he has examined both pagan and Christian wisdom, has digested the first sufficiently well while doing a great deal with the second."⁸⁵⁸ The wives and mothers we have met also had a keen eye toward both the secular and sacred motivations.

The adoption of fortitude by women illustrates just how much culture during the Renaissance was transmitted through maternal influence.⁸⁵⁹ These women were fierce and courageous, but not celibate and passive as Antonio Loschi suggested the humanist Maddalena Scrovegni must be.⁸⁶⁰ Rather Alessandra and Lucrezia, amongst others, managed to transition from the domestic space to more public concerns with little regard to how an active role might affect the way that their chastity was perceived. In this capacity, when they showed strength, I have found them to be met only with great praise.

Alberti suggested that virtues resulted in an individual being "wonderfully serviceable to many people", which was the case with the fortitude of these women. We have seen them supporting not only their individual welfare in times of adversity, but the needs of their families as well.⁸⁶¹ They have been little studied in their pursuit of

⁸⁵⁸ Wayne Rebhorn, ed., *Renaissance Debates on Rhetoric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 20-4.

⁸⁵⁹ Maternal transmission is a focus in Margaret L. King, *Humanism, Venice, and Women*, 211-37.

⁸⁶⁰ Margaret L. King, "Goddess and Captive: Antonio Loschi's Poetic Tribute to Maddalena Scrovegni (1389)," *Medievalia et humanistica* (1980): 103-27.

⁸⁶¹ Leon Battista Alberti, *The Family in Renaissance Florence*, trans. Renee Neu Watkins (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1969), 79.

“strength” because history tends to chronicle the pursuits of powerful men.⁸⁶² Women rarely appeared on the public stage during the fifteenth century in Florence, but they did not need to do so to embrace civic virtue. Civic identity began in the domestic space, because it was grounded in one’s identity as a member of a kinship network. In the past, the lack of “exceptionalism” in the lives of these elite women had aroused little curiosity. Like princesses, these women were written off as being all dressed up with no power to speak of. Yes, these women could not hold public office, but that does not mean that they did not have a significant presence in many niches in the public spaces in Renaissance Florence. There are tremendous areas of gray between concepts of public and private space that this dissertation only begins to explore.

These women’s constant dedication to fortitude in the present and in planning for the future would be fully realized by later generations of kin. Alessandra Strozzi purchased the real estate that would later become the site of the Palazzo Strozzi that her son would build some 20 years later. This became become one of the most significant marks on the Florentine landscape that this family ever made. Her contribution to the larger legacy of this project, including how it marked the return of her family from exile back to Florence, was essential to this outcome.⁸⁶³

Tradition has suggested that men were indifferent or hostile to strong, determined women. But although they got little help, upper-class women in Florence were successful. Their activities would not only be valued, but supported by civically-minded husbands and fathers throughout the long fifteenth century.

⁸⁶² The phrase “malestream history” was coined by Mary O’Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 5.

⁸⁶³ Tomas, *A Positive Novelty*, 30.

VI. Conclusions

From the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, the *querelle des femmes*, the debate over women's worth relative to that of men, was part of the intellectual climate in Paris, Venice, and, eventually, London.⁸⁶⁴ Why, however, was this not the case in Florence? Florence, arguably the most intensely researched city of early modern Europe, was an urban environment whose complexities are extremely vivid in its records. Florence has been viewed under a microscope and consequently historical divisions have been placed between gender identities, neighborhoods, social class, economic status, and political motivations, which were not so black and white to Renaissance people themselves. I have explored the notion that women, although not able to shape identities outside of society's demands and values, were human actors with complex motives and personalities who adhered to the civic virtues of the city's larger humanist culture.

Elite women in Florence did not champion the education of their sex or argue that marriage should be a partnership within the *querelle des femmes* debate, but we have seen that they often accomplished these aims with the support of and in support of humanist culture. Christine de Pizan argued more than 600 years ago that men and women were equal in the eyes of men and God based on their equal capacity for virtue. Leo Strauss astutely remarked on the etymology of virtue when he said that "the mystery of Western thought is how a term that originally meant manliness of a man came to mean chastity of a woman."⁸⁶⁵ But perhaps, rather than being a shift in meaning, the reality of the situation has often been that virtues shifted their meaning to apply to both men and women rather than forming a distinct category of virtue.

In the *loggia* of the house where Margherita Datini was living in Prato, the seven virtues are still depicted in a large fresco partnered with vices at their feet. There is reason to believe that this woman saw this fresco every day and was immune to its

⁸⁶⁴ Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe From Prehistory to the Present* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 343.

⁸⁶⁵ Leo Strauss (1899-1973) was a German-born political philosopher.

message. Women could be virtuous without giving up their sex and “becoming a man.” Rather, they were acting as women who worked actively to become part of a much larger humanist culture.

Our chronology, the long quattrocento, was marked by a shift away from the medieval notion that man was not capable of modeling virtue perfectly. No longer did man’s perfection, as Augustine had argued in *City of God*, depend on God’s grace. During the Renaissance, renewed interest in the classical tradition inspired civic humanism to trumpet that it was possible for men to reach the highest level of virtue through their own merits. Women certainly seemed to follow suit. This exploration of civic virtue has ended at the turn of the sixteenth century because the Medici-dominated republic did not live long past the life of Lorenzo de Medici and humanism evolved to support a dukedom. Savonarola settled in Florence in 1489, and following his execution (and the turmoil that he orchestrated), Machiavelli and Guiccardini, in their histories of the city, were the first to really look back on the Laurentian period as one of prosperity and peace.⁸⁶⁶ The influence of humanism, even in the shifting political climate, continued to resonate through the writing of the Florentine elites. In a damaged selection of *Epistle Latine*, dated 1525, the manuscripts testify to a continued interest in the art of Latin letter writing, commenting on Cicero’s *eloquentia* and praising Greek literature as well.⁸⁶⁷ Humanism continued to resonate amongst the elites of the city, though Florence’s government had become a dukedom. Humanism began to mirror the new, less representative, political structure. Duke Cosimo I was a capable ruler and the old patriarchy survived in the senate, but active virtue was not as much of a focus as it had been in earlier humanist culture.

While the focus was on active, civic humanism, one can see the contribution of men and women to this culture and construct a more complete picture of the lives of elites in fifteenth-century Florence. Rather than being a feminist history, this is a

⁸⁶⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses On Livy*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Francesco Guicciardini, *The History of Florence* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

⁸⁶⁷ Carte Stroziane, 4.

women's history. Feminist history is primarily concerned about past and present oppression of women and seeks to show the disparity in women's experiences.⁸⁶⁸ Proto-feminism in Florence may not have been recognized by those searching for "feminism" in the past because it was not committed to the ideology of individual struggles for social changes.⁸⁶⁹ Florentine women focused their behavior on the good of the "community" and thus acted in support of social and cultural norms rather than challenging them. Thus their actions, because they mirror the civic communal mentality of their sons, fathers, husbands and brothers, have been overlooked in historical inquiry as being a lifestyle "choice" that was made for them. I do not discount the uniqueness of women's experience, but I do believe, at least in the case of Renaissance Florence, that oppression was more reflective of a man or woman's economic position than the label of their sex. Since the 1960s social history has divided the study of classes by economic strata. Although this division is seen by many who work in the field of gender studies as too limiting, I have sought to show that it is indeed closer to the reality of women's lives.⁸⁷⁰ A position in the upper-class certainly afforded women a great deal of agency and privilege as well as a closer proximity to humanist culture than many who occupied a lower socioeconomic position.

In a way, I am taking Judith Bennett up on her advice in her 2006 *History Matters*.⁸⁷¹ She suggests that the patriarchy should not be trivialized if women's history is to unveil the reality of most women's experiences in the past rather than to focus on the few "badly behaved ones." Women's history should paint on a larger canvas. Perhaps well-behaved women *do* make history, just not the history that we have been focused on.⁸⁷²

⁸⁶⁸ Sue Morgan ed., *The Feminist History Reader, Feminism and History* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 59-73.

⁸⁶⁹ Elisabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 225-44.

⁸⁷⁰ Morgan, 113.

⁸⁷¹ Judith Bennett, *History Matters* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

⁸⁷² Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

Much of the historiography of women during the Renaissance has served to highlight an argument that men were indifferent at best, or hostile at worse, to women who attempted to identify with and benefit from their efforts to model their behavior on the civic virtues. However, male humanists in Florence often saw an advantage to women's efforts and supported these women by praising them and recognizing the value of their behavior when it exemplified fortitude, temperance, justice, and prudence. The lengthy list of male humanists who were sympathetic to women included Henricus Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535), Mario Equicola (1470-1525), Galeazzo Flavio Capra (1487-1537), and Bartolomeo Scala (1430-1497). There is a clear distinction in viewing Cassandra Fedele with a sense of wonder because she was a woman who excelled in a masculine domain of intellectual pursuits and thus was like a man compared with views of the women who were praised as virtuous Florentine wives, daughters, and mothers. Dale Spender, a contemporary feminist scholar, argues that men silenced women because women's voices challenged or subverted men's view of the world. She is assuming that women reflected a distinct female culture and I have argued here that they did not.⁸⁷³ These women were praised for being Florentine and not attacked for seeking to pick up pens or swords to attack the patriarchy.

This study has shown that Florentines, both men and women, expressed cohesion to each other, and were the children of a common legacy, and (to some extent) of a common environment. I exhibited case studies of men and women, and patterns of similarity in terms of what these individuals professed as the constituents of Florentine pride in a variety of public and private situations. It is not as though the lives and experiences of these women have not been discussed in the context of glimpses into the complex and understudied experiences of women in the late Middle Ages/early modern eras, but that these women have not been put into the larger context of their society's adherence to a much larger set of civically inspired virtues. To do this, I have attempted to interpret old sources in a new way within a much larger historical context that brings the history of men and women together. While scholarship for early modern England has

⁸⁷³ Dale Spender, *Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them from Aphra Behn to Adrienne Rich* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 5.

stressed the mobility between “state and private,” “public and domestic”, Italian scholarship has continued to focus too much on public and domestic space as an impermeable divide among elites in the urban centers of northern Italy.⁸⁷⁴

As Elisabeth Fox-Genovese noted in *Feminism Without Illusions*, teachers are regularly surprised by students who anxiously search the historical record for evidence of some society that had sexual equality.⁸⁷⁵ Although I would not suggest that fifteenth-century Florence was a society in which women functioned as men’s equals, the historical record is not simply a collective record of suppression. Rather, women of means had a great deal of influence and many active connections to the much larger culture. For all of the efforts in the Western tradition to separate the behavior and intellectual patterns of the sexes, these women’s path to a virtuous life was much the same as men’s.

⁸⁷⁴ John Morrill and Paul Slack, ed., *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England: Essays presented to G.E. Aylmer* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1993).

⁸⁷⁵ Fox-Genovese, *Feminism*, 226-7.

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