**A Medici Monarchy in Tuscany**

The existence of a principality ruled by the Medici dynasty in Tuscany was a byproduct of the sometimes fraught relationship between the Spanish and the papacy in the tumultuous years of the Italian Wars (1494–1530 or 1559). Expelled in 1494 and 1527, the Medici had required massive Spanish military intervention to emerge as Florentine princes. Two Medici popes, Leo X (r. 1513–1521) and Clement VII (r. 1523–1534), used the considerable powers of their office to secure their house’s position in Florence over the objections of powerful republican opposition. The final suppression of the republicans in the devastating siege of 1529–1530, conducted by Holy Roman Emperor Charles V’s (1500–1558) forces, bound the Medici and Spanish Habsburgs by ties of mutual dependence. In the early years, this dependence was largely that of a satellite regime on its mighty protector to ensure its survival against a conquered people. The Medici regime and Florentine independence seemed precarious, as underlined by Charles V’s acquisition of Milan in 1535. Florence teetered on the brink of a Spanish annexation with the assassination of Alessandro de’ Medici (1510–1537) in 1537 before the tenuous installation of the scion of a cadet line of the Medici, the seventeen-year-old Cosimo de’ Medici.

The fall of the Florentine republic in 1530 famously marked the collapse of an illustrious republican tradition. On its ashes rose a stable Medici monarchy, a transition traditionally regarded as the end of Florence’s golden age by dismayed Anglophone historians. The dark portrait has undoubted merits. Regional consolidation had been costly. A series of wars, revolutions, and revolts saw Prato sacked and Pisa, Florence, and Siena successfully besieged and captured between 1509 and 1555. From this violence, a centralized autocratic state emerged, snuffing out centuries of republicanism. Seen from the perspective of Florence’s economy, international standing, and internal peace, however, the replacement of an unstable republic in hostile rivalry with Siena and exercising lordly dominion over sometimes seething subject cities—such as Arezzo, Volterra, or Pisa—with a remarkably stable regional monarchy offered significant advantages. The advantages could only be secured, however, if Tuscans could bear the costs and maintain their independence. For decades, this seemed a doubtful prospect.

Cosimo I’s critical insight, however, was to appreciate that the mutuality of Spanish-Medici dependence could be turned to his advantage. The extensive bloodshed that resulted from installing the Medici and the reliance on Imperial garrisons gave the Spanish Habsburgs few friends in Tuscany. Short of direct annexation—a policy that, for reasons of legitimacy, public image, and expense, was ultimately unattractive—the Medici offered the best prospects of a stable regime that could make a net contribution to the Imperial cause. Domestically, Cosimo I created a space between the poles of Francophile republicanism and Spanish rule that proved acceptable to the bulk of the politically active populace. To a country scarred by war and social and political turmoil, he offered stability, the eventual withdrawal of foreign troops, and an independent regime that could turn patricians into aristocratic courtiers while excluding Savonarolan piagnoni and die-hard republicans. Mixing threat and incentive, Cosimo could portray all this as the best that could be achieved against an Imperial party suspicious of republicanism and itching for a more repressive, autocratic option. To the Imperial party, Cosimo could act as a bulwark of stability against religious and political radicalism and Francophile republicanism. More than this, Cosimo I could offer an ever-more impecunious Emperor the option of replacing an expensive military occupation with net contributions by an ever-faithful ally bound by dynastic marriage ties. Through patient state-building and occasional boldness in pushing the boundaries of acceptable action, Cosimo I transformed the Spanish satellite Duchy of Florence into the Spanish ally Grand Duchy of Tuscany. With the strong support of his powerful Spanish-Imperial allies, Cosimo I’s regime defeated exile armies in 1537 and 1554 and acquired most of the territory of Siena (1554–1557) after a brutal siege of the city (1554–1555).

With the conquest of Siena, the Medici both completed their substantive expansion in Tuscany and secured an unassailable position as Florence’s hereditary princes. Buoyed by Florence’s robust recovery and a peace dividend, the Medici could afford to turn outward in a way that no regime in Florence had been able to do for generations. Flush with the success of unifying most of Tuscany as an absolutist, bureaucratic, and centralized polity at peace with its immediate neighbors, the Medici could devote considerable resources to foreign adventures. The heavy fortification of Tuscany—it has been likened to Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban’s (1633–1707) later defenses of France—Medici alliance with the Spanish Habsburgs, and the stability of the regime’s political position meant that force could be used overseas with relative impunity. A few words on names may be in order. As the foregoing sketch indicates, Florence and the other polities of Tuscany underwent repeated political changes in the sixteenth century. At the beginning of the century, four republics and a small lordship ruled the ancient historic region of Tuscany. The largest among them was the Florentine Republic, then in the midst of a bitter war with the rebel Republic of Pisa, which it would finally conquer in 1509. The Republics of Siena and Lucca and the much smaller Lordship of Piombino all retained their independence, ever wary of Florence’s ambitions. By 1557, the Medici had long since effectively transformed the old Republic of Florence into a hereditary duchy. To this, they had added control of the Republic of Siena, except for key coastal territories, mostly from the old Republic of Siena, which the Spanish retained as the Presidial (from presidio or fortress) States. In 1569, Pope Pius V granted Cosimo I the novel title of Grand Duke of Tuscany, thereby transforming the remnants of these rival republics into the new Grand Duchy of Tuscany.

At no point, however, did the Medici realize their ambition to control all of Tuscany, for the Republic of Lucca successfully defended its independence against all comers until 1799. Thus, when I use “Tuscany” and “Tuscans” throughout this book, I generally deploy these words in a political sense, as shorthand for the Medici monarchy that became the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and that state’s subjects and representatives. The intrinsically ambiguous relationship between these political terms and the larger historic cultural region of Tuscany is productive, however, in that it points to how early modern Tuscans used history for political ends. Although the Medici never made good their political claim to all of Tuscany, in good Renaissance fashion they unabashedly appropriated the heritage of Etruria and the Etruscans as the truly ancient historical basis for their new state. As untroubled by a need for a singular, consistent basis for their rule as most Renaissance princes, the Medici also merrily appropriated Roman, medieval, Renaissance, religious, and mythic bases for legitimacy when it suited them. Above all, however, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany grew out of the old Florentine Republic. The grand dukes promoted other cities in Tuscany, including, notably, Pisa and Livorno, but Florence retained a clear primacy. As a result, it remained fairly common to refer to Florence, Florentines, and the duke of Florence as if the Grand Duchy of Tuscany had not supplanted its more famous republican predecessor. In some settings, there were power dynamics and claims to status and legitimacy associated with the use of one term or the other, but equally the choice could be a matter of casual usage. Generally, I have sought to limit the usage of Florence and Florentines to the specific case of the city and its citizens and to use Tuscany and Tuscans for the state and its citizens, but I have also followed the sources in their usage of the terms. In any event, ambiguity on this score dates to the late sixteenth century itself, reflecting unresolved questions about the relationship between Tuscany, its dominant city, and the legacy of the old republic.

**Florence’s Historians and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany**

Crossing the boundaries of numerous specialties, this study covers a period of Tuscan history that had once been neglected but is now flourishing. For nearly half a century from the end of the Second World War, Renaissance Florence constituted a major locus of Anglophone scholarship. This was overwhelmingly the Florence of the republic, especially that of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Animated by a belief in Florence as the torchbearer of civic republicanism, capitalism, and the cultural efflorescence that emerged from the flourishing of competitive individualism, Anglophone scholars working in the context of the Cold War characterized Florence from Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) to Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) as experiencing a Golden Age critical for the advancement of Western Civilization. Inspired by Jacob Burckhardt’s notions of both the state and the individual as works of art and Hans Baron’s thesis about the relationship between Florence’s beginning of the fifteenth century military crisis and civic humanism , to the postwar generation of Anglophone historians, Florence’s role as the birthplace of the Renaissance and as restorer of classical republican political traditions seemed naturally convergent. Several acknowledged tensions lay at the heart of this story, however, for scholars also appreciated the failings of Florence’s republic. Above all, they had to wrestle with the role of Florence’s most famous family, the Medici, who worked diligently to subvert republican institutions even as they lavishly patronized the Renaissance.

Mounting evidence of the practical functioning of the Florentine state and an emerging left politics in the 1970s and 1980s that focused on class conflict presented an altogether less sunny image. In this story, Florence’s social history meshed with its political history to cast Florence as a society beset by struggle, culminating in the tragic victory of the Medici. The end of the Cold War and its ideological battles and the broadening of the narrative of the Renaissance beyond Florence opened historiographic space for new questions but also reduced the automatic centrality of Florence. Comparing Florence with other polities and seeing it in a longer time horizon showed the complex dynamism of other states in Tuscany, Florence’s relationship to the broader story of the rise and fall of the communes, and the key role of the lordships of central and northern Italy in the Renaissance.

Even as the story of the Renaissance has broadened, Florence has retained its claim to a special role on several grounds. Most of them—for instance, those pertaining to art history—are beyond the scope of this study, but a few bear mentioning here. For one, Florence has retained a very large number of public and private records. Exceptionally, Florentines generated both extraordinary family records, especially the ricordanze and accounts books of the patriciate, and detailed, albeit problematic, tax records from the first catasto of 1427 onward. These have enabled the writing of very detailed family, neighborhood, and social histories that have few parallels elsewhere. In light of Florentine families’ critical role in the history of banking, finance, and the rise of capitalism, there has been a confluence of family and business studies, which often sit at the base of larger studies of Florence’s economy. Likewise, the torrent of writing about the tortuous and ultimately unsuccessful politics of the Florentine republic has given Florence an enduring place in the history of political thought, culminating in Machiavelli and Francesco Guicciardini (1483–1540). As a result, an understanding of the precise details of late republican Florentine politics is essential and has fueled continual inquiry. These studies share a tacit endpoint with the fall of the last republic in 1530 or the rise of the Grand Duchy, as, for instance, in John Najemy’s now standard A History of Florence: 1200–1575.

Even as the traditional fields of Florentine history have seen a relative decline in recent decades, Medici Tuscany in the reigns of Cosimo I, Francesco I, and Ferdinando I has been the subject of increasingly intensive scholarship. Of course, new interest among Anglophone scholars has not marked the beginning of grand ducal historiography—far from it. An illustrious Italian tradition of writing on this period stretches from the work of Jacopo Riguccio Galluzzi (1739–1801) through Luciano Berti’s study of Francesco I to the three-volume history of the Grand Duchy by Furio Diaz. Even so, Anglophone interest has been helped by early ducal Tuscany’s dynamism, the abundance and accessibility of sources held at the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, and the relative neglect of the period by previous generations, which had prompted Eric Cochrane to write his seminal Florence in the Forgotten Centuries, 1527–1800.

This book is written in that broader historiographic framework, situating Tuscany’s global actions in the context of an abundance of recent research on the Grand Duchy, particularly the period known in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze as the Mediceo del Principato (1537–1743). The contours of scholarship on the grand ducal Medici differ markedly from the more familiar works on the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Politically, interest has concentrated on the Medici project of successfully co-opting both the previously rival cities of Tuscany and the Florentine political elite into an autocratic political system. This developed into a prototypical absolutist, bureaucratic, and centralized state epitomized by the construction of the Uffizi (offices, in Tuscan dialect).56 In a region traditionally contested by rival republics riven by internal strife, such a new monarchy required an accompanying cultural and religious framework of legitimation, as has been explored in several recent studies.

Autocratic centralization not only transformed Tuscany’s political history but also gave scope for new, large-scale development projects that challenged the traditional urban hierarchy and political economy of Tuscany. The Medici attempted this most successfully in the newly redeveloped city of Livorno, which grew spectacularly as a result of the development of the physical and especially legal infrastructure that turned it into a pioneering free port. Recent studies by Francesca Trivellato, on communitarian cosmopolitanism, and Corey Tazzara, on the development of the free port, have shown how the conjuncture of economic growth and relative religious tolerance transformed Livorno into a dynamic cosmopolitan center and hub of the Sephardic diaspora. Even as Livorno grew into a major nexus of peaceful trade, the centralized regime that built it also developed it as the operational base both of the Tuscan navy and of the separate naval military order of the Knights of Santo Stefano. Throughout the period considered in this book, the Medici grand dukes strained to transform Tuscany into a remarkably active naval power. To this end, the Medici regime hosted northern Europeans in Livorno, facilitating their epochal commercial and piratical entry into the Mediterranean as a whole. In so doing, the grand dukes sought to move beyond the fifteenth-century galley system of the Florentine republic to tap the deeper legacy of Pisa as one of the great medieval maritime republics and to play an active role in Spanish-led naval coalitions in both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic.

In light of the tremendous scale of the surviving documentation, range of Medici actions, and depth of the historiography, this study seeks not to be comprehensive but rather to play the role of a puzzle piece crafted to slot together with exciting work occurring on many fronts, especially among a new generation of Italian scholars. For instance, Giorgio-Giòrs Tosco’s recent dissertation undertakes a thorough and systematic comparison of Tuscan and Genoese efforts to enter world trade, primarily focused on the seventeenth century. New dissertation projects ongoing at the University of Padua and the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa consider Tuscany’s sugar trade and Ferdinando I’s ventures in Morocco. The role of fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century Florentine merchants in early Iberian trade and exploration, with particular attention to the Florentine community in Lisbon, has been the subject of a series of studies, many displaying remarkable archival virtuosity. In keeping with a broader historiographical interest in reassessing early modern projects for intellectual engagement with the Islamic world—principally the Ottoman and Safavid Empires—the last decade has seen research on the Tuscan-Papal Medici Oriental Press and the work of Giovanni Battista Raimondi (1536–1614). Likewise, exhibitions on Tuscany’s ties to Russia and on the operation of the Medici Oriental Press have produced important companion volumes, which have proved invaluable.65 I draw on these studies without seeking to reproduce them. Similarly, I briefly summarize the findings of Hair and Davies on Tuscany in Sierra Leone and of Kaled El Bibas on Tuscany’s relationship with the Lebanese emir Fakhr ad-Dīn; I have also benefited from the latter’s work on Tuscany’s interaction with Morocco.66 The present study seeks to embed these discrete episodes in a broader framework that captures the range of Tuscan activity and the political logic that bound its multifarious enterprises together.

In parallel with the transformation in historians’ approach to the period, art historians have directed our attention to a broader vision of material culture and new conceptions of collecting, influence, and imagination that engage with Renaissance Italy’s long-distance connections. To their careful reconstructions and analyses both of the Grand Duchy’s collections and of the products of the Medici workshops, the present study adds the broader political framework through which objects and information could move to and from Tuscany. It explores the general patterns of action that gave the Medici access to objects from around the world, specific instances when Medici agents sent items to Florence, and times when the Medici dispatched luxury goods as diplomatic gifts.

Central to Grand Ducal Tuscany’s historiographic rehabilitation has been a deepening appreciation of its pioneering role in the history of science, not only as patron of Galileo, but also as a center of botanical inquiry. The network of Medici agents, affiliates, and diplomats who sent samples to Tuscany’s new botanical gardens, there to be depicted by talented artists, also brought the rare and exotic items that filled Medici collections and supplied Grand Ducal workshops. This book seeks to elucidate some of the social, political, and diplomatic structures that enabled exotic flora and fauna, luxury goods, and information to come to Tuscany. The institutions that were developed to house and analyze them, from the botanical gardens and villas to the collections of the Guardaroba, are considered primarily in so far as they pertain to Tuscany’s long-distance activities and their diplomatic and political dimensions.

Just as the need to constrain the scope of this study thematically requires the imposition of artificial subject boundaries, so also this book wrestles with the same logistical challenges that face any individual’s attempt to write global history. Research for this volume rests primarily on Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and English manuscripts, with small amounts of German, French, and Latin in other sources. The Medici, however, had to contend with a much wider variety of languages in their global projects. Even in the Medici archives, I have relied on the accompanying early modern translations of diplomatic documents in languages like Arabic and Russian. The Medici addressed this same problem of language by commissioning their polyglot dragoman-diplomat, Michelangelo Corai, to negotiate on their behalf in Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran and by patronizing the Tipografia Medicea Orientale (Medici Oriental Press). Language and logistical constraints—Tuscany’s most important rebel ally was based in Aleppo, which has been shattered by rebellion and defeat again so recently—mean that this is a project told largely from the point of the view of the Tuscan state and its archives, with all that that entails. Fortunately, at least, the Tuscan side of this story has become vastly more accessible thanks to the Medici Archive Project and its BIA database, which renders visible much that would otherwise be obscured by the vast scale of the Medici archives.

**On Global History**

Globalization comes in waves. Late-nineteenth- and early-twentiethcentury globalization went hand in glove with expanding European, North American, and Japanese empires, both formal and informal. The current period of globalization, by contrast, gathered momentum amid a wave of decolonization and took off dramatically in an era of political fragmentation and the apparent dominance of the private economy and information networks. Historians’ accounts of subjects that would now be classified as global history have thus far mirrored broader trends and can be expected to continue to do so. From the stories of colonization and decolonization, through Marxist-infused economic analyses, to a dawning awareness of environmental change, global histories have now been extended to cover nearly every subject that historians investigate. After apparently sweeping all before it, global history has, however, faced a new wave of critiques. Amid all this historiographic energy, a few major trends in early modern global historiography bear particular mention here: nationalism and multiculturalism; collecting; commodities, trade patterns, and the groups involved; seas and the diasporas that span them; and comparative and connective history.

In telling the story of Tuscany’s engagement with the wider world, this study does not seek to contribute to tacitly nationalist narratives that tally the exploits of famous Italian travelers; indeed, it is meant to challenge implicitly national frameworks. In this, it leans against an old tradition in Italian scholarship that sees two accomplished Florentine travelers who play an important role in this book, Filippo Sassetti (1540–1588) and Francesco Carletti (1573 / 1574–1636), as exemplars of Italian travel in a line stretching back through Amerigo Vespucci to Marco Polo. The story of a third equally important Medici affiliate offers a useful corrective. Michelangelo Corai—a renegade Syrian dragoman, Mantuan knight, Tuscan diplomat, Persian mining commissioner, and spy—plays a central role in part 3 herein and certainly cannot be easily fit into any national narrative. While the case of Corai challenges nationalist narratives, it is also not an especially close fit for the last generation’s reveling in ambiguous, multiple, and unresolved identities as precursors of modern multiculturalism.