Introduction

Abstract

The introduction provides an overview of historiographical approaches to the study of family and gender in early modern Italy and interrogates conceptions of patriarchy and women's agency in early modern Europe more broadly. Through a series of examples focused on several Florentine patrician families (including the Covoni, Della Fioraia, Gondi, Gualterotti, Nobili, Peruzzi, Ricasoli, Rucellai, Spinelli, and Ugolini families), this book places gender relations at the heart of social, economic, religious, and political affairs in Italian society and argues that a network model of family life accounts for women's agency in early modern Italy.

Keywords: family, gender, networks, patriarchy, agency, letters

Cold and rainy weather marked the month of April 1569 in Florence. The widow Cassandra Gualterotti wrote a series of personal letters to her daughter, Costanza Ricasoli, expressing concern that the rainy weather threatened the deliveries of grain and other agricultural products sent to Florence from the Ricasoli family's Tuscan estates.[1] Costanza and her husband, Braccio Ricasoli, spent the majority of the winter and spring at their family villa of Cacchiano in the Chianti countryside. Cassandra's regular correspondence provided reports on the grain brought into

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1   Cassandra wrote fifty-four letters to her daughter Costanza in 1569 and 1570, nine of which were written in April 1569. Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASF), Ricasoli Parte Antica (hereafter RPA), filza 46, fascio I, fascetto III, lettera n. 7, 21 April [1569]: "il veturale portò sabato 26 staia di grano e lunedi 24 staia di grano e og(g)i 22 staia che ve ne 7 staia di più cat(t)ivo grano"; "quello che mi dire domat(t)ina me(r)coledi no(n) si vede grano per tanto piovere." The original spelling of the early modern Italian has been preserved in the transcription of the letters included here in the notes, with parentheses added in for missing letters of abbreviated words. Final punctuation has been added to the quotations from archival sources. Accents have been added according to standard modern Italian usage. All translations of the archival sources are my own unless otherwise noted.
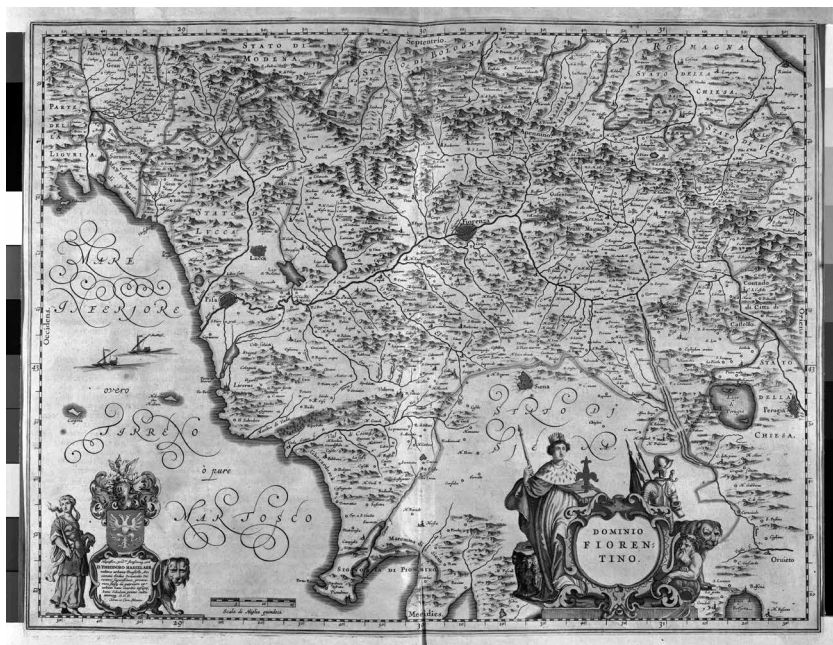

Figure 1: Map of the territory of Florence by Joan Bleau in 1640. The map is held at the Museo Navali di Pegli in Genoa, Italy. Scala/Art Resource, NY.

Florence from Panzano and Gaiole in Chianti.[2] Her letters also sent Costanza the latest news from Florence: Costanza's brother, Giovanni, had recently returned to the city and would have dinner with them soon.[3] Maddalena Ricasoli, Cassandra's sister-in-law, was sick with a mild fever.[4] Costanza's sister, Lisabetta, intended to travel to her husband's country villa.[5] Cassandra worried in her letters about the health of her daughter and granddaughter who was her namesake, the two-year old Cassandra (nicknamed Cassandrina), who would hopefully be well enough for them to return soon.[6]

2   ASF, RPA, filza 46, fascio I, fascetto III, lettere n. 3–9.

3   ASF, RPA, filza 46, fascio I, fascetto III, lettera n. 4, 7 April [1569]: "Giovanni è tornato v(u) ole disinare." Cassandra reported that Costanza's brother Giovanni and her sister Lisabetta also wanted to dine together soon. Lettera n. 8: "c'è la lisabetta e Giovanni v(u)ole disiniare tutti si racomandava a voi."

4   ASF, RPA, filza 46, fascio I, fascetto III, lettera n. 6, 14 April [1569]: "ma(donna) Mad(d)alena vostra è malata a(v)uto la feb(b)re … ma no(n) sono molte grande feb(b)re."

5   ASF, RPA, filza 46, fascio I, fascetto III, lettera n. 10: "la scritta la lisabetta che domattina va in villa e vi si raccomanda."

6   ASF, RPA, Filza 46, fascio I, fascetto V, lettera n. 9, 21 April [1569].

The news in Florence in April 1569 was the arrival of Archduke Charles II of Austria to the city. The ceremonies and celebrations surrounding the archduke's visit with his sister, Joanna of Austria, and her husband, Duke Francesco I de'Medici, would be a series of grand events. Cosimo I de'Medici's pursuit of the title Grand Duke of Tuscany, granted by Pope Pius V in 1569, necessitated the support of Austrian Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II. The marriage between Joanna, his sister, and Cosimo's son Francesco solidified connections between the Habsburgs and the Medici.[7] Hosting the emperor's brother, the archduke, was another step in the right direction for Medici political ambitions. The banquets and other social activities organized for the archduke's visit were important for patrician families to attend as a way to further their political ties to the Medici court. Braccio began the process of guiding his family into the Medici's good graces with his assistance to Duke Cosimo I during the war with Siena in 1554–55. Cassandra hoped that Costanza and Braccio would be able to return to Florence to attend the festivities. She missed her daughter and granddaughter: "It seems a thousand years," she wrote, since she had last seen them.[8]

Understanding the importance of the occasion, Cassandra sent new clothes and accessories for her daughter to wear to the social events surrounding the archduke's visit. Patrician families, including women, had a part to play in the social, political, and diplomatic events orchestrated for the arrival of a foreign dignitary in Florence.[9] Clothing reflected the social status, familial associations, and political prestige so important for patrician women at courtly functions.[10] Cassandra mediated the purchase of fabric for her daughter and granddaughter while they were in the countryside. In late March, Cassandra bought "little shoes" and "little buttons" for Cassandrina as well as some black silk for a new dress for Costanza.[11] She sent more material to her daughter in April for the upcoming social events. "With everything, I am sending the black silk. I don't know if it will be in your style. It costs 11

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7   Bercusson, "Joanna of Austria," 129–30. Cosimo officially resigned his title in 1564 so that his son Francesco would have it in order to enter into marriage negotiations. Bercusson, "Joanna of Austria," 130; Leuzzi, "Un'Asburgo a Firenze," 237–38.

8   ASF, RPA, filza 46, fascio I, fascetto V, lettera n. 9, 28 April [1569]: "parci mille anni."

9   For a discussion of public festivities associated with the Medici court in Florence, see Fletcher, *The Black Prince*, 131, 133–39. Specifically for entertainment regarding the archduke's visit in 1569, see Fenlon and Haar, *The Italian Madrigal*, 64.

10   Frick, *Dressing*, 107; Cox-Rearick, "Power Dressing," 39; Landini and Niccoli, *Moda a Firenze*; Field, "Female Dress."

11   ASF, RPA, filza 46, fascio I, fascetto V, lettera n. 2, 30 March [1569].

soldi. I'm not sure what to think about these festivities that are held for the archduke."[12] Cassandra was hesitant regarding whether the black silk would be right for Costanza to wear. But the purchase reflected her knowledge that black was associated with the Austrian Habsburgs—Joanna of Austria chose to wear black for her brother's visit to Florence.[13] Ultimately, concerns about Cassandrina's poor health prompted Costanza to remain in the fresh air of Tuscany rather than return to the city, so Cassandra reported on the May visit by letter: "Down here we have been at many parties in which there were ball games (*calcio*), masquerades (*bufole*),[14] and thousands of galas."[15] From Cassandra's perspective, the grandeur of the events in Florence meant that the archduke's visit was a success. From a personal point of view, she lamented the absence of her daughter and granddaughter, whom she longed to see soon.[16]

Mother and daughter circulated family news, exchanged advice, managed financial affairs, and discussed political events in their letters to one another over the course of 1569–70. Family letters in sixteenth-century Italy were generally written for practical, utilitarian purposes with the expectation of services sought or rendered from the recipient.[17] These letters were also highly rhetorically constructed, as the news they conveyed and the reports they sent were fashioned according to the writer's own agenda.[18] The beginning and end of letters followed formulaic letter-writing conventions, but the middle more informally addressed a wide variety of subjects that typically jumped from one topic to another. While patronage letters could be more formally structured, women's family letters were often more closely tied to oral culture.[19] In Cassandra's letters, a discussion of sickness in the home might move into an order for

12   ASF, RPA, filza 46, fascio I, fascetto V, lettera n. 9, 28 April [1569]: "con ugnicosa ti ma(n)do la seta nera no(n) so se la si sarà a tuo modo costa 11 soldi delle feste che si fan(n)o per questo arciducha no(n) ne so ragionare."

13   Bercusson, "Giovanna d'Austria," 693–94. Bercusson points out that this was a moment for Joanna to impose her style and authority on Florentine women, though they did not always follow her style of dress, which differed from their own. Bercusson, "Giovanna d'Austria," 696.

14   Pliasance, *Florence*, 126. *Bufole* could be masquerades or carnival songs.

15   ASF, RPA, filza 46, fascio I, fascetto V, lettera n. 10, 17 May [1569]: "noi qua giù siamo state in as(s)ai feste che ci se fatto calcio e bufole e mille gale."

16   ASF, RPA, filza 46, fascio I, fascetto V, lettera n. 10, 17 May [1569].

17   Cohen, "More Trials for Artemisia," 253; de'Amelia, "Lo scambio," 80; Doglio, *Lettere e donne*; Ottaviani, *"Me son missa a scriver questa letera."*

18   Couchman and Crabb, *Women's Letters*, 5.

19   Castiglione, *Accounting for Affection*, 20; Crabb, "How to Influence," 36; Ray, *Writing Gender*, 5–10.

the purchase of fabric or the collection of money for the sale of grain, followed by a discussion of events in the city and greetings sent to and/ or from other friends and family members.[20] The exchange of letters, whether between two individuals or among a group of relatives and friends, created connections that situated the author and recipient in common networks of association through the exchange of news, favors, and/or services. Cassandra's letters strengthened the bonds between mother and daughter just as they fostered closer connections among her children so as to maintain the unity of their natal family. This correspondence strategically cultivated ties to her daughters' marital families through the *parentado*—the network of relatives formed through marriage—as she also reported on Costanza's Ricasoli relatives. Additionally, Cassandra used her letters to transmit material goods, such as cloth and other textiles to ensure that Costanza would be properly attired for events at the Medici court when she returned to Florence.

Cassandra's letters to her daughter showcase how female bonds of kinship shaped sixteenth-century family life on multiple levels. The early modern Italian *casa* was "simultaneously a lineage, a historical legacy, a living family, and a financial enterprise."[21] Patrician women defined the kinship ties formed inside and outside their households with those extended relatives included as part of the larger family lineage. These lineage connections moved beyond the traditional focus on the patriline to relatives from the mother's lineage as well as across the horizontal connections of the *parentado* held together through women's marriages to other prominent families inside and outside Florence. In addition to bearing the legal flow of inheritance that defined conceptions of kinship, families were collections of interpersonal relationships formed through emotional and affective ties among individuals. Women negotiated these interpersonal relationships both in person and through letters to form intimate connections, often via a combination of affection and strategy. They facilitated introductions, exchanged news, engaged in commercial transactions, and participated in political culture in ways that connected them to relatives, friends, and neighbors well beyond the influence of their fathers or husbands. Both women and men made individual choices as well as lineage-driven decisions about which relatives or friends they chose to engage and interact with in family life.[22]

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20   Tomas, *Maria Salviati de'Medici*, 27.
21   Castiglione, *Accounting for Affection*, 8.
22   Cavallo, *Artisans of the Body*, 10.

The place of women, the nature of epistolary exchange, and the impact of gender on the development of familial, social, economic, religious, and political networks constitute the subjects of this book. Whether they continued to live in Florence, moved away for marriage purposes, departed with their husbands on political postings, or entered convents, patrician women used letters to create networks of contacts that tied together families and communities throughout Italy and beyond. As wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, widows, and friends, women played a central role in building relationships, engaging in economic transactions, forming spiritual bonds, developing friendships, and cultivating political ties to benefit those whom each letter-writer considered part of their actual or hoped for family unit or friend network. Their ability to do so with success depended on their specific context, as women often encountered limitations on their power to affect their own interests and those of their families. The correspondence found in the archives of elite Florentine families demonstrates how women formed the backbone of family connections and actively shaped the evolution of larger social networks. By examining discourse found in letters to reconstruct the material world—the actions, bodies, and practices—of early modern families, this book explores the variety of networks formed by women in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Italy.

A Network Model of Family Life

Strolling through twenty-first century Florence, evidence of the influence elite families exerted over Renaissance Florence is still found in the presence of family crests that adorn the walls of so many city *palazzi*. The Spinelli family crest on their Borgo Santa Croce *palazzo* established their presence in the *quartiere* of Santa Croce on a street adjacent to the church. Around the corner, the Peruzzi family crest marked out a group of buildings in the aptly named Piazza dei Peruzzi. These crests sat prominently on the façade of palace walls to deliberately associate buildings, streets, and neighborhoods with elite families.[23] The Ricasoli *palazzo* near the Church of Ognissanti in Florence as well as the villa of Cacchiano and ancestral Broglio castle marked that family's power in both the city and the larger Tuscan region. Elite women actively contributed to their families both inside and outside the walls of these physical sites of family power.

23   Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual*, 68–93.

Figure 2. Map of Florentine Residences

1:9,028

Georeferencing by Colin Rose. Image courtesy of Harvard College Map
Library, Esri, HERE, Garmin, INCREMENT P, USGS, METI/NASA
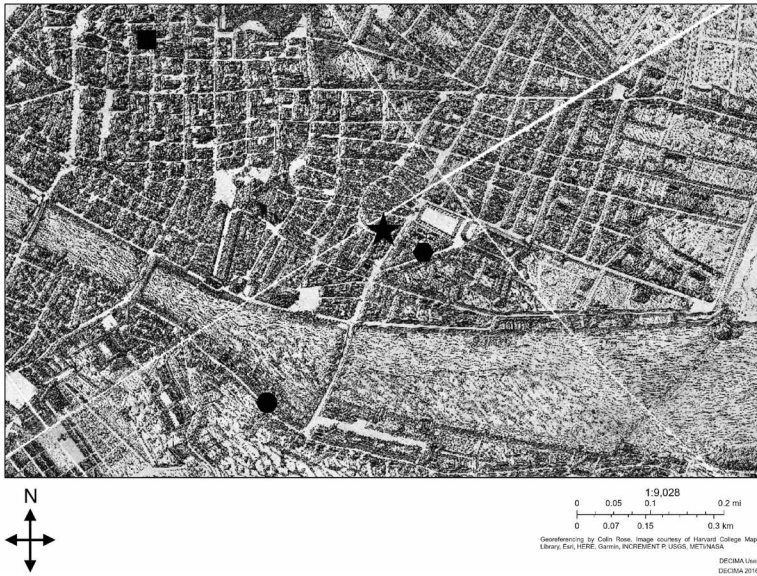
DECIMA User
DECIMA 2016

Figure 2: Map of Florence created using the DECIMA project. The DECIMA project uses the census data from the 1561 decima and GIS technology to map occupations, owners, and residents in the city. Each home identified on the map is marked with a blue marker and then differentiated with a different black shape. The black circle marks the house of Lorenzo di Stefano Porcellini, whose widowed mother, Maddalena, rented the house to Braccio Ricasoli, his wife, Costanza Gualterotti Ricasoli, and their daughter Cassandra Ricasoli on Via de' Bardi in the 1570s (and into the 1580s). The black square marks the residence of Filippo Arrigucci, who lived with his wife, Maddalena Ricasoli, and his daughter (Maddalena's stepdaughter), Maria Arrigucci, in Piazza S. Leo in 1561. The black star marks the house rented in 1561 by Maria Maddalena (Fiammetta) Peruzzi, widow of Rinieri Peruzzi, after the death of her husband in 1560 in the Piazza dei Peruzzi. Maria Maddalena's daughter, also called Maria Maddalena (Fiammetta), married Tommaso Spinelli in 1563. The black hexagon marks the house owned by Tommaso di Benedetto Spinelli in 1561, where he would live with his wife, Maria Maddalena Peruzzi, on Borgo Santa Croce. This map marks out the residences of several key figures from the Ricasoli and Spinelli families discussed in the book. Map made using the DECIMA GIS tool, at www.decima-map.net.

An array of terminology described family life in Renaissance Florence. *Casa* literally meant house or home and those relatives who lived under the same roof. But *casa* also referred to extended family members who were part of the larger "house" that bound kin together.[24] This larger *casa* could take many forms, some of the most common being the *consorteria*, or clan; the *agnatio*, or father's line of relatives (the vertical patriline); the *cognatio*, or mother's line of kinship; and the *parentado*, or horizontal kinship

24 Castiglione, *Accounting for Affection*, 8; Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual*, 70; Strocchia, "Remembering the Family," 636.

ties through marriage that connected the bride's and groom's families.[25] Social historians interested in the structure of family life first investigated whether the medieval family clan (*consorteria*) gave way to the modern nuclear household in fifteenth-century Florence.[26] Scholars found that lineage remained vitally important for elite Florentine families even if they did not always live together under one roof.[27] The decline of the magnate clans—the powerful feudal noble families that built tower societies and dominated city politics in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—did not mean the end of extended kinship ties and the start of nuclear households; rather, middling merchant families absorbed the priority of the patriline as they rose to prominence in the fifteenth century.[28] This emphasis on lineage traced through the male bloodline has led scholars to see Italian families as inherently patriarchal.[29] Joan Kelly famously asserted that "there was no renaissance for women—at least, not during the Renaissance."[30] Preoccupation with the patriline indeed relegated women to the outskirts of family life. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber's pioneering study argued that they were merely "passing guests," moving from father's home to husband's household after marriage, rather than central players in forming family identity.[31]

Legal constraints and inheritance practices also contributed to women's subordinate position: the influence of Roman law provided husbands and fathers with legal power (*patria potestas*) over household dependents, including wives and children.[32] The emphasis on patrilineal succession developed in the thirteenth century, when the dowry became women's sole form of inheritance.[33] The exchange of dowries and the arrangement of

25   Kuehn, *Family and Gender*, 34–37; Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 219–20.

26   Goldthwaite, *Private Wealth*, 252–53, 263; Bizzochi, "La dissoluzione," 3–45. Goldthwaite's argument about the development of the modern nuclear family is also seen other studies of early modern European social history in the 1960s and 1970s. Most notably, Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*; Stone, *The Family*.

27   Kent, *Household and Lineage*, 23–25. See also Malanima, *I Riccardi*; Cappelli, *Una famiglia*.

28   Padgett, "Open Elite?," 359; Barbagli, *Sotto lo stesso tetto*.

29   Martines, "A Way of Looking at Women," 15–28; Cohn, *Women in the Streets*, 41.

30   Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?," 137. She argued against Jacob Burckhardt's contention that "women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men." Burckhardt, *The Civilization*, 275. More recently, Merry Wiesner-Hanks argued that the Renaissance "may ultimately not be a useful category when exploring women's and gender history globally, but 'early modern,' a term developed more recently, is." Wiesner-Hanks, "Do Women Need the Renaissance?," 539.

31   Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual*, 117–18.

32   Kirshner, "Family and Marriage," 86.

33   Bellomo, *Ricerche*, 8; Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates*, 110; Bellomo, *La condizione*; Owen Hughes, "From Brideprice to Dowry"; Herlihy, *Women, Family, and Society*, 143; Chabot, "'La sposa in nero.'"

marriage alliances played a vital role in the formation of business associations, political bonds, social status, and patronage networks for wealthy Florentine families.[34] These marital strategies favored a high degree of endogamy in the circulation of dowries among the elite in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.[35] By the mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the horizontal connections of the *parentado* mattered less than the vertical patrilineal line of succession with the increased usage of the *fideicommissum*, or entailed estate.[36] The consolidation of the patrimony down a single male line pointed toward an even more restrictive patriarchal framework for family life.[37]

Scholars began to challenge this bleak view of an oppressively patriarchal society as they later came to find multiple ways that women exerted agency in early modern Italy. The ability to access legal courts, use financial resources, deploy authority in the family, and engage in cultural production offered avenues for women to influence their own lives and those of their children. No one set of laws governed family life, and family members often drew on a variety of laws to pursue their cases in court;[38] thus, women could and did use the law to their own advantage,[39] appealing to marital courts to deal with issues such as forced unions, marital separation, and domestic violence.[40] Women also moved around Italian cities as financial actors on their own behalf as well as for their husbands, children, and other family

34   Bullard, "Marriage, Politics, and Family," 668–87; Cappelli, "I Castellani di Firenze," 33–91; Clarke, *The Soderini and the Medici*, 135–40; James, "Florence and Ferrara," 365–78.

35   Molho, *Marriage Alliance*, 15; Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual*, 119. Mauro Carboni has found a similar emphasis on endogamy as a strategy to conserve elite lineages in early modern Bologna. Carboni, "Marriage Strategies and Oligarchy," 239. For similar contentions about Venice, see also Romano, *Patricians and Popolani*, 152–58; Chojnacki, "Daughters and Oligarchs," 63–86.

36   Thomas Kuehn defines the *fideicommissum* as "a trust erected around a directed substitution of heirs from the agnatic lineage with the provision that family property not be alienated to outsiders." Kuehn, *Patrimony and Law*, 9.

37   Casanova, *La famiglia italiana*, 48; Carboni, "Marriage Strategies," 242; Pomata, "Family and Gender," 69–81.
Litchfield, "Demographic Characteristics," 191–205; Gavitt, "Charity and State Building," 240; Kuehn, *Patrimony and Law*, 137–63.

38   Kuehn, *Family and Gender*, 29–30, 39.

39   Kuehn, *Family and Gender*, 29–30; Kuehn, *Law, Family, and Women*, 229; Kirshner, *Marriage, Dowry, and Citizenship*, 14, 136.

40   Ferraro, *Marriage Wars*, 6–9; Hacke, *Women, Sex, and Marriage*, 9–10; Ferrante, "Marriage and Women's Subjectivity"; Lombardi, "Intervention by Church and State"; Lombardi, *Matrimoni di antico regime*.

members.[41] These actions, which included the allocation of their dowries, suggest that women had more control over financial decisions than had been previously thought. Male lineage interests did not always dominate inheritance patterns, as women made their own choices about how to dedicate their dotal resources in last wills and testaments.[42] They also adapted a variety of nuptial rites to make themselves active participants in the marriage process and the composition of the material goods that made up their trousseau.[43] Over the last twenty years, moreover, scholars have uncovered vast amounts of evidence that women actively engaged in cultural life: participating in humanist studies, publishing their writings, undertaking artistic pursuits, and acting as patrons for cultural production.[44] By the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, both elite and non-elite Italian women regularly exercised agency in a society underpinned by structures that privileged the patriline.[45]

With the explosion of research on early modern women's agency, historians have questioned whether patriarchy is still a useful framework of analysis for early modern society.[46] Feminist scholars were some of the first to examine patriarchy in an effort to understand and contest women's subordination to men.[47] These scholars found that patriarchy generally strengthened over the years from 1500 to 1800 due to a combination of factors, including social

41 Chojnacka, *Working Women*, xvi–xvii, 27; Kuehn, *Family and Gender*, 164; Kuehn, *Patrimony and Law*, 74–75, 80.

42 Chojnacki, *Women and Men*, 136–44.

43 Eisenach, *Husbands, Wives, and Concubines*, xiv; De Vries, "Setting Up House," 67.

44 The bibliography for women's cultural production is extensive. Only a select few are cited here. An example of both the intense scholarly interest in women's writings as well as the extensive cultural production of women in early modern Italy are the works published and translated into English by series *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (from the University of Chicago Press and now at the University of Toronto Press.) Some examples include Cereta, *Collected Letters*; Fonte, *The Worth of Women*; Nogarola, *Complete Writings*; Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*; Colonna, *Sonnets for Michelangelo*; d'Este, *Selected Letters*; Andreini, *Mirtilla*; Erculiani, *Letters on Natural Philosophy*. There is also an extensive historiography examining women and cultural production in early modern Italy. Some select examples: King and Rabil, *Her Immaculate Hand*; Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*; King, *Women of the Renaissance*; Panizza and Woods, *A History of Women's Writing in Italy*; Reiss and Wilkins, *Beyond Isabella*; Weaver, *Convent Theatre*; Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*; Eisenbichler, *The Cultural World*; Robin, *Publishing Women*; Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*; Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy*; Ray, *Writing Gender*; Ray, *Daughters of Alchemy*; Richardson, *Women*.

45 Cavallo, *Artisans of the Body*, 10; Castiglione, *Accounting for Affection*, 4; Cohen and Couling, *Non-Elite Women's Networks*, 11.

46 Wiesner-Hanks, "Forum Introduction," 320.

47 Gerda Lernar asked, "How, when, and why did female subordination come into existence?" Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, 16. Feminist scholars analyzed patriarchy as a category of

disciplining from the Protestant and Catholic Reformations, the expansion of pre-industrial capitalism, the move toward political centralization, and the subsequent growth of nation-states.[48] The problem with patriarchy as an overriding structural concept is that women were seen by historians either as victims of or as exceptions to this system of oppression. The rigid binary of oppression versus agency fails to capture the multiplicity of relationships and interactions found in early modern society.[49]

A single framework of patriarchal power also implies that all women experienced the same conditions and responded to circumstances in similar ways.[50] The notion of a collective experience for women, however, has been challenged by intersectional feminism, which considers multiple identity categories and recognizes how some women's power and privilege resulted in the exclusion or oppression of other women.[51] The interplay of forces such as age, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and religion affected how women negotiated experiences such as courtship and marriage in the early modern world.[52] Young elite women, for example, generally had greater protection and restrictions in place—required to preserve their chastity for marriage according to patriarchal prescriptions—than did non-elite women, who more openly engaged in premarital sex.[53] However, both elite and non-elite women participated in courtship rituals and the marital process.[54] Life stages were not fixed: there were as many varieties of old age

analysis and also critiqued it as an analytical concept. Millett, *Sexual Politics*; Beechey, "On Patriarchy"; Walby, "Theorizing Patriarchy."

48   Stone, *The Family*; Kirshner and Molho, "The Dowry Fund"; Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?"; Hanley, "Engendering the State"; Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual*; Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*; Howell, *Women, Production and Patriarchy*; Roper, *The Holy Household*; Bennett, "Feminism and History"; Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination*; Bennett, "Confronting Continuity"; Hardwick, *The Practice of Patriarchy*; Miller, *Transformations of Patriarchy*; Bennett, *History Matters.*

49   Wiesner-Hanks, "Forum Introduction," 320.

50   The focus on gender as a category of analysis restructured debates on patriarchy as scholars examined the constructed nature of femininity and masculinity in ways that challenged the concept of universal experiences among women. See Scott, "Gender." For an overview on the historiography of patriarchy in early modern Europe, see Dialeti, "From Women's Oppression," 19–32.

51   Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing"; McCall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality"; Gordon, "'Intersectionality'"; Dialeti, "From Women's Oppression," 30–31; Hunt, "Relations of Domination and Subordination"; Dialeti, "Patriarchy," 332.

52   Amussen and Poska, "Restoring Miranda," 346; Dursteler, *Renegade Women*; Palmer, *Intimate Bonds*; Hunt, "Relations of Domination and Subordination"; Hardwick, *Sex in an Old Regime City*.

53   Cohen, "Straying and Led Astray," 280; Cohen and Reeves, "Introduction," 21–24; Hardwick, "'In Search,'" 316–17; Poska, *Women and Authority*, 75–110; Hubbard, *City Women*, 79–110.

54   Castiglione, *Accounting for Affection*, 34–41; Moran, "Young Women"; Couchman, "'Is It Possible,'" 196–97; Hubbard, "A Room of Their Own," 298.

and widowhood as there were different experiences of youth, marriage, and motherhood.[55] Single women who never married for a variety of reasons also complicated the patriarchal focus on marriage as the dominant ideal.[56] Family life, too, took many forms beyond those of the patriarchal model, as the formation of stepfamilies, half-siblings, and blended households complicated patrilineal norms.[57]

At the same time, male power was by no means monolithic.[58] Patriarchal versions of manhood were not the only forms of masculinity found in early modern Europe,[59] and some scholars have therefore stopped using the term patriarchy altogether.[60] Even if the concept retains a value for analysis, it must be interrogated and analyzed in new ways.[61] Notions of the early modern family can be reframed by a more nuanced view of patriarchy as having multiple iterations formed through a process of negotiation and interplay with other sites of identity.[62] Simply accounting for female agency is also not enough.[63] Indeed, pushing female agency beyond finding examples of it further enables exploration of the "multiple, intersecting, and shifting forces and concerns" that shaped the lives, decisions, and actions taken by early modern women.[64] There was no single system of patriarchal power that defined families just as there was no one form of female agency. The interplay of multiple gender norms accounts for the active influence of women at the center of dynamic, shifting familial and social relationships formed in early modern Florence and Tuscany.

55 Botelho, "Old Women," 297; Hardwick, "Widowhood and Patriarchy"; Cavallo and Warner, *Widowhood*.
56 Poska, "Upending Patriarchy," 196; Hufton, "Women without Men"; Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen*; Froide, *Never Married*; La Rocca, *Tra moglie e marito*.
57 Warner, "Stepfamilies"; Warner, *Stepfamilies in Europe*; Warner, "Family, Kin, and Friendship," 64–67.
58 Dialeti, "Defending Women," 2; Dialeti, "Patriarchy," 336.
59 Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*; Foyster, *Manhood*; Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade*; Chojnacki, "Subaltern Patriarchs," 73–90; Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*; Cavallo, "Bachelorhood and Masculinity"; Cavallo, *Artisans of the Body*; Dialeti, "From Women's Oppression," 29–30; Baernstein, "Reprobates and Courtiers"; Sarti, "Men at Home"; Dallavalle, "The Moretti Family"; Nussdorfer, "Masculine Hierarchies"; Coolidge, *Sex, Gender, and Illegitmacy*, 25.
60 Wiesner-Hanks, "Forum Introduction," 320.
61 Amussen, "The Contradictions of Patriarchy"; Dialeti, "Patriarchy," 335.
62 Dialeti, "Patriarchy," 335.
63 Lynn Thomas points out how female agency has become a "safety argument," or an end in itself, rather than a starting point to push forward new understandings. Thomas, "Historicizing Agency," 328–29; Wiesner-Hanks, *Challenging Women's Agency*, 11–12.
64 Thomas, "Historicizing Agency," 330.

This book argues that a network model offers a framework of analysis in which to deconstruct patriarchy as a single system of institutionalized dominance in early modern Italy. Networks account for female agency as an interactive force that shaped the kinship ties, affective relationships, and material connections of elite Florentine families. Women served at the center as network nodes and at the periphery as edges or links that held relationships together.[65] They were at their most visible when serving as network nodes or hubs in the letters they wrote and/or received from family members and friends. As network edges or links, women produced connections among other individuals and/or groups by facilitating introductions, mediating commercial transactions, sending gifts, dispensing advice, offering prayers, and formulating patronage requests.[66] Though often less visible as edges or links, women contributed to the structural framework of elite families not only peripherally but also sometimes, as this book demonstrates, with substantial influence—however subtle.[67]

As elites, these women had access to financial resources, which they employed to their own advantage and that of their families. Elite status also came with limitations, as patriarchal ideals and lineage considerations structured elite women's lives more closely than non-elite women's lives. Network interactions were dynamic: they changed over time and varied according to personal circumstance and cultural context.[68] These constantly shifting dynamics determined the effectiveness of networks as well as the agency of those involved in them.[69] Connections were formed, broken, and

65   From a sociological perspective, scholars have used social network analysis to explore digital and online social networks as well as "face-to-face relationships, political associations and connections, economic transactions among business enterprises, and geopolitical relations among nation states and international agencies." Scott, *Social Network Analysis*, 2. McLean, *Culture in Networks*, 16; Wellman and Wetherell, "Social Network Analysis"; Kemp, Powell, and Link, "Accounting." New digital methodologies provide a way to visualize the formation of networks. Ahnert and Ahnert, "Protestant Letter Networks," 14–15; Medici, "Using Network Analysis," 162; Ahnert, "Maps vs. Networks," 131; McLean, *Culture in Networks*, 4; McLean, *The Art of the Network*, 6–8; Medici, "Using Network Analysis," 155–56. For projects that look at digital mapping of early modern networks, see Warren, Shore, and Otis, *Six Degrees of Francis Bacon*; Coolahan, *RECIRC*; Medici, *Visualizing the Sidney Network*.
66   Medici, "Using Network Analysis," 153–55; Dunn and Weddle, *Convent Networks*, 20.
67   Sociologist Charles Kadushin explains how "whole networks are held together as much by weak ties as they are by strong connections" and that "one key idea is flow through networks." Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, 13–45.
68   McLean, *Culture in Networks*, 5, 134–35.
69   Emirbayer and Goodwin, "Network Analysis"; Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks*, 57–58; Dunn and Weddle, *Convent Networks*, 20–21; Kemp, Powell, and Link, "Accounting," 288–91.

then remade as women and men negotiated their world. At some times, female alliances could be just as important if not more so than property and inheritance; at other times, the transmission of property that favored male bloodlines was the overriding concern for families.[70]

Placing women at the center of active kinship networks depicts a more inclusive vision of the premodern family.[71] The interplay of patriarchal norms regarding inheritance patterns and lineage concerns regularly intersected with gender norms that encouraged women's kinship ties, commercial activities, religious associations, and political connections to promote family interests. Patriarchy was only one of the available gender ideologies at play in early modern society.[72] Allyson Poska has suggested applying the term "agentic," whereby individuals are "expressing or having agency," to early modern women's gender norms in order to reflect the expectation that women could and did act on their own to exert authority in their daily lives in ways that were valued and familiar to early modern society.[73] Networks account for many of the spaces that women created to maneuver for and to access—if not easily then more effectively—authority in their families and communities.

The interactions of women and men from the two core examples of the Spinelli and Ricasoli families (as well as the associated Covoni, Della Fioraia, Gondi, Gualterotti, Nobili, Peruzzi, Rucellai, and Ugolini families) that form the backbone of this book reveal how female alliances and gender dynamics shaped the process of building networks. Understanding Florentine families as a series of networks accommodates individual choice in defining family relations and accounts for the larger lineage concerns so important to patrician households.[74] Women's agency in constructing kinship connections, negotiating interpersonal relationships, and forming networks display these agentic gender norms for women at work as Florentine women purposefully created more inclusive families that encompassed people well beyond the patriline.[75]

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70   Herbert, *Female Alliances*, 15–16.

71   Klapisch-Zuber, "The Genesis"; Calvi and Blutrach-Jelin, "Sibling Relations," 698; Cavallo, *Artisans of the Body*, 125–26; Cohen, "Open City," 35; Warner, "Family, Kin, and Friendship," 54.

72   Poska, "The Case for Agentic Gender Norms," 354–55

73   Poska, "The Case for Agentic Gender Norms," 354. She argues that the use of this term highlights "the early modern expectation that women had the opportunity to act independently, achieve success, and exert power and authority in many aspects of their lives." Poska, "The Case for Agentic Gender Norms," 355.

74   Cavallo, *Artisans of the Body*, 10; Castiglione, *Accounting for Affection*, 4.

75   Kemp, Powell, and Link, "Accounting," 292. The authors specifically argue that "awareness be a dimension of agency," as they investigate early modern women who "purposefully" made decisions on behalf of themselves and/or a collective group they identified with.

Chapter One explores how women formed their identities, both strategically and emotionally, as wives, mothers, and widows. The letters of the Spinelli and Ricasoli women provide a window onto marital relationships that allows us to examine shifting interactions between husband and wife. Wives expected to take on an active role in commercial affairs not only as widows or in the absence of male relatives but as a regular part of their wifely duties. Patrician women managed financial accounts for elite Florentine families through their participation in consumer culture and a deep involvement in the agricultural sector. To accomplish their goals, women moved beyond the marital union to build their own female kinship networks as they bridged their natal and marital families. Mothers and mothers-in-law regularly provided aid and support to their daughters and daughters-in-law over the course of their marriages. These wider female-centered kinship networks affected the marital dynamics of the household as they contributed to the family enterprise.

Although marriage played a large role in family life, it was not the only or even always the most important relationship for women. Chapter Two investigates sibling ties, which have been largely overlooked, as Italian women were thought to leave their natal homes behind in favor of their new marital households. Brother-sister relationships proved to be one of the most durable family connections for women after they left the natal household for marriage or the convent. Blended households offer further complications as well as opportunities for network growth, as stepfamilies and half-siblings were common occurrences in early modern Italian society. Florentine women strategically sustained close connections with half-siblings to create families that held several lineages together.

Sacred bonds and religious ties provided another layer of networks that intersected with secular familial associations, since nuns were important members of patrician families. Chapter Three explores how religious women negotiated their relationships with their secular families in the face of efforts by the Catholic Church to more strictly enforce *clausura*, or enclosure, on convent communities in the wake of Tridentine reforms in the mid-sixteenth century. The actions of clerics interested in enforcing enclosure and the motives of fathers and/or other male relatives who hoped to preserve their patrilines by placing daughters into convents did not always align. The multiplicity of patriarchies at work in strategies of enclosure offered religious women a space in which to manipulate these forces for the sake of their own interests and those of their convents. Like secular women, religious women negotiated their identities and worked to build networks between their secular families and convent communities.

Moving beyond family ties, Chapter Four contends that women forged a variety of female friendships in early modern Florence and Tuscany. Women's friendships must be taken seriously as an important set of social relationships. Women talked with one another at social gatherings and dinner parties about domestic, commercial, and political affairs. The oral nature of female friendship also translated to the written page as women wrote to each other as well as their male relatives to share gossip, news, and information. The news shared among them tightened links through the exchange of material gifts and/or facilitation of social introductions and commercial transactions. Friendships often developed out of family ties, as seen in the bonds between sisters and sisters-in-law; they also extended beyond kinship as alternative sources of aid and support for women. Female friendships at times benefitted male lineage interests even as they show how women worked outside patrilineal boundaries.

Friendships intersected with political connections as women participated in patronage-clientage networks at the Medici court. Chapter Five examines how patrician women took advantage of the informal nature of family and friendship bonds to transform these into more formal political networks for their families when Florence transitioned from a republic to a duchy in the mid sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Women's networks stretched beyond the household, reaching across geographical and cultural distances to shape the political contours of early modern states.[76]

The Spinelli and Ricasoli Families

All the examples discussed in this book are from the patrician class, the middle to upper social strata of merchant families that dominated Florentine economic and political life. The families that made up the patrician class fluctuated as family fortunes rose and fell over time. In the thirteenth century, the elite—referred to as the *grandi*, *ottimati*, or *magnati* (the big, best, or great men)—were feudal nobles whose families owned extensive lands in the countryside, though many had become urbanized aristocrats as

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76 Scholars have looked at how family networks spanned national boundaries and empires in the early modern world. Tomas, *The Medici Women*; Calvi and Spinelli, *Le donne medici*; Calvi and Chabot, *Moving Elites*; Catterall and Campbell, *Women in Port*; Benadusi and Brown, *Medici Women*; Maglaque, *Venice's Intimate Empire*; O'Leary, *Elite Women*; Modesti, *Women's Patronage*; Romney, *New Netherland Connections*, 18; Rothschild, *The Inner Life of Empires*, 2–7; Herbert, *Female Alliances*, 117, 136–41.

they moved into the city and became heavily involved in commercial life.[77]
The *popolo* (people) were commoners, though there were large gradations
among this class in terms of wealth, status, and rank.[78] As the wool, silk,
and banking industries developed in Florence, families whose members
populated the major and minor guilds grew in wealth and influence.

Often referred to as the *popolani* in contemporary sources, families with
guild membership exercised greater and greater political power by the
thirteenth century, as citizenship depended on membership in the guilds
and determined eligibility for political office in the republic.[79] Artisans
and laborers who did not have access to guild membership—the *popolo
minuto*—were not eligible for political office. Noble feuds and vendet-
tas, famously described in the chronicles by Giovanni Villani and Dino
Compagni, eventually provoked the guilds to issue the Ordinances of Justice
in 1293 to protect the peace and commercial interests of the city.[80] This
prevented the *ottimati* from holding positions in the republic and allowed
the *popolani* families, who populated the major guilds, to take power and
become the new elite. Over time, marriage alliances, business partner-
ships, and social connections with prominent *popolani* families brought
many magnates back into the circles of commercial and political power.[81]
Meanwhile, economic grievances and the denial of guild membership to the
popolo minuto prompted uprisings in the fourteenth century, most notably
the Ciompi revolt in 1378.[82] By the fifteenth century, fear of uprisings by the
poor was prompting *ottimati* and *popolani* families to align their interests
and collaborate to maintain their grip on the republic.[83]

Political patronage, always a part of the Florentine republic, became the
dominant method of rising through the ranks for both *ottomati* and *popolani*
under the Medici after they came to power in 1434.[84] Their expulsion in 1494
and subsequent return to political power in 1512 and again in 1532 reshuffled
the composition of families holding political offices. The term *patrician*
may be too simplistic for Florence's complicated social structure, but it
remains useful to encompass the flexibility and sliding scale of *popolani*

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77   Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 1–11.
78   Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 35–37.
79   Najemy, "Guild Republicanism," 58.
80   Villani, *Nuova cronica*; Bornstein, *Dino Compagni's Chronicle of Florence*.
81   Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 124.
82   Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 157–66.
83   Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 156, 182–87.
84   Kent, *The Rise of the Medici*; Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici*; Clarke, *The Soderini and the Medici*,
123–53; Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 281; Zorzi, "Communal Traditions," 49.

and *ottimati* families who accessed commercial, social, and political power in early sixteenth-century Florence. Though the families who held offices varied considerably over the years, *patrician* refers to those elite families from the middle to upper social strata who were eligible for political office by the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[85]

Patrician families remained vital to the workings of the Florentine state in the mid-sixteenth to seventeenth centuries. Historians have traditionally characterized the city as stagnant and/or in decline after the innovation of its republican years in the fifteenth century.[86] Recent scholarship paints a very different picture—one of transformation instead of decline—in which the Medici ducal court both retained elements of its republican character and reshaped the city as a more centralized state.[87] The members of *popolani* and *ottimati* families who constituted the republic's patrician elite continued to fulfill political roles in the principate.[88] The Medici integrated lesser-known merchant families from Florence and Tuscany as well as older patrician families into their growing power structure through a system of favors, the assignment of new political offices, and administrative postings in surrounding Tuscan towns. The success of this centralization process remains the subject of debate, and families often appropriated the networking that was being undertaken by the Medici to develop their own networks.[89] Patrician families played an important role in reimagining the Florentine state. The office-holding class reorganized the principate in ways that produced a continuity of political culture between the republic and the duchy.[90]

This adaptation to court society also involved the acquisition of titles of nobility under the Medici. Membership in aristocratic orders such as the Knights of the Order of Santo Stefano, established by Cosimo I, marked the assimilation of patrician elite into a noble class of courtiers

85   Nicholas Scott Baker argues that "given the political volatility of these years, together with the inherent social mobility that colored Florence throughout the Renaissance, attempts to define precisely the membership of the ruling group are useful only for limited moments of time." Baker, *The Fruit of Liberty*, 8–9.

Croce, *Storia*; Litchfield, *Emergence of a Bureaucracy*, 4; Baker, *The Fruit of Liberty*, 8–9.

86   Cochrane, *Florence*, 1; Litchfield, *Emergence of a Bureaucracy*, 4. See also Anzilotti, *La crisi costituzionale*; Diaz, *Il granducato di Toscana*.

87   Baker, *The Fruit of Liberty*, 6; Fantoni, *La corte del granduca*; Fantoni, "The Grand Duchy of Tuscany"; Litchfield, *Florence Ducal Capital*.

88   Litchfield, *Emergence of a Bureaucracy*, 6.

89   Baker, *The Fruit of Liberty*, 8–9.

90   Baker, *The Fruit of Liberty*, 191; Verga, "Un principato regionale"; Litchfield, *Florence Ducal Capital*, 153–59.

still involved in the Florentine state.[91] Patricians actively participated in commercial and political affairs in ways that were valued—though also closely monitored—by the Medici dukes.[92] Though the Spinelli originated from the *popolani* and the Ricasoli were one of the oldest *ottimati* families in the city, both families were considered part of the office-holding elite in Florence. The Spinelli and Ricasoli therefore offer, as points of comparison, examples of families from middling to more powerful on the social scale that adapted to the changes occurring as Florence became a duchy.

As a middling merchant family, the Spinelli were commoners who rose, through their mercantile successes, in wealth and status across the fifteenth century, though they were struggling financially by the mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The earliest record of the family is found in the registers of the Arte della Seta (silk guild) in 1225.[93] While the family branched in many directions, the main line that rose to prominence in Florence followed from Bisarenese's son, Bonsignore Piccialdino, who was a member of the silk guild. The Spinelli surname originated with Bonsignore's son, Spinello, who was a member of the furrier guild.[94] In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Spinelli were considered part of the *gente nuovo*, as they were not one of the old noble families. The most successful Spinelli merchant, a man named Tommaso nicknamed "Il Grande," built the bulk of the family fortune.[95] Tommaso worked as a banker in Rome, rising to the position of depository general for the papacy, before he returned to set up his own banking firm and silk business in Florence in the mid-fifteenth century. He commissioned the construction of a large family palace from an aggregate of Spinelli houses on Borgo Santa Croce.

After Tommaso died, the patrimony passed to his nephew Guasparre Spinelli, whose father Niccodemo owned a business in Venice.[96] Guasparre's oldest son, also Tommaso Spinelli, was a courtier for King Henry VIII of England, then Margaret of Savoy in France, then Charles I of Spain.[97] Their second son, Lionardo, entered the priesthood and became a papal

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91   Litchfield, "The Social World," 91; Goudriaan, *Florentine Patricians*, 17–18.
92   Goudriaan, *Florentine Patricians*, 20–23.
93   Caferro and Jacks, *The Spinelli*, 16.
94   Caferro and Jacks, *The Spinelli*, 16.
95   Caferro and Jacks, *The Spinelli*; Caferro, "L'attiva bancaria papale"; Caferro, "The Silk Business," 417–39.
96   Caferro and Jacks, *The Spinelli*, 259–61.
97   Caferro and Jacks, *The Spinelli*, 261.

chamberlain to the Medici Pope Leo X.[98] Guasparre's fourth son, Benedetto, took over the family business in Florence. He worked to restore the family fortunes (which had declined under his father's mismanagement) by dismantling the failing banking firm and concentrating instead on bolstering the silk business.[99] Both Benedetto and his son, a third Tommaso, held bureaucratic positions under the Medici throughout the mid-to-late sixteenth century. By the seventeenth century, the Spinelli finances suffered further losses with problems related to the *fideicommissum*. Even with these financial problems, the family attained noble status at the Medici court and Bonsignore Spinelli served as a senator in the late seventeenth century.[100]

Figure 3: An illustrated family tree of one main branch of the Spinelli family discussed in the book. The image is from the Armorial Book, with the history of the early Spinelli by Giovanni Vincenzio and genealogical charts by Pier'Lorenzo Maria Mariani, held at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.

The Ricasoli offer another model of Florentine patricians as an *ottimati* family. As early as the eleventh century, the Ricasoli owned land in the

98   Caferro and Jacks, *The Spinelli*, 261. Lionardo also traveled to England on behalf of the pope, where he presented King Henry VIII with the cap and sword as defender of the faith in 1514.
99   Caferro and Jacks, *The Spinelli*, 262.
100   Goldthwaite, *Villa Spelman*. BRML, Box 651, Spinelli Archive Oversize.

Chianti countryside on the border between Florence and Siena. The family originated from a Ridolfo or Firidolfi, who inherited the title of baron in 1029 and took possession of the castle of Broglio by 1141.[101] This book focuses on two branches of the family: one based around the villa of Cacchiano near Gaiole in Chianti, and another that inherited the castle of Broglio and, after aiding in Cosimo I's war with Siena, regained family lands in Trappola. As an old noble family, the Ricasoli had titles as well as a social status above that of the Spinelli, though magnate status carried a stigma in Florence.

Figure 4: A photograph of the current location of the villa of Cacchiano in Tuscany, which was the country residence of one branch of the Ricasoli family in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Cacchiano is located in the municipality of Gaioli in Chianti in the province of Siena today, though it was considered part of Florentine territory in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Like other *ottimati*, the Ricasoli worked their way back into the city elite through strategic marriages, mercantile activities, and political offices that integrated them with prominent *popolani* families by the fifteenth century.[102] Piero Giovanni Ricasoli fought for the Florentine armies against the Aragonese in 1478. He was elected as *commissario generale* in Chianti in 1482; served as prior in 1493, *podestà* of Prato in 1497, and *capitano del*

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101 Passerini, *Genealogia e storia*, 4.
102 Klapisch-Zuber, "Nobles or Pariahs?," 218, 227.

Figure 5: A photograph of Brolio Castle or Castello di Brolio in the municipality of Gaioli in Chianti in the Province of Siena. The castle has been rebuilt over the years, and much of the current brick structure in neo-gothic style was begun under Baron Bettino Ricasoli in the nineteenth century. Brolio Castle was the residence of the Ricasoli family for generations and served as a defensive fortress between Florence and Siena. The castle is currently part of the Ricasoli family wine business and lands. It is located in the province of Siena today, though it was considered part of Florentine territory in the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

popolo in Volterra in 1498; and fought in the war against Pisa.[103] His son, Filippo, inherited the lands around the villa of Cacchiano and served the republic like his father when he fought against the French in 1512. Filippo was banished from the city after an assault charge in 1522 and then exiled again by the Medici in 1527. He fought for the republic against the Medici and imperial forces during the siege of Florence from 1529 to 1530; he died shortly after the Medici entered the city in triumph in 1531. After his death, Filippo's three sons—Matteo, Raffaello, and Braccio—worked to restore their standing in Florence and consolidate the Ricasoli estates in Tuscany. The eldest brother, Matteo, became a priest as part of the family strategy to control the benefices on the Ricasoli's ancestral lands in Chianti.[104] Matteo's and Raffaello's death in 1566 left Braccio as the sole inheritor of the family lands. Braccio aided Duke Cosimo I in the war with Siena, worked as a

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103 Passerini, *Genealogia e storia*, 157–58.
104 ASF, Ricasoli Parte Antica Pergamene, Pezzo 366, 12 March 1554; Pezzo 369, 21 July 1556. The archbishop of Arezzo later confirmed the papal orders for Matteo in April 1557. Pezzo 370, 9 April 1557; Pezzo 378, 9 April 1565.

magistrate on the Otto di Guardia in 1580, became a senator in 1586, and served as the *commissario* of Pistoia in 1588.[105]

Bettino Ricasoli, heir to Broglio, inherited the family lands through his cousin, Giulio Ricasoli, who gained prominence fighting in the war against Siena. Giulio provided a commission for Bettino the elder to serve in Hungary, aiding Emperor Rudolf II in his fight against the Ottomans.[106] Bettino's oldest son, Giulio, served in a number of positions for the Medici Duchy: he was made a senator in 1625, *commissario* of Cortona in 1626, *commissario* of Pistoia in 1628 and 1631, and *commissario* of Pisa in 1650 and 1652. Bettino's brother Leone and second son Ottaviano both became Knights of Santo Stefano.[107] Ottaviano and his brother, Bettino the younger, fought, too, for the Habsburg forces against the Ottomans as well as during the Thirty Years War.[108] While magnate heritage did not necessarily offer any advantage under the Medici dukes, their attempts to build a nobility along the lines of the northern European courts allowed families like the Ricasoli to remove any stigma tied to their magnate status and instead celebrate their noble origins by the early seventeenth century.[109]

Figure 6: A photograph of the ancestral parts of Brolio Castle that remain alongside the more modern structure today.

105 Passerini, *Genealogia e storia*, 170.
106 Passerini, *Genealogia e storia*, 203.
107 Passerini, *Genealogia e storia*, 203–4.
108 Passerini, *Genealogia e storia*, 204.
109 Litchfield, *Emergence of a Bureacracy*, 28.

Figure 7: A photograph of the view from Brolio Castle to the city of Siena. The image captures the lands surrounding Brolio Castle and the Ricasoli family wine business.

Much of what is known about both the Spinelli and Ricasoli derives from the traditional method of examining the commercial affairs and political offices held by male family members. The Spinelli and Ricasoli archives hold thousands of papers, from account books to legal documents as well as a vast collection of letters related to family business. The function of family archives as a collection of papers associated with the male heads of household shaped the materials saved and catalogued. However, large collections of women's letters existed in Italian family archives by the sixteenth century. These letter collections depict a dynamic and complex vision of family life in which women occupied a central position in a wide range of kinship bonds that reached far beyond the household.

Gender and Epistolary Exchange

The Spinelli and Ricasoli family archives from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are full of women's letters. There are letters written by women themselves as well as letters written by scribes or other family members for women who either could not write or chose to dictate. There are also many letters from men to the women in their families, who were clearly expected to read and respond in kind. The ability of women to write

letters in their own hand was not unusual by the sixteenth century, when middle- to upper-class women from elite Italian families were often at least partially, if not fully, literate.[110] These correspondence collections include letters written back and forth as a complete exchange; at other times, historians are only able to hear one side of the story. This book investigates how women formed epistolary networks to actively contribute to the fortunes of the Spinelli and Ricasoli families.

Reading early modern correspondence is challenging, as authors rhetorically constructed their letters to fashion a narrative. Just as historians now look at court cases not as a literal recitation of events but as carefully constructed stories, so too scholars recognize that letters contained literary or fictive elements.[111] Neither transparent fact nor pure fiction, letters functioned as "composed texts" that filtered lived experience through discourse but were also grounded in everyday life.[112] The ways women chose to tell their stories depended on the context in which they found themselves.[113] Any study of early modern women's correspondence must therefore take into account the rhetorical strategies women used to compose their letters. These strategies affected the outcome of the letters, the relationships formed thereby, and the networks that developed as a result. What letter writers chose to include and how they presented their chosen material reflected conscious decisions about how to present their lives and actions to those with whom each woman corresponded.

Early modern women and men followed formulaic language conventions that rendered their letters more formal than modern readers would expect from family correspondence today.[114] Most letters opened with a formal expression of concern for the well-being of the recipient that might mask a more intimate emotion or sense of affection. At the same time, letters written to political leaders or patrons overflowed with declarations of love and service that evoked close ties aspired to but perhaps not yet achieved. The effusive praise lavished by patronage letters established the hierarchy of the

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110 Baernstein, "'In My Own Hand,'" 140; Miglio, "Leggere," 355–83; Stott, "Reading Cornelia Collonello's Letters," 83; Crabb, "'If I Could Write,'" 1174; Crabb, "How to Influence," 36; See also Doglio, *Lettere e donne*; Gregory, *Selected Letters*; Chemello, *Alla lettera*; Zarri, *Per lettera*; Doglio, *L'arte delle lettere*; Ottaviani, *"Me son missa a scriver questa letera"*; Miglio, *Governare l'alfabeto*; James and Pagliaro, *Letters to Francesco Datini*; Robin and Westwater, *Ippolita Maria Sforza*; Shemek, *Isabella d'Este*; Copello, *Vittora Colonna*; Tomas, *Maria Salviati de'Medici*.
111 Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*, 3–4; Cohen, *Words and Deeds*, 19–20; Sadlack, "Epistolary Negotiations," 693.
112 Couchman and Crabb, *Women's Letters*, 5.
113 Neuschel, *Word of Honor*, 103; Monagle et al., *European Women's Letter-Writing*, 8–10.
114 Cohen, "More Trials for Artemisia," 253.

patron-client relationship. It is thus often difficult to gauge the authenticity of emotions in early modern letters.[115] The salutations chosen cannot be read literally, though they mattered very much: they reflected the connection the author worked to build with the recipient. While formulaic, letter-writing conventions can tell scholars a lot about the goals of the correspondence and the relationship (real or fictive) between author and recipient.

Women's correspondence did not always conform to formal letter-writing conventions. While humanist-style letters required correct grammatical form, familiar correspondence and everyday family letters allowed some bending of the rules, which enabled more women to engage in epistolary activities.[116] The letters of the Spinelli and Ricasoli women were more closely connected to oral culture, as they focused on practical concerns in everyday life more so than the carefully crafted compositions of female humanists intended for publication.[117] Even so, patrician women expected that others would read and circulate their correspondence.[118] The success of translating the message of a note on the page to a sustained association with a person or persons varied, depending on the recipient's willingness and/or ability to circulate the letter—or, more likely, orally pass on news and greetings to those mentioned in the correspondence.[119]

The multi-layered interactions that occurred in letter writing offer insights into how women negotiated the use of epistolary exchange.[120] Letters were meant to be practical, written for one or more specific purpose(s) that the letter writer hoped to achieve.[121] More often than not, family letters served several purposes discussed in a somewhat disjointed jump from topic to topic with very minimal use of punctuation.[122] The semipublic nature of family letters meant that multisided conversations occurred as individuals exchanged messages and responded to one another—or several people—at once. Both women and men wrote in their own hand and also commonly employed scribes to handle their correspondence. Authors

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115   Cohen, "More Trials for Artemisia," 253; Broomhall, *Gender and Emotions*, 7–8; Tomas, *Maria Salviati de'Medici*, 24; James and O'Leary, "Letter-Writing," 260–61.
116   Najemy, *Between Friends*, 22; Couchman and Crabb, *Women's Letters*, 7–8; De' Amelia, "Lo scambio," 80; Chemello, *Alla lettera*; Doglio, *Lettere e donna*.
117   Castiglione, *Accounting for Affection*, 20; Crabb, "How to Influence," 36; Doglio, "Letter Writing," 16; Ray, *Writing Gender*, 5–10. Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy*.
118   Cohen, "More Trials for Artemisia," 253–54.
119   Daybell, "Privacy," 150–51.
120   Daybell and Gordon, *Women and Epistolary Agency*, 2.
121   Cohen, "More Trials for Artemisia," 253.
122   Tomas, *Maria Salviati de'Medici*, 27.

routinely alternated between composition and dictation.[123] Some women overtly claimed authorship over their writing, though not all women so clearly marked their role on the written page. Letter writing was thus often a collaborative process for both men and women. These interactions shaped the form and content of early modern correspondence networks. The act of taking up the pen was an exercise in agency that allowed women to use their voice whether on their own or filtered through scribes or other family members.[124]

As physical objects, letters created a bond between author and recipient in ways that enabled women to develop and sustain alliances and networks.[125] Often accompanied by a gift of food or clothing, the material nature of epistolary exchange resulted in tangible benefits for women and their families. Sometimes, of course, women's letters failed to produce the desired results: requests were not granted nor was advice heeded. Nevertheless, writing a letter provided women with a textual space from which to emerge as power brokers in commercial dealings and political relationships.[126] Through their letters, women built social connections, ordered material goods, pursued financial opportunities, formed spiritual ties, and cultivated political associations. The resulting epistolary networks influenced the operations of family life as well as larger social, religious, economic, and political affairs in early modern Italy.

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123 Couchman and Crabb, *Women's Letters*, 8–9; Stott, "Reading Cornelia Collonello's Letters," 83.
124 Daybell and Gordon, *Women and Epistolary Agency*, 7; Monagle et al., *European Women's Letter-Writing*, 18–19.
125 Shemek, "In Continuous Expectation," 285.
126 Daybell and Gordon, *Women and Epistolary Agency*, 4; Monagle et al., *European Women's Letter-Writing*, 128.

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