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Florentine patricians and their changing social and political position (1530-1670)

Introduction

With the establishment of the Duchy of the Medici in 1530, the social and political position of the other patricians in the Florentine society changed drastically. In this chapter, we will discuss which aspects of the society changed and how the patricians reacted to these changes. We start with an historical overview of the forming of the Duchy of Florence and the accompanying changing political institutions. After that, we will focus on how the patricians had to compete with so-called *uomini nuovi* who entered the Florentine government, and which arguments and solutions the patricians used to reclaim their former political power. From the third section on we will consider the aristocratisation process of both the Medici and the patricians and we will see how and why they needed each other to increase their social prestige on the European level. We will discuss the patricians' concept of nobility and analyze those aspects in which their social identity differed from that of other European noblemen. In the fourth and fifth sections we will emphasize how the patricians' economic power contributed to the stability of Tuscany in the seventeenth century. This is important to stress, because traditionally the seventeenth century is seen as a period of decay, with regard to both the Tuscan economy and the social position of the Florentine nobles. Finally, we will demonstrate which political,

social and military functions the Florentine patricians could carry out in service of the Medici and how they contributed in this way to the functioning of the whole administrative and political system of the Medici court. Over all, this chapter will give us a clear insight into the importance of the growing social and political influence of the patricians for the stability of the Grand Ducal state.

1.1 The forming of the Duchy of the Medici in Florence

1531-1537 - The reign of the first Duke Alessandro de' Medici and changing political institutions: the introduction of the Magistrato Supremo, the Consiglio dei Dugento and the Consiglio dei Quarantotto

In October 1531, some philo-medicean intellectuals, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, and Pope Clement VII agreed that Alessandro de' Medici should become the first Duke of Florence.¹⁵ This decision was taken because of the weak government of Florence after the occupation of the city by troops of the Pope and the Emperor in 1529-30 and a revolt of earlier exiled Florentine patricians. For centuries Florence had been a city-state, so the transformation into a duchy was a drastic change. Therefore, in 1532, twelve men chosen from the Florentine elite were ordered to design a new system of government in which a hereditary monarchy was combined with the administration of justice that had been part of the republican government.¹⁶ Among these twelve men were Francesco Vettori, Roberto Acciaiuoli, and the famous historian Francesco Guicciardini.

The new government system designed by the team of twelve men meant a fundamental break with the past. The Signoria, the largest executive organ of the city from the thirteenth century on, was abolished.¹⁷ It was replaced by the Magistrato Supremo, a government organ that consisted of the duke and four advisers.¹⁸ Two other assemblies were established at the same moment, the Consiglio dei Dugento and the Consiglio dei Quarantotto, or the Senato. The

¹⁵ Rouchon 2004: 57-58.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*: 58. Rowen (1966: 422) states that the term monarchy in the seventeenth century referred to a state ruled by one person, a king, an emperor, a count, a duke or a lord.

¹⁷ Rubinstein 1980: 43 The Signoria was the government organ in medieval and renaissance Florence. It consisted of nine magistrates, chosen every two months from the major and minor guilds of the city. Eight of these members were called the priori and the ninth, their leader and the leader of the Florentine militia, was called the gonfaloniere di giustizia. Many of the patricians' ancestors had executed the important functions of priore and gonfaloniere di giustizia in the Signoria.

¹⁸ Rouchon 2004: 58.

Consiglio dei Dugento, which members were chosen for life, had to approve decrees from private citizens and associations. The forty-eight members of the Senato were chosen for life by the Grand Duke from the Consiglio dei Dugento. The Senato approved laws, assigned jobs, and nominated magistrates.¹⁹ The senators were allowed to work at the same time as magistrates, as ambassadors or as diplomats.

To minimize the potential for resistance, the twelve reformers tried to form a government system in which the patrician elite could cooperate with the Duke of Florence.²⁰ In fact the Medici did not dare to abolish the republican institutions totally and as a result, according to Marcello Verga, Florence was a 'Repubblica con a capo un duca' during the whole Medici-principate.²¹ Verga cites the Tuscan jurist Bernardo Tanucci who wrote in 1737 that many laws and magistrates of the Grand Duchy served only one city of the Tuscan domain: Florence. This was a strange increase in institutions, as if they added the new institutions of the principate to the old republican ones without abolishing them.²²

1.2 The nomination of Duke Cosimo I, the patricians' loss of political power, the arrival of non-Florentine courtiers and the patricians' quest to regain political influence (1537-1609)

Cosimo's quest for political independence

In January 1537 Duke Alessandro de' Medici was murdered by his cousin Lorenzo di Pier Francesco de' Medici, and three days later Cosimo I de' Medici (fig. 1) was nominated as Duke of Florence.²³ Before he could officially be called duke however, a circle of pro-Medici intellectuals from the Florentine elite discussed the conditions of the new regime with him.²⁴ In the following decades, Cosimo I transformed the weak government into a strong principate, starting with his suppression of a revolt of exiled Florentine patricians in August 1537 at Montemurlo.

19 *Ibid.*: 59.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Verga 2007: 54.

22 *Ibid.*: 54-55.

23 Rouchon 2004: 60.

24 Verga 2007: 54.

Cosimo I chose to live in the Palazzo della Signoria, known from that moment as the Palazzo ducale.²⁵ To make the government stronger he established two new institutions, the *auditori* and the *segretari*. The three *auditori* decided about fiscal and juridical questions, and amendments of the law. The team of *segretari* consisted of a *primo segretario* or Segretario di Stato (State secretary), a confidential adviser to the Grand Duke and ten other secretaries. In addition to that, in 1547 the Pratica Segreta was established, an advisory council of confidential advisors to the Grand Duke.²⁶

Although originally a system was chosen in which the patrician elite could cooperate with the Duke of Florence, Cosimo I set out his own policy. The *segretari* and *auditori*, together with the *cancellieri* and *provveditori* were all chosen by the Grand Duke and consisted not of the patrician elite, but of non-Florentines, among which Tuscan uomini nuovi and non-Tuscan nobles.²⁷ These uomini nuovi were mostly jurists (lawyers and notaries) who came from little Tuscan towns and did not have strong grassroots support in the capital.²⁸ It was especially for them that Cosimo I created the new position of Segretario di Stato as a function of prestige.²⁹ Besides uomini nuovi, the Medici appointed aristocrats and military commanders from Rome and other important cities as courtiers.³⁰ By giving the important positions to uomini nuovi and Roman aristocrats, the Medici prevented the traditional Florentine patricians from amassing enough power to revolt against or even bring down the government. The uomini nuovi owed all their power to the Medici and were therefore very faithful servants.³¹ By excluding the patricians from key positions in the government, Cosimo I sought to increase his independence from the patrician elite.³² Members of the patriciate were only assigned functions as diplomats and governors of cities in

25 Rouchon 2004: 61.

26 Ibid.: 62.

27 Ibid.; Litchfield 2008: 78, Van Veen 2008: 16; Van Veen 2005: 63; Diaz 1976.

28 Litchfield 2008: 78, Van Veen 2008: 16; Van Veen 2005: 63.

29 Litchfield 2008: 79; Stumpo 1984: 179. Famous families of uomini nuovi were for example the families Campana, Riccio, Guidi, Concini, Grifoni, Pagni, Vinta, Ximenez, Serguidi, Cioli, Picchena, and Usimbardi. Most of them had their origins in small Tuscan towns like Colle Val d'Elsa, San Miniato al Tedesco, Pescia, Prato, Volterra, Terranuova and Pontremoli.

30 Stumpo 1984: 151, 181. Examples were the families Colonna, Orsini, Savelli, Sforza, Colloredo, Gonzaga, Malaspina, Bourbon del Monte, Barbolani di Montauto, Malvezzi and Della Cornia

31 Contini 1999: 94-97; Stumpo 1984: 153. This strategy was also applied by the papal court; many of the bishops, nuncios, legates, legal employees, and even the Pope were often recruited from relatively unknown and non-Roman families, to prevent the original oligarchic Roman families from becoming too powerful.

32 Litchfield 2008: 78.

the domain of Florence, though not inside the city itself.³³ It must be clear that this was a significant change with the past. For centuries Florentine patricians had been influential in the different republican governments, together with members of the patrician Medici family. But now, in an instant, as soon as the Medici established their duchy, the other patricians lost almost all their political power.³⁴

As a reaction to these radical changes, some members of the traditional patrician families emigrated from Florence to other Italian cities or to France, especially those who were relatives of the patricians murdered by Cosimo I in 1537, after they revolted against him at Montemurlo.³⁵ These emigrated patricians were called the *fuoriusciti* (or *fuorusciti*), exiles. The *uomini nuovi* received permission to live in the abandoned palaces of the *fuoriusciti*.³⁶ Cosimo I set up a whole network of spies to control the movements and gatherings of the *fuoriusciti* in different cities, to prevent them from forming alliances with the Farnese or other powerful Italian families.³⁷ This was necessary because several times in the sixteenth century patricians at foreign courts tried to conspire against him.³⁸

Not only internally but also in his foreign policy, Cosimo I gave himself freedom of manoeuvre by means of active and well-considered negotiations and compromises with the papal state, the Holy Roman Empire, and the French Kingdom. As Alessandra Contini explains, he started this process by controlling the *fuoriusciti*. The next important step was the conquest of Siena in 1555.³⁹ After the peace of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559), which brought the Habsburg/Spanish-French wars to an end, Cosimo's power grew stronger very fast. During

33 Rouchon 2004: 62.

34 Litchfield 2008: 78, 147; Van Veen 2008: 16; Van Veen 2005: 63; Stumpo 1984: 153.

35 Litchfield 2008: 148. The patricians who had tried to revolt against Cosimo I in 1537 at Montemurlo originated from the families Adimari, Albizzi, Antinori, Bartoli, Canigiani, Capponi, Da Filicaia, Giugni, Rinuccini, Rucellai, Strozzi, and Valori.

36 Bevilacqua/Madonna 2003: 22

37 Contini 1999: 105-114, 118-19. Cosimo I sent secret agents to many Italian courts to control the movements of the *fuoriusciti*. The Strozzi, in their turn, followed the movements of the Medici's secret agents, to see which actions the Medici undertook to restrict the influence of the *fuoriusciti*. A lot of patricians emigrated to Venice, some of them resided at Ferrara with the Este, some were in anti-medicean Rome with Pope Paul III, and others in France at the courts of Francis I and Henry II. Florentine merchants were very active in Lyon.

38 Litchfield 2008: 148. The patricians who tried to conspire against Cosimo I during the sixteenth century were Giuliano Buonaccorsi (1543), the Burlamachi (from Lucca, in 1546), Pandolfo Pucci (from Rome, 1559), and Orazio Pucci together with members from the families Alamanni, Capponi and Ridolfi (1574).

39 Contini 1999: 105, 110-14, 18-19.

the wars, he had already entered into an alliance with all three superpowers (for example, through wedding alliances or by financing wars). He concluded important treaties like the one with the King of Spain which gave him the investiture of Siena so that he could incorporate this city into his domain.⁴⁰ After gaining control over possible revolts and expanding his domain, it was time to fight for his independence and recognition.⁴¹ The climax of this whole process was the Grand Ducal title, which was given to him by Pope Pius V in 1569. But the struggle was not over yet, because this heritable title was not recognized by the Holy Roman emperor until 1576, two years after Cosimo's death. Thanks to this title, the Grand Dukes of Florence suddenly became more important than almost all other Italian princes.

The patricians' counterquest for political recognition

After the formal and official recognition of the Medici Grand Duchy, the symbolic representation of the Medici in Europe received increased emphasis.⁴² From the reign of Francesco I until the reign of Cosimo III, the Medici spent lavishly on marriages, funeral ceremonies, or entries of important persons, and in the decoration of their palaces, villas, and gardens. The patricians played an essential role in this social and cultural representation of the Medici in Europe, but to do so they first had to regain their social and political influence. We will now explain how they succeeded in this.

Cosimo I's direct successors, Francesco I (fig. 2) and Ferdinand I (fig. 3), continued the policy of their father regarding the patricians. They persisted in excluding them from the government and household, as becomes clear from Samuel Berner's analyses of the lists of *salariati*.⁴³ During the reign of Ferdinand I (1587-1609), the Medici government and household consisted of 260 people. Of these, eighteen persons occupied important positions. Only seven of these were Florentines and only one was a patrician; the remaining positions were occupied by foreigners. Of the other 242 people, only nine were patricians and in total there were nineteen Florentines. All the others were foreigners.⁴⁴ So the Florentine government at that moment mainly operated, at the administrative level, with non-Florentine functionaries.

40 *Ibid.*: 111, 114.

41 *Ibid.*: 106-9.

42 *Ibid.*: 123.

43 Berner 1972: 1-15.

44 *Ibid.*: 12.

Because of the modest presence of the patricians in the government, even eighty years after the establishment of the Duchy of the Medici, many historians accepted the view that they had withdrawn from society and politics, and that they had become passive land-owners who no longer had any influence on economic, cultural, social, or political aspects of Florentine society.⁴⁵ This traditional view turns up even in recent articles of historians and cultural historians.⁴⁶ Other economic, prosopographical, and social historians, however, have tried to revise this image by bringing up arguments based on archival research that show the active commercial, economic, and social life of the patricians.⁴⁷ In the field of economics, the first to stress the continuing economic investments of the patricians was Berner, who showed that the patricians continued to invest between 1531 and 1610, and that there was no significant change in these activities compared to the preceding period.⁴⁸ Although they invested in real estate in the countryside, they did not go and live there permanently. Instead, they set up farms with houses for several families who held a share tenancy.⁴⁹ Besides that, they created country cottages or villas to retire to themselves especially during the hot summer months. For the rest of the year, they continued to live in the city.⁵⁰

Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the patricians tried to regain their position in society and politics.⁵¹ As Richard Goldthwaite shows, to reclaim their right to participate in the government, they started to investigate their own family histories.⁵² Because of the increased concentration on the honour of the family, a concept of nobility began to gain more and more attention for many patrician families. Goldthwaite states that although this process preceded the establishment of the Duchy of the Medici, it was in any case intensified by its existence.⁵³

45 Cochrane 1981; Braudel 1977; Diaz 1976.

46 Like Bizzocchi 2003a, 1991; Fantoni 1994.

47 Litchfield 2008, 1986; Boutier 2005a, 2004, 2000, 1993a; Contini 1997; Goldthwaite 1993; Stumpo 1984; Berner 1972, 1971.

48 Berner 1972: 7-8. There was a lot of commerce with cities outside Florence, like Venice, Siena, the Papal State, but also with Flanders, Naples, Sicily, England, Spain and France.

49 Malanima 1996: 218.

50 Borelli 1990: 396.

51 Donati 1988: 215.

52 Goldthwaite 1986: 252-75.

53 Stumpo 1984: 181, describes the same phenomenon: the changing mentality of the patricians, which was incited further by the establishment of the Medici court.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Florentine families consisted of large clans and, as a consequence, different branches and members of the same families lived together in the same palaces. Goldthwaite calls this type of families ‘horizontal families’. Already in the fourteenth century, these traditional structures began to dissolve. Brothers chose to live in different palaces and to form alliances with commercial partners from other families. This tendency increased in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, although brothers often kept on living in the same neighbourhoods.⁵⁴

In the sixteenth century, when families threatened to be fragmented more and more, patricians started to develop a large interest in the vertical component of their families.⁵⁵ By means of documents from their family archives, the patricians wanted to prove that their ancestors had already served the city of Florence for centuries, and therefore they granted themselves the right to be part of the government again.⁵⁶ One of their sources were for example the *Libri di Ricordi* in which births, matrimonies, and deaths were listed, and which contained among other things family trees, dates about dowries, dates about the bookkeeping of one or more villas, and lists of books in a family’s possession. Their ancestors had written the *Libri di Ricordi* out of an “extreme sense of eternity”, to quote Giovanni Ciappelli.⁵⁷

The *Accademia dei Virtuosi*, directed by the historian Francesco Segaloni, focused entirely on the genealogy and heraldic aspects of Florentine families. With the help of his lettered friends, Segaloni wrote *Il Priorista* (1625), the official register of Florentine families whose members had been *gonfaloniere* or *priore* in the republican period. Like many other patricians Giovanni Niccolini combined this kind of publication with the documents in his own archive and wrote his own family history.⁵⁸ His goal, which he shared with his fellow patricians, was to prove that his ancestors had served the city of Florence continuously and that his family therefore deserved a noble status.

54 Goldthwaite 1986.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ciappelli 2001: 574-75.

58 Moroni 2002: 302, 314-15. This family history, a manuscript of 35 pages, was never published but is preserved in the Niccolini archive. See Niccolini G., *Libri di ricordanze dei Niccolini*, in “*Rivista delle biblioteche e degli archivi*”, 2:7-10 (1924): 172-87, and 2: 11-12 (1924): 243-52.

1.3 The patricians' run on noble titles, their social domination over the 'uomini nuovi' and their growing political power (1609-1670)

Economic, sociopolitical, and historical articles show that in the seventeenth century there was a tremendous change in the attitude of the Medici towards the patricians as regards their participation in the government and the household.⁵⁹ The Medici grew increasingly aware that they needed the patricians to maintain their political, social, and economic position in Europe. At the end of the sixteenth and in the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Medici court grew in European political and ceremonial significance.⁶⁰ As a consequence the patricians could begin to call themselves nobles (*nobili*), even if they did not yet possess official titles. In fact, as Christian Wieland remarks, the Medici and the patricians both underwent a development from wealthy merchants into nobles with an aristocratic lifestyle.⁶¹

At many European courts, from the end of the sixteenth century onward there was a run on noble titles. Almost all the ambassadors of foreign countries could present noble titles like baron, count, duke, or marquis. Without noble titles, Florentine ambassadors and diplomats were in danger of not being taken seriously.⁶² The regents Maria Magdalena of Austria (fig. 5) and Christina of Lorraine (fig. 4), who reigned together in the period between 1621 and 1628⁶³ were accustomed to the use of noble titles at the courts of their relatives, so when the patricians asked them for noble titles, they were willing to give them.⁶⁴ Sometimes, they awarded marquises to patricians who had served the state for many years.⁶⁵ At other times, the patricians obtained marquises by buying

59 Litchfield 2008, 1986; Boutier 2005a, 2004, 2000, 1993a; Contini 1997; Goldthwaite 1993; Stumpo 1984; Berner 1972, 1971.

60 Wieland 2004b: 43. The number of servants of the Medici court compared to other courts: Cosimo I: 7 servants in 1549, increased to 168 servants in 1564. Ranuccio I Farnese of Parma had 226 servants in 1593, Alfonso II d'Este of Ferrara had 480 servants in 1598, and Vincenzo I Gonzaga of Mantua had 383 servants in 1591 and 529 in 1595. Francesco I de' Medici (1564-1587) had 233 servants, Ferdinand I, 359, Cosimo II, 457 and Ferdinand II, 719. In 1695, the Medici court had 792 servants. At that moment the Savoia, with Carlo Emanuele I (1580-1630) had 200-230 servants. Source: Fantoni 1994: 30

61 Wieland 2004a: 371.

62 Boutier 2000: 296.

63 When Cosimo II died in 1621, his son Ferdinand II (1610-70) was still too young to govern and until 1628 the Grand Duchy was governed by the two regents Christina of Lorraine and Maria Magdalena of Austria, who continued to assist him for the first few years after he began to govern in his own rights.

64 Boutier 2000: 295.

65 Litchfield 2008: 80, 150; Boutier 2000: 299: The regents, Ferdinando II and Cosimo III together granted sixty-six titles in the seventeenth century, of which forty-five were marquises. Vincenzo Salviati was the first to receive the title of marquis (of Montieri) from the Grand Duke. He was appointed as ambas-

a fief in the Medici domain.⁶⁶ On still other occasions, patricians obtained the titles from the Kings of France or Spain, the viceroy of Naples, the Habsburg emperor, Italian dukes, or the Pope. In this way, many patricians like the Corsi, Capponi, Corsini, Frescobaldi, Guadagni, Guicciardini, and Niccolini received noble titles from the Medici or other rulers and could begin to carry out high functions in the government.⁶⁷ The Grand Dukes gave seventy-eight noble titles (mostly between 1620 and 1640), 30 percent of them to Florentine citizens.⁶⁸ The titles were heritable, so their children were immediately of noble status.

Before the patricians could play a role in the government with their newly obtained noble titles, a law had to be changed. This was a republican law from the year 1292 that prohibited people with noble titles from participating in the government.⁶⁹ Around that year, feudal nobles were sent to the periphery of the *contado* (county) and chose to live in mountainous regions like the Mugello, the Apennines, and the Casentino. In the city of Florence, from the thirteenth century on all nobles or *magnati* who still lived in the city were changed into *cittadini* (citizens).⁷⁰ They transformed from landed aristocracy into prosperous merchants and began to lead a politically, socially, and economically active bourgeois life.⁷¹ Economic capital and power was in the hands of a hundred influential families who formed together only one percent of the population. These citizens were called the *ottimati*.⁷²

To allow the patricians legally to be part of the government in Florence again, the regents decided in 1623 to abolish this centuries-old law. As a consequence, as newly created nobles the Florentine patricians began to occupy positions in all the official and semi-official institutions of the Medici government.⁷³ They occupied one-fifth of all government offices in 1604, but their share rose to one-third later in the century.⁷⁴ But the most important change was that they began to obtain the highest positions in the administration and

sador of Rome in 1621, as successor to Piero Guicciardini, who was also awarded a noble title by the regents.

66 See, for example, the letter of Giovanni Corsi to Filippo Niccolini of 14 May 1639 in which Giovanni expresses the idea of acquiring a fief called Monte Foscili. ANCFI, fondo antico 245, inserto 18.

67 Boutier 2000: 299; Malanima 1996: 217; Stumpo 1984.

68 Boutier 2004a: 222.

69 Litchfield 2008: 157; Verga 2007: 62; Boutier 2000: 294. The law is called the law of *incompatibilità*, the incompatibility of being part of the government while having a noble title.

70 Boutier 2004a: 214.

71 Bizzocchi 2003a: 486.

72 Boutier 2004a: 214.

73 Boutier 2000: 294; Stumpo 1984; Lazzeri 1983: 8.

74 Stumpo 1984: 178.

household.⁷⁵ From 1623, the (bureaucratic) administrative system comprised the *uomini nuovi* while the top positions were held by patricians.⁷⁶ The household up till that moment had been staffed by humble people, but at a European level these functions were executed by the elite.⁷⁷ Analogous to the European model, the Medici started to place patricians in functions such as chamberlain of the Grand Dukes and princes. Almost all these patricians carried noble titles like duke, marquis, and count.⁷⁸

The Roman aristocrats, who had been the highest functionaries in the government during the sixteenth century, became more and more privileged towards the end of that century.⁷⁹ This created a potentially dangerous situation for the Medici, because the Roman families were influential in Italy, so the Medici decided to diminish their influence in the government. Other members of high social classes were few in Florence, so the patricians were the only candidates capable of taking over the important political functions of the Roman aristocrats. Nevertheless, the Medici remained cautious until the end, afraid of the potential power the patrician families could develop once they were appointed to high positions again. As the economic historian Enrico Stumpo shows, the Consiglio Segreto founded by the regents in 1621, consisted of only one patrician: the rest of the members came from the old feudal families of Tuscany.⁸⁰ But these families were too few to form a prestigious European court, so in the Consigli of the following years the names of patrician families like members of the Capponi, Rinuccini, Altoviti, Corsini, and the Del Nero families finally began to appear.⁸¹ In the Consiglio di Stato of 1653 the brothers of Grand Duke Ferdinand II participated, together with the patricians Vincenzo Salviati, Luca degli Albizzi, Ferdinando Bardi, and Giovan Battista Gondi.⁸² The position of Segretario di Stato, which had always been carried out by the most influential *uomini nuovi* between 1550 and 1620, lost its importance from the

75 Verga 2007: 63; Boutier 2000: 299.

76 Contini 1999: 82.

77 Litchfield 2008: 79.

78 *Ibid.*: 81.

79 Stumpo 1984: 151.

80 *Ibid.*: 180; Chauvineau 2004: 232; Boutier 2004a: 217. The old feudal nobles were families with noble origins incorporated into the city, such as the Bardi di Vernio, the Della Gherardesca, the Malaspina, the Barbolani di Montauto, the Bourbon del Monte, the Pannocchieschi d'Elci, the Colloredo Daldsee-Mels, and the Del Bufalo.

81 Litchfield 2008; Wieland 2004b: 128; Stumpo 1984: 181.

82 Verga 2007: 63.

moment the Consiglio Segreto was formed.⁸³ So, as soon as the patricians had entered the Consiglio Segreto, this institution surpassed the Segretario di Stato in importance and the political success of the *uomini nuovi* started to stagnate.

Later in the seventeenth century, the patricians had become a stable factor in the Medici government. In his article 'Un principato regionale. Gli stati medicei nell'età barocca' (2007), Marcello Verga gives a very clear overview of Florentine society in the seventeenth century and the relationship between the Medici and the elite.⁸⁴ He demonstrates that the seventeenth-century Medici Grand Dukes were fully aware of the patricians' economic and political interests and by taking these into account in their policy they were able to reach a fruitful balance between domination and interdependence.⁸⁵ Jean Claude Waquet and H el ene Chauvineau add to this that the Grand Duke continually discussed his policies with his advisors, his family members, the patrician elite, the magistrates, and the church.⁸⁶ Their power was not absolutist, but more a controlling power.⁸⁷

Claudio Donati wonders whether the Medici actively stimulated the participation of the patricians in the government and household and their aristocratization, or just accepted this process passively.⁸⁸ My opinion is that they stimulated it. The Florentine patricians were the Medici's representatives at the foreign courts and enabled them to meet all the ceremonial standards. If the Medici had not given noble titles to the patricians, their court would not have been taken seriously at the other Italian and European courts. Wieland rightly says that the Florentine patricians at the same time tolerated the Medici regime and were their most dangerous competitors. In order to avoid revolts, the Medici felt compelled to satisfy the patricians with all kinds of privileges, including noble titles.⁸⁹

1.4 Social and economic power of seventeenth-century patricians

Considering the new functions of the patricians at the Medici court and in the government at the beginning of the seventeenth century, some historians, like

83 Angiolini 1992a: 704.

84 Verga 2007: 49-76.

85 *Ibid.*: 51.

86 Waquet 2004: 84.

87 Chauvineau 2004: 237.

88 Donati 1988: 215.

89 Wieland 2004b: 40.

Roberto Bizzocchi, write that the republican aristocracy changed into socially limited nobles, while the highest ranking of them were organised as courtiers around the prince.⁹⁰ Bizzocchi's view is rather traditional, if compared to the articles about the concepts of nobility and the economic activities of the patricians from economic and social historians of the past three decades like Berner, R. Burr. Litchfield, Stumpo and Jean Boutier, who show that the patricians had their own autonomous life, with their own economic capital.

In my opinion, the patricians could even exert social, political, and economic power that the Medici could never entirely control. The reason was that the predecessors of the seventeenth-century patricians had largely participated in the political and cultural history of Florence, just like the Medici. Consequently they had always built up relations with renowned Italian families from other cities, many of which were still influential in the seventeenth century. Some patricians even had cardinals in their families – for example Luigi Capponi (1582-1659) and Neri Corsini (1614-1678) - and therefore could exert their power also outside Florence. Others, such as the Altoviti, Ridolfi, Strozzi, Pazzi, Martelli, Rucellai, and Cerretani families had important branches of banks in Rome.⁹¹ The Medici had to give the relatives of these families living in Florence important positions so that they would not conspire and revolt.

Enrico Stumpo suggests that although the patricians already had a firm economic position, they even got economic and fiscal privileges from the Medici rulers. In exchange for political support, the Medici arranged that the economic power of the patricians could remain intact far into the seventeenth century.⁹² All the republican institutions (like the Magistrature and the Senato) continued to exist, although they had no (politically) decisive power.⁹³ Those institutions could give commercial and fiscal privileges to the patricians, so that they could preserve their wealth during the whole seventeenth century.⁹⁴ This was also important for the Medici court, because in 1688 noblemen accounted for 75 percent of the state finances, and 93 percent of them were patricians.⁹⁵ Florentine nobles were not excluded from paying taxes, which is why they

90 Bizzocchi 1991: 100.

91 Valone 1972: 167.

92 Stumpo 1984: 182. He supposes that for the patricians their political power was of secondary importance, after their economic power and the preservation of their patrimony for their descendents.

93 *Ibid.*: 177.

94 *Ibid.*: 192.

95 Boutier 1993a: 150.

provided such a large part of the state income.⁹⁶ It was a very different situation from France for example, where the court financed the aristocracy.⁹⁷ The Florentine patricians were autonomous and, therefore, did not become decadent courtiers and could maintain their economic power and social independence. This is illustrated in a lively way by the Englishman Richard Lassels, who visited Florence in 1654 and writes just about this difference between Florentine and French courtiers:

Yet the gentry here hold it no disgrace to have a Ship at sea, and a back warehouse, with a faithfull servant and a countbooke at home, whiles they vapor it at court, and in their coaches. This makes them hold up their noble families by the chinn, and not onely preserves them from sincking, but allso makes them swimm in a full sea of honour by being able to buy offices for their children in Princes courts, whereby they come to greatest preferments: whither when they are come, no man questioneth the way they came thither: whether by water, or by Land: by traffic or by sword: by the Count-book or the army. If the French gentry would follow this way, they might have shooes and stockings for their children [...] whereby to keep their noble blood warme withall in winter.⁹⁸

A major difference with courtiers from other European courts was that the Florentine patricians, when they had become courtiers, did not live in the court palace.⁹⁹ In Florence, to be a courtier did not mean that this was your only position. Patricians often served more patrons or even princes, and they continued their commercial activities.¹⁰⁰ As a consequence all courtiers had their own palaces. Their court function only increased their wealth and social status. The patricians even took advantage of their high social standing to develop commercial contacts. Only in the eighteenth century did their commercial activities decline.¹⁰¹

A concrete example of a patrician family who kept investing in commerce is the Corsini family. The brothers Filippo (1538-1601) and Bartolomeo Corsini (1545-1613) had a prospering business in wheat and silk. They exported these

96 Boutier 2004a: 220.

97 Boutier 1993a: 150.

98 Lassels is quoted by Chaney 1985: 167. National Library of Scotland Adv. MS. 15.2.15, pp. 110-113.

99 Litchfield 2008: 82, Bertelli 2002.

100 Chauvineau 2004: 238-239.

101 *Ibid.*: 238.

products to England and imported herring to Italy. They had trade contacts in the cities of Florence, Palermo, Antwerp, Amsterdam, The Hague, Brussels, and London, as well as in cities in Spain and France.¹⁰² The still unexplored mercantile letters that were exchanged during these commercial relations are preserved in the Corsini archive in Florence.¹⁰³ When Filippo died he ordered his brother to invest his whole capital (300.000 scudi) in beni immobili (real estate). Bartolomeo obeyed this order and bought properties in Mugello, S. Casciano, Figline, Certaldo, Radda, Campi, Capua, Umbria, and Volterra and founded many farms there. Although their descendents did not continue their commercial activities and invested much of their money in luxury goods, the capital Filippo and Bartolomeo had acquired with their commercial activities (800.000 scudi) was enough for the family to rise in prestige considerably and to play a role on the European scale in the centuries after.¹⁰⁴ Lorenzo Corsini (1652-1740) even became Pope, under the name Clement XII from 1730 until his death.

The families of the *uomini nuovi* were less independent, both socially and economically, and therefore their political power and social influence decreased. They were not as firmly rooted in the city as the old patrician families, and many families of *uomini nuovi* were already extinct in the seventeenth century, after only two or three generations.¹⁰⁵ This had a specific reason. From the sixteenth century onward there was a policy in Florence (and in many other Italian cities) that determined that only one male per family could get married.¹⁰⁶ This had to be the eldest son (if he was still alive). Moreover, the *fidecommesso* law determined that the first-born son inherited the whole family capital.¹⁰⁷ In this way, the capital of the family could be handed down in such a way that there were no quarrels and the money and properties could remain in the family.

As Boutier showed, a considerable part of the patrician families survived from the fifteenth until the eighteenth century, much longer than the *uomini nuovi*.¹⁰⁸ This had to do with the fact that the restricted matrimony policy did

102 Moroni 1989: 104.

103 A.C. stanza V lettere mercantili scritte da vari mittenti a Bartolomeo Corsini in Firenze, 1600-1601. Quaderno di Cassa di Filippo Corsini (1588-1592), doc. 44.

104 Moroni 1989: 105.

105 Boutier 1993a: 148.

106 Ibid.

107 Francis Cowan 1986: 145.

108 Boutier 1993a: 146.

not yet exist in the fifteenth century, so it could happen that families existed with several branches – up to twenty in some instances – at the same time.¹⁰⁹ The families with the most branches continued to exist until the eighteenth century.¹¹⁰ The competition for power between patrician families in the period of the republican governments in the previous centuries made it necessary for all the sons of the families to marry and create as much collateral branches as possible, to become more powerful thanks to alliances to other important families.¹¹¹ When the Tuscan state was ruled by one family, the Medici, this competition for power was no longer necessary and families only strived to become more noble.¹¹² Due to the restricted matrimony policy, the *uomini nuovi* who arrived in Florence only in the sixteenth century never had time to build up such large families as the patricians who had lived in Florence since the thirteenth century, when the policy did not exist. So although the *uomini nuovi* were endowed with significant economic capital¹¹³, their success was of short duration, for legal-biological reasons.¹¹⁴ This policy to some extent also led to the extinction of the patricians, by forcing a drastic reduction in the number of collateral lines. As a consequence there were fewer investments of money, and biologically speaking, the lineages risked extinction.¹¹⁵

109 Ibid.: 148.

110 Ibid. Boutier observes that 93 (29 percent) of the 325 families who were active in the republican government of Florence before 1433 were still extant in the *Libro d'Oro* of 1750. There were twelve families who existed in more than twenty branches in 1433. Of these large families, as many as 92 percent still existed in 1750. Among these families were the Albizi, Altoviti, Bilioti, Canigiani, Capponi, Giugni, Guasconi, Peruzzi, Rucellai, Rondinelli, and Strozzi. Of the 34 families with fewer than twenty branches but more than nine branches, 75 percent survived in 1750. Of the 61 families with six to nine branches, 34 percent survived, of the 130 families with two to five branches only 20 percent, and of the 130 families with one branch in 1433 only 11,4 percent.

111 Pomata 2002: 76.

112 Ibid.

113 Bevilacqua/Madonna 2003: 23.

114 Boutier 1993a: 148.

115 Litchfield 2008: 155,171; Pomata 2002: 76; Boutier 1993a: 146. Francis Cowan (1986: 145-6) notes about Venetian families that sometimes a child was weak, in which case his brother was allowed to marry. But if the weak child survived against expectations, quarrels about the patrimony could ensue. Sometimes the *cadetti* (brothers of the firstborn) were allowed to marry as soon as the inheritance of their eldest brother was officially arranged.

1.5 The patricians' contribution to the economic stability of Tuscany in the seventeenth century

At the end of the sixteenth century the economic prosperity of Italy came to a halt, mainly because of the decline of the wool industry and the bankruptcy of many European branches of Italian banks between 1573 and 1660.¹¹⁶ The traditional view is that Italy and Florence were in decline in the period afterwards. Paolo Malanima states that this has to be considered from another point of view: at the beginning of the fourteenth century Italy had a high population density, urbanisation, many industrial, commercial and financial activities and high investments in culture and art, benchmarks of economic growth that many other countries did not reach until centuries later.¹¹⁷ In fact this high level of urbanisation and financial and cultural investment far surpassed the average. In the seventeenth century, this wealth and the general economic climate drew more in line with the other European countries, though this seemed like a drastic decline compared to the previous period. In reality, however, the Italian economy remained flexible and adjusted to the other European economies quite well, and the observed decline was only a relative one.¹¹⁸ It was only in later centuries that serious economic problems arose.

The view of Malanima is true also for Tuscany in particular. Waquet underlines the stability of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in the seventeenth century and writes that there was no crisis, decadence, or decline at all.¹¹⁹ This new view has proved quite persuasive in the past two decades as more and more scholars from different countries have tried to reconstruct the history of Tuscany in the seventeenth century.¹²⁰ Regarding the economic stability, important changes were the growth of new production sectors such as porcelain and silk, and the foundation of the sea-port of Livorno.¹²¹

A large part of the Florentine patriciate had their own commercial companies during the seventeenth century, as shown by hundreds of commercial contracts found by Malanima in the Florentine State Archive.¹²² The amount of commercial activity was possibly less than at the end of the sixteenth

116 Malanima 1996: 207-208.

117 Malanima 2007: 384-385.

118 *Ibid.*: 384, 386.

119 Verga 2007: 51 (he refers to Waquet 1990).

120 Such as Boutier/Landi/Rouchon 2004; Fasano Guarini 2003; Mannori 1994 and Litchfield 1986.

121 Verga 2007: 52; Malanima 2007: 386.

122 Malanima 1996: 213. ASF Tribunale della Mercanzia, 10837-10858.

century, but it certainly did not stop. During the whole seventeenth century, 10-20 percent of all commercial associations were in the hands of the patrician elite, which also kept making financial investments.¹²³ After the crisis of 1573, instead of investments in unlimited liability, they increased their investments in limited liability enterprises.¹²⁴ Already in 1602, the elite had invested half of their capital in these kinds of enterprises.¹²⁵ These were risky investments, but yielded more than investments in landed estates. Investments by the elite in limited liability enterprises declined only after 1730.¹²⁶ The noble elite in the seventeenth century also invested in loans, purchased state bonds, acquired land in periods of economic success (most sales were between families) and spent heavily on luxuries such as furniture, clothes, silver, alms, art patronage, the salaries of servants, carriages, grooms, horses, stables, and their salons. Thanks to this luxury consumption, the urban crafts in Florence grew and other luxury goods were imported from other cities or countries.¹²⁷

1.6 *Cittadini* or noble courtiers?

In the seventeenth century, the bourgeoisie across Europe was developing a new lifestyle, obtained political functions, and noble titles. In Florence there was no clear separation between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. The patricians embodied both.¹²⁸ They were a *nobiltà imperfetta* (imperfect nobility), because they had achieved their noble status with economic wealth and positions in the oligarchic government during the republican period.¹²⁹ In other European countries the bourgeoisie concentrated more and more on land ownership, while the aristocracy started to show interest in commercial and industrial activities. The Florentine patricians had always owned properties in the countryside and they had been merchants and bankers for centuries.¹³⁰

Already in the fifteenth century there was a vivid debate about nobility. Treatises were written about the topic by Buonaccorso da Montemagno (*De nobilitate*, 1428), Poggio Bracciolini (*De vera nobilitate*, 1440) and Cristoforo

123 Malanima 1996: 214 who cites Litchfield 1986: 214.

124 Malanima 1996: 214.

125 For a list of families who invested in limited liability enterprises, see Malanima 1996: 215.

126 *Ibid.*

127 *Ibid.*: 216-217.

128 Angiolini 1979.

129 Boutier 2004a: 213. For an elaboration on the term 'nobiltà imperfetta', see Angiolini 1991: 875-99.

130 Angiolini 1979.

Landino (*De vera nobilitate*, post 1487). One group thought wisdom and virtue was the key to individual nobility. The second group thought wealth and the fame of the lineage could create nobility.¹³¹

Although many patricians transformed into nobles, they continued to call themselves *cittadini* and patricians.¹³² In the old *Vocabolario della Crusca* of 1612 the definitions of *patrizio* and *nobile* (patrician and noble) are quite similar. The definition of *patrizio* is *huomo nobile, de' primi della città*. The definition of *nobile* is *di chiara, e illustre schiatta*.¹³³ There are several authors who indicate that "Florentine patrician" has a more profound connotation. The fact that the Florentine patricians called themselves *cittadini* comprehends that civil and political commitment were of paramount importance.¹³⁴ For centuries the patricians had occupied themselves with commerce and politics and held out public offices.¹³⁵ It was not even possible to be called a patrician without such civic engagement, though it was possible to be called a noble without having any political role.¹³⁶ Components of the patrician identity were their cultural patronage and their large socio-political engagement with the city. In the republican time, the patricians as a group felt themselves responsible for the preservation of the democratic character and sovereignty of the city. In the seventeenth century, they still represented the city outside Florence as diplomats and ambassadors, but also inside Florence in the administration of the government. The houses of every family were concentrated in a certain part of the city, where they felt themselves responsible for patronizing churches and financing popular feasts.¹³⁷

Together with the aristocratic customs, many new aristocratic terms entered the Florentine society. Chauvineau tried to determine whether the Medici used one specific Italian or European court as a model to increase the aristocratic aspect of their own court. As turns out from her analysis, the names the Medici used for all the new functions at their aristocratic court were borrowed from a variety of courts and languages. The old Burgundian name for chamberlain was *gentilhomme de la chambre*, which was also used at the court of Louis XIV. In Tuscany this function was initially called *cameriere*, the name used at the court of

131 Boutier 2004a: 216.

132 Berengo 1994: 517.

133 *Vocabolario della Crusca*, 1612. *Schiatta* = *discendenza*.

134 Berengo 1994: 518; Borelli 1990: 386.

135 Wieland 2004b: 176; Berengo 1994: 518.

136 Stumpo 1984: 154.

137 Boutier 1993a: 154; Boutier 1986.

Ferrara.¹³⁸ Later on, the name *maestro di camera* was adopted, this time inspired by the Spanish *maestro de la camera*. The name for *maggiordomo* was inspired by the Spanish *maiordomo*.¹³⁹ The *maggiordomo maggiore* was the person who managed the whole staff of the court, such as the secretaries, chamberlains, pages, head grooms, the cloakroom, and the *gentiluomini di camera*. Other influences came from the papal court, where Ferdinand I lived as a cardinal.¹⁴⁰ Despite these influences from other courts, the terms of address in Florence, like *Vostra Eccellenza* and *Illustrissimo Signore*, had a republican and humanistic origin.¹⁴¹ In the course of the seventeenth century, however, the tendency to imitate the customs of other European courts grew stronger, as we have seen in the previous paragraphs.¹⁴² During the reigns of Cosimo II (fig. 5) and the regents, court ceremonial was based more and more on the customs at the French court and not on those of the Spanish court, and as a result all chamberlains were called *gentiluomo di camera*, a name which resembled the term used at the court of Louis XIV.¹⁴³

Although many patricians had a function as chamberlain, Chauvineau states that they never mentioned this function in their wills, while they did mention their involvement with military orders. Most patricians emphasized specifically their Florentine citizenship.¹⁴⁴ Besides that, they emphasized the title of Senator, a title of republican origin.¹⁴⁵ Chauvineau concludes from these facts that the patricians served the court but did not consider themselves courtiers.¹⁴⁶ It seems to me that for the seventeenth century, where so many patricians led double lives as courtiers and citizens and where the lives of the patricians were so much intertwined with those of the Medici, this viewpoint does not hold. Even if they did not refer to their functions or roles at court in their wills, the patricians were nevertheless proud to be part of the Medici regime and to represent it abroad. As Boutier writes, they had already maintained their own identity for centuries and mixed their European aristocratic

138 Chauvineau 2002: 35-37.

139 *Ibid.*: 36.

140 *Ibid.*: 37.

141 *Ibid.*: 36.

142 Fantoni 1994: 37. The models were the courts of Turin, Venice, Mantua, Genova, Parma, Modena, the Papal State, the Holy Roman Empire, France, Spain, England, Poland, Sweden, the Dutch Republic, and the court of Bavaria.

143 Verga 2007: 60; Boutier 1993b: 220.

144 Chauvineau 2002: 44.

145 *Ibid.*: 45.

146 *Ibid.*: 46.

identity with this authentic patrician identity.¹⁴⁷ Components of this European identity were military orders, special schools and societies for nobles, ambassadorships, and travels through Europe.¹⁴⁸ The patricians were proud to be part of this European aristocratic culture. Marcello Fantoni, a professor specialized in Court Studies, writes that even in the seventeenth century one could still identify many characteristics of the republican time in Florentine society, but that the patriciate had nonetheless been incorporated into the new lifestyle of aristocratic and courtly society.¹⁴⁹

The reason why the courtiers did not mention their functions at court may be that both the Medici and the patricians did not attach great value to all the European aristocratic names and titles when within Florence; the titles may have mattered only when they went abroad. Inside the Grand Duchy, the titles did not have any influence on the hierarchy of social classes.¹⁵⁰ Boutier remarks that in Marc'Antonio Savelli's *Pratica Universale* of 1665 the Florentine nobles were called *il ceto dei cittadini fiorentini* (the class of Florentine citizens).¹⁵¹ And even in a 1704 Venetian tractate by Agostino Paradisi about nobles in fifty-five cities in Italy, quoted by Boutier, we can read:

Nella città di Firenze quelli sono stimati i nobili i cui ascendenti hanno goduto o sono stati capaci di godere delle principali dignità ed uffizi che quivi si conseguivano in tempo della Repubblica. [...] non si fa altra differenza da nobile a nobile a Firenze che per quello che porta il grado senatorio. Chi se ne trova fregiato precede a qualunque altra persona¹⁵² che non sia tale quantunque insignata con carattere di Marchese, Conte o Barone.¹⁵³

Apparently, in Florence there were no important hierarchical differences between different kinds of nobles. We can speak of a nobility of equals that existed for centuries, even if it was theoretically possible to make a distinction between different kinds of nobles.¹⁵⁴ This distinction was discussed in a round-table discussion directed by Alessandra Contini. Enrico Stumpo makes

147 Boutier 1993a: 154.

148 Ibid.; Boutier 1986.

149 Fantoni 1994: 10.

150 Boutier 2000: 299.

151 Ibid.: 294.

152 This has to do with the specific order in which people have to walk and stand during public ceremonies. Unlike at other courts, in Florence there was apparently no such specific order.

153 Boutier 2000: 296.

154 Ibid.: 299.

a division in three parts: the Florentine patriciate, consisting of large families with an urban mercantile origin; the feudal nobility, some of papal and some of imperial origin; and the nobility of service (*nobiltà di servizio*), the uomini nuovi who served the Medici and were often members of the military Order of Saint Stephen.¹⁵⁵ Only in 1750 an official law was formulated that contained the conditions necessary to call oneself noble, the *Legge per regolamento della Nobiltà e della Cittadinanza*. All the noble families were listed from that moment onward in the *Libro d'Oro* (Book of Gold). The law determined that families could call themselves noble if at least one of four conditions was met:¹⁵⁶

1. One of their ancestors should have had a function as *priore*¹⁵⁷ before the reform of the government in 1532.
2. The Grand Dukes should have named one of their ancestors a senator.
3. One of their ancestors should have received a noble title.
4. One of their ancestors should have been admitted to the Order of Saint Stephen.

1.7 Patrician careers in Tuscany, Rome and Malta

During the reign of Cosimo I, Tuscany grew increasingly involved in international politics, and to help maintain the balance of power, permanent ambassadors resided in the Holy Roman Empire from 1537, in Rome from 1539, and in France from 1544 onward. From the late 1560s ambassadors were also present in Spain and a permanent ambassador began to reside in London under the reign of Ferdinand I. In the other Italian states, Tuscany could not install any permanent residents until the title of Grand Duke, and its accompanying social status, was recognized, first unofficially and later officially by the Pope and the Emperor. In the meantime, instead of ambassadors, Cosimo sent agents to many Italian states, for example to Venice, where the first permanent ambassador settled in 1589. Agents were also sent to Ferrara from 1551, and these were replaced by ambassadors from 1560 on. In Naples, the power of the Medici had been recognized already very early (1537), thanks to the marriage of Cosimo with Eleonora da Toledo, the daughter of the viceroy of Naples. The ruling families most reluctant to recognize Medici power were the Farnese (Parma),

¹⁵⁵ Contini 1997: 750.

¹⁵⁶ Litchfield 2008: 150; Boutier 1993a: 141.

¹⁵⁷ A *priore* was a magistrate who was chosen to execute power in the republican government for a period of two months.

the Gonzaga (Mantua), the Este (Modena/Ferrara) and the Savoy (Turin).¹⁵⁸ In the seventeenth century, when recognition had been secured across Europe, the Medici court had agents and ambassadors in all the important states of Italy (city states, duchies, kingdoms, and papal areas) and in the rest of Europe, such as at the Imperial Court and in England, France and Spain.¹⁵⁹

In the earlier centuries, young patricians used to carry out commercial internships abroad as merchants. The new solution in the seventeenth century was that they joined Florentine ambassadors at foreign courts for a few months. This was seen as a kind of internship, in which they could learn how to operate as diplomats.¹⁶⁰ The continuous presence of Florentine ambassadors at different Italian and European courts meant a steady stream of information, which enabled the Medici to anticipate important political developments.¹⁶¹ Many ambassadors were Florentine patricians, while their assistants, the *segretari di legazione* were all *uomini nuovi*.¹⁶² The career prospects for the *uomini nuovi* and the patricians in service of the Medici were different. After having finished their functions as *segretari di legazione* the *uomini nuovi* could obtain ecclesiastical or bureaucratic offices and even the high office of state secretary, but it was impossible for them to become *maggiordomo* or chamberlain.¹⁶³ After returning from their ambassadorships, patricians could obtain a position as governor of a Tuscan city, chamberlain of princes or even the Grand Duke himself, *maggiordomo*, senator, member of the Pratica Segreta, bishop, and even cardinal.¹⁶⁴

Apart from ambassadorships, there were many other functions that Florentine patricians could carry out in service of the Medici court to strengthen their social position. On the political level the Dell'Antella family furnishes a good example. Niccolò dell'Antella (1560-1630) was personal advisor of Ferdinand I, Cosimo II, and the regents and at the same time he was archbishop of Pisa.¹⁶⁵ At the end of his life, he was nominated senator by the Medici, as a reward for

158 Contini 1999: 80, 118. The ambassadors in Spain during the 1560s and 1570s were De Nobili, and from 1571 Giulio del Caccia, who was assisted by the secretary Antonio Serguidi. After Del Caccia came Roberto Ridolfi from 1575. The ambassador in the Holy Roman Empire was Lodovico Antinori from 1568-72, who was assisted by the secretary Giovan Battista Concini.

159 Contini 2000: 63-64.

160 Boutier 1994: 267.

161 Contini 2000: 64.

162 Contini 1999: 93.

163 Wieland 2004b: 78; Contini 1999: 98.

164 Wieland 2004b: 510; Contini 1999: 82, 98.

165 Vivoli 1989: 121-24.

all his services.¹⁶⁶ His brother Francesco di Filippo dell'Antella (1567-1624) was nominated *maggiordomo maggiore* by Cosimo II.¹⁶⁷

Another political task that the patricians executed was receiving important guests whom they met in the region of Tuscany before they arrived in Florence. The patrician Matteo Botti had to receive the ambassador of Venice, Niccolò Molino in Firenzuola in the year 1600.¹⁶⁸ The same year he had to accompany the ambassador of Poland from Rome to Poggio a Caiano. In 1607 he had to meet the French ambassador at Borgo San Lorenzo and in 1608 he had to go to Marradi to receive the future Grand Duchess Maria Maddalena of Austria, together with Carlo di Ottavio de' Bardi (1573- 1646).¹⁶⁹ Finally, in 1609, Matteo Botti had to accompany the count of Gonzaga-Nevers from Colle Val d'Elsa to Castiglione Aretino. As a way of thanks for all these services he was nominated *maggiordomo maggiore* by Ferdinand I.¹⁷⁰

The patricians could also function in the political area as a magistrate. Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger performed this function from 1613-24 in the Magistrato di Dogana, Magistrato di Nove, Magistrato della Grascia, Magistrato dei Conservatori della Legge, and in the Magistrato del Sale.¹⁷¹ The mass of evidence shows, then, that it was only natural course that, at the beginning of the seventeenth century the patricians and the Medici were together responsible for the whole political organisation of Florence, from the reception of important guests to the running of all the major governmental institutions.

Yet another possibility for the future career of the patricians was to take part of a military order. Military orders originated in the crusades and had an international character. From the fourteenth century on, the international military and religious orders were supplemented by dynastic orders with a less international character, such as the Order of Jarretièrè in England (1346), the

166 Casprini 2000: 109.

167 Sebegondi Fiorentini 1982: 113 *Maggiordomo maggiore* = majordomo, the highest office in the household of the Medici. Other patricians that were nominated *maggiordomo maggiore* as a way of thanks for their services were Piero Guicciardini (1569-1626) in 1621 (Fallani 1991/92: 75), Gabriello Riccardi (1606-1675) in 1659, and Francesco Riccardi (1648-1719) in 1693 (Minicucci 1985: 5).

168 Cantagalli 1971: 447-50. Matteo Botti (1570-1621) came from a family of recent patricians. Originally from Cremona, the family had settled in Florence at the end of the republican period. Botti was a member of the Accademia degli Alterati (with the pseudonym *Insipido*) and of the Accademia Fiorentina, and in 1591 he became a knight in the Order of Saint Stephen. Botti made many diplomatic missions in the service of the Medici, to Savoy (1588), France (1589), Vienna (1592), the Netherlands (1598), Spain (1609), and England (1609).

169 *Ibid.*; Benassai 2002: 36.

170 Cantagalli 1971: 447-50, see note 88.

171 Masera 1941: 17.

Order of the Golden Fleece (1430) in the Low Countries, and the Order of Saint Louis in France (1469).¹⁷² The most obvious choice for the patricians was to become a member of the Order of Santo Stefano, the Tuscan Order founded by the Medici. To be a member of Santo Stefano was a sign of fidelity to the Medici regime.¹⁷³ Many patricians entered this Order, including Cosimo dell'Antella (1563-1640)¹⁷⁴ and Francesco di Giovanni Niccolini (1584-1650), who was Gran Cancelliere dell'Ordine.¹⁷⁵ Other patricians like Francesco Buonarroti (1574-1632) made the less obvious choice to enter the Order of San Giovanni in Malta, one of the old international religious orders.¹⁷⁶ Between 1600 and 1718 a total of 1983 knights from Tuscany (among them 692 Florentine nobles) became a member of the Order of Santo Stefano. At the same time 356 knights entered the Order of Malta (among them 165 Florentine nobles).¹⁷⁷ So, broadly speaking some one-fourth of the Florentine nobles chose to join the Order of Malta.

Some researchers, like Angelantonio Spagnoletti, consider the choice of the patricians for the Order of Malta as a provocation to the Medici family.¹⁷⁸ To judge his opinion one has to look at the differences between the two orders. The Order of Malta contained members from many countries, including France, the Netherlands, the Holy Roman Empire, Italy, Spain and England. From 1555, every member had to prove four quarters of nobility, meaning that his parents and grandparents from both sides had to be noble. Towards the end of the century, in France they even asked for eight quarters and in the Holy Roman Empire sixteen. In Italy a noble descent of two centuries from the paternal line was enough.¹⁷⁹ For the Order of Santo Stefano, the same requirement of four quarters was valid, but it was possible to circumvent the difficulties of an imperfect nobility by founding a *commenda di padronato* or by requesting a pardon from the Grand Duke.¹⁸⁰ In this way gentlemen with recent fortunes,

172 Janssens 2008: 492.

173 Spagnoletti 1988: 77-78.

174 Vivoli 1989: 121-24.

175 Spinelli 1990: 101.

176 Sebegondi Fiorentini 1986: 50 Buonarroti was admitted in the Order of Malta in 1599.

177 Sire 1994: 170; Spagnoletti 1988: 77-78.

178 Spagnoletti 1988: 77-78.

179 Janssens 2008: 513.

180 Angiolini 1996: 69. As was explained to me by Angiolini in an interview at Pisa on 21 June 2010 a *commenda di padronato* was a form of membership in an order of chivalry, in which the knight agreed that all the profit of his properties (such as houses, shops, storehouses, land, farms, and banks) were allocated to the order and also the properties themselves would be passed down to the order (instead

like the *uomini nuovi*, could enter the Order. This mechanism was impossible with the Order of Malta, as a result of which practically all members were traditional aristocrats. Spagnoletti states that in the seventeenth century, the Order of Malta was like an aristocratic republic in a sea of absolutist regimes.¹⁸¹

From 1599 a law of the *Veneranda Lingua d'Italia* decided that in addition to traditional aristocrats members of families with a mercantile origin from Florence, Lucca, and Genoa could also enter the Order of Malta.¹⁸² If they wanted to apply, however, they had to prove that their family had a history of at least 200 years. Therefore Florentine families, either in Rome or in Florence, ordered historians such as Cesare Magalotti and Carlo Strozzi to reconstruct their genealogical history.¹⁸³ Magalotti and Strozzi explored Florentine archives to find certificates of baptism, dowries, and marriages and searched for epitaphs and family trees.¹⁸⁴ The historians rediscovered in this way important episodes of Florentine history and tried to make their genealogies as accurate as possible. Sometimes, however, they were not averse to manipulating facts according to the expectations of their patrons who wanted their sons to enter the Order of Malta.¹⁸⁵

The advantage of Malta was that it was an international order, while Santo Stefano was a Tuscan order in the hands of the Medici. That some patricians entered the Order of Malta did not signify that they were against the Medici regime. Laura Vigni remarks that the Siense patricians who entered the Order of Malta continued to carry out all kinds of positions for the Medici. She thinks that the closed aristocratic character of the Order of Malta attracted patricians who wanted to rise in prestige and in this way show their superiority over the *uomini nuovi*.¹⁸⁶ Since the Order of Malta demanded celibacy, the advantage of Santo Stefano was that its members could marry.¹⁸⁷ In any case, the patricians

of to their families) after the knights died. In return they were admitted to the order, without having to prove their nobility.

181 Spagnoletti 1988: 33.

182 Polverini Fosi 1994: 185. The *Veneranda Lingua d'Italia* was the subdivision of the Order of Malta which contained the knights who originated from Italy.

183 The historian Carlo di Tommaso Strozzi (1587-1670) was senator and a member of the *Accademia Fiorentina* and the *Accademia della Crusca*. He had a large collection of Latin and Italian manuscripts, which can still be consulted in the *Biblioteca Laurenziana*, the *Biblioteca Nazionale* and the *Florentine State Archive*. See Mencarelli 2011 and 'Strozzi, Carlo' in *Treccani, L'enciclopedia italiana*. Retrieved October 28, 2014 from *Treccani*: <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-strozzi/>.

184 *Ibid.*: 180.

185 *Ibid.*: 190.

186 Vigni 2007: 124.

187 Angiolini, in an interview at Pisa on 21 June 2010.

who entered one of the two orders based their choices not on their religious or military character, but rather on the possibility to gain prestige for themselves and their families.

Instead of choosing military orders, the patricians could also chose to participate in the Grand Ducal armies. Alberto di Ottavio de' Bardi (?-1632) was *cavallerizzo maggiore* of Cardinal Carlo de' Medici and earlier in his life he fought in Hungary in 1593 for Ferdinand I, to be of assistance to Emperor Rudolf II.¹⁸⁸ Carlo Gerini (1616-1673) held the rank of *cavallerizzo maggiore* as well, this time in the service of Cardinal Giovan Carlo de' Medici (1595-1666). Lorenzo di Girolamo Guicciardini (1597-1649) was *comandante delle milizie granducali* (commander of the Grand Ducal armed forces) and in 1630 he was nominated *capitano delle corazze* in Arezzo.¹⁸⁹

Conclusion

In this chapter we approached the world of the Florentine patricians from a socio-political perspective. By combining recent insights from the fields of social, economic, and political history, we tried to revise some traditional views of the patricians' role in Florentine society.

The Medici court functioned thanks to the cooperation of many patricians in important functions and thanks to the fact that the patricians were willing to serve the city and the regime. The patricians executed these functions without losing their patrician identity and while continuing their autonomous life and preserving their economic capital. The more European their court became, the more the Medici realised they could not ignore the social and economic power of the patricians. The *uomini nuovi*, as we have seen, were not powerful enough, either socially or numerically, to play an influential role that fulfilled the needs of the Medici at a European level.

By convincing the Medici to give them all kinds of social privileges, the patricians were able to increase their social and cultural prestige. Thanks to their functions as representatives of the Medici court, they were able to form social bonds with important European nobles. The high position of the patricians in the Medici government and household inside Florence from the seventeenth century onwards also created for them a position of high prestige which they could use to be influential cultural patrons and brokers.

188 Benassai 2002: 34. The *cavallerizzo maggiore* was the supervisor of the court stables.

189 Bruno 2008: 190. The *capitano delle corazze* was the commander of the heavy cavalry.

In this chapter we focussed on the changing political position of the Medici and patricians during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But we did not show the important role that culture played in all these processes. One of the characteristics the patricians shared with the Medici was the typical Florentine custom of using culture as an instrument of social and political prestige.¹⁹⁰ In the following chapters, we will analyze how they succeeded in this and we will focus in particular on the patricians' contribution, both individually and as a group, to the cultural climate in seventeenth-century Florence, and to the social and cultural representation of the Medici court in Florence and abroad.

190 Haskell 2001: 233-35.

Figures – Chapter one



Figure 1: Agnolo Bronzino, *portrait of Cosimo I de' Medici in armour*, 1545, Art Gallery of New South Wales.



Figure 2: Alessandro Allori, *portrait of Francesco I de' Medici as a young man*, 1560, Art Institute of Chicago.



Figure 3: Scipione Pulzone/il Gaetano, *portrait of Ferdinand I de' Medici*, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



Figure 4: Frans Pourbus the Younger, *portrait of Christine of Lorraine*



Figure 5: Justus Sustermans, portrait of Maria Magdalena of Austria, Cosimo II de' Medici and Ferdinand II de' Medici, 1640, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.