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## The cultural importance of Florentine patricians

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## Conclusion

After a period in which the Medici excluded the Florentine patricians from the administration of the government and from functions in their household, in the seventeenth century, the Grand Dukes started to involve the patricians in their regime so that they felt themselves participants of it. The patricians' contributions proved to be decisive for the political and cultural success of the Medici court and furthermore determined the diversity of cultural life of seventeenth-century Florence to a surprising degree.

This thesis gives the first broad overview of both the diplomatic significance of the Florentine patricians and their cultural importance as a group, by carefully combining original archival research and the results of previous case studies to individual patrician families. Moreover, I placed the patricians' cultural activities into a sociopolitical and historical context. The themes discussed in this thesis are directly related to the multiplicity of functions and roles in which the patricians manifested themselves. Members of major Florentine families such as the Guicciardini and the Niccolini were active in many fields that together determined the social, political, and cultural representation of the Medici court in different ways: as ambassadors and agents; as political advisors; as chamberlains and tutors of Medici princes; as vice patrons and members of cultural academies; as artistic patrons and brokers with large cultural networks; as supervisors of architectural projects; as organizers of public ceremonies; as writers of treatises; and as librarians. In all these functions patricians gave appropriate advice with their large insight into local customs and cultural trends

at other courts, their comprehension of Florentine history and identity and of the historical and actual political position of Tuscany in relation to other states.

Clearly, most of the patricians' cultural activities were of both cultural and political importance. This is most obvious when it comes to their roles as ambassadors and chamberlains and in the organization of ceremonial events. As to the latter, I have shown how the patricians could help by organizing marriage ceremonies, by hiring actors for theatrical productions and painters and other artists for the construction of the temporary scenes, by developing the iconographic programs of the pieces performed, and by writing reports about these. By sending these reports to foreign courts, where other patricians spread them among the courtiers, the social and cultural prestige of the Medici could reach the ears and eyes of nobles and princes throughout the whole of Europe. Their input was therefore extremely varied and required a considerable amount of artistic and literary creativity.

For their role in the organization of such events the patricians could rely on their excellent education and their extensive networks. Florentine cultural academies such as the *Alterati*, the *Apatisti*, the *Svogliati* and the *Crusca*, in which Florentine noblemen usually entered at an early age, seem to have functioned as important stepping stones for all sorts of future collaborations. Chapter 4 shows how omnipresent the academies were in the world of the patricians. The membership of many distinguished Medici princes – notably Don Giovanni de' Medici and the three brothers of Grand Duke Ferdinand II, Giovan Carlo, Mattias and Leopoldo de' Medici – added considerably to their appeal and political significance. Likewise, the cultural brokerage activities discussed in chapter 5 often took place within a complex and dynamic political context. As brokers, patricians often gave advice about or arranged cultural gifts that at the same time had a political meaning.

Essential for our understanding of the patricians' contribution to the cultural climate in seventeenth-century Florence and to the cultural success of the Medici court is the concept of mutual profit. Many patricians enjoyed social esteem thanks to their work in service of the Medici family. Thanks to this role, they could associate with important patrons and artists at different courts and see their art collections and theatrical activities (on the occasion of entries, marriages and funeral ceremonies), which was useful for their own cultural development and prestige, but also for the cultural success of the Medici court. Without the patricians, the Medici could not have met all the ceremonial needs of a European court and therefore they continued to bestow political privileges and important positions on the patricians.

Thanks both to their travels to other courts in Italy and around Europe as diplomats and ambassadors and to their large correspondence networks, the patricians were constantly able to circulate cultural news and objects from several courts to Florence and vice versa. They discussed all these new influences within their academies. Moreover, the experience of the patricians at other courts helped the Medici to have original and modern programs for marriage festivities or commemoration ceremonies. The patricians' travels kept Florence up to date about cultural events and innovations at other courts and could take this as an example for future events, while at the same time the patricians brought the cultural achievements of Florence to other courts, which used the Florentine events as a model for their own celebrations.

The Medici trusted the cultural authority of the patricians as a group, and gave them considerable freedom to experiment within the academies in the fields of poetry, art, literature, music, and especially theatre. The most successful concepts could then be applied in a larger form for cultural events of the Medici court, as was the case with the first opera performances and with the famous *intermedi* and improvised plays. Without the patricians as the driving force behind all the Medici festivities, the Medici could never have been so innovating and could never have anticipated or responded to all the European artistic and cultural trends.

The Medici occasionally also benefitted from the patricians' sensibility for new styles in the visual arts, especially in Rome. Guicciardini, for instance, could help the Medici to collect all the latest art genres, like the Flemish landscapes and paintings of the *caravaggisti*, allowing the Medici to be in line with new modes in international taste.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that in the field of art patronage, the patricians gradually started to present themselves in a more princely way, by glorifying their own families in the present and emphasizing their alliances to other noble families and their possessions in the countryside. Within a relatively stable political system, such imagery seems to lack polemical undertones. As a result they found a new way to express family pride without undermining the authority of the Medici family and court.

Most of the conclusions presented here are based on the rich evidence I found in the Florentine archives about subjects as diverse as food gifts, the exchange of musical compositions, cultural brokerage activities, the social and geographic mobility of employees and artists, the social representation of the Medici and their representatives and cardinals in Rome, and about the diplomatic etiquette at the Roman court. It is through the richness of the source material that the

true scope of the patricians' contribution to Florentine culture can be put into sharp focus and that the general mechanisms behind their activities can be made clear. In some cases, notably the brokerage activities of Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger, one can look far beyond the boundaries of seventeenth-century Florence, when extensive correspondence sheds unexpected light on the complexity of recommendation and recruiting mechanisms using informal networks.

I believe that the Florentine elite can function as an important touchstone for the study of informal patrician networks and their contribution to the functioning and success of a territorial court in general. This issue surely requires more investigation and inevitably leads to new questions that could not be addressed in this dissertation. What happened for example, after the patricians carried out their functions as ambassadors abroad? Did they stay in close contact with the European elite, or did their relations dissolve after their missions were concluded? And what were the similarities (or differences) between the activities of Florentine patrician ambassadors in Rome and at other European courts? And more specifically about Rome: what kind of relations existed between diplomats from other states at the papal court? Did they also form informal networks? Research on these kinds of topics can shed more light on cultural contacts and diplomatic relations between Tuscany and other states.

What fascinated me most while committing this research project is the versatility of the patricians. In my opinion, the combination of political functions with artistic patronage activities, membership and active participation in cultural academies and confraternities, and the organization of ceremonial events, was something unique to the Florentine patricians, with their rich cultural history and specific historical identity.

