THE MEDICI

Citizens and Masters
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*Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome, 1960–) DBI
Florence Archivio di Stato ASF
    Arte della lana AL
    Capitani di Parte Guelfa CPG
    Carte Strozziane CS
    Consulte e pratiche CP
    Dogana di Firenze DF
    Signori, Legazioni e commissarie LC
    Mediceo avanti il principato MAP
    Signori, Missive, I° Cancelleria Missive
    Notarile antecosimiano NA
    Otto di guardia e balia Otto
    Provvisioni, Registri PR
    Signori, Dieci, Otto, Legazioni e
    Commissarie, Missive, Responsive Sig.X.VIII
Florence Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana BML
Florence Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale BNCF
    Magliabechi Magl.
Florence Biblioteca Riccardiana BRF
Abbreviations


Mantua Archivio di Stato ASMn
Archivio Gonzaga AG
Milan Archivio di Stato ASMi
Potenze estere, Firenze Pot. est.
Registri delle missive Missive
Milan Biblioteca Ambrosiana BA
Modena ASMo

Carteggio tra principi Estensi, casa e stato CS
Vatican City Archivio Segreto Vaticano ASV
Registra vaticana RV
Vatican City Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana BAV
Paris Bibliothèque Nationale de France PBNF
Rome Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale BNCR
sine data (undated) s.d.

NB: All dates have been modernized unless otherwise indicated.
PART IV

The Medici and Their Image
The sponsorship of spectacles and pageantry was a customary way for Renaissance princes to make an impression of magnificence (magnificentia). An exemplary and much-studied case is the activity promoted by Ercole d’Este, not just in celebration of his dynasty but every year also at carnival time. During these so-called Ferrarese festivals, the salons of the ducal palace provided the backdrop for vernacular performances of comedies by Plautus and Terence, or of dramatic texts newly composed for the occasion. At Ferrara, theatrical entertainment was one of the most visible and characteristic components of the humanist culture exhibited by the Este court as a badge of its distinction and nobility.1

In a princely state (signoria) such as Ferrara (or Milan, Mantua, or Bologna), the space granted to civic ceremonies was determined by the ruler, who tended to exert control over such displays of civic identity as festivals celebrating local patron saints and horse races through the city (palio).2 In republican Florence, by contrast, especially after the oligarchic resurgence in 1382, civic identity—not to mention the preeminence of the families forming the ruling group—was celebrated3

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2 For an initial comparison of how civic identity was fêted in three cities under different political regimes, see Ventrone 2003. For comparisons between Venice and Florence not specifically focused on festivals of civic identity, see Casini 1996; between Florence and Milan, see Garbero Zorzi 1989.
3 On civic pride in republican Florence and its persistence under the Medici regime, see F. W. Kent 2004b, 10–12.
above all during the festival honoring the city’s patron saint John the Baptist: such occasions witnessed a highly articulated system of spectacles, including exhibitions of chivalric prowess such as jousts and armeggerie (choreographed equestrian performances), and flamboyant displays such as the procession of the Magi. Here the protagonists were the citizenry as a whole, or the governing class, but never one family set apart from its supporters and relatives, much less a single individual.

The role that the fifteenth-century Medici played in sponsoring festivals and theatrical performances can shed light on whether they were in fact “princely rulers,” or only first among equals. Such a perspective can elucidate, first, their ambiguous political position in the city; second, the limits placed by Florentine republican traditions (vivere civile) on their freedom of choice in matters of ceremony; third, the extent to which staged entertainment varied between the eras of Cosimo “il vecchio” and Lorenzo the Magnificent; and finally, the differences between theatrical patronage in a republican context as opposed to a genuine princely court.

When Cosimo de’ Medici returned from exile in October 1434, the basic pattern of ceremonial and celebratory theater in Florence was already established and would remain virtually unaltered until the principate’s inception in the 1530s. In the period before 1382, a variety of spectacles are documented: corti d’amore (open-air banquets, dancing, and cavalcades through the city) organized by groups of magnates (nobles prohibited from holding the highest political offices), especially in the May Day period; processions; chivalric games; and parades by the minor guilds. But they never became a matter of routine, nor were they formalized: Florentines evidently did not wish to be reminded of the political conflicts out of which they grew. These displays constituted attempts—neither always effective nor welcome to the citizenry as a whole—to give the limelight to their organizers, often significant political and social actors. After 1382, such “experiments” in ceremonial performance tended to employ both chivalric and religious languages—two modes of discourse that often overlapped.

The families making up the Albizzi regime regularized the city’s festive calendar in the hope of giving Florence an image of ceremonial dignity and civic unity, in contrast to the factional strife and numerous regime changes that had occurred before 1382. Beginning at the end of the fourteenth century, new feast days were

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4 There are numerous studies of this Florentine festival: the classic is Trexler 1980b, 240–263; see Ventrone 2007a for previous bibliography.


6 Hatfield 1970; Trexler 1978e.


8 I use the term “religious language” in relation to the institution in the 1390s of the oldest feasts and performances on religious themes of which we know, the festa de’ Magi and that of the Ascension. These became regular features of the city’s festive calendar in the fifteenth century, though not with identical regularity, affording important opportunities for display to both the confraternities in charge as well as to the individual families’ members who played a part in their preparation and staging.

instituted and the festival of St. John the Baptist, the major annual celebration of Florence’s civic identity, was restructured.\textsuperscript{10} Traditional chivalric displays continued, but were now organized so as to give starring roles to ruling family members: in jousts, or dances and mock combats (armeggerie) arranged by groups of youths (brigate), under instruction from the Guelf party to celebrate important events (such as the conquest of Pisa in 1406),\textsuperscript{11} or visits by illustrious guests (such as Emperor Sigismund of Luxembourg’s ambassadors in 1432).\textsuperscript{12}

The first notice of a \textit{festa dei magi} dates from 1390,\textsuperscript{13} as does the earliest mention of a religious play in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine recounting the Ascension of Christ;\textsuperscript{14} in later years there also were religious plays focused on the Pentecost and the Annunciation in the churches, respectively, of Santo Spirito and San Felice in Piazza.\textsuperscript{15} At the \textit{festa dei magi}, city dwellers could be dazzled by a cavalcade through the streets of eminent citizens in the regal dress of the magi, accompanied by a throng of squires and aristocratic youths, exotic animals, and carriages loaded with precious wares, while those attending the religious plays could be thrilled by avant-garde stage machinery of astounding complexity, later attributed by Giorgio Vasari to Filippo Brunelleschi.\textsuperscript{16} Such plays enabled the faithful to visualize a new and impressive image of paradise, besides dramatizing the mystery of Christ’s twofold nature, human and divine.\textsuperscript{17}

The stance of the Medici regime vis-à-vis this rich panorama of spectacle was conservative. They continued oligarchic traditions without emphasizing (beyond what established custom would allow) their own family members’ prominence, both in jousts and armeggerie and in religious and civic festivals. Cosimo “il vecchio” and his relatives and friends did, however, begin, not long after their return from exile, to affiliate themselves with the confraternities organizing such spectacles, either joining forces with, or taking the place of, the rich members and patrons who had helped to cover the costs under the previous regime.\textsuperscript{18} A telling sign was Medici family membership in the company of the magi, whose annual procession through Florence had once conferred luster on the Albizzi regime’s top families, and that now, immediately after the political revolution, became a conspicuous

\textsuperscript{10} Guasti 1908.
\textsuperscript{12} For the frequency and solemnity of the chivalric ceremonies organized for important visits, see Petriboni and Rinaldi 2001. See also Trexler 1978c; and for the visit of the imperial ambassadors, Trexler 1980b, 236–238; Ventrone 2007b, 14–15.
\textsuperscript{14} Sacchetti 1970, 55, 188.
\textsuperscript{15} For these festivals, see Newbigin 1996a, vol. 2.
\textsuperscript{16} Vasari 1906, 2:375–378.
\textsuperscript{17} Ventrone 2015.
\textsuperscript{18} On this, see as well Kent 2000, 47, 65–66. The involvement of the Medici in the so-called \textit{feste di Oltrarno} is confirmed by several sonnets of Feo Belcari, addressed to Cosimo and his sons and published most recently in Newbigin 1996a, 2:239 (Annunciazione), 2:253 (Ascensione).
opportunity for displaying Medici wealth and preeminence—indeed for regal transfiguration. Cosimo himself, luxuriously attired, not only took part in the celebration;\(^{19}\) he also linked the magi’s image indissolubly to his own lineage and of his leading political allies\(^ {20}\) with Benozzo Gozzoli’s frescoes in Medici palace chapel on via Larga (today via Cavour), where the idealized portrait of the young Lorenzo as the magus Gaspare prefigured the leadership role that he was “dynastically” destined to fill.\(^ {21}\) The Florentine public was exposed to the sumptuous regality that still strikes viewers today in those paintings (deliberately entrusted to a leading practitioner of the International Gothic style, the favored contemporary vehicle for representing the core notions of chivalric and princely nobility) mainly at “live” performances of the procession (though these were held infrequently):\(^ {22}\) access to the Medici chapel was a rare privilege reserved for select foreign visitors, or for the Medici’s Florentine intimates. Thus the Medici projected an image of magnificence outside Florence, which they could keep deliberately subdued at home.

But at key political junctures Cosimo did not hesitate to promote displays illustrating his family’s preeminence, without, however, ever overstepping the bounds of civic tradition. He simultaneously demonstrated keen awareness of theatrical communication’s potency as an instrument of propaganda, showing acute sensitivity to the need to keep his own patronage sufficiently understated so as not to grate on other leading oligarchs’ sensibilities. The two most significant moments at which Cosimo took the lead in staging spectacles were the ecumenical council of 1439 and the visit of Pope Pius II and Galeazzo Maria Sforza to Florence in 1459.

It is well known that the council summoned to reunite the Western and Eastern churches was transferred to Florence at the instance of Cosimo and his brother Lorenzo, providing support, and so deriving potent reinforcement of their family’s prestige.\(^ {23}\) For the occasion, the coterie of humanists and theologians who were habitués of the Florentine church of Santa Maria degli Angeli put together, under the guidance of Ambrogio Traversari, an ambitious theatrical program in support of the unionist position of the Roman church, in the context of the traditional Annunciation and Ascension festivals. The stage sets of these religious plays were adapted so as to convey a visual endorsement of the *filioque* clause (at the

\(^ {19}\) On Medici patronage of the *compagnia de’ magi*, see Hatfield 1970, 135–141. In 1451, Cosimo received an expensive fur cape to wear during the festival: ibid., 136–137; Kent 2000, 65–66.

\(^ {20}\) Including Galeazzo Maria Sforza and Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, prominently portrayed in the foreground.

\(^ {21}\) On Medici portraiture linked to the theme of the magi, see Chastel 1959, 240–248; Hatfield 1976. On the relationship between Lorenzo and his grandfather Cosimo, see F. W. Kent 2004b, 13–14, 17–18.

\(^ {22}\) The feast of the magi was meant to take place every three and then every five years, but is attested only sporadically in the Medici period: 1439, 1447, 1451, and 1469, besides 1454 as a pageant during the San Giovanni festival: Hatfield 1970, 113–119. On the affiliation of leading writers and intellectuals (from Luigi Pulci to Poliziano and Marsilio Ficino) with the *compagnia dei magi* in the Laurentian years, see ibid., 115–117, 135–141; Trexler 1980b, 423–425.

\(^ {23}\) On the council of Florence’s historiography, see Viti 1994.
Annunciation play) and the principle of papal *plenitudo potestatis* (at the Ascension play).\(^{24}\) The *Annunciazione* play in particular was designed to put the unionist message across, with an original stage setting never subsequently reemployed, and a changed location from the usual church of San Felice in Piazza to San Marco, then being remodeled by Michelozzi (with Cosimo’s patronage) under a Dominican rector, Antonino Pierozzi, who was himself deeply involved in the conciliar debates. Given the synod’s positive outcome (if only in the short term), these elaborate performances must have further buttressed the position of the Medici—but more on the plane of international relations than internal politics: the churches would have been packed not with the Florentine populace, but with local and foreign ecclesiastics and intellectuals attached to the council. None of the numerous Florentine sources and chronicles nor, so far as I know, any ambassadorial dispatches, mentions the plays, which in contrast are minutely described by Bishop Abraham of Suzdal, a member of the Russian delegation.\(^{25}\)

During the two decades following the council, the Medici cannot be detected attempting to overshadow or upstage other elite family members at major festivals. But an important diplomatic event spurred the government to plan a program of civic festivities of unprecedented richness and variety. Pius II’s visit, en route to the diet of Mantua to promote a crusade against the Ottomans, drew princes and diplomats to Florence from all over Europe—a mark of the central role the city now played on the wider political scene, especially after the peace of Lodi in 1454. As the herald, Francesco Filarete recorded in the *Liber cerimonialis*\(^{26}\) that, in addition to a series of solemn receptions, visits, and banquets offered to the illustrious guests, the *signoria* (the chief Florentine magistracy) organized a joust in piazza Santa Croce,\(^{27}\) a ball in the *mercato nuovo* (which was adorned with tapestries and silver to resemble a salon in a palazzo), and a wild animal hunt in piazza della Signoria.\(^{28}\)

During these events, the Medici deliberately mingled with the other participating ruling families, maintaining a discreet presence so as to escape notice either in the official source (*Liber cerimonialis*) or in most private memoirs. Cosimo did however play the host in his own palace to Galeazzo Maria Sforza, the young heir

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\(^{24}\) For this thesis, see Ventrone 2009, with previous bibliography and an assessment of the sources. On papal *plenitudo potestatis*, see Rizzi 2010.

\(^{25}\) His descriptions are published in Prokof’ev 1970, 205–208, 254–256, and, in a new Italian translation accompanied by the Cyrillic text, in Ventrone 2015.

\(^{26}\) Trexler 1978c, 74–78; Petriboni and Rinaldi 2001, 466–470.

\(^{27}\) Apropos of this joust, Cosimo wrote to his nephew Pierfrancesco di Lorenzo, who intended to participate on his own horse, “questa è festa della chomunità et fassi per honore della ciptà e non per altre leggieri chagioni come s’e chostumato piu volte” (“This is a community festival and is being held for the city’s benefit and not for other frivolous reasons, as has often been the case”): Kent 2000, 476 n. 310. On this joust, and in general on Florence’s ceremonial apparatus on this occasion, see now Lurati 2012.

of Duke Francesco Sforza, his main political ally, sponsoring an armeggeria in his honor at which the ten-year-old Lorenzo, bearing the honorific title of messere, rode at the head of a brigata of youths—a way of presenting him as his grandfather’s legitimate successor at the head of the Medici consorteria (lineage), and so of the city itself. Even here the Medici comported themselves ambiguously: on the one hand Lorenzo’s first “public” appearance took place in an armeggeria, an activity that had given the elite’s offspring the chance to swagger ever since the Albizzi period, but on the other the display’s symbolic message was highlighted in a pageant, “conducted” by the noble youths and mounting a triumph of love (amore), the first such known in Florence. The message was conveyed in a short poem—one of two dedicated by anonymous clients (clientes) to Lorenzo’s father Piero and grandfather Cosimo: the people assembled were meant to understand “they all were subject to one lord [signore].”

Encomiastic poetry of this type, linked to spectacles promoted by particular families, first appears in Florence, as far as I know, with the 1459 festivals, and more than official sources and private memoirs it highlights the fusion of civic and family interests that Dale Kent has identified as Cosimo’s characteristic political style. The two short poems describe the celebrations, organized by the signoria, and the equestrian display, mounted by the Medici, as exaltations of the city’s and its rulers’ wealth and political centrality. And yet despite their explicit eulogies, such compositions—preserved in single, usually dedication, manuscripts—were intended for a circumscribed audience, declaimed as they were exclusively for the dedictees and their closest associates, and thus reflecting the dialogue between reality and appearance that had characterized the ruling family’s double image since 1434: within the civic domain respectful of oligarchic tradition, and yet within the inner circle of their “relatives and friends” laying the basis of an identity on the wider

29 Visitors from abroad were customarily lodged with the Florentine elite; Galeazzo Maria stayed with the Medici obviously to emphasize, both in Florence and throughout Italy, the solidity of the Medici-Sforza alliance.

30 Petriboni and Rinaldi 2001, 469. The word used is menare, meaning “to lead” or “to conduct.”

31 “Poi venne un giovanetto assai virile, / giovan di tempo e vecchio di sapere, / e tiene ancora di boce puerile. / Costui per più cagioni ha gran potere, / perciò che la sua casa molto puote, / e questo chiaro si puote vedere, / Figliuol di Piero e di Cosmo nipote; / però questi gentili il fan signore, / avendo inteso del tinor le note. / Ond’egli, come savio a tal tinore, / volle mostrare a tutta quella gente / ch’eran suggetti tutti a un signore” (Then there came a thoroughly manly youngster, a youth in years but a man in wisdom, still with a boy’s voice. For many reasons he has great power because his house is potent, as is plain to see [for he is] the son of Piero and grandson of Cosimo; so these gentlemen make him signore, having understood the notes of the tenor. Whence he, understanding this tenor too, wishes to show to all the people assembled that they all were subject to one lord): Ricordi di Firenze 1459, BNCF, MS Magl. XXV.24, p. 31. The other short poem is Terze rime (BNCF, MS Magliabechiano 7.1121, published in Newbigin 2011): Biagini 1992, 152; Bessi 1992, 108–109. It has been repeatedly emphasized, ever since Chastel 1959, 241, that the golden tunic and turban worn by Lorenzo in this armeggeria resembled the young magus Gaspare’s in the cavalcade depicted in Gozzoli’s fresco—in other words, with the political message that the family’s young scion was the city’s future leader.

32 Kent 2009.
stage of interstate relations sufficiently elevated and noble to set them on a par with legitimate princely dynasties elsewhere.\(^\text{33}\)

Encomiastic descriptions of spectacles staged on special occasions became the norm in the sixteenth century, when princely marriages or other significant moments in rulers’ private lives assumed a public character in the civic celebratory calendar;\(^\text{34}\) similar accounts are to be found in the previous century too, both in manuscript and in print, especially in courtly contexts.\(^\text{35}\) While Medici sponsorship of displays and spectacles might have been quantitatively modest in comparison to similar events at Italian princely courts,\(^\text{36}\) it is nevertheless significant that there are copious and precocious encomia for festivities featuring not just the Medici but their closest political allies too. Such compositions (especially when preserved in a single manuscript and obviously limited in circulation) helped to create a self-conscious awareness of the Medici regime’s growing exclusiveness.\(^\text{37}\)

The two short poems in terza rima on the 1459 festivities inaugurated a mode of marking the few spectacles publicly sponsored by the Medici: Filippo Lapaccini’s tercets on the \textit{armeggeria} of 1464, dedicated by Tommaso Benci to Marietta degli Strozzi;\(^\text{38}\) Luigi Pulci’s \textit{Giostra} and a short poem, no longer extant, by Ugolino Verino for Lorenzo’s jousting victory in 1469;\(^\text{39}\) Poliziano’s \textit{Stanze} and the \textit{Hexametrum}

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\(^{33}\) An emblem of the Medici’s double aspect, originating with Cosimo and maintained by his successors, is the monumental marble portal (on view today in the Museo d’Arte Antica at the Castello Sforzesco in Milan) that welcomed visitors to Medici bank’s Milan seat—a building donated by Francesco Sforza. It features the sculpted Medici and Sforza emblems, emphasizing their parity in a way hard to imagine in Florence. The Medici’s private and public status is confirmed by the embassy sent to Florence (26–27 February 1450) announcing Francesco Sforza’s conquest of Milan, delivered both to “La comunità de Fiorenza” and “Cosmo de’ Medici” in person: Colomba 1905, 95. With regard to the insignia conveying the “external” image of the Medici at the Bolognese marriage of Annibale Bentivoglio to Lucrezia d’Este in 1487, Lorenzo de’ Medici’s personal coat of arms figured among the Italian princes’ heraldic crests adorning the reception room walls—demonstrating the signorial status, de facto if not de jure, accorded to him outside Florence: see Cazzola 1979, 24.

\(^{34}\) Molinari 1980; Mitchell 1990.

\(^{35}\) No specific and up-to-date study exists on the pamphlets published to celebrate marriages in the quattrocento. See in general Pinto 1971, which is now dated; for a selection of Sforza marriages, see Lopez 1976, 2008.

\(^{36}\) Even a cursory examination of the Mantuan ambassadors’ letters while resident at the Milanese court between 1458 and 1482 will reveal that at carnival and Christmas time, during spring and summer, as well as for weddings, funerals, and the entrées of illustrious visitors, feasts, balls, hunts, banquets, and jousts were taking place almost daily. In Florence, such activities were rarer and almost always prompted (except for weddings and funerals) by important civic occasions. See Leverotti and Lazzarini 1999–; see too the chronology of Ferrarese spectacles in Cruciani, Falletti, and Ruffini 1994, 164–167.

\(^{37}\) Regardless of staged spectacles, the encomiastic poetry dedicated to the Medici (for example, Ugolino Verino’s \textit{Carlina}) could never be as explicit as, for example, Tito Vespasiano Strozzi’s \textit{Borsidae} or Francesco Filelio’s \textit{Sphortias}, addressed respectively to the Estensi and the Sforza—another measure of the “distance that separated the Sforza and the Estensi—dukes and legitimate sovereigns—from Lorenzo, who exercised princely power in fact but not by right”: Bausi 2006, 163.

\(^{38}\) Lapaccini 1973–75. On the political significance of this \textit{armeggeria}, see Ventrone 2007b, 18–22, with bibliography.

\(^{39}\) Pulci 1986; on Verino’s composition, see Bausi 1996, 358–359.
carmen de ludicro hastatorum equitum certamine ad Iulianum Medicem virum clarissimum by Naldo Naldi for Giuliano’s jousting triumph in 1475;\(^40\) and the Elegia in septem stellas errantes, sub humana specie per urbem florentinam curribus a Laurentio Medice patriae patre duci iussas more triumphantium, also by Naldi, for the seven planets’ cavalcade sponsored by Lorenzo for the 1490 carnival\(^41\)—to mention only poems linked to spectacles. Such compositions reveal the political significance of the events celebrated (although the message was for only a select circle able to decipher the allusions’ cryptic symbolism). Examples are the lines cited above from the Terz e rime alluding to the Medici’s power,\(^42\) or Pulci’s verses explaining the meaning of Lorenzo’s standard in the 1469 joust:

E’ mi parea sentir sonar Miseno,
quando in sul campo Lorenzo giugnea
sopra un caval che tremar fa il terreno;
e nel suo bel vexillo si vedea
di sopra un sole e poi l’arcobaleno,
dove a lettere d’oro si leggea:
“Le tems revient,” che può interpretarsi
tornare il tempo e ’l secol rinnovarsi.\(^43\)

Lorenzo thus adhered to his grandfather’s policy of dissimulation, at least until the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478—itself a watershed, resulting in no public spectacles for a decade.\(^44\) The participation of the two Medici brothers in the jousts of 1469 and

\(^{41}\) NALDI NALDII ELEGIA IN SEP/TEM STELLAS ERRANTES SVB/ HVMANA SPECIE PER VRBEM/ FLORENTINAM CVRRIBVS A/ LAVRENTIO MEDICE PATRIA/ E PATRE/ DVICI IVSSAS MORE TR/VMPHANTIVM, BRF, Edizioni rare 572, the unique copy without indication of place or date of publication: see IGI, n. 6766. The Elegia is discussed and partly published in Ventrone 1990, 356–360.
\(^{42}\) See note 31 above.
\(^{43}\) Pulci 1986, lxiv, 86. “And it seemed to me I heard Misenus sound [his horn] when Lorenzo came onto the field riding a horse that made the ground shake. And on his fair standard could be seen a sun on high and then a rainbow, and these golden letters could be read: ‘The time returns,’ which may be taken to mean that time has returned and the world been renewed.” For a “Caesarean” reading of these verses and of Lorenzo’s standard, see Ricciardi 1992, 190–191.
\(^{44}\) This is clear from, among other sources, Piero da Bibbiena letter to Giovanni Lanfredini, in Fabroni 1784, 2:388: “Non voglio dimenticare di dire che più di dieci anni sono non si feciono edifici et trionfi, et in questi tali di et per amore di sua Sig[noria Franceschetto Cibo] se ne sono fatti da sei che gli sono paruti maravigliosi e opera divina [. . .] È concorso questa volta in questa terra il maggior popolo che ci si ricordassi mai, in tal modo che da Palagio a S. Giovanni non poterono portare le cose pubbliche come ceri et similia. È stato continuo un numero infinito di persone, et quando questi famigli pubblici volevano rimuoverne alcuni, rispondevano gridando che erano venuti nella città per vedere il genero di Lorenzo, il figliuolo del papa, ché così parlavano.” (Let me not forget to mention that it has been more than ten years since any [temporary] edifices or triumphs were mounted, and yet just recently, out of affection for his lordship Franceschetto Cibo, six have been put on, appearing to him marvelous and divine. . . . On this occasion the largest crowd within memory assembled in Florence, so that it was impossible to carry public items
1475 may have been notable for the splendor of their outfits and of the literary commemorations they received (which, however, remained entirely “in house,” as we have seen), but there was no rupture with the pattern of the oligarchy’s traditional civic ceremonial. Lorenzo’s understated style is evident as well on the particular occasion that, not only at princely courts but in Florence itself, shed most luster on ruling families: a wedding.

Lorenzo’s marriage to the Roman noble Clarice Orsini in June 1469, while celebrated magnificently in the cortile and in the garden of the Medici palace, and on a deck with lavish trappings erected in the street for dancing (as was customary among the Florentine oligarchy), did not violate communal sumptuary regulations for such occasions: no solemn entrée with ephemeral architectural “sets” was organized at the city gates for the bride, and no theatrical spectacles or allegorical entremets, customary at princely courts, were mounted. Luxury was judicious and sparing. As Marco Parenti recalled, “The food served was better suited to a wedding than to splendid feasting, and this I believe they did on purpose, to set an example to such as ceri and the like from the Palazzo della Signoria to the Baptistry of San Giovanni. The immense crowd never thinned out, and when the communal employees tried to get some of them to move along, they responded with an outcry that they had come to town to see Lorenzo’s son-in-law, the pope’s son as they called him.) Ceri were not candles, but wood and papier-mâché constructions representing towns subject to Florence. They were called ceri because they were offered to the patron saint. They were large and carried by porters. For other reports, see Gori 1926, 193–195.


46 Such a deliberate understatement also emerges during illustrious visits, for example by Galeazzo Maria Sforza and Bona of Savoy in 1471, and Eleonora of Aragon in 1473. In the first instance, as their host in his own palace, Lorenzo organized no special display or entertainment: it was the city that staged religious plays in the Oltrarno churches (Newbigin 1996a, 1:39–41). In the second, the greeting offered by the signoria and the citizenry to Ferrara’s future duchess was combined with the San Giovanni Battista festival: she attended the processions, the various pageants (edifizi) in parade and the palio race, and was then welcomed at the Medici palace, where (as she herself recalled in a letter) there was a “domestic lunch at which Lorenzo and Giuliano served her [at table] as esquires”—a diplomatic way of marking their inferiority to her in rank (see Falletti 1988, 134). On both occasions, Lorenzo displayed no behavior in public that overstepped his status as “citizen” or overshadowed the signoria’s preeminence at official ceremonies.

47 Iconographic evidence, especially fifteenth-century marriage chests (cassoni nuziali), is more abundant than written. Since such furniture was intended for the newlyweds’ bedrooms, it often depicted wedding feasts—a way to record the virtual “stage sets” (arches, decks, lavish decorations) erected in the street at Florentine weddings, as well as the table settings, and the finery worn, for their owners’ future recollection. See Paolini and Parenti 2010, with bibliography.

48 Entremets, a word of Franco-Burgundian origin, was used in the fifteenth century to denote what would later be called interludes, pauses between the main courses of a banquet at court that might include both the service of some light dish and some brief staged entertainment, often allegorical. Examples of court banquets in Italy prior to Lorenzo’s wedding are the Milanese wedding of Tristano Sforza and Beatrice d’Este in 1455 (Motta 1894, 57–66) and Ippolita Sforza’s to Alfonso of Aragon, duke of Calabria, in 1465 (Rosmini 1820, 4:31–47). A subsequent example is the wedding of Eleonora of Aragon to Ercole d’Este in 1473 (Falletti 1988, 135–138). One custom the rich families of Florence did have was to assemble a mounted brigata of “the wedding youth” (giovani delle nozze) to accompany the bride from her father’s house to her husband’s. On Florentine wedding rituals, see Klapisch-Zuber 1979; Fabbri 1991, 175–193.
others to preserve the modesty and the middling approach appropriate to a wedding, since there was no more than one roast meat course.”

"Le vivande furono acomodate a noze, più tosto che a conviti splendidissimi, e questo credo che facessi de industria, per dare esempio agl’altri a servire quella modestia e mediocrità che-si richiede nelle noze, peroché non die’ mai più che uno arrosto." Parenti 1996, 247–250, at 248; italics mine.

Moreover, "no credenziera was installed for silverware," and even in the choice of table silver moderation prevailed in comparison not just to the princely weddings known to us, but to some festivities for other young Florentine patricians.

Less caution about display was evident, for example, in June 1466 at Nannina di Piero de’ Medici’s and Bernardo Rucellai’s wedding feast, which spilled over into the piazzetta facing Palazzo Rucellai and the loggia on which it bordered—a space joined together by an artificial “sky of deep blue fabric overhead, giving protection from the sun,” and embellished with the two families’ coats of arms. There was also a “rich credenziera laden with wrought silverware—the most beautiful and gracious ornament ever made for a wedding feast.” Although differing in political and cultural context, similarly sumptuous was Lorenzo Tornabuoni and Giovanna degli Albizzi’s wedding in September 1486, celebrated with exceptionally rich
furnishings, banquets, dances, and jousts, and with a profusion of premium tableware that tempted a light-fingered guest to make off with a valuable silver bowl.\textsuperscript{54}

Abundant costly utensils at table, and especially a \textit{credenziere}—a display cabinet with staggered shelves covered in finely embroidered cloth and containing expensive cutlery intended for admiration, not use—can reveal the self-image that patrons hoped to project—an object symbolically chosen to exhibit magnificence at princely weddings and regularly described and appraised as such by chroniclers and ambassadors.\textsuperscript{55} It is perhaps no accident that the only surviving part of the sumptuous pictorial decor by Melozzo da Forlì and his assistants once adorning the banquet hall of Girolamo Riario’s Roman palace (today Palazzo Altemps) is the imposing, life-size \textit{piattaia} (a cabinet for displaying plates), which aptly conveys the visual effect once produced on illustrious guests.\textsuperscript{56}

The matrimonial opulence practiced by families related or closely linked to the Medici, in contrast to the affected self-restraint of Lorenzo’s own wedding,\textsuperscript{57} can be viewed from two perspectives. On the one hand, it shows a reluctance, especially in the delicate circumstances of his probably imminent succession to his father Piero, to adopt forms of behavior too elitist toward his social peers,\textsuperscript{58} especially given the choice of an aristocratic, non-Florentine bride. On the other, the lavish weddings of families with Medici ties suggests a concerted sharing of charisma within the narrow Medici circle, with the magnificence exhibited redounding to the ruling family’s advantage too. It was a process that gathered pace, especially in the 1480s, in tandem with the authoritarian legislative measures following the Pazzi conspiracy,\textsuperscript{59} through architectural and pictorial commissions not given directly by Lorenzo but entrusted to his closest supporters. Such commissions changed the aspect of the city and many of its religious buildings. Examples of architectural commissions include the Scala and Gondi palaces, erected in Albertian style by Giuliano da Sangallo, and Filippo Strozzi’s palace by Benedetto da Maiano. Examples of pictorial commissions

\begin{itemize}
\item[54] The political importance of this matrimonial alliance, linking two lineages particularly close to the Medici, is emphasized in the \textit{Nuptiale carmen} (Wedding Poem) commissioned by the families from the humanist (and Medici client) Naldo Naldi: see Sman 2010, 31–44.
\item[55] On objects associated with court banquet ceremonial and symbolizing courtly magnificence, see Bertelli and Crifo 1985.
\item[56] \textit{Credenziere} are often depicted on wedding chests: see note 47 above; and see too the one prominently on view in the wall panel (\textit{spalliera}) by Sandro Botticelli depicting the fourth episode of the \textit{Storie di Nastagio degli Onesti} cycle, now in the Florentine Collezione Pucci.
\item[57] It is significant that there are no reports of festivities in Florence for the weddings of Piero di Lorenzo with Alfonsina Orsini, nor of his sister Maddalena with Franceschetto Cibo, Innocent VIII’s son—alliances politically essential for the Medici but viewed with suspicion by the wider Florentine elite. The aim was evidently to avoid spotlighting unions needed to consolidate Lorenzo’s hegemony.
\item[58] Parenti seems to suggest that no diplomats from other states were present, unlike courtly weddings. The only reference to an external political alliance, coded but significant for those in the know, was the palfrey given to Lorenzo by Ferrante of Naples for his joust, mounted by Clarice Orsini for the ride to her new husband’s palace: Parenti 1996, 247.
\item[59] Rubinstein 1997, 226 ff.
\end{itemize}
include the Sassetti chapel in Santa Trinita and the Tornabuoni chapel in Santa Maria Novella, both the work of Domenico Ghirlandaio, not to mention numerous suburban building projects. In sum, during the last years of Lorenzo’s hegemony, the Medici continued to be formally *primi inter pares*, but the number of *pares* (equals) continued to shrink and harden into a caste of loyalists who abandoned once and for all the Gothic and chivalric style once the badge of the traditional oligarchy, and embraced the languages (perhaps even more political than cultural and aesthetic) of classicism and Neoplatonic hermeticism.

And yet, despite the relative stability regained after the Pazzi crisis, Lorenzo never surrendered the cautiously understated attitude always characterizing his public and diplomatic conduct, evident in a particularly significant letter written to his son Piero when the latter, then just twelve years old, took part in the embassy to Rome following Innocent VIII’s election to the papacy in 1484. Against this background, Lorenzo told Piero how to behave and what ceremonial protocol he should follow, emphasizing in particular the importance of heeding the counselors and adult associates accompanying him, and of maintaining an equable and modest demeanor consonant with his family’s institutional role both locally and internationally: “At times and places where the other ambassadors’ sons join you, bear yourself gravely and considerately toward your equals and make sure not to precede them if they are older than you, *for you may be my son, but you are still no more than a citizen of Florence, just as they are.*”

At the end of the 1480s, especially after his son Giovanni’s cardinalate, Lorenzo the Magnificent took an active interest in conceiving and organizing spectacles that aligned his own image with that of a “civic prince” dedicated to the common good, and, indeed, constrained by love of his homeland’s liberty (*patria libertas*) to assume the burden of leadership. Such was the message of the only public

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61 “Ne’ tempi e luoghi dove concorrano gl’altri giovani degl’ambasciatori, pórtati gravemente et con humanità verso gli altri pari tuoi, guardandoti di non preceder loro, se fussino di età più di te, perché per essere mia figliolo non se’ però altro che cittadino di Firenze, come sono ancor loro.” Medici 1977– 8:70; italics mine.
62 Notable are the remarks by Bartolomeo Cerretani, a Medici supporter, on Florence’s flourishing state in 1490: “Il che tutto chausava lo ’ngegno, iuditio, animo et felice fortuna di Lorenzo de’ Medici et di quella schuola di ciptadini savi che erano preposti al governare la ciptà, et quali non passavano il numero di 20, che chon deto Lorenzo asiduamente pratichavano l’onore utile et felicità della florentina republica. Et di già, havendo dato una sua figl[i]ola al signore Franceschetto figl[i]olo d’Inocentio ottavo [I correct Berti’s erroneous reading terzo], et facto chardinale messere Giovann[i]o suo sechondo figl[i]olo pareva che la ciptà per lui et lui per la ciptà, chon tutto il popolo felicitassi in asidue feste et popolari triomphi chon una optima contenteza universalmente et de’ ciptadini et della plebe et finalmente di tutto lo ‘merio nostro.’ (The cause of all this was the intelligence, judgment, high spirits, and happy fortune of Lorenzo de’ Medici and of that group of wise citizens who headed the city’s government. They were no more than twenty, and together with Lorenzo they strove assiduously for the Florentine republic’s honor, utility, and felicity. And having already given one of his daughters to signore Franceschetto, son of Innocent VIII, and with his second son messer Giovanni a cardinal, it was as if the city for him and he for the city took delight with all the people in ongoing festivals and popular triumphs, with the greatest
spectacles he is known to have directly designed and sponsored: the *Trionfo dei sette pianeti* (*Triumph of the Seven Planets*) for carnival in 1490, the *Trionfo di Paolo Emilio* for the Saint John the Baptist festival in 1491, and a *Rappresentazione di San Giovanni e Paolo* in the same year.⁶³ And yet notwithstanding the public exposure that such initiatives entailed for Lorenzo, he always had the common sense to retain his footing both in Florentine civic tradition (carnival, festivals for Saint John the Baptist, religious and sacred plays by confraternities) and in the groups and confraternities that traditionally organized performances (in these specific cases, the company *della Stella*, which organized carnival and the festival of Saint John the Baptist, and the company of the *fanciulli del Vangelista*, which organized the *Rappresentazione di San Giovanni e Paolo*), prudently exhibiting the comportment of a citizen (however particularly eminent) at odds with the signorial magnificence on view in the numerous wedding feasts that featured in the Italian princely courts during those years,⁶⁴ while treading the narrow path of equilibrium between reality and appearance: *primus inter pares* at home, yet prince abroad.

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⁶³ For an overview of these spectacles and their ideological and political significance, see Ventrone 1992. On the political testament evident in the *Rappresentazione di San Giovanni e Paolo* in particular, see Ventrone 2008, 346–348; 2015.

⁶⁴ For example, the Milanese festivities for the three Sforza weddings between 1489 and 1491—Gian Galeazzo to Isabella d’Aragona, Ludovico il Moro to Beatrice d’Este, and Alfonso d’Este to Anna Sforza: Lopez 1976, Mazzocchi Doglio 1983.