Gifts and Dynastic Politics: Medici Cultural Diplomacy in Spain, 1608–1622[1]

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Scholars studying Medici gifts to the Spanish Habsburg court in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries have focused primarily on the major conduits of Vienna, Rome, and Naples, leaving the Tuscan case comparatively understudied.[2] Yet precisely because Tuscany, a "minor" court, could provide gifts of extraordinary cultural and economic value, it offers an unusually clear view of how objects were mobilized to advance the interests of a foreign state at the Spanish court. However, these gifts were progressively absorbed and naturalized into the ceremonial language of the Spanish monarchy, where they fulfilled different purposes.

"Gifts and Dynastic Politics" traces that process through three case studies: the printed account of the 1607 siege of Bona, Cristofano Allori's state and chivalric portraits of Cosimo II, and Galileo's *Sidereus Nuncius*. By following their production, mediation, and reception, we can see how Florentine strategies of self-assertion were transformed into instruments that served different priorities once they became part of another symbolic repertoire and were redeployed under new political conditions. It is within this framework of contingent sovereignty that the betrothal and marriage of the future Cosimo II de' Medici between 1607 and 1608 must be understood.

Entering the Habsburg Circuit: The Betrothal and Marriage of Cosimo II

The wide range of panegyrical texts produced for Cosimo's marriage reveals how Medici dynastic legitimacy had to be continually reaffirmed because of the relative recency of their noble status.[3] In 1530, Emperor Charles V named Alessandro de' Medici hereditary duke of Florence following the city's subjugation.[4] Although Pope Clement VII confirmed the title in 1532, his assassination without an heir in 1537 meant that the dukedom passed to his cousin

Fig. 1 Cosimo I receiving the grand-ducal crown, Galle, 1584.

[1] This article builds on an earlier analysis of the 1622 Aranjuez festival, which examines the contributions of Leonor Pimentel and the Count of Villamediana to the event's theatrical program, see Frank A. Domínguez, "Philip IV's Fiesta de Aranjuez, Part I: The Marriage of Cosimo II de' Medici to María Magdalena de Austria and Leonor Pimentel," *Hispanófila* 158 (2009): 39–62.

[2] See Karin J. MacHardy, *War, Religion, and Court Patronage in Habsburg Austria: The Social and Cultural Dimension of Political Interaction, 1521–1622* (London: Palgrave, 2003); Diana Carrió-Invernizzi, "Gift and [illegible] *torical Journal* 51.4 (2008): 881–899; Alberto Marcos [illegible] the Grand Multinational Organizations of the Early Modern Period." In Pedro Cardim, Tamar Herzog, José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez, and Gaetano Sabatini eds. *Polycentric Monarchies: How Did Early Modern Spain and Portugal Achieve and Maintain a Global Hegemony?* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012). 322–336; and Verónica Gallego Manzanares, "Matrimonios lejos del lugar de origen." In Marcella Aglietti and I. A. A. Thompson eds. *Le élites italiane e la Monarchia ispanica (secoli XVI–XVII)* (Madrid: Polifemo, 2025). 161–178. On Spanish collectionism during the reign of Francesco I de' Medici, see Suzanne Kubersky-Pireda, *Die Kunst des Schenkens: Der diplomatische Gabentausch zwischen europäischen Fürstenhöfen des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2013).

[3] See, for example, Daniel L'Ermite, *Panegyricus Cosmo Medices* (Florence, 1608); Christopher Palmer, *Europae gaudium de felicissimis nuptiis* (Bologna, 1608); Giovanni Battista Pinelli, *In nuptias serenissimorum principum* (1608); Leonardo Gherardi, *Vaticinium* (Florence, 1608); and Prosper Tatius, *Hymenaeus* (Florence, 1608).

[4] For a recent overview, see Michael Edward Mallett and Christine Shaw, *The Italian Wars 1494–1559: War, State and Society in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2012).

Cosimo with the approval of the emperor.[5] Cosimo was then made the first Grand Duke of Tuscany (Etruria) by Pope Pius V in 1569, thereby signaling the dynasty's territorial reach (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Philips Galle (1584), The Coronation of Cosimo I,
Royal Library of Belgium, S.I 54396

Titles, however, were fiercely contested because they determined rank. As Favalli has shown, the grand-ducal title sharpened tensions within the Italian dynastic hierarchy. Houses such as Este and Savoy resisted the style *Serenissimo Gran Duca di Toscana*, which eclipsed their own *Illustrissimo Signore* or *Sua Eccellenza* by granting the Medici precedence in ceremonial order.[6] In this context, closer incorporation into the Habsburg family acquired strategic significance for the Medici, because it promised to neutralize rival objections. The dual marriages of Philip III to Margaret of Austria in 1599 and, more significantly, of Cosimo II to her sister María Magdalena in 1608 secured a long-sought alliance. Yet this was only a partial success, for it did not free Tuscany from dependence on Spain.

Discussions over the terms of Maria Magdalena's betrothal reveal that Philip III had promised to provide her with a dowry (which according to Luis Cabrera de Córdoba, totaled 500,000 escudos: 300,000 through cancellation of a debt Philip II owed the dukes of Florence and 200,000 drawn from revenues of the Kingdom of Naples). Despite this apparent magnanimity, negotiations dragged on for months. This delay was partly due to the fact that Spain had been driven into bankruptcy by Philip III's heavy borrowing, and the dowry had to be assembled through debt cancellations, transfers from Neapolitan revenues, and anticipated payments from Indies silver.[7] The precise sum, however, mattered less than what the lack of

[5] Cosimo I had asked Charles V for permission to marry Alessandro's widow but was rejected. Instead the emperor proposed that he reinforce Spanish ties by marrying Eleonora of Toledo, daughter of the Spanish viceroy of Naples, Pedro de Toledo.

[6] See Alessandra Favalli, "'Questo titolo conosciuto da tutto il mondo per instrumento notabilissimo di tutte le discordie.' La strategia di Alfonso II d'Este e la Monarchia spagnola dinanzi all'elevazione dei Medici al titolo Granducale negli anni settanta del XVI secolo," *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna* 49.2 (2024): 301–322; also 7 January 1570, Mediceo del Principato (MdP), vol. 3080, 491v–492r.

[7] A letter to Pannocchieschi later clarifies that the 300,000 "scudi" were to be paid from silver arriving from the Indies between 1608 and 1610, 17 July 1609, MdP, vol. 5080, 1018r. Whatever the figure of the dowry, it was the equivalent of nearly 88 million dollars, not as large as Maria de' Medici's dowry of 600,000 "scudi," but large enough to fund parts of the state budget for several years; see Sara Mamone, *Firenze e Parigi: due capitali dello*

haste revealed. The pace of the negotiations was firmly in Spanish hands, and Medici dynastic advancement partly depended on moneys already owed them.

Spain's control was even more unambiguous in the matter of the investiture of Siena and Portoferraio—Italian territories bordering Tuscany that the Medici held as fiefs from the Spanish Crown.[8] Archival correspondence records their mounting frustration over its delay[9]—the investiture was not delivered until February 1609—and what was implied by Philip III's decision to seal the document in a silver case as if a gift. The gesture was not an excuse but a reminder that the bestowal was an honor and the areas remained tied to them.[10]

The marriage also raised delicate questions of address that took some time to settle. Should Cosimo be styled *sobrino*, *cognato*, or *hermano*? Each term encoded a different level of proximity and parity, and each carried implications for how Medici status would be read within the broader architecture of Habsburg power.

The Spanish Crown initially seems to have opted for *cuñado*, grounding the relationship in Cosimo's marriage to the sister of Queen Margaret and withholding the rhetorical parity implied by *hermano*. The Florentine secretary of State, Belisario di Francesco Vinta, and the ambassador to Spain, Orso Pannocchieschi d'Elci, immediately mounted a methodical campaign to reject *cognato* in favor of *hermano* as the preferred form of address.[11] They succeeded and in October 1609 the court settled on *hermano*—a shift attributed in the correspondence to Queen Margaret's intervention.[12]

In an atmosphere of contested precedence at European courts, familial proximity within dynastic networks carried disproportionate weight. The Medici used gifts to cement relationships and secure political gains at a moment in time when prestige had to be negotiated as much as performed. Gifts positioned states within a competitive field of recognition. Letters could be intercepted, reworded, or reframed in their retelling; speech, because of its pliability, lent itself to

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spettacolo per una regina (Milan: ???, 1988). For a recent view on the economic state of Spain and Tuscany, see Ramón Lanza García coord. *Finanzas y crisis financieras en la Monarquía Hispánica, siglos XVI–XVII* (Madrid: Pons, 2023); Alberto Marcos Martín, "Pagar en tres pagas: tarde o mal o nunca: comportamientos financieros heterodoxos de la Monarquía Hispánica en los siglos XVI y XVII." In Ramón Lanza García coord. *Finanzas y crisis financieras en la Monarquía Hispánica, siglos XVI–XVII* (Madrid: Pons, 2023). 217–250; Matteo Calcagni, "Reinterpreting the Tuscan Economy in the Long Seventeenth Century: New Perspectives for Research from Two Rediscovered Archives," *The Journal of European Economic History* 52.2 (2023): 77–94; and Giuseppe De Luca, "Trading Money and Empire Building in Spanish Milan (1570–1640)." In Pedro Cardim, Tamar Herzog, José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez, and Gaetano Sabatini eds. *Polycentric Monarchies: How Did Early Modern Spain and Portugal Achieve and Maintain a Global Hegemony?* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012). 163–188.

[8] 17 February 1609, MdP, vol. 4941, 120r. Gifts like this one were considered rewards by everyone. Rodrigo Calderón, for example, who expedited the investitures of Siena and Portoferraio, was to receive in recompense a cloth of gold Cosimo had sent for him only after the document was signed (3 November 1609, MdP, vol. 4943, 34r).

[9] Discussions over the marriage remained active for months, provoking speculation and unease, see for example the letters Asdrubale Barbolini wrote to Grand Duke Ferdinando I that year (9 June 1607, MdP, vol. 3000, 119r; and 15 December 1607, MdP, vol. 2944, 431r).

[10] 17 February 1609, MdP, vol. 4941, 120r.

[11] 5 September 1609, MdP, vol. 302, 3r. "Cuñado" is often used despectively to refer to a "smart Alec" or a "know-it-all," what is called *cuñadismo* today. Unless otherwise noted, translations come from the Medici Interactive Archive of the *Mediceo del Principato* (MdP).

[12] MdP, vol. 4941, 292r; and 5 September 1609, vol. 302, 3r. Somewhat later, Pannocchieschi reported that Philip III continued to address Cosimo as *hermano*, called him *Signore*, and even omitted his own royal titles from letter headings—an epistolary restraint typically reserved for sovereign peers (2 November 1617, MdP, vol. 5080, 908r). For Medici-Habsburg integration under Cosimo II's son, see Liesbeth Geevers, "A Coda: The Medici as Habsburgs?" In *The Spanish Habsburgs and Dynastic Rule* (London/New York: Routledge, 2023). 217–229.

distortion and could even serve as a form of aggression. Objects, by contrast, offered a more durable—if still interpretable—medium of propaganda.

There is no quantitative metric by which to measure the "scale" of Medici diplomatic gifts against those of other European powers. Their political significance can nevertheless be assessed in relation to states whose more internally oriented absolutist visual programs sought to legitimize power through the monumentalization of dynasty within their own territories. The Medici, by contrast, were rulers of a comparatively small but culturally formidable principality within the European dynastic hierarchy. Lacking territorial amplitude, they cultivated authority through other means: cultural patronage, financial networks, ceremonial display, and—above all—portraiture, which functioned in this context as a diplomatic instrument designed for circulation, projecting authority, confessional legitimacy, and dynastic continuity before distant courts. This function becomes particularly evident in two portraits of Cosimo II de' Medici painted by Cristofano Allori in 1608–1609, which together articulate complementary modes of Medici sovereignty: princely governance and militant Catholic knighthood.

Crafting a Diplomatic Image: Cristofano Allori's State Portrait of Cosimo II

As we have seen, rank still had to be asserted within a dynastic arena populated by princely houses whose claims to antiquity and inherited dignity were more firmly established than that of the Medici. Cristofano Allori's state portrait of Cosimo II depicts a grand duke who embodies the intellectual, moral, and physical attributes traditionally associated with sovereign authority. By utilizing the visual language of princely legitimacy, the painting compels recognition within that convention.[13]

Cosimo I's *Guardaroba Nuova*—a curated repository of valuables, diplomatic gifts, and dynastic portraits—had displayed images of foreign rulers as though they were products of a reciprocal exchange. Cavallo and Rosen have shown that this traffic in paintings was often fictional: it positioned the Medici as peers within Mediterranean networks of power to which they did not yet fully belong.[14] By Cosimo II's accession, however, state portraiture no longer depended on this subterfuge. Cristofano Allori's likenesses of grand duke and his wife showed them as sovereign princes in a manner legible beyond Florence.

[13] Maria Pia Paoli, "Per l'instituzione d'un principe fanciullo: Cammilo Guidi e i progetti di educazione per Cosimo II de' Medici." In *Tra Archivi e Storia: Scritti dedicati ad Alessandra Contini Bonacossi* (Florence: Florence University Press, 2018). 2 vols., vol. 1, 397–436, here 398–409. She points out that Cristina di Lorena is praised for directing and supervising the prince's *retta istituzione*, intervening in its execution and acting at once as lady, mother, teacher, and governor (423).

[14] See Bradley J. Cavallo, "Cosimo I de' Medici's Dissimulation of Diplomacy in the Guardaroba Nuova," *Diplomatica* 4 (2022): 52–73, and Mark Rosen, "The Medici Guardaroba and Its Role in the Florentine Cosmos." In *The Mapping of Power in Renaissance Italy: Painted Cartographic Cycles in Social and Intellectual Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). 79–89. However, the exchange of art remained asymmetrical and typically favored Spanish interests; see Edward L. Goldberg, "Artistic Relations between the Medici and Spain: A Documentary Survey, 1532–1667," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 40.1 (1996): 123–142, and Edward L. Goldberg, "Artistic Relations between the Medici and Spain: A Documentary Survey, Part II (1667–1737)," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 40.2 (1996): 243–270. For the impact of art and ceremony on Cosimo II's rule, see Kathleen Comerford, *Jesuit Foundations and Medici Power, 1532–1621* (Boston: Brill, 2016), 81–84, 174–175.

Cristofano was particularly suited to his role as court painter. Emerging from a lineage long sustained by Medici patronage, he consciously aligned himself with the tradition of Bronzino—hence his appellations *il Bronzino* and *Bronzino Giovane*[15]—but he had trained under Cigoli and Gregorio Pagani as well. He translated the polished *maniera* of the late sixteenth century into a post-Tridentine naturalism capable of projecting authority with heightened immediacy. Filippo Baldinucci (1625–1696) saw him as the legitimate heir of Bronzino and distinguished by his vivid coloring and expressiveness, and as a person who was often found in the company of ranked and literary men. What is more, his relationships with Spanish patrons and residents in Florence positioned him within the active circuits of Medici–Habsburg exchange,

Fig. 2: Cristofano Allori, Portrait of Maria Magdalena of Austria, Prado Museum (P000008)

Fig. 3: Cristofano Allori, Portrait of Cosimo II of Tuscany, Prado Museum (P000007)

where portraits functioned as portable affirmations of alliance across political boundaries. [16]

[15] The name was more than a stylistic homage; it was a claim to dynastic continuity in paint. See 13 October 1609, MdP, vol. 5052, 723r; vol. 4943, 56r. For assessments of Cristofano Allori's work, see Hanna Koritzer, *Cristofano Allori* (PhD diss., University of Leipzig, 1928), Miles Chappell, "Cristofano Allori and the Medici Court," *The Art Bulletin* 58.2 (1976): 229–248, and Giovanni Pizzorusso, "Il soggiorno italiano del conte di Villa," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 151.1 (1993): 3–51.

[16] Cristofano was "dearly loved" by the Tuscan prince and in demand among foreigners; see Giulio Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, ed. Adriana Marucchi, 2 vols. (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1956), 1:228; Filippo Baldinucci, *Opere di Filippo Baldinucci*, 10 vols. (Milan: Nicolò Bettoni, 1812), 10:260 and 10:284; also Gabriello Chiabrera, *Delle Opere di Gabbriello Chiabrera*, 4 vols. (Venice: Geremia, 1730), and Gabriello Chiabrera, *Delle Poesie di Gabriello Chiabrera Parte Prima [-Terza]: Per Lui Medesimo Ordinata* (Genoa: G. Pavoni, 1605), 185. For Allori paintings for Spanish patrons and nationals residing in Florence, see Blanca González Talavera, "Imagen y poder español en la Florencia medicea: La Capilla de los Españoles de Santa María Novella." In *Actas de la XI Reunión Científica de la Fundación Española de Historia Moderna* (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2012). vol. 1, 361–372; and 1584, MdP, vol. 1234a. The emotive style of Italian religious

Allori's state portraits (Figs. 2 and 3) adopted an existing Habsburg compositional schema[17] in which the persons are an interpretable scaffold for textiles, jewelry, and heraldic imagery.[18]

Cosimo and Maria Magdalena stand in three-quarter pose before curtains, clad in richly starched platter collars. Her embroidered ruff hovers above a black robe studded with gold. Her right hand hangs limply on her side, while her left rests lightly on a table. The impression we get is of a somber and serene but richly attired consort. Cosimo's portrait is more detailed. His collar hovers over a polished steel corselet damascened in gold that is punctuated by vivid crimson piccadills. Slashed breeches and vamped shoes complete a wardrobe that adopts Spanish court fashion as its diplomatic idiom.[19] His right hand rests on a parade helmet on a similar table while the other steadies his posture. Also on the table is a gemmed grand-ducal crown—radiate and capped with a Florentine lily—that asserts a dignity that exceeds that of lesser Italian princes.[20] Helmet, corselet,[21] and sword articulate his disciplined chivalric identity, while her composure signals restraint. The effect demonstrates Cristofano's mastery of the visual language through which recognition was granted.

The state portrait's chivalric inflection, however, becomes clearer when we compare it to a second, more intimate likeness of the grand duke (Fig. 4). Stripped of regalia yet aligned in pose and costume with the state portrait, it shows Cosimo in a black doublet embroidered with

painting, unlike portrait likenesses, met with some negative response in Spain; see Edward L. Goldberg, "Circa 1600: Spanish Values and Tuscan Painting," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51.3 (1998): 912–933.

[17] See, for example, Titian's portrait of Philip II (Prado Museum, P000411) or Rodrigo de Villandrando's portrait of Philip III (Prado Museum, P005774); also José Luis Colomer and Amalia Descalzo Lorenzo eds. *Vestir a la española en las cortes europeas* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2014), 2 vols. .

[18] Carlos Varona 2022, 164.

[19] The platter collars—*cuellos de lechuguilla / cuellos escarolados*—and Cosimo's slashed breeches—*gregüescos / calzas largas folladas*—show the influence of Spanish dress; see Miguel Herrero García, *Estudios sobre indumentaria española en la España de los Austrias* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2014); José Luis Colomer and Amalia Descalzo Lorenzo eds. *Vestir a la española en las cortes europeas* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2014), esp. Gabriel Guarino, "Modas españolas y leyes suntuarias en la Italia de los Austrias." In José Luis Colomer and Amalia Descalzo Lorenzo eds. *Vestir a la española en las cortes europeas* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2014). 2 vols., vol. 1, 233–250; and Roberta Orsi Landini and Bruna Niccoli, "La imagen de un nuevo poder: la moda en la corte de Florencia a mediados del siglo XVI." In José Luis Colomer and Amalia Descalzo Lorenzo eds. *Vestir a la española en las cortes europeas* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2014). vol. 2, 37–62.

[20] The grand-ducal crown is partially depicted in Allori's state portrait, but a full-crown representation can be seen in many paintings, for example, in the ca. 1590 anonymous portrait of Cosimo II's mother, Christine de Lorraine, who ruled as regent after Ferdinando died; see Brian Sandberg, "Of Mothers and Aunts: Regency Government and Performance in Early Modern France and Tuscany under Maria de' Medici and Christine de Lorraine." In Alessio Assonitis and Brian Sandberg eds. *The Grand Ducal Medici and Their Archive (1537–1743)* (London/Turnhout: Brepols, 2016). 164; J. Hayward, "An Eighteenth-Century Drawing of the Grand-Ducal Crown of Tuscany," *The Burlington Magazine* 97.631 (1955): 308–311; C. Willemijn Fock, "The Medici Crown: Work of the Delft Goldsmith Jacques Bylivelt," *Oud Holland* 75 (1970): 197–209; Christina Strunck, "Murder and Mystery: The Missing Medici Crown." In Louis A. Waldman ed. *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Joseph Connors* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). vol. 2, 138–143; eadem, "Schuld und Sühne der Medici: Der Tod Grossherzog Francescos I, und seine Folgen für die Kunst (1587–1628)," *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft* 36 (2009): 243–266.

[21] A corselet worn in childhood by Cosimo II is now at the Detroit Institute of Arts; see *Tournament Armor of Cosimo II de' Medici*, Detroit Institute of Arts, https://dia.org/collection/tournament-armor-cosimo-ii-de-medici-25425.

the red cross of the Order of St. Stephen, echoed by the cross suspended from his neck.[22] Like most Renaissance paintings, it is unsigned but an inscription—*Cosmus • Med • M • Dux • Etruri • IIII*—identifies him as Grand Duke, even in the absence of crown and armor.[23] The painting makes explicit what the state portrait encodes: Cosimo's identity as a knight-commander aligned with a broader Catholic and Habsburg military order.[24]

Fig. 4 Cristofano Allori, Portrait Cosimo II de' Medici (private collection)

Both of these portraits of Cosimo likely drew on an earlier prototype which, according to Ambassador Pannocchieschi, had been executed "two years earlier," when Cosimo was still a prince, adding that new portraits would be required to reflect the sitters' true ages.[25] This reuse of a prototype was not unusual. Portrait types circulated to specific audiences and locations as political circumstances required. The image of Cosimo as a member of the Order of St. Stephen follows this established formula,[26] but the "two years earlier" that Ambassador Pannocchieschi mentions is significant because it points to a specific event associated with it.

Chivalric Capital: The Order of St. Stephen

[22] The portrait is reminiscent of a 1590 painting of Ferdinando I by Scipione Pulzone at the Gallerie degli Uffizi (Inventario 1890, 2243) wearing similar clothing and the insignia of the Order. It is also reminiscent of a later painting by Sustermanns in the State Museum of History and Art at Serpukho. The livery of the Order of St. Stephen was actually white with a red cross.

[23] Painting workshops engaged in systematic copying of popular subjects to meet market demand and produced multiple versions with or without the intervention of the master. These "copies" contributed to a flourishing trade in paintings and their circulation is well attested in the archival correspondence.

[24] Cosimo does not hold a baton, a sign of absolute sovereignty, and this detail is a choice that indicates that the portrait is for external consumption; for contrast see Giovanni Battista Naldini's *Cosimo I de'Medici as Grand Duke*, 1585, Galleria degli Uffizi, Serie Aulica; and (anon) *Painting of S.A.S. Cosimo II de' Medici* (1590-1621), Galeria Palatina, Florence, both in full regalia as sovereigns.

[25] 12 November 1609, MdP, vol. 4941, 299r.

[26] 14 December 1609, MdP, vol. 4943, 63r.

Founded in 1561 by Cosimo I and confirmed by papal bull the following year, the Order of St. Stephen served as a mechanism for consolidating ducal authority over the often-restive nobilities of Florence, Pisa, and Siena by binding noble status to obligatory service aboard its galleys. Under subsequent grand dukes, it evolved into a crucial instrument of Mediterranean policy, combining chivalric discipline, confessional militancy, and naval power in the struggle against Ottoman expansion.[27]

Under Francesco I and Ferdinando I de' Medici, the Order participated in major campaigns against Ottoman forces and their allies, including Lepanto (1571) and subsequent actions in the eastern and western Mediterranean. These exploits were not left to speak for themselves. Between 1602 and 1628 alone, approximately twenty pamphlets—issued at grand-ducal expense—publicized the Order's maritime vigilance and its victories as enduring proofs of the Medici commitment to the defense of the faith.

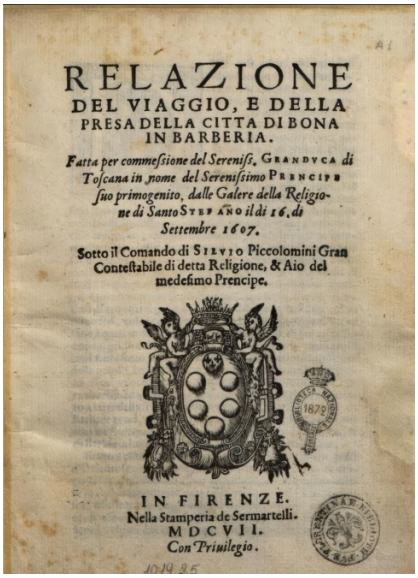
RELAZIONE
DEL VIAGGIO, E DELLA
PRESA DELLA CITTA DI BONA
IN BARBERIA.
Fatta per commessione del Serenissi. GRANDVCA di Toscana in nome del Serenissimo PRENCIPE suo primogenito, dalle Galere della Religione di Santo STEFANO il dì 16. di Settembre 1607.
Sotto il Comando di SILVIO Piccolomini Gran Contestabile di detta Religione, & Aio del medesimo Prencipe.
IN FIRENZE.
Nella Stamperia de Sermartelli.
M D C V I I.
Con Privilegio.

Fig. 5 *Relazione del viaggio, e della presa della città di Bona in Barberia* (Florence: Sermartelli, 1607)

Among the printed pamphlets, one is particularly revealing because it touches on the training of prince Cosimo.[28] The *Relazione del viaggio e della presa della città di Bona* (Fig. 5)

[27] The 1563 siege of Oran predated the Order's effective military organization following its foundation in 1561. See Jacopo Suggi, "A difesa della fede e a protezione del Mediterraneo: Storia dei Cavalieri di Santo Stefano," *Finestre sull'Arte*, 6 July 2024; Gino Guarnieri, *L'Ordine di S. Stefano nei suoi aspetti organizzativi interni sotto il Gran Magisterio Mediceo* (Pisa: Guarnieri, 1966); Andrea Merlotti, "Le ambizioni del duca di Savoia: La dimensione europea degli ordini cavallereschi sabaudi fra Cinque e Seicento." In *Guerra y sociedad en la monarquía hispánica: política, estrategia y cultura en la Europa Moderna, 1500–1700* (Madrid: Laberinto/Fundación Mapfre/CSIC, 2006). 2 vols., vol. 2, 661–690; Gaetano Greco ed. *Il principe, la spada e l'altare* (Pisa: ETS, 2014); and Andrea M. Poole, "The Medici Grand Dukes and the Papal Court: The Courtesan as Cultural Broker," *Renaissance Quarterly* 60.1 (2007): 88–129. The Order came to include Spanish knights, who expressed concern regarding its statutes and requested that they be translated into Spanish and forwarded to Philip III (10 Feb. 1607, MdP, vol. 5080, 19r).

[28] See Giovanni Ciappelli, "L'informazione e la propaganda: la guerra di corsa delle galee toscane contro Turchi e Barbareschi nel Seicento, attraverso relazioni e relaciones a stampa." In Giovanni Ciappelli and Valentina Nider eds. *La invención de las noticias: las relaciones de sucesos entre la literatura y la información (siglos XVI–XVIII)* (Trento: Università degli Studi di Trento, 2017). 133–161. The *Relazione* should be read in the broader context of

describes the Order's assault on the North African city of Bona—ancient Hippo Regius—at precisely the moment when Ferdinando I was negotiating Cosimo's marriage to Maria Magdalena of Austria. The narrative presents a naval siege as evidence of the prince's training for an audience that measures fitness through performances of virtue and service. Ferdinando I ordered Cosimo's tutor, Silvio Piccolomini, Constable of the Order, "to lead the attack in the name of said Prince, his son (who was present during the campaign) to awaken the young spirit to his paternal glories and inflame him toward those same most noble actions in the fervor of youth" (1).[29] Printed in Florence and reissued in Bologna, Siena, Milan, Naples, and Barcelona, it describes the siege as formative in the prince's life and claims that its success is evidence of his "outstanding good fortune" (p. 16)—a phrase that subtly points to an auspicious future.

Ferdinando I capitalized on Cosimo's participation in the siege to press forward negotiations for the prince's marriage to Maria Magdalena of Austria. Diplomatic correspondence, already active for months, records speculation and unease, revealing that military service was being converted into matrimonial currency.[30]

Bona fell on 14 September 1607. By mid-October, Secretary Vinta had dispatched a printed account of the campaign, accompanied by a map of the city, to Ambassador Sallustio Tarugi, with instructions to present both to Philip III. With this gesture, the narrative of a Mediterranean engagement was deliberately recruited as a diplomatic instrument to further the negotiations.[31] That same month, the *Relazione* appeared in Spanish translation as *Relacion del viage y saco de la ciudad de Bona en Berberia, hecha por las galeras del Duque de Florencia y sus cavalleros del orden de San Esteban a 16 de setembre*. Its publication ensured that the episode circulated within Spanish print culture and courtly rumor, embedding Cosimo's chivalric performance within the broader informational networks of the Habsburg monarchy.[32]

Cosimo participates in the siege (September 1607); the pamphlet is sent to Philip III (October 1607); the prince is invested as a knight of the Order of St. Stephen (15 February 1608); he marries Maria Magdalena of Austria (19 October 1608); commissions the state portrait shortly after his accession to the grand duchy (17 February 1609); and he assumes the grand mastership of the Order shortly after. The *Relazione* is integral to this sequence of events. It constructs Cosimo's legitimacy narratively through martial action, establishing a framework that Allori's

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gazettes and printed newsletters on Italian events; see Rafael Soto Escobar et al., *Gaceta de Roma (Valencia, Felipe Mey, 1618–1620): Estudio y edición crítica del primer periódico español* (A Coruña: SIELAE, 2020).

[29] See Ciappelli, "L'informazione e la propaganda," 152. The sack of Bona was celebrated by a grand parade and mass, and by poets such as Gabriello Chiabrera, who attributed the victory to the prince, *Delle Opere di Gabbriello Chiabrera*, 46. Another poem of Chiabrera in the same collection compares Cosimo's deeds to those of Jason and writes, "…fierce in war / Cosimo rules the seas, and proud war / makes them strangely tremble at the sound of his name" ("E se feroce in guerra / Cosmo ara il mare, ed orgogliosi liti / Fa tremar di suo nome in strani modi"), *Delle Opere di Gabbriello Chiabrera*, 51–52.

[30] For example, the letter Asdrubale Barbolini wrote to Grand Duke Ferdinando I that year (9 June 1607, MdP, vol. 3000, 119r; and 15 December 1607, MdP, vol. 2944, 431r).

[31] 16 October 1607, MdP, vol. 5052, 483r. A "Relación del estado de la ciudad de Bona" (1607) that contains two maps exists in the Academia de la Historia; see Antonio Rodríguez Villa, *Catálogo general de manuscritos de la Real Academia de la Historia*, https://www.rah.es/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Cat_gen_manuscritos1.pdf, sign. 9-7161, no. 5.

[32] The siege was the subject of Bernardino Poccetti's frescoes for the Palazzo Pitti (1608; Palatine Gallery, Appartamento degli Arazzi, Sala di Bona) conceived as a visual counterpart to the written *Relazione del viaggio*. On cross-border *relaciones* and their rapid reprinting, see Henry Ettinghausen, "Relaciones internacionales: las relaciones de sucesos, un fenómeno paneuropeo." In Jorge García López and Sònia Boadas eds. *Las relaciones de sucesos en los cambios políticos y sociales de la Europa moderna* (Barcelona: Studia Aurea Monográfica, 2015). 13–27.

portraits would later stabilize visually, and that Galileo's celestial naming would extend cosmologically.

Scientific Diplomacy: The *Sidereus Nuncius* and Cosmological Capital

The sequence of events noted above allows us to better understand the meaning of the state portrait's visual rhetoric, but martial service was not the only means of pointing to Medici influence. A parallel form of distinction—operating through the same logic of visible inscription but grounded in the heavens rather than the sea—emerged almost simultaneously. The Medici were known for their interest in pharmacy and science. Camillo Guidi, for example, implies that prince Cosimo was taught about the cosmos, including meteors/comets and the terrestrial globe—so he could "speak adequately when drawn into conversation" and avoid "ridiculous barbarisms."[33] This interest in cosmology continued when Cosimo became grand duke. On 13 March 1610, Galileo Galilei published *Sidereus Nuncius* (The Starry Messenger), in which he announced the discovery of four satellites orbiting Jupiter, and named them the *Medicea Sidera* (Medicean Stars).[34] What might have remained a scientific breakthrough became a political act of inscription, comparable in function to portraiture and printed narrative.

Almost immediately, Magagnati published his *Meditazione poetica sopra i pianeti medicei* (1610), which, building on Galileo, remarks on a decisive shift from terrestrial metaphors to celestial inscription in the language used to proclaim Medici legitimacy. Rejecting marble and bronze as "subject to Time and dark Oblivion," the poet declares that the glory of Cosimo's lineage will instead be "inscribed in celestial annals" and shine "flaming among the stars." Therefore, the astronomer is figured by Magagnati as dynastic herald who "ploughed… the ether," discovering "new orbs and new lights" and delivering to his sovereign "the fateful honor of the Medicean Stars." Most strikingly, he asserts that the classical constellations "bend humbly" before the Medici lights, while "the Medicean torches alone move freely through Olympus."[35] The Medici were therefore no longer merely protected by heaven; they were inscribed within it as active, luminous agents. *Sidereus Nuncius* thus operated within the same logic as portraiture and printed relations, translating authority into visible, transportable form.[36] Both converted observation—whether of the prince or the heavens—into a medium of political affirmation.

In July 1610, both Juan Fernández de Velasco y Tovar, Duke of Frías, and Diego de Silva y Mendoza, Count of Salinas, were present at a meeting in which Galileo's discoveries and his telescope were discussed, indicating that news of the Medicean Stars had reached members of the Spanish administrative elite.[37] In the years that followed, the circulation of astronomy

[33] 13 October 1620, MdP, vol. 4635, nn; also Appendix III of Paoli 407-408, 433.
[34] See Biagioli, "Galileo the Emblem Maker," and Battistini, "La fortuna planetaria."
[35] Translation mine.
[36] Cosimo II's protection granted Galileo temporary security; however, opposition from influential members of the Florentine clergy surfaced almost immediately. By 1615, Galileo had been denounced to the Inquisition, Biagioli, "Galileo the Emblem Maker."
[37] 22 July 1610, *MdP*, vol. 4941, 522r; 21 June 1611, *MdP*, vol. 3137, 383r.

manuals, celestial globes, and telescopes to Philip III translated these developments into material form, effectively rendering Medici intellectual authority tangible at the Spanish court.[38]

This process was mediated by individuals who occupied both political and cultural positions within Habsburg governance. Velasco y Tovar was a known bibliophile with a marked interest in scientific inquiry,[39] who appears frequently in correspondence with Florence concerning the acquisition of books, including items from Girolamo Mercurio's medical library.[40] While Velasco y Tovar's earlier contacts with the grand duke date to his tenure as governor of Milan, Ambassador Pannocchieschi underscores his greater importance after his elevation to "president of the Council of Italy and the leading vote in the Council of State," recommending that he be actively cultivated.[41]

A comparable role was played by Silva y Mendoza, who—prior to the condemnation of Copernicanism—promoted the use of Copernican astronomy in Spain. His reputation as a patron of scientific knowledge is reflected in the dedication of Francisco Suárez de Argüello's *Ephemerides generales de los movimientos de los cielos por doze años* (1608), which names him explicitly as protector.[42] As a member of the Consejo de Estado, he also oversaw technical and scientific initiatives, including proposed improvements to the compass by Luis de Fonseca Coutinho.[43] Science thus joined painting in projecting Medicean excellence across martial, artistic, and intellectual domains.

Reception and Mediation: Queen Margaret of Austria's Household

What unites all of these forms of representation is not their content, but their function: each translates Medici authority into a visible and legible structure—whether narrative, pictorial, or cosmological—understandable beyond Florence. They were also a response to the fragility of written diplomacy. Letters could be intercepted, tampered, and resealed by hostile factions, whereas material objects resisted manipulation: they could not be altered, only received and interpreted. Their iconographic content remained fixed. For this reason, gifts offered a form of communication resistant to tampering.[44] However, power over the gifting—who received or staged these objects—conferred control over their function. In this sense, the queen's household did not merely receive Medici gifts; it governed their political interpretation.

[38] On Medici gifts of scientific instruments and astronomical materials, see the archival evidence in Goldberg, "Artistic Relations between the Medici and Spain"; for the broader context of scientific patronage as diplomatic currency, see Kathleen Comerford, *Jesuit Foundations and Medici Power, 1532–1621* (Boston: Brill, 2016).

[39] Ambassador Pannocchieschi suggested that if Galileo did not want him to present his ideas for discussion in Madrid, they could be introduced by Velasco y Tovar and Silva y Mendoza, 12 January 1610, MdP, Vol. 4941, 522r.

[40] 14 February 1609, MdP, vol. 4991, 76r; 29 August 1609, MdP, vol. 4941, 223r; 15 February 1609, MdP, vol. 4941, 388r; 20 June 1609, MdP, vol. 4941, 179r.

[41] 29 August 1609, MdP, vol. 4941, 223r.

[42] Suárez de Argüello's reliance on Copernicus for the superior planets did not entail endorsement of heliocentrism as physical doctrine; rather, it reflects the pragmatic use of his findings as computational instruments within a still fundamentally Ptolemaic framework. The Count of Salinas's association with such work signals his participation in advanced mathematical astronomy, an engagement with planetary language that was already intellectually current at court.

[43] See A. Ceballos-Escalera Gila, "Una navegación de Acapulco a Manila en 1611," *Revista de Historia Naval* 17.65 (1996): 7–42. According to Trevor J. Dadson, "Um viso-rei que faz trovas. El conde de Salinas, Diego Silva y Mendoza: Mecenazgo poético y político entre Madrid y Lisboa," *Atalanta* 7.1 (2019): 40–68, at 54, the Count of Salinas was fluent in Italian.

[44] Medici correspondence records the interception, opening, and resealing of letters, and even formal protests—such as Iñigo de Cárdenas's summon of Asdrubale Barbolani di Montauto in 1607, n.d., MdP, vol. 3000, 71r, 84v–85r.

In Madrid, grand-ducal propaganda found a court fractured by factional rivalry, where political survival depended on physical access to the king and queen. Within this unstable environment, the Medici directed many of their gifts deliberately toward Philip III's wife, Queen Margaret, recognizing her household as a relatively reliable point of entry. Yet, once received, these objects became instruments through which the queen could assert her own dynastic position.

The reception of Allori's portraits of Cosimo II and Maria Magdalena makes this dynamic particularly clear. Images of ruling princes were not treated as mere likenesses but as substitutes for sovereign presence, and their reception acknowledged them as such. Precisely because they functioned as proxies, authority over their staging—how, where, and before whom they were displayed—determined how that presence would be politically understood. Portraits did not carry a single, stable message; they required activation within specific social settings that governed their meaning.[45]

The handling of the Allori portraits underscores the degree to which presentation itself was politically consequential. Although the paintings reached Madrid on 30 September 1609, Ambassador Orso Pannocchieschi d'Elci was instructed to delay their delivery until they had been properly mounted and dressed.[46] Their scale, surface, and framing were not neutral details but conditions of legibility. Presented as rolled canvases, they would have diminished the authority they were meant to project;[47] properly staged, they could operate as convincing surrogates for princely presence.[48]

This process of staging occurred within a courtly environment in which Queen Margaret occupied an ambiguous position as both insider and foreign consort. As a German-speaking queen within Lerma's Castilian-dominated political order, her direct intervention in formal decision-making was constrained.[49] Her influence instead operated through kinship networks and through spaces that were less visible yet no less consequential—female-governed palatial and conventual environments. In these settings, the circulation and display of portraits and luxury objects formed part of a sociability that her household sustained.[50] Her retreats to the Descalzas

[45] The transporting of high-end portraits and gifts between Naples and Madrid served as a visual currency in diplomatic negotiations; see Fernando Bouza, "De Rafael a Ribera y de Nápoles a Madrid," *Boletín del Museo del Prado* 27.45 (2009): 44–71. Bouza argues in *Imagen y propaganda: capítulos de historia cultural del reinado de Felipe II* (Madrid: Akal, 1998) that in an empire where a king cannot be everywhere, the portrait becomes the king for the purposes of law and ritual, and is given the same protocolary deference as if he were present.

[46] 2 March 1609, MdP, vol. 5052, 723r; and again referenced 13 October 1609. Ferdinando I died on 17 February 1609. News of his death reached the Spanish court in mid-March, prompting a period of mourning; see Cabrera de Córdoba, *Relaciones de las cosas sucedidas*, 363.

[47] Ambassador Pannocchieschi arrived at Madrid from Florence as an envoy on 9 October 1608 (MdP, vol. 4941, 3r), and he met with the king and queen at El Escorial on the 23rd. He was accompanied to the meeting by 25 men in black livery (MdP, vol. 4941, 23r) and was subsequently named permanent ambassador.

[48] 12 November 1609, MdP, vol. 4941, 299r. It was normal for paintings to be rolled for shipment and unrolled to display them to the receivers (23 June 1611, MdP, vol. 4189, nn).

[49] Margaret's foreign origin and linguistic difficulties (she could not speak Spanish well) made her worry about her attendants, a fact that she acknowledged in her testament when she wrote of them "como extranjeros por acá no tenían a nadie sino a mí," and noted that the Crown had rewarded them "por mi intercesión… muchas y grandes mercedes"; see Emily Deleen Porta, "Servir y prosperar: Mecanismos de integración y asimilación de la nobleza femenina extranjera en la Cámara de Margarita de Austria (1598–1611)," *Tiempos Modernos* 46 (2023): 41–57, at 55. Those concerns made her indispensable for the Florentine court as well.

[50] De Carlos Varona, "Reginalidad y retrato," has emphasized that ambassadors pressed for high-quality images and for controlled presentation because the political value of a portrait depended on where it was seen, who was present, and how it was remembered. See also Emily Deleen Porta, "Una aproximación a la trayectoria familiar de la 'dama

Reales, framed in devotional terms, provided a setting that afforded greater autonomy from the immediate oversight of Lerma's faction while remaining embedded within a Habsburg dynastic framework. Her household thus functioned as a parallel diplomatic infrastructure, less formal than the *consejos,* but capable of shaping political relationships through controlled access, sociability, and display.

Within this alternative arena, the function of Medici portraits shifted. Displayed in the queen's gallery in the Alcázar, and possibly for a time in the Descalzas Reales, they no longer operated solely to assert parity between Florence and Madrid. Instead, they were incorporated into a visual and social program that reinforced the queen's own dynastic centrality within a broader Habsburg network. Her request to Ambassador Pannocchieschi for forty additional paintings to decorate her apartments at the Descalzas Reales exemplifies this process.[51] The resulting ensemble did not simply transmit Medici prestige;[52] it embedded that prestige within spaces most closely associated with her authority, transforming external diplomatic gifts into components of her own representational strategy.[53]

The broader structure of the Spanish monarchy helps explain this transformation. As a composite polity, it relied on a continual negotiation between service, patronage, and the managed assimilation of foreign elites, particularly through the marriage of ladies-in-waiting into Castilian society. Yet such assimilation did not dissolve foreign networks. Rather, it rendered them more adaptable within Spanish power structures. Margaret's efforts to "Castilianize" her retinue can thus be understood not as a process of erasure but of translation, one that made her network more legible and more effective within the language of Spanish patronage. Within this system, gifts functioned as key instruments of affiliation, capable of carrying external relationships into the fabric of court society. In this sense, Medici objects did not simply communicate Florentine intentions; once absorbed into the queen's sphere, they redistributed diplomatic agency, reinforcing her capacity to mediate and reshape the terms of dynastic exchange.[54]

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privada de la Reina,' María Sidonia Riederer von Paar, al servicio de la Casa de Austria," *Arenal* 32.1 (2025): 165–190, at 172–175; Alejandra Franganillo Álvarez, "Female Agents at the Royal Palace of Madrid: Political Interests, Favors and Gifts (ca. 1598–1640)," *Culture & History Digital Journal* 11.1 (2022), 3; and Alejandra Franganillo Álvarez, *La reina Isabel de Borbón: las redes de poder en torno a su casa (1621–1644)* (Diss. Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2015), 252–264.

[51] 22 June 1611, MdP, vol. 4943, 231r, and 3 July 1611, MdP, vol. 4941, 880r.

[52] See Manuel Rivero Rodríguez, "La preeminencia del Consejo de Italia y el sentimiento de la nación italiana." In A. Álvarez-Ossorio and B. García García eds. *La Monarquía de las Naciones. Patria, nación y naturaleza en la monarquía de España* (Madrid: Fundación Carlos de Amberes, 2004). 505–528.

[53] Franganillo Álvarez 2022, 5–8; idem 2015, 252–64. According to the Tuscan ambassador, it would be good to "oblige the Queen's goodwill by sending, from time to time, some curiosity from Italy and something newer and more charming than rich ... in order to have the means to make gifts to certain ladies and her favorite gentlewomen," and adds that he should be sent two small portraits he can gift to people like the Duchess of Rioseco who is anxious to get a portrait of Maria Magdalena (13 October 1609, MdP, vol. 4941, 265r).

[54] Work on Italian elites at Madrid shows how household service and marriage could function as structuring practices of the monarchy; see Alejandra Franganillo Álvarez and Francisco Javier Álvarez García, "Movilidad e integración de las élites italianas en el espacio áulico madrileño (ca. 1598–1665)." In Marcella Aglietti and I. A. A. Thompson eds. *Le élites italiane e la Monarchia ispanica (secoli XVI–XVII)* (Madrid: Polifemo, 2025). 209–238; Alberto Marcos Martín, "Epilogue: Polycentric Monarchies: Understanding the Grand Multinational Organizations of the Early Modern Period." In Pedro Cardim, Tamar Herzog, José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez, and Gaetano Sabatini eds. *Polycentric Monarchies* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012). 322–336. That is, "Italian" influence did not need to appear as a formal bloc to matter; it could operate through dispersed household placements, patronage lines, and interpersonal bonds. The role of Jesuits at Margaret's court shows how confessional pressures also shaped the

Miniature portraits of Cosimo and Maria Magdalena appear to have been gifted to Victoria Colonna, Duchess of Rioseco, and to other noblewomen at court.[55] Male courtiers associated with Italian governance were likewise targeted. Juan Fernández de Velasco y Tovar—who was promised the presidency of the Consejo de Italia after serving as governor of Milan—commissioned a painting from Cristofano Allori,[56] while Esteban de Ibarra, a member of the Consejo de Guerra, signaled his attachment to the Medici by requesting a suite of grand-ducal portraits for his private chapel.[57] In these cases, paintings operated as markers of Italian sympathies within Spanish administrative structures, transforming dynastic imagery into markers of affiliation.[58] This process, however, did not entail unilateral Medici control; once at court, the meaning of these objects was contingent on actors and contexts beyond Florentine direction.

The Persistence of a Medici-Inspired Symbolic Repertoire: "Agents" and Italophiles

Margaret's death in 1611[59] disrupted but did not dismantle the system through which Medici influence had been mediated. The mechanisms that had governed the reception and redistribution of gifts—above all, control over access, display, and exchange—persisted within her household and were transferred to its surviving members.

The shock registered in Medici correspondence underscores the queen's importance. Belisario Vinta describes the event as disastrous for Tuscan interests, while Ambassador Pannocchieschi laments that it is "the most sorrowful occasion that could ever have arisen for me at this Court."[60] Yet the same correspondence reveals an immediate recognition that access to the king depended on continued penetration of the domestic sphere that structured his daily life. Discussions began at once regarding the possibility of marrying one of Ferdinando I de' Medici's daughters to Philip III,[61] confirming that, from Florence's perspective, insertion into a functioning household network remained indispensable.[62]

As Deelen Porta has argued, Margaret "adulterated the paradigm" of ideal queenship by transforming a formally circumscribed role into a locus of informal political authority.[63] That authority did not vanish with her death; it persisted in the habits, loyalties, and techniques she

staffing and influence of her household—another reminder that queenship was a managed political site rather than a purely domestic sphere; see Esther Jiménez Pablo, "Los jesuitas en la corte de Margarita de Austria: Ricardo Haller y Fernando de Mendoza." In José Martínez Millán and Maria Paula Marçal Lourenço coords. *Las relaciones discretas entre las Monarquías Hispana y Portuguesa: Las Casas de las Reinas (siglos XV–XIX)* Madrid: Ediciones Polifemo, 2008). vol. 2, 1071–1120, esp. 1077–1080. For the influence of the Medici on Spanish subjects in Florence, see Sara Mamone and Anna Maria Testaverde, "Court Culture and Pageantry of the 'Spanish Nation' in Florence," *Bulletin of Spanish Visual Studies* 4.2 (2019): 255–266.

[55] 13 October 1609, MdP, vol. 4941, 265r. Victoria Colonna was the daughter of Marcantonio Colonna, Prince of Tagliacozza, a power in Naples and the Papal Estates, who led the pope's fleets at the battle of Lepanto and became Viceroy of Sicily.

[56] Bouza, "Corte y protesta," 2:26–29.

[57] 17 February 1610, MdP, vol. 4941, 391r. Although the paintings arrived too late for the elderly statesman to enjoy, the logic of the request is explicit.

[58] *Guardaroba Medicea Diari di Etichetta*, 3 bis, U/V; MdP, vol. 3137, 605r.

[59] 4 October 1611, MdP, vol. 4941, 955r; 31 October 1611, MdP, vol. 5080, 948r.

[60] 4 October 1611, MdP vol. 4941, 955r.

[61] 31 October 1611, MdP, vol. 5080, 948r.

[62] Carrió-Invernizzi, "Gift and Diplomacy," 881–899; Marcos Martín, "Epilogue," 322–336.

[63] Emily Deleen Porta, "La casa de Margarita de Austria y la adulteración del paradigma (1599–1611)," *Librosdelacorte.es* 30 (2025): 330–350.

had institutionalized.[64] Court women could open, delay, or redirect favor; they interpreted requests, arranged introductions, and controlled the rhythms through which access to the monarch was negotiated. In doing so, they continued to mediate the circulation and meaning of diplomatic gifts, ensuring that the mechanisms through which Medici objects had operated remained active even in her absence.

Leonor Pimentel exemplifies how this system operated in practice. She was not an anomaly but a particularly well-documented case of how proximity to the queen could be converted into leverage within Spain's Italian networks. Ladies-in-waiting like her frequently supplemented their income by facilitating diplomatic requests,[65] but such contacts were not exempt from danger when outcomes misaligned with Medici interests.

Medici ambassadors were instructed to approach women like Leonor with caution.[66] Giuliano de' Medici di Castellina's assessment of her warns about the hazards of dealing with their demands: "Give them a finger and they take not just the hand, but the entire arm." He recounts how earlier agents had nearly committed funds to Leonor only to see demands escalate—from 500 scudi to a request for 1,000 as a "loan"—and accused her of diverting gifts intended for others and appropriating luxury objects such as amber for her own ends.[67] The complaint nevertheless reveals that the anxiety about female mediation was tempered by the fact that their informal brokerage was a recognized, even expected, dimension of court politics.

Leonor's political utility becomes clearer when set against her connections to some of the most powerful officials in Spain. Her brother, Antonio Pimentel y Toledo, became viceroy of Sicily in 1624;[68] she was a cousin of Juan Alonso Pimentel de Herrera y Quiñones, whose career moved through Valencia, Naples, the Consejo de Estado, and the Consejo de Italia,[69] and of Antonio Alonso Pimentel, IX Count and VI Duke of Benavente, who was appointed *mayordomo mayor* to Queen Isabel in April of 1621.[70] She also frequently had contact with two important figures, one of which we have mentioned before: her guardian, Diego Sarmiento de Acuña (Count of Gondomar), a leading court powerbroker and diplomat-bibliophile;[71] and her paramour, Diego de Silva y Mendoza, Count of Salinas.[72] We can consider all of them members of a courtly Italophile network that mediated access to the monarch and translated symbolic forms into instruments of political negotiation. These individuals did not simply absorb Medici forms but used them for their own purposes.

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[64] Emily Deleen Porta, "Una aproximación a la trayectoria familiar de la 'dama privada de la Reina,' María Sidonia Riederer von Paar, al servicio de la Casa de Austria," *Arenal* 32.1 (2025): 165–190, and Emily Deleen Porta, "Servir y prosperar," 41–57, esp. 42 and 55.

[65] 7 April 1619, MdP, vol. 4947, 288r; 2 September 1619, MdP, vol. 4949, 125r.

[66] 27 March 1620, MdP, vol. 5079, 824r.

[67] 20 February 1620, MdP, vol. 5079, 870r; Franganillo Álvarez, "Female Agents," 5–8; idem, *La reina Isabel de Borbón*, 252–264.

[68] 11 November 1624, MdP, vol. 4952, nn.

[69] 28 June 1619, MdP, vol. 4949, 42r.

[70] Leonor married the Duke of Benavente in October 1622, confirming her role at the highest level of household authority.

[71] See below.

[72] On Leonor Pimentel's more personal life, see Trevor J. Dadson, "El conde de Salinas y Leonor Pimentel: cuando se juntan el amor y la poesía." In Jean Andrews and Isabel Torres eds. *Spanish Golden Age Poetry in Motion: The Dynamics of Creation and Conversation* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2014). 185–212; Trevor J. Dadson, "Nuevos datos para la biografía de Don Diego de Silva y Mendoza, conde de Salinas," *Criticón* 31 (1985): 59–84, esp. 83; Trevor J. Dadson and Laura S. Muñoz Pérez, "Beyond the Boundaries of Private Spaces: Women and the Spanish Court," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 93.7–8 (2016): 1–16; and Franganillo Álvarez, *La reina Isabel de Borbón*, 232–264.

Aranjuez and the Naturalization of Medici Idioms

The visual and textual image constructed through Medici painting and festival literature exerted a discernible influence on the ceremonial language of the Spanish court by 1622. The celebration of Philip IV's birthday at Aranjuez was neither Medici-sponsored nor explicitly Tuscan in its references; yet its scenographic and theatrical forms mobilized a repertoire that had already entered Habsburg ceremonial practice through earlier exchanges.[73] Writing to Florence on 20 May 1622, Averardo de' Medici reported that the festivities were widely admired at court and had incurred considerable expense. He added, however, that "from what I understand from Italians who have seen both this and the festivities in Italy, it has nothing to do with those seen in Tuscany."[74] Yet the same letter also records that the Infanta's celebration, directed by Leonor Pimentel, ended in disaster when the stage caught fire, forcing spectators to flee and resulting in the loss of costumes and ornaments before they could be seen.

The Medici wedding festivities of 1608–1609 articulated a visual grammar in which dynastic authority was staged through allegory, mythological spectacle, and chivalric symbolism tied to the myth of Jason—elements readily adaptable beyond their original context, particularly within a courtly culture shaped by the symbolism of the Golden Fleece.[75] What is most significant, however, is not direct imitation of that grammar but its transformation. Their detachment from a specifically Florentine framework—despite being perceived as such by Averardo—reveals most clearly a process of cultural naturalization: motifs that had originated as instruments of Medici self-assertion were absorbed into the broader ceremonial idiom of the Habsburg court. By 1622, they were part of an internalized and self-sustaining courtly language, capable of articulating royal magnificence without reference to its sources.

Its transmission followed two overlapping paths. First, courtiers and ladies-in-waiting who had served in the households of Margaret of Austria and Isabel de Borbón carried forward embodied habits of display, mediation, and presentation. Second, Medici-related texts, paintings, and printed relations preserved a repertory of images and allegories available for inspiration. Together, these channels ensured that Medici forms persisted not as fixed messages but as adaptable elements of courtly practice. The figures of Leonor Pimentel and Villamediana make this process visible.

After Queen Margaret's death, Leonor continued in service to Isabel de Borbón, first as princess and then as queen. During these years, her relationship with the Count of Salinas entered its final phase, ending definitively in 1621. Yet the dissolution of this personal bond did not disrupt the political and intellectual networks in which they operated. Salinas and Leonor's guardian, Diego Sarmiento de Acuña, Count of Gondomar, belonged to a Lusophone and Italophile milieu deeply engaged in questions of dynastic precedence and territorial strategy. Galileo's planetary discoveries were not treated by courtiers as an abstract science but a symbolic system: a language of centrality, orbit, and hierarchy with Jupiter as center and its

[73] On the broader culture of court spectacle and its political uses in both Italian and Spanish contexts, see Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Giudizio di Paride* (Florence, 1608); Francesco Cini, *Notte d'amore* (Florence, 1608); Bartolomeo Sermartelli, *Castore e Polluce* (Florence, 1608); and, for the Spanish courtly adaptation of such forms, Antonio Hurtado de Mendoza's accounts of the 1622 Aranjuez festivities and in Lope de Vega's *El vellocino de oro* tradition.

[74] 20 May 1622, MdP, vol. 4951, 1v-2r.

[75] For the broader corpus of wedding panegyrics and festival literature, see Bonini, Bocchineri, Cini, Favilla, Palmer, and others listed in the Works Cited bibliography.

satellites as dependent bodies that could be appropriated. Gondomar's prominence in diplomatic exchanges should not obscure Salinas's position within the same network; his collaboration with Gondomar and proximity to Leonor situate him within a milieu accustomed to translating literary and cosmological forms into instruments of courtly strategy.

In 1621 Lope de Vega dedicated *La Filomena* to Leonor Pimentel.[76] Her sponsorship of *El vellocino de oro*—whose thematic genealogy, as we have said, reaches back to the Medici wedding of 1608—further demonstrates how Medicean and Habsburg systems of representation intersected within her orbit. Mythological, celestial, and chivalric forms were not discrete aesthetic choices but elements of a shared repertoire through which dynastic ambition could be staged. In this context, the Medicean Stars entered a court already conditioned to read cosmology as political language.

Villamediana, after extended stays in Italy between 1611 and 1615—where he moved within elite academies, collaborated with Giulio Cesare Fontana, and absorbed the conventions of court spectacle—participated directly in the Aranjuez festivities. His Italian sojourn did not simply expose him to Italian theatrical idioms; it incorporated them into his own performative repertoire. By the second decade of the seventeenth century, such forms could be deployed within Spanish ceremonial culture without explicit acknowledgment of their Tuscan origin.[77]

The textual record underpins the process. Rinuccini's *Descrizione* preserved allegories and formulae that later Habsburg spectacles could recall under altered political conditions. Chivalric rhetoric linking the Order of St. Stephen and the capture of Bona to the myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece circulated widely in panegyric literature. Cosmological imagery followed a comparable trajectory. As Vélez Sainz has shown, the divisa of the *rey planeta* was already operative in encomiastic poetry by 1605; celestial language had long been a part of royal praise.[78] Galileo's naming of the Medicean stars did not create this idiom, but added to its repertoire of forms; Jean Tarde's *Borbonia Sidera* (1620) demonstrates how rapidly that cosmological strategy could be appropriated in Bourbon praise and expanded its use in addresses to Philip IV.

Aranjuez 1622 marked not a rupture but a continuation, as instruments of Medici diplomacy—portraits, chivalric narratives, and cosmological emblems—entered a common courtly language used for asserting sovereignty. The trajectory traced here is not one of unilateral Tuscan "influence," but of transformation through reuse, in which meaning was reshaped under shifting political conditions. What began as a strategy of Florentine self-assertion was

[76] Lope de Vega dedicates *La Filomena* (Madrid: Sebastián Cormel, 1621) to Leonor because of the "protección que ha hecho a mis escritos el divino ingenio de la ilustrísima señora" (Prólogo). She also appears as the dedicatee in two of its poems.

[77] See Otis H. Green's "Villamediana as *Correo Mayor* in the Kingdom of Naples." *Hispanic Review* 15.2 (1947): 302–306 and "The Literary Court of the Conde de Lemos at Naples, 1610–1616." *Hispanic Review* 1.4 (1933): 290–330. Villamediana's interactions with Cosimo II were largely negative. A pointed note collected in the manuscript *Varios papeles curiosos* reveals that he had been offended by being addressed with the wrong honorifics during a visit to the Florentine court. This incident prompted Secretary Curzio Picchena to defend the court's protocol by saying that Villamediana had been housed in prince Cosimo's former apartments in the Palazzo Pitti and had been addressed as "Most Illustrious," a courtesy generally reserved for princes. "It is we," he concluded, "who have the right to complain" (20 October 1613, MdP, vol. 4943, 525r).

[78] Lope de Vega coined the epithet *rey planeta* in reference to Philip II and used it more insistently for Philip IV from Aranjuez 1622 on; see Julio Vélez Sainz, *El rey planeta: Suerte de una divisa en el entramado encomiástico en torno a Felipe IV* (Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2017), 13 and 56–58; Cipriano López Lorenzo, *Lope de Vega como escritor cortesano: 'La Filomena' (1621) y 'La Circe' (1624) a estudio* (Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2023), 213.

reconstituted in Madrid as a shared ceremonial language, no longer dependent on its Medici origin yet still structured by it.

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