

# Cosimo I de' Medici as Collector



Cosimo I de' Medici as Collector:  
Antiquities and Archaeology  
in Sixteenth-century Florence

By

Andrea M. Gáldy

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P U B L I S H I N G

Cosimo I de' Medici as Collector: Antiquities and Archaeology in Sixteenth-century Florence,  
by Andrea M. Gáldy

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To my parents  
Ervin and Brigitte Gáldy

and to  
Sir Brian and Mary lady Tovey



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i>
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ASF	Archivio di Stato di Firenze
BML	Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana
BNCF	Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze
DBI	<i>Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani</i>
Dütschke	Dütschke, Hans. "Zerstreute antike Bildwerke in Florenz."
II	In <i>Antike Bildwerke in Oberitalien</i> . Leipzig: W. Engelmann, 1875.
Dütschke	Dütschke, Hans. "Die antiken Marmorbildwerke der
III	Uffizien in Florenz." In <i>Antike Bildwerke in Oberitalien</i> . Leipzig: W. Engelmann, 1878
EA	Arndt, Paul and Walther Amelung. <i>Photographische Einzelaufnahmen antiker Sculpturen nach Auswahl und mit Text</i> . Munich: Verlagsanstalt für Kunst und Wissenschaft vormals F.Bruckmann, 1893-.
Frey,	Frey, Karl, ed. <i>Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris</i> ,
Nachlass I	I. Munich: Georg Müller, 1923.
Frey,	Frey, Karl and Hermann-Walther Frey, eds. <i>Der literarische</i>
Nachlass	<i>Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris</i> , II. Munich: Georg Müller,
II	1930.
GDLI	<i>Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italia</i> , edited by Salvatore Battaglia, Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese [UTET], 1961-.
GDSU	Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi
GM	<i>Guardaroba Medicea</i>
GVB	Vasari, Giorgio. <i>Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568</i> , edited by Paola Barocchi and Rosanna Bettarini. Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1966.
GVO	Vasari, Giorgio. <i>Le Opere con nuove annotazioni e commenti</i> , edited by Gaetano Milanese. Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1878-85.
JCWI	<i>Journal of the Courtauld and Warburg Institutes</i>
JDI	<i>Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts</i>

Magl.	<i>Magliabechiano</i>
Mansuelli I	Mansuelli, Guido Achille. <i>Galleria degli Uffizi, Le sculture I</i> . Florence: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1958.
Mansuelli II	Mansuelli, Guido Achille. <i>Galleria degli Uffizi, Le sculture II</i> . Florence: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1960.
MAP	<i>Mediceo avanti il Principato</i>
MKIF	<i>Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz</i>
MP	<i>Mediceo del Principato</i>
O.A.	Opere d'arte
Palat.	<i>Palatino</i>
Palazzo Vecchio	Barocchi, Paola, ed. <i>Firenze e la Toscana dei Medici nell'Europa del Cinquecento: Palazzo Vecchio: committenza e collezionismo medicei 1537-1610</i> (Catalogo della mostra, Firenze 1980). Florence: Centro Di, Alinari, Scala, 1980.
RM	<i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts in Rom</i>
SBAS	<i>Soprintendenza dei beni artistici e storici</i>
VBC	<i>Vita di Benvenuto Cellini</i> , edited by Orazio Bacci. Florence: Sansoni, 1901

# FLORENTINE RENAISSANCE MEASUREMENTS

1 canna = 4 braccia = c. 2.33 m

1 braccio = 20 soldi = c. 0.583 m

1 soldo = 12 denari = c. 0.029 m

## NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTIONS

For the policy on transcriptions employed for the present study, please see the introduction of the Appendix.

## NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

Throughout the thesis I have only translated extracts in Latin, leaving anything Italian in the original language. If not otherwise stated translations from Latin into English are my own with generous help from Dr Frank Bezner.



## INTRODUCTION

“Con bellissimo ordine”—this is how collections of artworks and plants were often praised in sixteenth century Italy. The principle of order was also applied to collections of antiquities like that of Cosimo I de’ Medici (1519-1574) in Florence. Is order necessarily beautiful, or does order—the arrangement of objects according to certain principles—enhance the beauty of the objects so displayed? Is order useful or is it sterile? Is order conducive to study and scientific exploration—even indispensable to it? In Duke Cosimo’s residences in Florence, the exhibition of ancient and modern artworks was highly choreographed in two special rooms, the Scrittoio della Calliope and the Sala delle Nicchie. The display in several rooms of the *guardaroba* was much less studied, although not necessarily disorderly.

*With the most beautiful order* here implies not only a form of display but also an underlying scientific theory. It could almost be translated as “classification”. Sixteenth-century scholars and antiquarians classified ancient material according to age, provenance, material and so forth. Ancient artworks were displayed in ways thought most appropriate to their beauty and usefulness. Moreover, if archaeology as indicated by its name is fundamentally a discipline concerned with origins and beginnings, then its roots were highly ideological. Contemporary Florentines were fascinated by the idea of establishing the origins of their city and the Tuscan people: they entertained a variety of theses to explain their beginnings and history, and to rationalise what they took to be their political and artistic supremacy. That they might be taken in by forgeries, or fabricate them as props for their theories, does not diminish their achievement.<sup>1</sup>

An overview of Cosimo I de’ Medici’s ancient artworks affords an insight into the interaction of these factors. Two rooms were set up predominantly for the display of his antiquities: the Scrittoio della Calliope and the Sala delle Nicchie. Although a full survey of the mass of his archaeological material would be a daunting (and given the sources, perhaps impossible) enterprise, the objects in these two rooms can be discussed in detail. Clearly, they were not an arbitrary selection. The objects can be related to each other and placed within the composition and development of the entire collection. They can also be related to the type

of room in which they were displayed, and these in turn to the physical organisation of the two ducal *palazzi*. Inventories and other sources indicate that the Scrittoio della Calliope and the Sala delle Nicchie housed mainly figurative sculpture. The broader collection contained other kinds of ancient artworks, such as gems, different kinds of marble, or porphyry.

How people in the sixteenth century perceived the works of art in the collection is problematical. Contemporary commentators possessed very variable levels of antiquarian or artistic knowledge. Labels like “*gnudo della paura*” (typically *all’antica* bronzes of Marsyas playing the pipes) reveal the struggle to make sense of objects. Even the compilers of the inventories failed to use standard labels, which makes it harder for us to trace the journey undertaken by single objects from category to category, or from room to room. Moreover, the term “*anticaglia*”, normally used to denote antiquities, can extend to *all’antica* objects, whether or not the modern artist was named. On the whole, little or no distinction was made in administrative documents between ancient and modern works of art, as long as they depicted a subject derived from classical Antiquity.

Cosimo’s collection did serve to demonstrate the power, wealth, erudition and taste of the Duke and his family, but he was not simply following a princely fashion. Raphael, Giorgio Vasari, Benvenuto Cellini, Giovambattista Adriani and others tried to trace the development of styles and materials, and to create the categories necessary for order and classification. These categories in turn triggered investigation: the definition of “*la maniera etrusca*” would awaken an interest in Etruscan art and open the road into systematic exploration of Etruscan civilisation taken by Thomas Dempster’s *De Etruria Regali Libri Septem* in the early seventeenth century.<sup>2</sup>

The Etruscans appeared in Florentine myths of the city’s origins but hardly figured in the more strictly archaeological knowledge about ancient Roman Florence that was current at the time. This knowledge can be investigated through the *Discorsi* of Vasari’s friend, Vincenzo Borghini, and the reconstruction of Roman *Florentia* on the *soffitto* of the Salone dei Cinquecento. They show that even by this early date rudimentary archaeological method was being applied to ancient remains. Similarly, contemporary letters and other documentary evidence afford an insight into the research methods of scholars, artists, and courtiers with a taste for *anticaglie*. They compared ancient figurative art, for example, with images on coins. This had the added advantage of securely dating artworks, buildings or events.

The development in collecting antiquities and the expansion of knowledge about Florentine origins went hand in hand. This was only one



link between the collection pieces and intellectual developments important to an ambitious prince who also happened to be a collector. Post-Tridentine Catholicism could differentiate between antiquities appropriate to a cardinal and to a secular ruler, but the Church's official attitude was not favourable to pagan antiquities. Popes and cardinals occasionally saw advantage in disembarassing themselves of these objects. The Duke and his collection profited thereby, but he was sufficiently involved with papal policy to be aware of Catholic debates relating to propriety and decorum in art. These Catholic critics of *anticaglie*, however, also endorsed the importance of order and intellectual precision.

Their investigations gave rise to the new discipline of Christian archaeology in Rome and elsewhere. Two of the most important Florentine churches, Santa Reparata, predecessor to the Cathedral, and San Lorenzo, were founded in the fourth century AD, and the Baptistry was thought to have been a temple to Mars until Pope Sylvester transformed it into a Christian church.<sup>3</sup> In the Vatican, the decoration of the Sala di Costantino recounted the conversion of Constantine by the same pope. Leo X de' Medici, who commissioned the work, was keenly interested in Constantinople and the Greek tradition.<sup>4</sup> Although the ducal collection in Florence does not appear to have contained any Christian antiquities, an attempt may have been made to remedy this absence: ancient columns were intended to bear statues of Justice, Peace and Religion in a Constantinian tradition.<sup>5</sup>

The foremost aims of Cosimo's cultural politics were to create and maintain a strong link to the main branch of his family, to stress the fact that his rule was not so much a break with but a further development of the Florentine Republic, and to devise a unique court culture and etiquette that enabled him to express his princely aspirations in an appropriate manner. His collection of ancient artworks was one of the instruments he used to this end.

This study increases the sum of knowledge about a major Italian collection of antiquities of the sixteenth century. It also shows that Cosimo's antiquities were objects of study to Cinquecento artists and scholars. As such the collection exercised a significant influence on the history and development of archaeology in early modern Florence.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The watershed between antiquarianism and modern archaeology is usually located in the work of the eighteenth-century scholar J.J. Winckelmann. In Bruer and Kunze (*Restoration*, 7) Winckelmann is called “Begründer[s] der Klassischen Archäologie als Wissenschaft im heutigen Sinne und der neuzeitlichen Kunstgeschichte überhaupt.” His *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764) discussed the art of Persians, Phoenicians, and Etruscans, emphasising Greek and Roman art under historical and aesthetic points of view. Winckelmann was, however, not only interested in the development of ancient European and Mediterranean art but also studying ancient sculpture in order to determine to what extent these pieces had been restored and whether they had not originally been intended to depict a different subject; see his *desiderata* list in Bruer and Kunze, *Restoration*, 73-6.

<sup>2</sup> Cristofani, “Sugli inizi dell’etruscheria.”, in *MEFRA* 90, 1978, 577-625.

<sup>3</sup> Butters, *The Triumph of Vulcan*, I, 74.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*; D. Heikamp, “Die Säulenmonumente Cosimo I.”, in *Boboli* 90, I, 3-17.

# **PART I**



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PRINCE

A privately owned portrait, currently at the National Gallery in London, shows a young man in his late teens, dressed in black with a dainty white lace collar.<sup>1</sup> The youth holds a book open before him; in the background we see some drapery and half hidden behind it an *all'antica* statue of Bacchus with a Satyr. The painting is attributed to Agnolo Bronzino (1503-1572) and commonly dated to the years 1550-55. Both Bronzino and his teacher Pontormo (1494-1556) worked for duke Cosimo I (1519-1574); Bronzino developed the Duke's "official" portrait.<sup>2</sup> The sitter of the portrait in the National Gallery may be Cosimo himself or one of his sons.<sup>3</sup> Giovanni de' Medici is the son whose known portraits, for example the painting in the Ashmolean Museum, resemble the painting in the National Gallery, but he was born in 1543, and would have been too young to be the sitter when the painting was most likely executed.<sup>4</sup>

His father, already in his mid-thirties, is too old. However, the man in black looks very much like Cosimo shortly after he became duke: compare him, for example, with the still quite youthful Orpheus portrait in Philadelphia (Fig. 7) and the slightly older ones in the Uffizi.<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to resolve the point definitively.<sup>6</sup> In the Orpheus portrait, Bronzino models the young Duke's body on the *Torso Belvedere* (genuine ancient sculpture) to turn him into an *all'antica* statue.<sup>7</sup> In the National Gallery portrait young Cosimo is shown with a half hidden *all'antica* statue group at his side. The *Bacchus and Satyr* look more like a Renaissance work of art than ancient sculpture, although the right arm of the *Bacchus* is broken rather than cut off. Cosimo's interest in ancient art is a presence in both paintings.

#### 1. 1. Family and Career

Alessandro de' Medici, effective ruler of Florence, was assassinated on 6 January 1537.<sup>8</sup> His young kinsman Cosimo was elected as *Capo della Repubblica*, and two days later as the Duke of Florence.<sup>9</sup> Cosimo was

descended through his mother from Lorenzo il Magnifico and through his father related to Lorenzo il Vecchio, brother of Cosimo *Pater Patriae*.<sup>10</sup> He was legitimate and conformed to Charles V's stipulations regarding the succession to his son in law, the late Alessandro.<sup>11</sup>

In 1537 Cosimo was young and healthy, having spent most of his youth in the Mugello countryside hunting and fishing. He had been to Venice, Rome, Bologna, and Naples and had met pope Clement VII and emperor Charles V. His godfather pope Leo X de' Medici had named him for the earlier Cosimo *Pater Patriae*.<sup>12</sup> While his father had been the military hero Giovanni delle Bande Nere, his mother, Maria Salviati, had raised Cosimo in the Christian religion and Medici tradition. The tutor Pierfrancesco Ricci had been a devoted, if perhaps not entirely successful teacher, taking the young boy to safety in Venice in the dangerous times after his father's death.<sup>13</sup>

During the crisis of 1537, Cosimo appeared a helpless and inexperienced adolescent. This may have been reassuring to those who sought to lead Florence back to republican government or to gain power for themselves, but there were already those, like Benvenuto Cellini, who recognised the young Duke's potential.<sup>14</sup> In his *Autobiography* the Florentine artist described his reaction to the news of Cosimo's rise to power, claiming for himself considerable political foresight:

E' mi disse, come Cosimo de' Medici figliuolo del signor Giovanni era fatto duca: ma che gli era fatto con certe conditioni, le quali l'arebbono tenuto, che lui non harebbe potuto isvolazare a suo modo. Allora toccò a me a ridermi di loro, e dissi: cotesti huomini di Firenze hanno messo un giovane sopra un meraviglioso cavallo, poi gli ànno messo gli sproni, e datogli la briglia in mano in sua libertà, e messolo in sun un bellissimo campo, dove è fiori e frutti e moltissime delitie; poi gli ànno detto che lui non passi certi contrasegnati termini: or ditemi a me voi, chi è quello che tener lo possa, quando lui passar li voglia. Le leggie non si posson dare a chi è padron di esse.<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, Cosimo's situation during the first months of his reign was almost desperate. Spanish troops occupied key fortresses. Members of leading Florentine families tried to restrict his power and revenue. Republican rebels numbered Cosimo's own relatives such as cardinal Salviati amongst them.<sup>16</sup> The army of the *fuorusciti* was massing outside Florence under the leadership of Filippo Strozzi.<sup>17</sup> Even after their defeat at Montemurlo on 1 August 1537, the situation within Florence still called for great caution. The Medici were heavily dependent on Habsburg help, and marriage to Alessandro's widow, Margherita, natural daughter of the Emperor, was considered.<sup>18</sup> However, Charles V preferred to marry her to