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ART, MOBILITY, AND EXCHANGE IN EARLY MODERN TUSCANY AND EURASIA

EDITED BY
FRANCESCO FREDDOLINI
AND MARCO MUSILLO



Art, Mobility, and Exchange in Early Modern Tuscany and Eurasia

This book explores how the Medici Grand Dukes pursued ways to expand their political, commercial, and cultural networks beyond Europe, cultivating complex relations with the Ottoman Empire and other Islamicate regions, and looking further east to India, China, and Japan.

The chapters in this volume discuss how casting a global, cross-cultural net was part and parcel of the Medicean political vision. Diplomatic gifts, items of commercial exchange, objects looted at war, maritime connections, and political plots were an inherent part of how the Medici projected their state on the global arena. The eleven chapters of this volume demonstrate that the mobility of objects, people, and knowledge that generated the global interactions analyzed here was not unidirectional—rather, it went both to and from Tuscany. In addition, by exploring evidence of objects produced in Tuscany for Asian markets, this book reveals hitherto neglected histories of how Western cultures projected themselves eastwards.

Francesco Freddolini is Associate Professor of Art History at Luther College, University of Regina, Canada, and Director of the Humanities Research Institute, University of Regina.

Marco Musillo is an independent scholar.

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Abbreviations

AGL	Archivio Ginori Lisci
ASB	Archivio di Stato, Bologna
ASF	Archivio di Stato, Florence
ASP	Archivio di Stato, Pisa
ASL	Archivio di Stato, Livorno
BU	Biblioteca degli Uffizi, Florence
BUB	Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna
MAP	Medici Archive Project
MdP	Mediceo del Principato
MM	Miscellanea Medicea
Corp. Rel.	Corporazioni religiose soppresse dal governo francese

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1 Introduction

Eurasian Tuscany, or the Fifth Element

Francesco Freddolini

Jacques Callot's print depicting Ferdinando I overseeing the fortification of the Port of Livorno visualizes a political dream in the making (Figure 1.1).¹ Engraved between 1615 and 1620, this posthumous image celebrated the creation of the infrastructures that provided Florence full access to the Mediterranean and, through a network of diplomatic and commercial relations, the oceans.² The dates are significant for understanding how this image resonates with a period of fervent interest in global networks at the Medici court. In 1612, only a few years after Ferdinando's death, his successor, Cosimo II, received a report from his secretary, Orso D'Elci, outlining the nautical connections between the Grand Duchy, the East Indies, and the West Indies.³ The complex, ten-paragraph document revolving around the centrality of Livorno as a node within a larger maritime network aimed to obtain a license from the King of Spain for unmediated access to the oceans. A key passage in D'Elci's text explains that

The question to ask His Catholic Majesty for the business in the Indies is to obtain a license to send ships to the said Indies, East and West. [These ships] should be able to leave from the port of Livorno, and on both ways they should be able to dock at any port in France, England, and the Low Countries, without prejudice, and there have permission to load and unload merchandises.⁴

After Ferdinando I expanded the port and the city of Livorno to grant the Medicean state full access to maritime routes, the time was ripe to explore opportunities beyond the European continent and the Mediterranean basin.

This volume explores how the Grand Dukes pursued ways to expand their political, commercial, and cultural networks beyond Europe, cultivating complex relations with the Ottoman Empire and other Islamic regions, and looking further east to India, China, and Japan. The chapters that follow show how casting a global, cross-cultural net was part and parcel of the Medicean political vision. Diplomatic gifts, items of commercial exchange, objects looted at war, maritime connections, and political plots were an inherent part of how the Medici projected their state on the global arena.

Once again, the arts conceptualized this vision with unparalleled lucidity. In 1592, Jacopo Ligozzi signed a monumental painting on slate representing *Pope Boniface VIII Receiving Twelve Ambassadors* (Figure 1.2). The work was made for the Salone dei Cinquecento, the hall in Palazzo Vecchio that Giorgio Vasari envisioned as a visual journey into the formation of the Ducal (and later Grand Ducal) political identity of the Tuscan state.⁵ The subject is Pope Boniface VIII's legendary reception, held in 1300, of twelve ambassadors from various parts of Europe and Asia. Upon realizing



Figure 1.1 Jacques Callot, *Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici Overseeing the Fortification of Livorno*, c. 1615–1620, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Transferred from the Library of Congress, 1986.50.112.

Source: Courtesy of National Gallery of Art, Washington.

that all ambassadors were Florentines, the Pope defined Florence as the “fifth element” and acknowledged its role as commercial and political connector on the Eurasian scale. This episode, becoming popular in the sixteenth century, was celebrated by Michelangelo Buonarroti and Benedetto Varchi as a mark of Florentine identity.⁶

Ligozzi added another layer, transporting the narrative into the temporal and geopolitical context of Grand Ducal Florence. In the background, a painting within the painting portrays Tuscany seated on a throne in an ideal dialogue with Asia, Europe, Africa, and America. Tuscany wears the Grand Ducal insignia; it is, unmistakably, Medici Tuscany vis-à-vis the continents. The visual centrality of Tuscany evokes the political ambition to become an independent and central interlocutor with the four continents—the “fifth element” of Boniface’s embassy, a node within a larger, and now truly global, network.

As Lia Markey has demonstrated, visualizing America at the Medici court became a way to conceptualize Florence’s identity within a dramatically expanding world.⁷ Colonization, either real or “vicarious,” as Markey has defined Florence’s colonizing efforts, is crucial for understanding transatlantic histories of the Medici state. Once we direct our gaze eastwards, however, we are faced with a different gamut of historical and historiographical problems. A longer tradition of interreligious tensions, dating



Figure 1.2 Jacopo Ligozzi, *Pope Boniface VIII Receiving Twelve Ambassadors*, 1591, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

Source: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

back at least to the crusades, shaped the Medici relations to the Ottoman Empire and coexisted with commercial relations that never stopped. These were further enriched by the long-standing trade routes that had been already established with Asia, which in turn became more multifaceted through the mediation (or lack thereof) of Russia, especially over the course of the seventeenth century. As Geoffrey C. Gunn has persuasively argued, although vast peripheral areas of Asia were subjugated and radically transformed by European colonization, “in Asia the Europeans entered elaborate and mannered trading networks.”⁸

The connective, transnational tissue of the Eurasian cultural and geographical region has recently proven to be an extremely productive area for studying transcultural interactions. This volume contributes to this historiographical stream by exploring how the Grand Dukes promoted such connections. Exchanges were crucial for Florence when looking East, and a network of political and infrastructural relations was essential to support them.⁹ The document penned by D’Elci in 1612 could be seen as the culmination of the late-sixteenth-century strategy to connect Florence with the global world, a vision that started with Cosimo I and was fostered by the ruling family as part of a political plan. Courtly spaces articulated this strategy through images and objects on display. The maps of the *Sala delle Carte Geografiche* in the Medici *Guardaroba* (Figure 1.3), painted in two phases by Egnazio Danti (1563–1575) and Stefano Bonsignori (1576–1586), prompted the Grand Dukes, their courtiers, and their guests to understand the Ducal (and later Grand Ducal) territories in relation to the global



Figure 1.3 View of the Guardaroba Nuova, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

Source: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

world, metaphorically projecting the Medicean state into a growing network of exploration and colonial aspiration, as well as mobility of people, objects, and knowledge.¹⁰

In a similar vein, Ludovico Buti portrayed exotic worlds on the ceilings of the *Armeria* (1588),¹¹ and the Grand Dukes avidly collected exotic objects from Asia, the Islamic world, and the Americas.¹² It is well known that the aspirations to establish colonies across the Atlantic and open direct maritime routes from Livorno to the Atlantic and Indian Oceans soon vanished due to the opposition of the true global maritime powers¹³—Spain, Portugal, the Dutch Republic, and Britain—but the Medici still participated in the main networks of interactions by making Livorno a node of larger commercial exchanges. Livorno—as the chapters by Tazzara, Iannello, and Sicca demonstrate—epitomizes the ambition of the Grand Dukes, whose strategy was to find a role within exchanges that transcended the Mediterranean. Livorno, furthermore, shows that global interactions for the Medici were a political affair that required a strategy to finally turn the Tuscan state into the “fifth element.”

A growing interest in how objects and knowledge were exchanged in the increasingly complex transcultural arena of the early modern period has helped us understand the agency of things and the importance of their social life.¹⁴ Seminal scholarship by Paula Findlen and Pamela Smith, as well as more recent studies by Giorgio Riello, Anne Gerritsen, Meredith Martin, and Daniela Bleichmar among others, have helped shape this field.¹⁵ Our book also explores objects—it is the central methodological tenet that informs most of the art history and material culture approaches in the

chapters that follow—but our aim is different from the one adopted in most of the aforementioned studies exploring the social lives of things along the lines of broad networks of exchange.¹⁶ As Paula Findlen reminds us, “the global lives of things emerge within and at the interstices between local, regional, and long-distance trading networks.”¹⁷ In order to delve deeply into such interstices, we have chosen to focus on a specific geopolitical entity—the Medicean state—and explore how actants—objects, networks, infrastructures, and people—instantiated its interactions with the Levant and Asia.¹⁸ Our book, in other words, is about Grand Ducal Tuscany; our aim is to situate the Medici politics during the Grand Ducal period within a larger map encompassing the Eurasian space.

With a few exceptions—for example Marco Spallanzani’s studies on *maiolica* and oriental carpets in Renaissance Florence, Francesco Morena’s work on porcelain, or some articles addressing focused case studies—this early modern global history of the Grand Duchy has only recently emerged.¹⁹ Studies on Florentine merchant networks in the Mediterranean Basin and Asia have paved the way to understanding the multifaceted relations between the Medici and the Orient, while work specifically inspired by the vast diplomatic correspondence in the Grand Ducal archive has recently cast new light on the relations between the Tuscan dynasty and the Levant.²⁰

One feature of Grand Ducal Tuscany that offers a distinctive lens through which to study early modern Italy in relation to global interactions is its archival repositories.²¹ A methodology of inquiry based on archival research has enabled most of the authors in this volume to delve deeply into the histories of individual objects, merchants, and political agendas. Objects, biographies, and histories of local infrastructures such as the port of Livorno enable us to connect the local (Grand Ducal Tuscany) with the global (the Eurasian context) by way of what Francesca Trivellato has recently defined as “global microhistories.”²² As Trivellato argues, this method stemming from a distinctively Italian historiographical tradition has great potential for casting light on how localized facts—for example one object, or one biography—are nodes within complex networks. A local fact can have connections with much larger contexts, and things mutate—physically, semantically, and ontologically—through space and time and in relation to cross-cultural exchanges. For the authors in this volume, the archive is a means to explore the social life of things on the move across cultures, to show how regimes of value and meanings change through exchange, and to reveal how the ontological status of objects is modified by their display or use within new frameworks of social and religious rituals.²³

By centering our attention on Grand Ducal Tuscany, the chapters in this volume forge connections between objects and contexts. We can follow Islamicate objects reaching Florence and then transitioning to Bologna, while Islamic banners are given a new ontological status in Pisa—almost forced to convert, as Joseph M. Silva argues. At the same time, British merchants establish commercial agreements with coral suppliers, thanks to privileged conditions in the port of Livorno. Through the letters of Sassetti, the printing of Giampiero Maffei’s *Istoria delle Indie Orientali* by Filippo Giunti in 1589, or the Ivories at the Museo degli Argenti described by Erin E. Benay, we can explore how India was perceived, consumed, and shaped as a narrative in Florence. Further primary sources reveal how the Medici exported luxury objects to Asia, while quenching their thirst for knowledge about China through a myriad of routes, objects, and people by way of Russia. In this volume, the oscillation between micro and macro is essential for understanding Medicean Tuscany as a Eurasian entity.

An important methodological premise is our understanding of the Medicean state as a whole, to focus especially on the triad of cities that projected the Medici towards the seas: Florence, Pisa, and Livorno. Most studies have focused on Florence and the Medici family as the exclusive center of interest; however, to understand the Grand Duchy as a complex geopolitical entity, our study explores how the cities of Pisa and Livorno played a crucial role in positioning the Medicean state vis-à-vis the global world.²⁴ This approach, grounded in the history of the Grand Duchy, stems from the political identity that the Grand Dukes personally promoted for their state.²⁵ In fact, when the painter Baldassare Franceschini, called Il Volterrano, celebrated the era of Ferdinando I in the Medici villa of La Petraia between 1636 and 1646, he reimagined Giovanni Bandini's statue in Livorno to function as a proxy of the Grand Duke himself—standing on the shore and dominating the sea, accompanied by Neptune (Figure 1.4). However, the Grand Duke was not alone. The painter included the personifications of Livorno and Pisa, which highlights how the Medici's political agenda was clearly based on the interactions between the capital—Florence—and these two cities.²⁶

Florence alone, in other words, was not the Medici state. The visual and material culture of spolia in Pisa, where the Medici and their Knights of St. Stephen performed rituals that reminded them of their role as defenders of the Christian faith, as well as the ubiquitous presence of Livorno in almost all chapters as the essential infrastructural and institutional context for the mobility of objects and people, show how



Figure 1.4 Baldassare Franceschini, called Il Volterrano, *Ferdinando I Dominating the Sea*, 1636–46, Villa La Petraia, Florence.

Source: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

studying these cities together is key for understanding Medici politics. This is true not only within the local history of Tuscany but, more importantly, as part of Grand Ducal Tuscany's international—indeed Eurasian—history.

A selective focus on Florence, to the detriment of other cities in Tuscany, has been especially prominent in the field of art history—a consequence of studies largely devoted to the history of collecting, exploring objects imported by the Medici, or to the representation of other cultures at the Grand Ducal court. This volume aims to counterbalance this approach, not only in terms of its geopolitical emphasis, but by revealing how the flow of objects towards Florence represents only half of the narrative. As the chapters in this volume collectively argue, mobility was not unidirectional. The consumption of objects from the Eurasian context in Florence coexisted with the projection of Medicean influence on other cultures and the export of Grand Ducal commodities to other regions. As such, a twofold way of examining exchanges—to and from Tuscany—becomes both the object of our study and the methodological choice that enables us to better situate the Medici Grand Dukes within a narrative of global interactions.²⁷

Several chapters explore evidence of objects produced in Tuscany for Asian markets and reveal hitherto neglected histories of how Western cultures projected themselves eastwards. Most studies on global circulation of objects—art, or material culture—tend to privilege a mobility towards Europe, exploring the often unstable ontological status of objects and their agency within Europe and investigating how non-European communities developed infrastructures for the production and commercialization of things for western consumption.²⁸ By focusing on the Eurasian context, however, we note more complex trajectories of interactions: the Mughal emperors and their avid demand for European objects, the Ottoman Empire as both a market for western luxury objects and a door towards markets further east, Goa as a hub for commercial relations in Asia, China and its curiosity towards Europe, Russia and its unstable position between Europe and Asia—all topics that emerge in the chapters in this volume.²⁹

Together with chapters that explore collecting practices by the Medici and their courtiers, such as Ferdinando Cospi, or the reception and representation of India at the Medici court, this volume includes contributions on how the Medici, helped by their entourage, found ways to export luxury objects far beyond the boundaries of Europe, creating the conditions for their production and commercialization, and exchanging information on the objects that could be more marketable in Asia. Ample historiography has shown how Florentine merchants and agents—Andrea Corsali or Filippo Sassetti, just to mention two prominent protagonists of this story—sent information on distant lands, shaping narratives of alterity and fostering the demand for exotic objects.³⁰ A complementary though less studied chapter of this story is represented by the letters of the Jesuit Lay Brother Atanasio Fontebuoni urging the Medici to send devotional and luxury objects to Asia, confident in the profits to be made by meeting an avid local demand.³¹

Many objects—the fountain sent to Ali Pasha and discussed by Brian Brege; coral, porcelain, and *pietre dure* discussed by Iannello, Sicca, and Freddolini; as well as books such as the *Trattato della Direzione de' Fiumi* that we find in seventeenth-century Beijing—were made in Florence and found their ways to Istanbul, the Mughal court, or China. Studies that tackle the presence of western commodities in Asian cultures often explore such objects at their point of arrival and provide important reflection on such objects' status in the cultures of destination but rarely discuss how western

cultures catered to such global markets.³² By focusing on this theme, we can understand how promoting global interactions was part of the Medici's political agenda.

Several authors of the chapters in this volume are concerned with the circumstances of production of these luxury objects and on the networks of mobility that enabled them to travel and become transcultural agents. Supported by the Medici, Tuscan merchants and courtiers or British ships stopping in Livorno could carry such objects and export Medicean signature works across long trajectories. It was, of course, a profitable market, but at the same time—and perhaps more importantly—a means to establish an identity on the international political arena.

Even though we are limiting our scope to the Eurasian context, our approach shapes a global history of Medicean Tuscany in terms of methodology, especially by looking at how the Grand Duchy contributed to—and existed as a node of—complex transnational interactions. World history and global history do not always coincide. As Sebastian Conrad has articulated, global history “is both an object of study and a particular way of looking at history: it is both a process and a perspective, subject matter and methodology.”³³ Therefore, studying the networks that linked the port of Livorno to the East India Company in the seventeenth century or exploring how Florentine courtiers and merchants established connections across cultures to mobilize objects along old and new trade routes enables us to understand Florence, the Medici, their courtiers, and the Grand Duchy as a significant part of a dynamic system of interactions.

It is precisely this multidirectional flow of things and people along the lines of a complex infrastructure of mobility, instantiated by Livorno and fostered by the Medici politics, that lets the specificity of Grand Ducal Tuscany emerge. Tuscany tells a different story from Venice, for example, whose relations with the East had been shaped by long-standing transcultural relations based on Venice's geographical position and commercial history, and whose print industry mediated the reception of the Americas for most of the early modern armchair travelers.³⁴

The Medici had virtually no rivals among the other rulers of the Italian peninsula in terms of collecting across cultures. At the same time, they succeeded in developing a network of commercial and diplomatic relations that projected the Grand Ducal state in a global context.³⁵ Livorno, an entangled ethnoscape shaped by the presence of merchants, agents, as well as slaves from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds,³⁶ played a crucial role in developing such networks, as did the presence of Florentine merchants in key outposts located in colonial states such as Portugal, Spain, and the Dutch Republic. The Medici expanded these traditional merchant networks operating along international routes. Such networks, and such a tradition, survived the Tuscan dynasty, as Cinzia Sicca in this volume shows. When in the late 1740s Marquis Ginori succeeded in the export of his porcelain to Constantinople, he relied on a solid network of diplomatic and mercantile relations, especially with the British, whose presence in Livorno dated back to the seventeenth century and, as Tiziana Iannello's chapter demonstrates, included the Tuscan port within a larger infrastructural and financial network for maritime trade. Ginori's entrepreneurial efforts, as Sicca argues, were also a way to reclaim a tradition by establishing a new—but quintessentially Florentine—post-Medici mercantile identity for the Tuscan ruling families, again in a context of cross-cultural exchange.

In addition to merchants and, of course, diplomats, the Medici cultivated networks among the religious orders, especially the Jesuits, to obtain information and have

trustworthy agents even in areas under the control of Spain or Portugal. Letters sent to Florence by the earlier-mentioned Jesuit painter Bartolomeo Fontebuoni, who made a career in Asia, show how he maintained relations with his family and the Medici court, conveying information and requesting objects from Florence.³⁷ More famously, when the Jesuit Johannes Grueber arrived in Livorno in 1666, he was welcomed by Florentine courtiers—especially by Lorenzo Magalotti, who eventually published a *Relazione della China* based on Grueber report.³⁸ Later, in 1667, a letter sent from Goa to Cosimo III by Tomaso Da Costa, who wanted to build a church in India in honor of St. Thomas, offers expressions of gratitude for the support received.³⁹ Da Costa's letter shows that the interest in St. Thomas' presence in India, explored in this volume by Erin E. Benay, went beyond the sixteenth century, developing into an overt intention to establish a Medici presence through art patronage in the territories related to the Apostle.

Art patronage helped establish a firm Medicean presence well beyond Italian or European boundaries. For example, in 1587 Ferdinando I—whose vision for a global reach of Florence laid the foundations for most of the stories unfolding in the pages that follow—commissioned from Giambologna a series of reliefs for the altar of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.⁴⁰ Almost exactly a century later, Cosimo III shipped from Florence all the bronze ornaments made by Giovanni Battista Foggini for the Altar of St. Francis Xavier in the Church of Bom Jesu in Goa (1689–1698).⁴¹ In 1688, the Superior General of the Jesuits, Tirso González de Santalla, thanked Cosimo III for his intention to “extend his royal liberality to the New World, to enrich St. Francis Xavier's sepulchre.”⁴² The Medici coat of arms marked the Grand Ducal presence in places that were not simply geographically distant from Florence (and from each other) but also represented symbolic outposts of Christianity within spaces of emblematic religious, cultural, and colonial tensions. On the one hand, the altar of the Holy Sepulchre stands as a material counterpart to the Islamic spoils looted and displayed in Pisa by the Knights of St. Stephen (examined here by Joseph M. Silva). On the other hand, the altar of St. Francis Xavier in Goa encapsulated the deep interests in the Indian subcontinent cultivated by the Medici since the late sixteenth century, as the letters by Filippo Sassetti have shown,⁴³ and as Erin E. Benay's chapter and my own confirm.

Our volume is divided into three spaces of discussion: *Mediterranean Connections*; *Livorno: Infrastructures and Networks of Exchange*; and *Asian Interactions*. Brian Brege's chapter, opening the first section, casts light on how Ferdinando I—quite surprisingly, considering his self-fashioning as a champion of a renewed crusade spirit—supported Canbuladoğlu Ali Pasha in his rebellion against the Ottoman Empire. Political schemes that could have led to profitable commercial interactions were behind the support offered by Ferdinando I to the Pasha of Aleppo—an example of how religious conflicts were complicated by the political agenda on a transnational scale, and an illuminating case study showing the multifaceted relations between the Medici and Islam.⁴⁴

The following chapter, by Joseph M. Silva, elucidates how Pisa, the city where the headquarters of the Knights of St. Stephen were located, became a privileged space to reconfigure Islamic spoils with new Christian and triumphalistic meanings. The third chapter of this section exploring various aspects of Mediterranean interactions is devoted to the collecting of Islamic artworks at the Medici court. Its author, Federica