

## The Grand (Ducal) Finale Anna Maria Luisa as the last Medici patron of the San Lorenzo Basilica in Florence\*

Sointu Cantell

AMBROSIANAE D. LAVRENTII MARTYRIS  
BASILICAE PAENE IAM CONLABENTIS.  
IVSSV ANNAE MARIAE LVDOVICAE.  
COSMI III. MAGNI DVCIS ETRVRIAE F.  
COMIT. PALAT. AD RHENVM ELECTRICIS.  
AERE SVO REFECTIS PILIS SOLIDATISQ.  
SVBSTRVCTIONIBVS. COEMETERIO  
RESTITVTO AMPLIATOQUE. NE POSTERI  
IGNORENT QVID FACTVM SIT. QVO IN LOCO.  
QVAVE RATIONE ET CONSILIO. NEVE EAS  
SVBEANT DIFFICVLTATES. QVAS TRIVM  
ANNORVM SPATIO INCREDIBILIS CVRA ET  
MAGNI SVMTVS SVPERARVNT. ACCVRATAM  
OPERVM DESCRIPTIONEM. ADIECTIS  
TABVLIS ICHNOGRAPHICIS. IN TABVLARIO  
EIVSDEM BASILICAE EAM ADSERVARI.  
CVIVIS OSTENDI. NVLLO VNQVAM  
TEMPORE DISTRAHI ALIENARIVE.  
CAVTVM EST. HAEC PROMITTENTIBVS  
PRO SE SVISQVE SVCCESORIBVS.  
ALEXANDRO CAVALCANTIO. ANTEA  
FRANC. MARIA MANCINIO. ANTISTITE.  
ET SINGVLIS CANONICIS. VTI ACTA  
AB HONORIO CLARIO SCRIBA FLORENT.  
III. KAL. MAIAS. AN. M. DCC. XXXXII.  
AD PERPETVAM REI GESTAE MEMORIAM.  
EXARATA TESTANTVR.

Tucked away in the *loggia* of San Lorenzo's *Chiostro dei Canonici*, an ornate baroque epigraph reveals itself as one of the few remaining references to a remarkably underappreciated phase of the Medici-infused history of Florence's San Lorenzo

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Basilica (fig. 1). The epigraph describes a period between 1738 and 1743, when the San Lorenzo complex underwent extensive architectural and decorative interventions, undertaken by the last heir of the Medici family, Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici (1667-1743).<sup>1</sup> Anna Maria was the sister of the last Medici Grand Duke, Gian Gastone de' Medici (1671-1737), whose marriage had left no heirs to the Tuscan Grand Duchy. When Anna Maria's own marriage, too, remained without issue, the princess was left with the inauspicious honor of being the last surviving member of the Medici lineage. The consequences of this imminent end of the Medici bloodline were far-reaching, instigating – among other things – a troublesome transition of the Tuscan Grand Duchy to the house of Habsburg-Lorraine.<sup>2</sup> Anna Maria, entangled in this powershift, embarked on a large-scale restoration and preservation enterprise of the cultural heritage of her ancestors, of which her work in San Lorenzo in Florence is the best representation. Her efforts to maintain the legacy of her perishing family heavily shaped the last decades of Anna Maria's patronage, and it was against this backdrop of political turmoil that she bestowed “her” San Lorenzo with its final Medici refurbishment.

Although her story seemingly contains all the necessary elements for a place in the great Medici-canon of Florence, Anna Maria's projects in San Lorenzo have long been overshadowed by the High Renaissance program of the dynastic church. The religious complex boasts many Medici-commissioned highlights, amongst them the celebrated fifteenth- and sixteenth-century sacristies by Brunelleschi and Michelangelo, containing burial monuments of several important Medici figures. With masterpieces of this caliber under its roof, it has proved easy to overlook the eighteenth-century additions to the basilica of San Lorenzo. Although scholarship on this “forgotten century” and its key figures has duly gained momentum in the past decades, the importance of the eighteenth century in San Lorenzo remains ambiguous for most present-day visitors to the church.<sup>3</sup>

Highlighting Anna Maria de' Medici's fascinating eighteenth-century patronage in San Lorenzo makes for an interesting study *an sich*; however, it is valuable to look further into the princess's motivations for her elaborate renovation projects in the basilica. An in-depth discussion of each of her Laurentian projects is beyond the scope of this paper, instead, we will zoom in on two of the princess's most distinctive commissions in the basilica: the cupola fresco carried out by Vincenzo Meucci (1694-1766), and the new *campanile* by architect Ferdinando Ruggieri (1691-1741). These two projects, the only two that Anna Maria was able to complete before her death in 1743, most explicitly demonstrate the princess's ambitions in San Lorenzo. Though evidently both centered around a general theme of “tying loose ends”, the finitude faced by Anna Maria cannot alone explain the princess's fervent determination to undertake such ambitious projects.

With the cupola and the *campanile* as our guides we will attempt to answer the question: what were the reasons behind Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici's architectural and artistic interventions at San Lorenzo between 1738-1743? Before delving into this

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<sup>1</sup> For a short note on the *Chiostrò* inscription, see: S. Bellesi, ‘Epigrafe commemorativa dei lavori promossi dall’Elettrice Palatina in San Lorenzo’, in: M. Bietti (ed.), *Arte e politica. L’elettrice Palatina e l’ultima stagione della committenza medicea in San Lorenzo*, Livorno, Sillabe, 2014, pp. 242-243.

<sup>2</sup> R.W. Gaston & L.A. Waldman, *San Lorenzo. A Florentine Church*, Florence, Villa I Tatti - Harvard Center for Renaissance Studies, 2017, p. 649.

<sup>3</sup> An important recent impetus came from an extensive exhibition in the princess's honor organized in 2014 in the Medici Chapel Museum in Florence. The exhibition, entitled *Arte e politica. L’elettrice Palatina e l’ultima stagione della committenza medicea in San Lorenzo*, threw a new light onto the important patronage of the last Medici heir at the San Lorenzo complex, especially studying its implications for the broader cultural fabric of Florence. The exposition was accompanied by an eponymous publication that will be mentioned throughout this study.

question, however, it is necessary to further introduce our protagonist, as well as providing a concise sketch of the socio-political climate she faced during her years as the last Florentine Medici princess.

### **Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici and *Settecento* Florence**

Following the death of Anna Maria's brother, the last Medici Grand Duke Gian Gastone, in 1737, a long European tug-of-war ensued over the succession of the Tuscan duchy. This power-struggle eventually led the Medici throne to be passed on to Francis Stephen I of the house of Habsburg-Lorraine, who, in turn, elected a Council of Regency led by two Lorraine noblemen to represent him remotely in Tuscany.<sup>4</sup> The Tuscans were generally displeased with these changes, facing a period of uncertain political leadership and increased cultural and economic decline.<sup>5</sup> Although the relations between Anna Maria de' Medici and the new Lorraine order initially seemed cordial, striking up various practical and financial agreements, this relationship soon deteriorated.<sup>6</sup> For the Lorraines Anna Maria was an archaism, acting as an increasingly stubborn relic of the old guard of the Tuscan Grand Duchy that interfered with their plans for the duchy's future. In a letter from 1737 an important Lorraine advisor compared the state of the Florentine government that he encountered to an unsolvable "Gordian-knot", exclaiming: 'Le gouvernement de ce pays est un chaos presque impossible à débrouiller'.<sup>7</sup> For Anna Maria, and with her for many Florentines, the foreign annex was an unwelcome sign of changing times.<sup>8</sup> With the Habsburg-Lorraines now breathing down her neck, the princess took it into her own hands to tighten the provisions of her Florentine estate.

The princess's legal efforts culminated in her most well-known endeavor: the *patto di famiglia*. It is worth dwelling on this influential document briefly, as it illustrates the judicial framework that tinted the princess's final years as a Medici patron, especially regarding her work in the San Lorenzo Basilica. In the testament, the princess reluctantly bequeathed the entirety of the Medici properties under her ownership to the new Florentine duke, Francis Stephen I. However, the princess's bequest was not without strict conditions. In the last years of her life she had several codicils included to her testament, all aimed at securing the fate of her family's extensive inheritance.<sup>9</sup> The most celebrated codicil of Anna Maria's testament became its third, wherein she specifically established that all objects from her inheritance were to permanently remain in the public domain of Florence: 'as ornament of the state, for public utility and to attract the curiosity of foreigners'.<sup>10</sup> With this codicil, ratified in 1737, the princess ensured that centuries' worth of her family's treasures, artworks and other objects avoided dispersion by the new ruling family and remained

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<sup>4</sup> Charles III of Spain (Infante Don Carlos) was first intended to be Gian Gastone's successor. A complex European political situation ensued and Francis Stephen was eventually awarded the Tuscan Duchy for giving up the Duchy of Lorraine to the Polish king.

<sup>5</sup> E. Ciletti, 'Corsini Rome, Regency Florence, and the Last Medici Facade for San Lorenzo', in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* (1988), vol. 32, p. 480.

<sup>6</sup> E. Ciletti, 'San Lorenzo and the Extinction of the Medici (1737-1743)' [unpublished notes provided personally by author], conference: *San Lorenzo. A Florentine Church*, Villa I Tatti, 29 May 2009.

<sup>7</sup> M. Verga, 'Between Dynastic Strategies and Civic Myth. Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici and Florence as the New Athens', in: G. Benadusi (ed.), *The Making of a Dynasty in Grand Ducal Tuscany*, Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2015, p. 356, note 26 (exclaimed by Count Emmanuel de Richécourt).

<sup>8</sup> For more context on this troubled relationship, see: G. Coco, 'Forestieri illustri a Firenze nei primi anni della Reggenza Lorenese tra il 1737 e il 1743', in: Bietti (ed.), *Arte e politica*, cit., pp. 36-41.

<sup>9</sup> E. Ciletti, "'Ne Posterì Ignorant quid Factum Sit.'" The Legacy of the Electress Palatine at San Lorenzo', p. 4 (English version provided by prof. Ciletti); originally in Bietti (ed.), *Arte e politica*, cit., pp. 58-61.

<sup>10</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASF), *Trattati Internazionali*, f. 56. See: Bietti (ed.), *Arte e politica*, cit., p. 198.

common property of the Florentines. The document has had a lasting impact on the preservation of the cultural fundaments of Florence as they are still known – and proudly exhibited – today.

Coinciding with her legal efforts to preserve the cultural heritage of her predecessors were, then, the princess's large-scale restoration projects of the San Lorenzo Basilica. She first included the renowned edifice into her will with an annual sum for its maintenance in the spring of 1739, marking the beginning of her far-reaching involvement with the building, that would last until her death. Her testament, dated April 5<sup>th</sup> 1739, states:

Per ragione di legato et in ogni caso, lasciò, e lascia scudi cinquanta l'anno da darsi e pagarsi in perpetuo al Capitolo della venerabile Chiesa collegiata di San Lorenzo di questa città, ad effetto che devino servire per tanti suffragi per l'anime di tutti quelli suoi antenati, che non abbia disposto particolarmente in suffragi delle anime loro, includendo tutti i suoi antenati maschi e femmine, dal Serenissimo Gran Duca Cosimo primo fino a detta Serenissima Testatrice, per la di cui anima intende che la maggior parte di detti suffragi siano applicati, e, perciò, volse, e vuole che si faccia un fondo fruttifero capace di detta anima rendita perpetua.<sup>11</sup>

### **Interventions: Cupola and Campanile**

As illustrated in the testament above, the Medici family had a longstanding connection to the San Lorenzo Basilica, with several of their interventions since the early fifteenth century virtually transforming it into their own family church. However, as the tides turned for the Medici family, so too did San Lorenzo reveal the family's hardships leading up to its eighteenth-century renovations.

Only a handful of sketches and descriptions remain of the rather dilapidated early eighteenth-century appearance of the church, before the interventions by Anna Maria. However, an alternative source that can be consulted for the study of the building's renovations is the eighteenth-century diary kept by the canons of San Lorenzo's own chapter. This diary punctually documented the noteworthy activities and events that took place in and around the basilica complex, recording the Medici swansong at San Lorenzo between 1738 and 1743. In the early stages of the princess's involvement with San Lorenzo, the church's clergy note that Anna Maria had asked for their permission to begin 'with the decoration of the dome which is in front of the High Altar', indicating this project as the starting point for the princess's renovation enterprise.<sup>12</sup>

After the completion of the most urgent structural work in the basilica in early 1740, the princess employed the Florentine painter Vincenzo Meucci to execute the cupola fresco that she had long pursued in the nave of the basilica (figs. 2 and 3).<sup>13</sup> The scene that Meucci painted can be described as a "celestial whirlwind", executed in true late baroque style, with dramatic fluttering draperies, cottony clouds, and

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<sup>11</sup> ASF, *Trattati Internazionali*, LXII/1, c. 26, Testamento del 5 aprile 1739. See: Bietti (ed.), *Arte e politica*, cit., p. 55.

<sup>12</sup> 'La Ser.ma Elettrice Anna Luisa de Medici mandò a chiamare il nostro Sig.e Priore, quale andò subito a sentire quello comandava sua Altezza, la quale gli disse che se si contentava era di pensiero d'ornare la cupola, che è avant[i] l'Altare maggiore', 'Records of the Monastic Chapter of S. Lorenzo', published in: Ciletti, *The Patronage of the Last Medici*, cit., p. 473. Quoted from: Biblioteca Moreniana, f. 128, p. 293. It is important to note that Ciletti's 1981 dissertation erroneously identifies the canons of San Lorenzo as monks from San Lorenzo's convent. There was no Laurentian monastery (no affiliations with Dominicans nor Franciscans as is the case in the S. Maria Novella and the S. Croce); San Lorenzo was a parish church. This was later corrected.

<sup>13</sup> Ciletti, *The Patronage of the Last Medici*, cit., p. 129. Though not discussed within the capacity of this study, it is interesting to note that during the princess's extensive restoration work in the choir of the basilica, frescoes from ca. 1546 by Pontormo were lost. For the most recent treatment of this topic: E. Pilliod, *Pontormo at San Lorenzo. Art, History, Ritual. The Making and Meaning of a Lost Renaissance Masterpiece*, London, Brepols, 2022.



lively putti filling its surface.<sup>14</sup> Interspersing the pastel-colored scene are a multitude of saints, portrayed together in animated interaction. As a whole, the firmament and its figures form a commemorative display of Tuscan iconography, yet the cupola also follows a more general ecclesiastical program, with many of its characters being familiar figures in similar religious arrangements.<sup>15</sup> For today's visitor the cupola is the most evocative trace of Anna Maria's patronage in the San Lorenzo Basilica; however, the princess's work in the church had only just begun.

Until its demolition in the 1480's, the San Lorenzo Basilica had boasted a magnificent duecento *campanile*, yet no replacement for it had been conceived until Anna Maria became involved in the project in 1739.<sup>16</sup> Her chief architect, Ferdinando Ruggieri, stood at the helm of this undertaking, preparing several designs for the new belltower's construction.<sup>17</sup> He was challenged with the integration of the tower into the existing volumes of Michelangelo's eminent *Sagrestia Nuova* and the massive dome of the *Cappella dei Principi*.<sup>18</sup> In order to minimize the need for more new foundations, Ruggieri raised the new tower on an existing base adjacent to the northern exterior wall of the *Sagrestia Nuova*, creating a slim tripartite structure with a protruding canopy and a loggia with ionic pilasters to encase the tower's new bells.<sup>19</sup> In late July of 1741 the canons of San Lorenzo, still chronicling Anna Maria's renovations to their church, described the finalization of the *campanile* and the accompanying festive ringing of the tower's new bells:

26 Luglio 1741:

In tutto questo giorno dall'ore 9. insino alle 24. ore sonarono tutte le Campane del nuovo nostro Campanile in onore del Nome della Sereniss.a Gran Principessa Anna M.a Luisa de Medici Vedova Elettrice Palatina del Reno. Restò perfezionato il Campanile la sera de 24 Luglio. E la pietra fù collocata la mattina de 26. Luglio 1740. La mattina de 27. Luglio cominciarono a levare il Castello di legno dal Campanile.<sup>20</sup>

Having further introduced Anna Maria Luisa's Florentine circumstances and her two finalized San Lorenzo projects, it is now possible to attach both her *campanile* and her cupola to various underlying motivations for their conceptions.

### Promoting Florentine Artists

When looking strictly at the execution of Anna Maria's San Lorenzo renovations, it can be distilled that the princess employed mainly local artists and architects to carry out her plans for the church building. This may not seem out of the ordinary for a patron of Medici pedigree; however, in the eighteenth century the once flourishing activities of the Florentine workshops had begun to subside, leaving the city's cultural sector in a somewhat stagnant state. In fact, Anna Maria's venture at San Lorenzo was the only

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<sup>14</sup> 'Turbinio celeste' coined by Carlotta Lenzi in Bietti (ed.), *Arte e politica*, cit., p. 85.

<sup>15</sup> For a more extensive discussion of the cupola and its figures see: C.L. Iacomelli, 'Catalogo - Vincenzo Meucci', in: S. Casciu (ed.), *La principessa saggia, l'eredità di Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici elettrice Palatina*, Livorno, Sillabe, 2006, pp. 350-351.

<sup>16</sup> M. Trachtenberg, 'Building and Writing S. Lorenzo in Florence. Architect, Biographer, Patron, and Prior', in: *The Art Bulletin* (2015), vol. 97, no. 2, p. 149.

<sup>17</sup> Ferdinando Ruggieri died before the *campanile* was finished (June 1741). His brother, Giuseppe Ruggieri, continued his work.

<sup>18</sup> V. Tesi, "'Per accrescere la perfezione.'" Della venerabile chiesa di San Lorenzo,' in: Casciu (ed.), *La Principessa Saggia*, cit., p. 107.

<sup>19</sup> Ciletti, *The Patronage of the Last Medici*, cit., pp. 98-99.

<sup>20</sup> Published in Ciletti, *The Patronage of the Last Medici*, cit., p. 476. Quoted from: Biblioteca Moreniana, f. 128, p. 293.

large-scale public commission being undertaken at all in mid-*Settecento* Florence.<sup>21</sup> Since the early eighteenth century, the princess had been aware of this cultural decline and had carefully involved herself with local patronage and the promotion of the Florentine arts. One of her most notable commissions pre-dating her work in San Lorenzo was, for example, the extensive decoration of Villa La Quiete, six kilometers north of Florence.<sup>22</sup> Years later, at the dawn of Anna Maria's work in San Lorenzo, the princess had amassed a small network of Florentine artists and scholars who worked under her service at the Florentine Court. Amongst them were two by now familiar figures: the architect Ferdinando Ruggieri and the painter Vincenzo Meucci.

Ruggieri had traversed grand ducal circles since he was a young boy, growing up as the son of a court costume designer. The Medici seemingly recognized his talent early on, paying for an educational trip to Rome, for the budding architect to study Roman architecture in 1712.<sup>23</sup> Ruggieri would develop into a talented draughtsman and engraver, which eventually granted him the trust of princess Anna Maria to oversee her renovations of San Lorenzo.<sup>24</sup> Ruggieri's work in the basilica, however, was not unanimously appreciated, coinciding with a more general eighteenth-century current of criticism towards the often pompous, dated style of the late Medici rulers.<sup>25</sup> Especially Ruggieri's *campanile* was met with critique, both from his contemporaries and later.<sup>26</sup> For the princess, in any case, Ruggieri was a perfect fit, being able to carry out her desired plans infused with ample *Settecento* historicism, while remaining within the perimeters of her ever-shrinking budget.

Vincenzo Meucci had been introduced to the princess at the Villa La Quiete in 1727, when he worked there on a painting depicting Mary Magdalene.<sup>27</sup> Though no longer recognized as such, Meucci was a sought-after painter in *Settecento* Florence, with important affiliations to the Medici-patronized *Accademia del Disegno*.<sup>28</sup> From 1740 to 1742 Meucci can be traced on the scaffolds of San Lorenzo's cupola, with payments in the account books of the *Fabbriche Medicee* detailing his every expense.<sup>29</sup> It has been argued that Meucci's Laurentian *Glory of the Florentine Saints* was influenced by several baroque monuments from the turn of the century, for example the fresco decoration of the cupola of the Cappella Corsini in the S. Maria del Carmine by Luca Giordano (1634-1705) (fig. 5) or the Pitti decorations by the Venetian baroque

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<sup>21</sup> This situation is nuanced in K. Aschengreen-Piacenti, 'Decorative Arts – Introduction', in: S.F. Rossen (ed.), *The Twilight of the Medici. Late Baroque Art in Florence, 1670-1743*, Detroit, Centro Di, 1974, p. 330. According to Aschengreen-Piacenti the period was fruitful for the decorative arts, and a decline was mainly discernible in (public) architectural commissions. For more historical context on this period see, amongst others, E.W. Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries, 1527-1800. A History of Florence and the Florentines in the Age of the Grand Dukes*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1973, pp. 367-368; H. Acton, 'A Note on the Last Medici', in: Rossen (ed.) *The Twilight of the Medici*, cit., pp.15-17.

<sup>22</sup> A. Modesti, *Women's Patronage and Gendered Cultural Networks in Early Modern Europe: Vittoria Della Rovere, Grand Duchess of Tuscany*, New York, Routledge, 2020, p. 247.

<sup>23</sup> O. Brunetti, 'Ruggieri, Ferdinando', in: *Dizionario degli Italiani* 89 (2017), retrieved on 5 April 2022.

<sup>24</sup> It should be mentioned that around the same time he begun work at the San Lorenzo. Ruggieri also worked on the grand restorations of the Santa Felicita, another important Medici church in Florence.

<sup>25</sup> Aschengreen-Piacenti, 'Decorative Arts – Introduction', cit., p. 330; Tesi, 'Per accrescere la perfezione', cit., p. 107.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Ciletti, *The Patronage of the Last Medici*, cit., pp. 100-102: 'No amount of good will can reconcile his spindly tower with the sober and dignified mass from which it springs'. A contemporary even wrote a satirical sonnet about the campanile, published in Ciletti, *The Patronage of the Last Medici*, cit., doc. 10a, p. 482. This sonnet is kept in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Ms. Palat., f. 1107, vol. II.

<sup>27</sup> S. Casciu, 'Principessa di Gran Saviezza. Dal fasto barocco delle corti al patto di famiglia', in: S. Casciu (ed.), *La principessa saggia*, cit., p. 51.

<sup>28</sup> Ciletti, *The Patronage of the Last Medici*, cit., p. 143.

<sup>29</sup> ASF, *Fabbriche Medicee*, f.100; see also *ivi*, p. 129.

painter Sebastiano Ricci (1659-1734).<sup>30</sup> Meucci assimilated the existing qualities of the mounting Florentine baroque, adding hints of his own airy style that would, as mentioned, soon fall out of favor.<sup>31</sup>

Regardless of their receptions and reputations, both Ruggieri and Meucci became instrumental figures in establishing the late baroque vocabulary that would characterize the Grand Ducal finale in Florence – an effort made exceedingly possible by Anna Maria's commission. Though perhaps the output of her oeuvre as a Florentine patron is not as known as that of her many great ancestors, or even her closest relatives such as her grandmother Vittoria della Rovere (1622-1694) or her brother Ferdinando de' Medici (1663-1713), the impact of her San Lorenzo commission on both the promotion and the preservation of the arts of *Settecento* Florence should not be overlooked.<sup>32</sup> If we are to abide by the account of the canons of San Lorenzo, the Florentines certainly did not ignore Anna Maria's interventions in the basilica. During its inaugural festivities her work was received with great excitement and gratitude, with special admiration for the new cupola decoration by Vincenzo Meucci:

August 10, 1742

Si solennizzò con grandiosissima pompa la festa del nostro Padre, Patrono, e Titolare Insigne Martire S. Lorenzo con un gran Concorso e di contado e di tutta quasi la Città mossa dalla Curiosita di vedere il nobile apparato, e più per vedere la bellissima Cupola dipinta dal Sig.re Vincenzo Meucci. Furono dispensati tre bellissimi Sonetti lode di questo Insigne pittore in questa mattina Composizione di 3 nostri Chierici di nostra Scuola, il p.o [primo] era composto in Toscano, il 2. in Latino, e il 3.o in Francese. Onoro la Festa non solo tutta la Nobilit[à] secondo il solito il Magistrato Supremo, e tutti i Magistrati, ma ancora Monsig.e Arc.o [Archivescovo] e la Sereniss.a Elettrice Gran Principessa di Toscana nostra Insigne benefattrice, e Repatrice di questa Insigne Basilica Ambrosiana.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, Anna Maria's support for the Florentine arts was twofold. On the one hand, it was very literal: the princess employed local artists and architects to carry out her plans, following the tradition of her many predecessors. On the other hand, the princess's San Lorenzo project was a comprehensive effort to reinvigorate the once-celebrated arts and architecture of Florence, crystallizing the late baroque style synonymous to the Medici send-off while also gifting the Florentines a last Medici-commissioned masterpiece.

### The III Will

We have learned that the advent of the Habsburg-Lorraine government had led to increased socio-political unrest in Florence. Anna Maria, who was placed in direct diplomatic confrontation with her city's new rulers, was no less occupied with the imminent change of the Florentine guard. Having conceived influential documents such as the aforementioned *patto di famiglia*, it is clear that the princess's most effective resistance towards the new leaders of Tuscany was of legal nature. In the years before

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<sup>30</sup> See: G. Ewald, 'Introduction. The Florentines', in: Rossen (ed.), *The Twilight of the Medici*, cit., pp. 172-77.

<sup>31</sup> Ciletti, 'San Lorenzo and the Extinction of the Medici (1737-1743)', cit..

<sup>32</sup> Casciu, 'Principessa di Gran Saviezza', cit., p. 31. It must also be mentioned that Anna Maria's affinity with the arts extended far beyond her patronage at San Lorenzo and Villa La Quiete. This is reflected, for example, in her extensive collection of jewels, porcelain, coins and other treasures. See the most recent catalogue of Casciu (ed.), *La principessa saggia* cit., pp. 225-270.

<sup>33</sup> Published in Ciletti, *The Patronage of the Last Medici*, cit., p. 477. Quoted from: Biblioteca Moreniana f. 128, p. 293.

her death Anna Maria established as many judicial defenses as she could – and her precautions were not without reason.

Already in 1740, the new rulers of Florence had given a glimpse of their mercenary attitude towards their newly appointed Medici inheritance, dramatically melting down several batches of silver Medici furniture and other valuable objects.<sup>34</sup> On another instance Anna Maria expressed her annoyance after learning of the new Florentine rulers' haphazard approach to the preservation of the Medici-frescoes of the Palazzo Vecchio. She wrote to an advisor about the Lorraines hanging their own artworks over the centuries-old Medici frescoes in the palace:

così pericolano le Pitture a fresco et i Lorenesi tengono poco conto, e non anno maniera per conservare quel che anno portato, e sciuperanno quel che anno trovato, [...] ma bisognerebbe conservare la roba, e le Pitture a fresco [...].<sup>35</sup>

Upon their accession the Habsburg-Lorraines also played a part in the difficulties faced by the cultural scene of Florence by closing down several grand ducal workshops, most infamously the Medici *Arazzeria*, or tapestry workshop.<sup>36</sup>

With these and several other incidents in mind, it had become increasingly clear to the princess that the Habsburg-Lorraines would not feel voluntarily inclined to take over the building enterprise at San Lorenzo after her death. Worse still, it seemed that the new rulers were intent on using their inheritance for their personal enrichment, disregarding the wishes of the last Medici heiress. Therefore, it has been argued by Elena Ciletti that Anna Maria's charity towards the rebuilding of the basilica in the last years of her life must be regarded an effort to thwart the new Florentine rulers as much as it was a generous gift to the Florentine people.<sup>37</sup> When seen from this perspective, in the years leading up to her death, the princess faced a situation in which she was essentially forced to spend – or earmark – as much money as she could to keep her funds from eventually ending up in foreign hands.<sup>38</sup> The princess's *campanile* and cupola commissions, as well as her many other planned projects in San Lorenzo, can thus be approached as a result of this “money-funneling” propensity.<sup>39</sup>

This hostile perspective on the relationship between the two dynasties is complicated by the fact that the Lorraines did eventually end up continuing some components of the princess's work in San Lorenzo following her death, be it in a less opulent manner. The new generation of Tuscan rulers worked mainly on the basilica's *Cappella dei Principi*, finishing its Medici crypt (Ferdinand III, in 1791) and its cupola fresco by Pietro Benvenuti (Leopold II, in 1827).<sup>40</sup> These undertakings provide subtle

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<sup>34</sup> C. Lawrence, *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe. Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs*, University Park, PA, Pennsylvania University Press, 1997, pp. 231-232 (which also gives insight in the financial reasons behind the Lorraines's approach to their inheritance). See also W. Koeppel, *Art of the Royal Court. Treasures in Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art-Yale University Press, New York-New Haven, 2008 (catalogue).

<sup>35</sup> Quoted from ASF, *Mediceo del Principato* 6346, c. 20r, published in Ciletti, 'The Last Medici Facade for San Lorenzo', cit., p.506 note 8. And: Verga, 'Between Dynastic Strategies and Civic Myth', cit., p. 361.

<sup>36</sup> E. Ciletti, 'An 18th-Century Patron. The Case for Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici', in: *Woman's Art Journal* (1984), vol. 5, no. 1, p. 26. And: Aschengreen-Piacenti, 'Decorative Arts – Introduction', cit., p. 330.

<sup>37</sup> Ciletti, *The Patronage of the Last Medici*, cit., p. 129. See also: Ciletti, 'The Last Medici Facade for San Lorenzo', cit., p. 482.

<sup>38</sup> Ciletti, 'Filiality and Resistance in the Patronage of Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici at San Lorenzo', cit., p. 6 (English version provided by prof. Ciletti), originally in S. Casciù (ed.), *La principessa saggia*, cit., pp. 98-102. And: Ciletti, 'The Last Medici Facade for San Lorenzo', cit., p. 484.

<sup>39</sup> Ciletti, 'An 18th-Century Patron', cit., p. 25; Casciù, 'Principessa di Gran Saviezza', cit., p. 50.

<sup>40</sup> M. Bietti, 'Gennaio 1605: inizia l'edificazione della Cappella dei Principi', in *Portale Storia di Firenze*, Dipartimento di Storia, Archeologia, Geografia, Arte, Spettacolo dell'Università degli Studi di Firenze, <https://www.storiadifirenze.org/wp-content/uploads/kalins-pdf/singles/gennaio-1605-inizia-edificazione-della-cappella-dei-principi.pdf> (2 March 2022).

nuance to the narrative of extreme Medici-Lorraine conflict that has often been relayed in associated scholarship.

Clearly, it remains difficult to unravel the complex web of Anna Maria's relations and pertaining legalities with the Habsburg-Lorraines, but the two dynasties were undoubtedly largely interdependent while navigating the new stage of Florentine rulership. Suffice it to say that the relationship between the "old" and the "new" greatly influenced Anna Maria's work in San Lorenzo, endowing the project with an undeniable political undertone.

#### **'Quasi stellae in perpetuas aeternitates'**

Near the eastern-facing rim of Vincenzo Meucci's cupola decoration an angel can be seen holding a banner with an inscription that accurately encapsulates another of Anna Maria's key motivations in her San Lorenzo enterprise (fig. 6). The banner reads:

#### QUASI STELLAE IN PERPETUAS AETERNITATES

The verse ("as the stars for perpetual eternity"), derived from Daniel 12:3, refers to the depicted saints in the cupola as eternal stars in heaven.<sup>41</sup> With this exclamation in mind we can further approach the cupola as a manifestation of a deeply-rooted dynastic nostalgia. Meucci's scene particularly is permeated by references to the princess's predecessors and their deeply engrained connection to Florence. At this junction a few significant cupola figures are worth mentioning. We can discern, for example, Saint John the Baptist, depicted holding a cross with a banner reading 'Ecce Agnus Dei'. As a patron saint of Florence his inclusion in this program of memorable Florentine saints is unmistakable. Similarly, Saint Zenobius, another Florentine patron saint, has been included in the Medici cupola ensemble. Saints Andrew Corsini, Philip Neri and Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi too have found their way onto the Laurentian clouds, each representing different centuries of influential Florentine ecclesiastical authority.<sup>42</sup>

When looking beyond the cupola's iconography and figures, another noteworthy factor can be considered indicative of the princess's efforts to symbolically honor her ancestors. Though not previously mentioned in treatments of the cupola, the fresco's location within the San Lorenzo Basilica is an interesting factor to take into consideration. The cupola, in the nave of the church, is located directly above the tomb of Cosimo the Elder (1389-1464), the founding father of the Medici family. Cosimo's tomb is indicated on the church floor by an elaborate sepulcher of white marble and red and green porphyry created by Andrea del Verrocchio in the mid fifteenth century. Cosimo's tomb is ingeniously integrated into a column that stands in the crypt beneath the basilica's floor (see figs. 7 and 8.). Meucci's cupola fresco, as it were, crowns the tomb of the Medici *Pater Patriae*, connecting the final resting place of the "worldly Medici" to those in the heavenly realm. The decision by Anna Maria, as the last Medici member, to decorate the cupola above the tomb of the Medici patriarch, adds a significant commemorative layer to the fresco project.

With her interventions, such as the cupola decoration, the princess ensured that the imposing "Medici-aura" of San Lorenzo was preserved and even strengthened for future generations. In the basilica Anna Maria worked consciously on the final pages of the "Medici myth" that had been in the making since the fifteenth century. The nucleus of this centuries' long story was San Lorenzo, and Anna Maria had become the one to color in the final outlines left empty by her family. As suggested by Marcello Verga

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<sup>41</sup> The full verse (Daniel 12:3) reads: 'Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever'.

<sup>42</sup> Iacomelli, 'Catalogue - Vincenzo Meucci', cit., p. 351.

(2015), the princess worked on a conscious “museumification” of the heritage of her family during the last years of her life, cementing her family’s status and their eternal connection to Florence.<sup>43</sup> As so many of her predecessors had done before her, she combined artistic and architectural patronage to communicate this transgenerational Medici message that still resonates today.

### **From father to daughter**

Besides her resounding loyalty to the people, the arts and the ancestors of Florence, one must look closer at the princess’s inner circle to discover a more personal layer of motivation behind her San Lorenzo commissions. Anna Maria was, actually, not the first of her closest family members to have pursued embellishments and restorations in the cupola of the San Lorenzo Basilica. The princess’s father, Grand Duke Cosimo III, had notably already made plans for a copious artwork in the family church as early as 1681. Although the Grand Duke’s plans were originally intended as a mosaic for the grand cupola of San Lorenzo’s *Cappella dei Principi*, Cosimo’s iconographic plans were undeniably a blueprint for Anna Maria’s later fresco in the crossing dome of the Laurentian Basilica.<sup>44</sup> Anna Maria clearly set out to fulfill the wishes of her beloved father with her cupola commission, incorporating them heavily into her own contemporary plans.<sup>45</sup> In correspondence from the 1680’s between the late duke’s secretary and his favored architect Paolo Falconieri, a cupola displaying ‘la Gloria de’ Santi in Paradiso’ was proposed, as were specific figures that were to be included in the scene. The letters mention, among others, Saint John the Baptist ‘protettore della città’, Saint Lawrence ‘titolare della Chiesa’, and Saint John the Evangelist with Saint Peter of Alcantara ‘divoto del Gran Duca’.<sup>46</sup> Anna Maria’s cupola features these same figures, be it with certain additions and alterations, most importantly, the figures ‘divoto [i] del Gran Duca’ which the princess included in direct reference to the saints that had been important to her father.

An additional stimulus to be taken into account when discussing the loyalty Anna Maria demonstrated towards her late father’s plans for San Lorenzo was their personal connection. Anna Maria is considered to have been Cosimo’s favorite child.<sup>47</sup> The two are described to have had similar personalities, both living productive and dutiful, yet very conservative lives. The princess, who was once portrayed in an account by a contemporary court-visitor as ‘being seen more often in monasteries and churches than at Court’, found great recognition in her father’s piety – especially when compared to her two brothers.<sup>48</sup> The bond between Cosimo and his daughter is illustrated on many occasions throughout their lifetimes. One such occasion was Cosimo’s great effort to have his daughter considered as the successor to the Tuscan throne, even before the dynastic situation had become dire.

In a confidential decree signed by Cosimo in 1714, the Duke expressed his regret over the ‘calamity and misfortune of [his] family’, that was ‘punished by [the] divine majesty by depriving [them] of the hope of a successor’.<sup>49</sup> He then declared that after his own death and that of his son Gian Gastone, the succession would be transferred to ‘her venerable grand duchess Anna Maria Luisa, princess of Tuscany, duchess of

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<sup>43</sup> Verga, ‘Between Dynastic Strategies and Civic Myth’, cit., p. 365.

<sup>44</sup> Ciletti, ‘Filiality and Resistance in the Patronage of Anna Maria Luisa de’ Medici at San Lorenzo’, cit., p. 7 (English version provided by prof. Ciletti), originally in Casciu (ed.) ‘La principessa saggia’, cit., pp 98-102.

<sup>45</sup> Ciletti, ‘The Patronage of the Last Medici’, cit., p. 46.

<sup>46</sup> Ivi, p. 132.

<sup>47</sup> Casciu, ‘Principessa di Gran Saviezza’, cit., p. 40.

<sup>48</sup> Acton, ‘A Note on the Last Medici’, cit., p. 21.

<sup>49</sup> ASF, *Miscellanea Medicea*, f. 120, ins. 12.

Neuburg and Electress of the Palatinate-Neuburg' (fig. 9).<sup>50</sup> The decree was, although signed, never put into practice by the ruling European houses. The cupola plans once created by her late father must have motivated the princess's *Settecento* cupola fresco program, translating their strong bond into a tangible, familial project.

### Making a Medici patron

Having covered various external factors and motivations for Anna Maria's work at San Lorenzo, I have left one factor underlying her patronage undiscussed: the princess's personal ambitions regarding the reparations of the basilica. Admittedly, as a whole, the princess's undertakings in the church speak to a collective Medici narrative, aimed at the Florentines for whom the family had become part of their identity. However, the princess also ensured that several commemorations of her own personal patronage would be included in the enterprise.

The project where this tendency is most explicitly demonstrated is in San Lorenzo's *campanile*. On the princess's request her chief architect Ruggieri added a Latin inscription along the cornice of the tower. The heavily abbreviated text reads:

ANNA M(ARIA) L(UISA) E(LECTRIX) P(ALATINA) R(HENI) M(AGNA) E(TRVRIAE) P(RINCEPS) A  
FVNDAMEN(TIS) EREXIT ANNO MDCCXL<sup>51</sup>

The inscription leaves no uncertainty as to who was responsible for the construction of the belltower, 'A FVNDAMENTIS'. Though its subtle script chiseled into the tower's *pietra forte* is more restrained than other similar inscriptions known in Florence, it remains a clear reference to her patronage, visible externally to every visitor (fig. 4).<sup>52</sup>

A less subtle "ego-document" integrated into the basilica-program can be found hidden in the foundations of the *campanile*. Reminiscent of a modern-day time capsule, Anna Maria left a selection of relics, inscriptions, and medals with her own portrait concealed within a hollowed stone in the tower's base (the receipt for this addition is seen in fig. 10). This addition has only been scarcely referenced in prior scholarship, yet it provides a valuable insight into how the princess herself mediated the way she would be remembered by posterity. In the early nineteenth century the inscription was described by Florentine scholar Domenico Moreni to have been inserted into a lead tube that was then added to the foundations of the new tower.<sup>53</sup> As the original text is therefore not retrievable, I have compiled three relevant records of the text, each one slightly varying from the others.<sup>54</sup> Most probably, the version of the text

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<sup>50</sup> Full text of the decree: 'In view of the calamity and misfortune of our family, with which the holy, divine majesty has punished us for our sins by depriving us of the hope of a successor, and charged us, moreover, with the grievous loss of our beloved son, the grand prince Ferdinando, and with the ill health of our other beloved son, the grand prince Gian Gastone, who is still alive, and considering the general malaise in which Europe finds itself owing to a similar misfortune, we have come to the decision, by the power of the supreme authority due to us, [...] that only after our death and the death of his honorable grand prince Gian Gastone, who has no children and successor, will act in force, to transfer the succession in all states under our authority to her venerable grand duchess Anna Maria Luisa, princess of Tuscany, duchess of Neuburg and electress of Palatinate-Neuburg'. From ASF, *Miscellanea Medicea*. f. 120, ins. 12.

<sup>51</sup> Various interpretations of the abbreviated inscription exist. Here I have followed Ciletti, *The Patronage of the Last Medici*, cit., p. 98, with the addition of "R(HENI)", which she does not mention. I have also omitted the ampersand (&) that she notes between "P(RINCEPS) and FVNDAMENTIS".

<sup>52</sup> Think, for example, of the very prominent addition of Giovanni Rucellai's name on the façade pediment of the S. Maria Novella in the fifteenth century. For the building materials of the San Lorenzo church, see: Tesi, 'Per accrescere la perfezione', cit., p. 108.

<sup>53</sup> D. Moreni, *Continuazione delle memorie storiche della basilica di San Lorenzo di Firenze, dalla erezione della chiesa presente a tutto il regno Mediceo*, Florence, 1816-1817, vol. 02, pp. 126-127.

<sup>54</sup> 1: ASF, *Miscellanea Medicea* 972, ins. 34a [document could not be located in the archive as of March 2022].

2: ASF, *Peruzzi* 234 – ins. 6., p. 192.

that is held in the *Archivio di Stato* in Florence (*Miscellanea Medicea*) represents an early draft. The text was permeated with underlines, periods and parentheses, indicating its fragmentary state. These parentheses and punctuations disappear in the version cited by Bindo Simone Peruzzi (1737), a Florentine academician who was a contemporary of Anna Maria's. Both its format and the date of its recording point to this text as the most reliable source for our research. Lastly, a version by Domenico Moreni (1816-1817), who notes the text in lower-case letters, with its Latin abbreviations written out. This rendition was most likely based on Peruzzi's earlier text, in an attempt to translate and clarify the abbreviated Latin inscription for its future readers. With Peruzzi's record as a point of departure and Moreni's entry as a tool for its translation, the inscription that was inserted into the *campanile* must closely resemble the following text:

A P R M [AD PERPETUAM REI MEMORIAM]  
 ANNA MARIA LUDOVICA COM. PALAT. RH. ELECTRIX  
 ETRVRIAE MAGNA PRINCEPS RESTITVTA ORNATAQVE  
 AMBROSIANA BASILICA QVAM IOANNES MEDICES  
 A SOLO CONDIDIT DVM SACRA TVRRIS AERE SVO  
 EXSTRIVITVR [extruitur] DIVINO IMPLORATO PRAESIDIO  
 SANCTORVMQVE PIGNORIBVS IN EA REPOSITIS  
 PRAESERTIM B. ORLANDI MEDICIS AVSPICALEM  
 HVNC LAPIDEM FESTO DIE S. ANNAE ALMAE  
 VIRGINIS MARIAE GENITRICIS SOLEMNI RITV  
 BENEDICENDVM PONENDVMQVE CVRAVIT  
 ANNO M. D. CC. XL<sup>55</sup>

The self-referencing inscription describes how it – ‘this predictive stone’ – was entered into the ‘holy tower’ once having been properly inaugurated. After commending the princess's restorative and decorative work in the basilica, the inscription places Anna Maria directly in the footsteps of one of her illustrious predecessors: Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici, who ‘built the Ambrosian Basilica from the ground’. Historically this attribution is incorrect, as Giovanni de' Medici was only involved in the building's construction since 1419 when he commissioned Brunelleschi to rebuild the church. However, it does reveal, once more, Anna Maria's efforts to be seen as the continuator of an edifice that was founded by one of the Florence's great forefathers, granting her a place in the canon of great Medici patrons.

The inscription also mentions a certain ‘B. Orlandi de' Medici’, whose inclusion in the text is not immediately clear. It is likely that the Orlandi that is here referenced is otherwise known as Rolando de' Medici, who was a fourteenth-century hermit from the Milanese branch of the Medici family.<sup>56</sup> What little is known of the life of Rolando is derived from a manuscript that is kept in the *Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana* – hence it could have been accessible to those involved with projects in the vicinity of San

3: Moreni, *Continuazione [...] Basilica di San Lorenzo*, 1816-1817, cit., vol. 2, pp. 126-127.

<sup>55</sup> ‘In perpetual remembrance | Anna Maria Ludovica, Electress Palatine, Great Leader of Tuscany | Has ensured that in the restored and decorated Ambrosian Basilica | That was built from the ground by Giovanni [di Bicci] de' Medici | While the holy tower was being built with her money | After divine support was invoked and relics of the saints were placed inside her | Especially of B. Orlandi de Medici | This predictive stone, on the day of St. Anne, the nourishing mother of the holy Virgin Mary | Was blessed and inaugurated according to the solemn rite | In the year 1740.’

<sup>56</sup> See: Francesco Salvestrini, ‘Rolando, detto de' Medici’, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 88 (2017), [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/detto-de-medici-rolando\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/detto-de-medici-rolando_(Dizionario-Biografico)/), (25 April 2022); see also: Société des Bollandistes. *Acta Sanctorum* – Online Database 1643-1940, <https://www.bollandistes.org/history/actu-sanctorum/> (5 April 2022).



Lorenzo.<sup>57</sup> Why, then, would *beato* Rolando have been chosen for Anna Maria's *campanile* inscription? Initially, the only apparent historiographical connection between Rolando and the later members of the Medici family can be traced to the early seventeenth century, when Grand Duke Cosimo II appointed Rolando as one of the protectors of the grand ducal family on the occasion of his wedding to Maria Maddalena of Austria.<sup>58</sup> More importantly, however, when reverting back to the text of the belltower inscription we read of the 'PIGNORIBVS', or relics, 'PRAESERTIM B. ORLANDIS MEDICIS' ('the relics, principally of Rolando de' Medici'). The placement of relics alongside the inscription into the new belltower is mentioned again in the *Carte Peruzzi* (1734) and by Moreni (1816-1817). Thus, we may conclude that these inserted relics were believed to belong to the blessed Rolando de' Medici himself.<sup>59</sup>

The text of the *campanile* inscription was composed by the princess's antiquarian Antonio Francesco Gori, a member of the Florentine *Società Colombaria*. Interestingly, Gori also wrote the inscription in the main cloister of the San Lorenzo complex, presented on the first page of this study. After the princess's death in 1743 he was also responsible for devising her epitaph, buried by her side in the basilica.<sup>60</sup> Each of these texts convey a similar message: they testify to Anna Maria's generous decoration and restoration of the San Lorenzo Basilica, and to her generous protection of a seminal architectural landmark of the Renaissance. Though no documentation remains detailing the princess's final approval of the San Lorenzo project, she is known to have visited the construction site on a regular basis, keeping a close eye on the building progress.<sup>61</sup> In the beginning of 1742, her visits became increasingly sporadic as the princess slowly succumbed to an undetermined illness.<sup>62</sup> Leaving behind her partly unfinished basilica, she was buried in San Lorenzo's *Sagrestia Nuova* upon her own request on February 24<sup>th</sup> 1743 (fig. 11).<sup>63</sup> In the princess's eulogy antiquarian Gori concluded aptly: 'Praecipue vero palatinae electoralis familiae amorem, populorum admirationem meruerit et perpetuo virtutem meritorumque suorum splendore quam maxime amplificavit'.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

As a palimpsest of Medici benefaction, San Lorenzo has provided its visitors with a nominal display of Medici grandeur during the course of many centuries. Just how much

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<sup>57</sup> *De vita, penitentia, morte et miraculis beati Rolandi de Medicis* (Acta Sanctorum vol. 44, BHL 7291-92). Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, full quotation on Rolando from Acta Sanctorum: 'Rolando sive Orlando de Medicis (cujus vitam mirabilem dabimus 15 Septembris) legitur, quod spatio 26 annorum visus fuit a pluribus personis fide dignis, de die & de nocte super uno pede, spatio quinque vel sex horarum, oculis fixis infra rotam solis & lunæ, brachiis elevatis, devotissime Deum inspiciendo'.

<sup>58</sup> Salvestrini, 'Rolando, detto de' Medici', cit.

<sup>59</sup> This conclusion came to fruition thanks to a sharp observation by Jan de Jong (University of Groningen), who noted that 'PIGNORIBUS', from the Latin 'pignus', can be translated to 'relics', instead of the more common translation 'guarantees' or 'pledges'.

<sup>60</sup> It was long unclear who the author of the princess's eulogy was, until A.F. Gori's own correspondence finally revealed his involvement. An excerpt from a letter he received shortly after the death of the princess reads: 'Non ricevo in quest'ord.o conforme il solito le sue lettere, suppongo che la mancanza provenga dalle sue occupazioni in fare le iscrizioni funerali della Ser.ma Elettrice, che Dio abbia in gloria'. See the database: C. Benedictis & M. Marzi, *Progetto Gori – Epistolario di Anton Francesco Gori*, <http://www.maru.firenze.sbn.it/gori/progetto.htm> (March 2022) (the cursive is mine).

<sup>61</sup> Casciu, 'Principessa di Gran Saviezza', cit., p. 51.

<sup>62</sup> See: [Video] D. Lippi 'Beyond the Medici Project. The Survey on Anna Maria Luisa's Sepulchre', Gallerie degli Uffizi, <https://www.uffizi.it/en/video/donatella-lippi-beyond-the-medici-project-the-survey-on-anna-maria-luisa-s-sepulchre> (February 2022).

<sup>63</sup> In 1791 her remains were moved to the crypt below the *Cappella dei Principi*.

<sup>64</sup> 'Above all, she earned the love of the courtly electoral family and the admiration of the people – and she continually extended her virtue through the splendor of her services.' For the full eulogy see: Bietti (ed.), *Arte e Politica*, cit., p. 262.

of this narrative was salvaged, renovated and carefully curated by the electress Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici only becomes clear after delving deeper into her eighteenth-century involvement in the building. The princess's life has been shrouded by the emotional circumstances she faced as the last heir of the Medici family, and this finality evidently reverberates throughout her many Laurentian projects. However, in this study we have been able to unearth several ancillary factors underlying the princess's grand undertaking.

At the basis of Anna Maria's work in the basilica stood her *patto di famiglia*, the legal skeleton that reinforced her patronage during the last years of her life. The princess's great ability to anticipate and mediate shaped this document and aided her in navigating the many complex relationships she encountered throughout her lifetime – both those familial and foreign. A red thread throughout the princess's oeuvre was her interest and support for the Florentine arts. During a time when the cultural arena of her duchy was struggling, the princess's large-scale undertaking at San Lorenzo stood out. Her efforts to promote the artists of Florence coincided with her ambitions to celebrate the artistic legacy of her beloved town. The result was the materialization of the Florentine late baroque, that was influenced by a network of mainly Tuscan artists, architects and other erudite figures that worked for the Medici princess.

The implications of the power transition from the house of Medici to the house of Habsburg-Lorraine were far-reaching in mid-*Settecento* Florence. Similarly so, the San Lorenzo operation was fueled by Anna Maria's apprehensions towards the new Tuscan rulers. This concern could be largely traced to the struggles she faced with the often mercenary approach of the Habsburg-Lorraines to their new Medici inheritance. Having concluded that her successors would not continue her work in the basilica, the princess set her own testamentary provisions in motion, simultaneously frustrating the plans of the Habsburg-Lorraines and honoring her own family by committing her funds to the San Lorenzo enterprise. Her pragmatism allowed the preservation of San Lorenzo as a Medici monument, while withholding as much of her personal wealth as possible from the grasp of the new leaders.

Each of the princess's interventions in San Lorenzo was then embedded in a nostalgic Medici narrative. With her cupola and *campanile* projects, Anna Maria explicitly aimed to strengthen the memory of the prime of the Florentine Renaissance and the prominent role of the Medici within this prosperous period. Most notably her cupola fresco, with its figures and its notably symbolic placement, interweaved Anna Maria's family history with the history of Florence.

Anna Maria's late father Cosimo III was another key motivator to her work in the basilica. The pair shared similar values, and had maintained a close connection during their lifetimes. The paternal loyalty expressed by the princess in her San Lorenzo commission was inherent to this relationship, with Cosimo's influence becoming perceptible in the outlines for the basilica's cupola decoration.

Lastly, through the study of inscriptions, especially A.F. Gori's text hidden in San Lorenzo's *campanile*, we have been able to understand the strategies employed by Anna Maria to ensure that her own role as a Medici patron, and guardian, was disseminated to future generations through her San Lorenzo projects. This understudied project proved to be the princess's opportunity to establish herself as a Medici patron on her own merit, commissioning a contemporary design that was pervaded with references to the princess's own patronage.

When looking beyond San Lorenzo's most established masterpieces one can truly discover the importance of Anna Maria's eighteenth-century interventions in the basilica. Understanding her motives – ranging from pragmatic to emotive and from

personal to collective – establishes a more balanced view on these telling final Medici artefacts.<sup>65</sup>

**Keywords**

Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici, eighteenth-century Florence, San Lorenzo Basilica, Vincenzo Meucci, Ferdinando Ruggieri, patronage

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<sup>65</sup> Various interesting, yet often overlooked, monuments honoring the princess can be found hidden in and around the San Lorenzo complex, for example a statue in her honor by Alfonso Boninsegni (1946) in the current Medici crypt museum.



Fig. 1: Epigraph dedicated to Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici in the *Chiostro dei Canonici*, San Lorenzo, 1742. Text composed by Antonio Francesco Gori, sculptor: Girolamo Ticciati. Image: S. Cantell, Florence, 2022



Fig. 2: Interior view of the San Lorenzo Basilica, cupola decoration by Vincenzo Meucci seen from the nave. Image: S. Cantell, Florence, 2022.





Fig. 3: Vincenzo Meucci, *Glory of the Florentine Saints*, 1742, fresco, San Lorenzo, Florence. Image in the public domain.



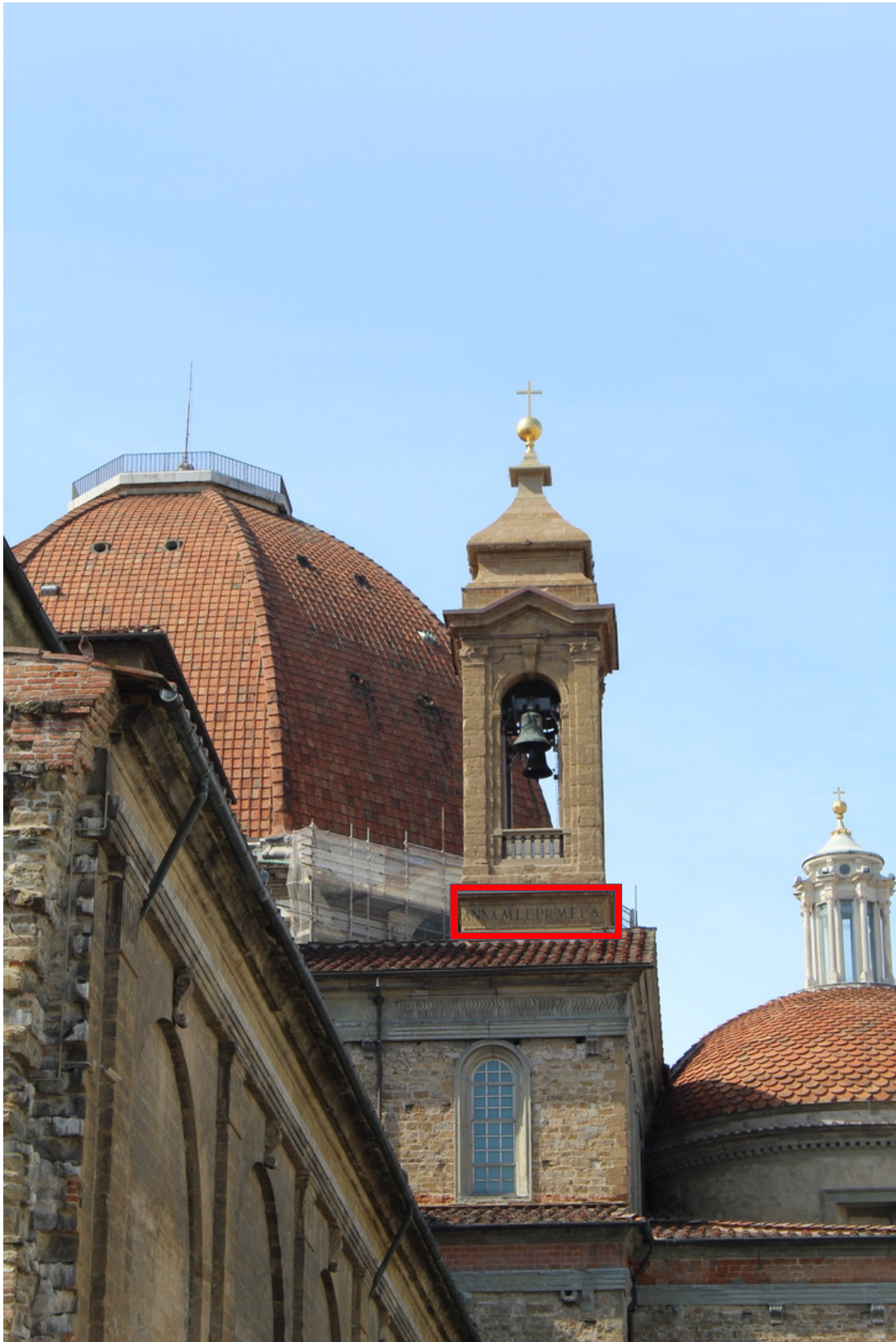


Fig. 4: The *campanile* of San Lorenzo, inscription marked in red. In addition: exterior view of *Cappella dei Principi*. Image: S. Cantell, Florence, 2022.





Fig. 5: Luca Giordano, *The Glory of St. Andrea Corsini*, 1682, fresco, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence. Image in the public domain.





Fig. 6: Detail of the nave cupola, San Lorenzo. Marked in red: angel holding banner reading 'Quasi Stellae in Perpetuas Aeternitates'. Image: S. Cantell, Florence, 2022.



Fig. 7: View of the high altar, San Lorenzo. In the foreground: the decorative tombstone of Cosimo the Elder by Andrea del Verrocchio (1465). Image: S. Cantell, Florence, 2022.





Fig. 8: Burial chamber of Cosimo il Vecchio, connected to the floor slab above in the nave of the church, seen in figure 15. Image: S. Cantell, Florence, 2022.



Cosmo Terzo per la grazia d'Idio S. Duca  
di Toscana  
Magnifici, e Sberabili Luogotenenti, e Consiglieri  
della Rep.<sup>ca</sup> nostra Fiorentina.  
1593  
Considerando noi da molti anni in qua, la fatalità,  
e disgrazia, con la quale S. D. M. a causa  
de nostri peccati ha voluto punirci, privandoci  
delle speranze di futura successione, aumentata  
dalla dolorosa perdita del fu S. Principe  
Ferdinando nostro figlio amatissimo, e  
con la deficienza di salute del S. Principe  
Gio: Gastone vivente, pur nostro caro e amato  
figliuolo, e riflettendo alle uniuersali calamità,  
nelle quali per sinail disgrazia, si tro-  
ua inuolta l'Europa, con tanta uarietà di  
sanguinose catastrofe, e sforzate mutazioni  
di dominio, che ben fanno comprendere, an-  
che alle più cieche menti, esser l'ira gius-  
tissima dell'Onnipotente, giunta a non ancor  
veduto segno. E desiderando per quanto sia  
possibile alla nostra paternal cura, di pre-  
seruare i nostri cari, e amati sudditi da  
quei disastri, e rovine, che la mancanza di  
successione, potesse un di, apportar loro,  
in particolare dall'incursione, e domi-

Fig. 9: First page of the 'Decreto segreto di Cosimo III sulla succezione al trono Toscano della figlia Anna Maria Luisa.' Archivio di Stato di Firenze, F. 335. Ins. 18. Image: S. Cantell, Florence, 2022.

495.5. 2.4  
803--1.4

Avere  
16. Novemb. 21. 3. Per l'Inscrizione Latine Collocate  
nella Basilica Ambrosiana, cioè una nei Fondamenti  
del nuovo Campanile, e l'altra nei Chioftri di sopra  
il tutto in ord. al Mandato firmato da S. E. il Sig. Conte  
di Richcourt e S. E. nella Città d'Uffizi tenuta dal  
Sig. Jacopo Nicolo Guiducci 1000 N. 21. 3.

Fig. 10: "Receipt" for the inclusion of two Latin inscriptions in the basilica. One in the foundations of the *campanile* and one in the *chostro* (see first page of this study). Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Scrittoio delle Fortezze e Fabbriche (Fabbriche Medicee)*, f. 110, ins. 11. Image: S. Cantell, Florence, 2022.





Fig. 11: Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici's funeral procession to the San Lorenzo Basilica on February 23<sup>rd</sup> 1743. Visible are funeral decorations on the bare façade and the unfinished state of the *Cappella dei Principi*. The campanile is not seen. Anonymous 18<sup>th</sup> century drawing. Image: *Arte e politica. L'elettrice Palatina e l'ultima stagione della committenza medicea in San Lorenzo*, Livorno, Sillabe, 2014, p. 258.

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## **RIASSUNTO**

### **Il gran finale mediceo. Anna Maria Luisa, ultima mecenate della basilica di San Lorenzo**

La basilica di San Lorenzo a Firenze, forse per ora nota a tutti per la sua storia legata al Rinascimento e ai Medici, è in realtà testimone anche delle successive fasi della storia della famiglia. Qui si analizzano gli ultimi interventi pittorici e architettonici voluti dall'ultima erede, la principessa Anna Maria Luisa la quale, fra il 1738 e il 1743, diede vita a una serie di opere di abbellimento e di restauro della chiesa, tuttora visibili. Si esaminano testimonianze volte a sottolineare il ruolo della casata nel difficile momento di passaggio fra il potere mediceo e quello degli Asburgo-Lorena: il programma pittorico commissionato a Vincenzo Meucci a decorare la cupola nel capocroce e il campanile progettato ed eretto da Ferdinando Ruggieri, gli unici due progetti portati a termine prima della morte della principessa, sono i punti chiave di questo scritto.