

Non Sine Labore: Cultural Endeavours of the Gondi Family in Cinquecento Florence



Gondi coat of arms including their motto 'Non Sine Labore'

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Patrician Patronage Project: Research Paper
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Introduction

A vast body of literature on the Medici dominates studies into art patronage in Renaissance Florence. Surely this reflects the family's historical significance. Still, even though in general the grand-ducal Medici court dictated political and cultural life in Renaissance Florence, the city housed several other patrician families. Without their support, the Medici rule would probably have turned out quite differently.¹ That is to say, their contribution to the cultural and political climate in Renaissance Florence is not to be underestimated. To this end, the art patronage of the Florentine patricians deserves a thorough reconstruction. Precisely this aim is underpinned by the *Patrician Patronage Project* (PPP). Reasoning from the perspective of the most important patrician families in Florence, the project aims to restore the distorted picture presented by historical studies.² More specifically, the project looks at artistic endeavours the Florentine patricians commissioned or acquired between 1530 and 1670. Furthermore, it devotes attention to the context of commissions – to its circumstances and to the patron's purposes.

As part of this project, I have studied one of the patrician families that operated in – and contributed to – this Florentine cultural milieu: the Gondi family. Following the approach of the PPP, this research focuses on their role in the cultural society of late quattrocento and cinquecento Florence. As you can see, the periodization is slightly expanded in favour of the quattrocento, for the sake of addressing the most important cultural agents. The following questions formulate the fundamental aim of the research:

To what extent do the artistic projects the Gondi family engaged in express the position they occupied within the political and cultural milieu in cinquecento Florence? What purpose did these endeavours serve?

In order to contextualize their endeavours, I shall start by sketching a general Gondi family history, addressing their social and political milieu in contemporary Italy. Subsequently, the French branch will be assessed with regard to the contemporary political situation. In the second chapter, I will shed light on the late quattrocento building projects of Florentine businessman Giuliano Gondi, in particular Palazzo Gondi. Both the building's appearance and the patron's position within Florentine society will lead to some more profound insights regarding the aim of this paper. After that, in the third chapter, the field of research extends from commissions to collections. I shall elaborate on two cinquecento art collectors: Bartolomeo Gondi and Benedetto Gondi. Both were successfully active in the cultural circle, taking up with adepts such as Giorgio Vasari and Medici court sculptor Giambologna. Finally, in the conclusion I shall formulate an answer to the main questions.

Methodologically I have used primary as well as secondary sources. It seems that Florentines, especially Florentine bankers like the Gondi, were remarkable record keepers.³ Apart from the many tax records and ledgers, testaments and inventories proved rather useful for this research. Unfortunately, nearly all of the cinquecento

¹ A similar statement is argued in Elisa Goudriaan's dissertation (2015).

² The PPP has set up a database to make its findings accessible and to provide a tool for researchers. More information: <<http://www.rug.nl/let/organization/bestuur-afdelingen-en-medewerkers/afdelingen/afdeling-kunstgeschiedenis/patronage-project/?lang=en>>

³ Goldthwaite 1968: 3.

documents, formerly part of the private archive in Palazzo Gondi, were stolen in 2001.⁴ With regard to the secondary sources, Gabriele Morolli's (2013) and Joanna Milstein's (2014) recent publications on the Italian and French Gondi branches, respectively, proved quite useful. My meeting with marquise Vittoria Gondi Citernesesi in Palazzo Gondi was perhaps one of the most important sources for this research – a first hand taste of the Gondi's quintessential memento of wealth and prestige.

1. The Gondi Family History: A Social and Political Context

Among prominent Florentine families in the cinquecento, the Gondi are one of the most ancient. With their alleged founder Braccio di Filippi (ca. 770-810), knight of Charlemagne, the roots of the Gondi family trace back to the year 787.⁵ After some time, in the early fourteenth century, the Gondi made a fortune participating in trade networks, which at long last would gain them a prominent position among the Florentine businessmen.⁶ Significantly, Simone de Geri Gondi (ca. 1340-1403) already became one of the wealthiest citizens in town, engaging in national and international financial activities. More specifically, Simone and his family owned *battiloro* (goldbeaters) workshops, which then served as trading companies too.⁷

Even though economically the family had obtained a firm position, their Ghibelline sympathies maintained an on-going ban from political offices. Until the year 1351, when the Gondi 'surrendered' to the Guelph party by subscribing a document. Despite this action, the family name still seemed suspicious to the government, for no Gondi would participate in political life until the intervention of Cosimo il Vecchio (1389-1464). From that moment on, in 1438, the Gondi would obtain important political posts such as *gonfaloniere* and, eventually, senator. Consequently, the family's incessant loyalty to the Medici party played a major role in their subsequent political careers.⁸

The rise (and fall) of the Medici family also affected the lives of other Florentine patricians. On the one hand, the survival of patrician families during the crisis years 1494-1530 owed much to the Medici, who managed to maintain political influence through Medici popes Leo X and Clement VII. On the other hand, many Florentine merchant-bankers who operated abroad without dealing with the Medici were not at all affected by their exile.⁹ Therefore the Gondi, autonomously operating their businesses in Florence and abroad, were able to maintain their fortune, yet gain political prominence afterwards as well. With the return of the Medici in the 1530s, loyal patrician houses were allowed to share in power, although not too much, by being granted access to the *Magistrato Supremo*.¹⁰ They handed out political functions in a clever manner, rewarding Florentine patricians for their support with important posts, yet at the same time not granting them too much power. Cosimo I de' Medici (1519-1574) for example, who became grand duke in 1537, feared a patrician revolt, hence he invited *uomini nuovi* from outside Florence for important

⁴ Conversation with Marquise Vittoria Gondi Citernesesi (February 22, 2016).

⁵ De Vuono 2005: 111.

⁶ Goldthwaite 1968: 158.

⁷ Morolli 2013: 23-24.

⁸ Ciabani 1992: 464-465.

⁹ Goldthwaite 1995: 649.

¹⁰ Litchfield 1986: 25-26.

governmental positions.¹¹ Moreover, besides political dominance, the Medici pertained influence on other levels of society, for example by using books and artistic endeavours as self-promoting agents.¹² Altogether, one could say that the good relation the Medici and the Florentine patricians maintained was of mutual benefit. On the one hand, patricians had a stable economic position; they were entitled to fiscal privileges, yet they could run private companies without interference from the government. On the other hand, the patricians provided political support for the Medici. They operated in a diplomatic network of European noblemen – often as representatives of the Medici court.¹³

With regard to this context, the Gondi are an exemplary case. Firstly, they played their part as allies of the Medici – an not in vain: between 1532 and 1736, eleven men of the Gondi family were appointed as senators.¹⁴ Secondly, many Gondi family members pursued a career in financial and commercial activities, in Florence and abroad, which put them in an autonomous, yet strong financial position. Lastly, besides political and financial ambitions, they also carried weight in the artistic circles of Florence. Like the Medici, the family owned buildings, art collections and were known as bounteous patrons in cinquecento Florence.¹⁵

However, their proliferating prosperity was not restricted to Florence or even the Italian peninsula. The descendants of Antonio di Leonardo Gondi (1443-1486) started a new chapter in the family's history by establishing a family business in Lyon. Antonio had had no political role in Florence, much like his brother Giuliano di Leonardo Gondi (1421-1501), with whom he ran the flourishing Gondi businesses in Florence and Naples.¹⁶ It was through the agency of Alessandro Gondi (1464-1521), Antonio's oldest son, that business was extended to France. A smart move, for export from Naples to Lyon turned out to be so lucrative it made out fourteen per cent of the import of Florentine fabrics into France in the late cinquecento.¹⁷ Whereas Alessandro remained in Florence, his brother Antonio II de Gondi established himself permanently in France.¹⁸

Strategic marriages and a mercantile background soon bolstered the Gondi's network and ensured them prominent political positions in France. Antonio married a noblewoman in 1516, received the Barony of Perron from King Francis I in 1544, and was employed by the church and throne as a financial agent.¹⁹ Already in the 1520s he had acquired a large property in Lyon where he would receive queen-to-be Catherine de' Medici (1519-1589). Her rule would be characterized by her welcoming

¹¹ Goudriaan 2015: 28.

¹² Marchand and Wright 1998: 2. For example book dedications (*Lives*) and large sculptural projects (Giambologna) would perpetuate their power and name.

¹³ Goudriaan 2015: 51.

¹⁴ Litchfield 1986: 142. (11 out of 634 posts) Examples of other prominent patrician families with a similar position were the Capponi, the Strozzi, the Guicciardini and the Niccolini.

¹⁵ These Gondi patrons as well as the artists they acquainted shall be elaborately addressed in chapter two and three.

Vasari 2015: 158. Vasari praised Bartolomeo Gondi in his *Lives*, addressing him as "gentiluomo fiorentino, amatore di queste nobili arti e di tutte le virtù".

¹⁶ Goldthwaite 1968: 164.

¹⁷ Milstein 2014: 62.

¹⁸ Lisci (I) 1972: 257.

¹⁹ Goldthwaite 1968: 180.

attitude towards foreigners, especially Florentines.²⁰ Hence, this relation meant the beginning of the Gondi's rise in French political and financial affairs. Catherine de' Medici secured their power by endorsing generations of family members important positions in the Royal Court. It all started off with Antonio Gondi becoming her collector of royal interest and banker to the court.²¹

Among the descendants of Antonio and his wife Marie-Catherine de Pierrevive were their sons Albert de Gondi (1522-1602) and Pierre de Gondi (1533-1616). Pierre and Albert would invigorate the already eminent status their parents had attained by acquiring high positions in court and ecclesiastical offices. With them, the Gondi became indispensable to the royal court and the church, bridging two worlds of politics and financial matters.²² Pierre undertook various missions to Rome for Henry III and Henry IV of France and participated in the 1592 Papal Conclave. Subsequently Pierre chose a religious path by becoming Bishop and Cardinal of Paris.²³ Pierre's brother Albert obtained many titles and privileges; marshal, marquis, *seigneur*, general, and duke.²⁴ Through his father Antonio he was appointed advisor of Queen Catherine. Despite all this, his marriage to the Baroness of Retz in 1565 proved decisive for him to manoeuvre into the upper echelons of French nobility. In the late sixteenth century, both Albert and Pierre were among the wealthiest men in France.²⁵

Altogether, Catherine de' Medici helped consolidating the Gondi's power in France on many levels. They were often sent abroad on diplomatic or financial missions, mainly functioning as intermediaries between the French court and leaders of Italian municipalities.²⁶ Meanwhile, the family company proliferated vastly in size and output from the quattrocento onwards. By the end of that century, branches extended to locations in Constantinople and Hungary.²⁷ Their loyalty to the French court yielded a far-reaching network and financial dexterity, which in return gained them control over more powerful positions.²⁸ Altogether, with the stalwart support of Catherine de' Medici the Gondi would not have been this successful. At the same time though, the crown's financial predicament maintained its increasing dependence on Italian bankers arranging loans for them through their networks.²⁹ Therefore the Gondi became indispensable to the royal court. In this respect, the connection of the Gondi to the French court is quite similar to the situation in Florence regarding the Medici rulers. In conclusion, the relations between the Gondi and the local ruling class was generally based on the principle of mutual benefit.

²⁰ Ridolfi 1928: 4-5; Milstein 2014: 58. Italian financiers were indispensable due to their financial liquidity in combination with the increasingly dire financial situation of the French monarchs.

²¹ Morolli 2013: 19.

²² Milstein 2014: 1, 58. (see Pomerol 1953)

²³ Ibidem: 137-152.

²⁴ Goldthwaite 1968: 180.

²⁵ Milstein 2014: 27. To provide an example: Albert's money and property estimated to be valued between 1,500,000 and 1,800,000 *livres*.

²⁶ Ibidem: 59-60. Giuliano Gondi became ambassador of Ferrara in 1464, Antonio was the banker of Ippolito d'Este before he went to Lyon. Jean-Baptiste and Jérôme de Gondi, who both worked for the French Court of Catherine de' Medici, were sent on diplomatic missions to Venice in 1560.

²⁷ Goldthwaite 1968: 161.

²⁸ Milstein 2014: 31. For example, Philip II tried to persuade Jérôme de Gondi to gather information about France (regarding their stance on the Revolt). Gondi refused, for his loyalty was still with Catherine de Medici.

²⁹ Ibidem: 57.

2. Late Quattrocento Building Projects: Giuliano Gondi

Architectural projects that rose in (late) quattrocento Florence are illustrative for making out the contemporary position of the Gondi. They seem part of a rather purposefully manifested statement of one particular member of the family: Giuliano di Leonardo Gondi (1421-1501). Giuliano owned a large *battiloro*, that included financial operations such as loans and deposits. Moreover, prominent names turn up – Federigo da Montefeltro (1422-1482), Duke of Urbino, and Ercole I d’Este (1431-1505), Duke of Ferrara. Besides, it is known that Giuliano had dealings with Ferdinand of Aragon (1452-1516), King of Naples, probably because the main workshop was established here.³⁰ Giuliano’s dealings with Naples put him in an interesting position, especially in the 1470s, when the tempers were running high between the Florentine sovereign Lorenzo il Magnifico (1449-1492) and the Northern states. A war was at stake, so Lorenzo personally travelled to Naples to avert an invasion of Florence. Giuliano Gondi is known to have mediated between Ferdinand and Lorenzo.³¹ Altogether, his financial skill put him in an autonomous, yet strong political and financial position. Still, Giuliano, like his brother Antonio di Leonardo Gondi (1443-1486) had no direct political employment in Florence.³² As noted before, their family was generally politically suspect in Florence, a predicament that would resolve itself in the subsequent generations. Considering this, Giuliano likely aimed at projecting his stature in a more salient manner: architecture.

Among his commissions, two attract most attention: Palazzo Gondi (IMG. IV) and Cappella Gondi (IMG. I) in the Santa Maria Novella. It might not be a coincidence that both programs were designed by Florentine architect Giuliano da Sangallo (ca. 1445-1516). Sangallo, who had previously worked for the court of Naples and enjoyed the confidence of many other sovereigns, got to know Gondi at the Neapolitan court.³³

In Giuliano’s days, the Gondi family owned houses in the Santa Maria Novella district, but the main *battiloro* was located in the Santa Croce district.³⁴ The first construction Giuliano commissioned was located in the church of Santa Maria Novella. Here he managed to obtain the rights to a chapel, Cappella Gondi, located on the Gospel side of the church, right next to the choir. Gondi approached Giuliano Sangallo to provide the designs for the decorations. A sculptural addition to the frugal tone of the chapel would be added in the cinquecento, in the form of Brunelleschi’s wooden Crucifix (ca. 1410) (IMG. II). After many requests, the famous crucifix was finally obtained by Giuliano’s descendants in 1571.³⁵ Significant in this respect is the role Duke Cosimo I played, as he lobbied for the Gondi on the condition that they would finish the Sangallo designs. That is to say, the designs were still not executed

³⁰ Goldthwaite 1968: 161. Exemplary company records of the *battiloro* show that debtors owed Giuliano Gondi a total of 15.000 florins in 1457.

³¹ Morolli 2013: 27.

³² Goldthwaite 1968: 164.

³³ Lisci (II) 1972: 585. Giuliano da Sangallo was commissioned to design buildings for Popes Julius II and Leo X, Ferdinand of Aragon, and Lorenzo “il Magnifico” de Medici.

³⁴ Lisci (II) 1972: 579-585.

³⁵ Turini 1995: 50. Giuliano di Federigo Gondi asked Duke Cosimo I for the crucifix, on the condition that he would soon finish the decorations.

despite Giuliano Gondi's request in his last will.³⁶ From this point on, the chapel would function as Gondi burial place. On the floor of the chapel lies the tombstone of Leonardo Gondi, who died in 1449, among others.³⁷ In addition to that, the chapel bears other visible marks of Gondi-ownership; their coat of arms are carved in the floor near the altar, and they appear on the stained-glass window above the altar (IMG. III). The latter was the last work commissioned for the chapel, executed in 1913.³⁸

Whereas it is not quite clear when exactly Giuliano Gondi obtained the rights to Cappella Gondi, he bought the palazzo not long after his return from exile in 1455. The palazzo previously belonged to the Giugni family, until Giuliano bought it for 1200 florins. Unlike the chapel, Palazzo Gondi is (still) located in the Santa Croce district, right behind Palazzo dei Priori.³⁹ Its distinctive rusticated façade traces it back to the late quattrocento, when this particular type characterized the external views of the majority contemporary palaces – compare Palazzo Gondi (IMG. IV) to Palazzo Strozzi (IMG. V) and Palazzo Pitti (IMG. VI) for example. Usually, these palazzi were commissioned by the patrician elite. They all seem to correspond to one prototypical façade: that of Palazzo Medici designed by Michelozzo (1396-1472) in 1444 (IMG. VII).⁴⁰

Even though the exterior of Palazzo Gondi follows the example set by the Medici-façade, it distinguished itself in its elegance at the same time. Roughly carved blocks on the ground floor gradually transition to softer masonry on the first floor and finally to a subtle, smooth surface that coats the walls of the second floor (IMG. IV). Sangallo's patterns in the vousoirs, highlighting verticality, is original and hint at his experience with Antique and Roman architecture.⁴¹ Apart from its grandeur and its political nod to the Medici-façade, the palazzo's exterior is also marked with obvious signs of Gondi-ownership. The family coat of arms recur several times (IMG. VIII), as do the flamed diamonds with torch holders (Giuliano Gondi's personal device) (IMG. IX).⁴² In this respect, the patron did not hold back either with regards to the interior decoration programme. The monumental staircase in the courtyard is particularly elaborate in decoration (IMG. X). Ancient fables are depicted to provide moral education, cornucopiae symbolize abundance, and, more directly, diamonds in flames again refer to the patron himself (IMG. XI). In the margins the letters 'SIN' appear, referring to the Gondi motto 'Non Sine Labore' ('not without effort').⁴³

Whilst encountering these allegories and symbols, the staircase leads to the *piano nobile*, where the majestic *camino*, a grand fireplace, looms up (IMG. XII).

³⁶ Morolli 2013: 150; Turini 1995: 51. When in 1565-1567 the grand restorations began, directed by Vasari, Cosimo I altered the interior of the Santa Maria Novella, including the Cappella Gondi, granting them Brunelleschi's masterpiece.

Giuliano's last will was drawn up in May 1501. It expresses his wish to his descendants for them to execute the Sangallo's designs. (Morolli 2013: 99.)

³⁷ Morolli 2013: 147.

³⁸ Ibidem: 151.

³⁹ Pellecchia 2003: 79-80.

⁴⁰ Tönnemann 1983: 69-79. The palazzo now goes by the name of Palazzo Medici-Riccardi.

⁴¹ Morolli 2013: 100-101. Sangallo's studies of his trip to Rome in the 1460s display similar motifs in the Arco dei Pantani and the Forum of August for example.

⁴² Ibidem: 102.

⁴³ Crociani 2011: 6-11.

Decorative elements similar to those in the cortile occur within the tangle of vegetal motifs: a cornucopia, a flamed diamond, and the family coat of arms (IMG. XIII). Sangallo's *camino* displays his skill and innovative power as a sculptor, for his creation perfectly balances architectural structure and sculptural decoration. Two statues of Hercules and Samson are placed on top of the structure, attesting to the heroic nature of the patron with his coat of arms placed in between the two heroes. In this respect, the sea theme expressed by Poseidon and his court of tritons (IMG. XIV) could refer to Gondi's commercial prosperity.⁴⁴

Palazzo Gondi was already the subject of praise during the cinquecento, among others by Vasari, who explicitly lauded Sangallo's "...cammino molto ricco d'intagli e tanto vario di componimento e bello che non se n'era insino allora veduto un simile, né con tanta copia di figure."⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the palazzo was only finished in the nineteenth century. Despite Giuliano Gondi's dire wish stipulated in his testament (1501) that the "domus magna nova sue habitationis" built to preserve "memoriam suam et pro honore suorum filiorum et domus et familie de Ghondis" was to be completed by his heirs, the construction would pause for a long time at his death.⁴⁶ Irrespective of his descendants' indifference regarding his last wish, Giuliano's words rather clearly state his primary purpose. A purpose that, as we have seen, is already embodied in the stature and decoration of the palazzo – perpetual preservation of his and his family's honour. His words are endorsed by the interior as well as the exterior of Palazzo Gondi, expressing the family's wealth, power and virtue. The Gondi coat of arms, Giuliano's personal device and the majestic exterior of the palazzo, corresponding to the Palazzo Medici façade, are unvarnished evidence of this.

3. Cinquecento Art Collectors and Sponsors: Bartolomeo and Benedetto Gondi

Whereas Giuliano Gondi tended to express his wealth through the medium of architecture, the subsequent generations are rather known for their art collections. In this chapter, the collections (and commissions) of father Bartolomeo di Bernardo Gondi (1492-1577) and his son Benedetto di Bartolomeo Gondi (1539-1616) shall be assessed.

One source that ought to be mentioned beforehand is the inventory of Benedetto Gondi's art collection, dating from 1609. In 1976, Gino Corti transcribed and published this pivotal document in *The Burlington Magazine*.⁴⁷ Dozens of valuable works of art are listed in the inventory. Some identifiable, some not. The major part of the older – trecento and quattrocento – works seem to trace back to Bartolomeo's collection (of which no inventory exists). The insight that Bartolomeo – not Benedetto – acquired this particular part of the collection is endorsed by Vasari's *Lives*. It mentions Bartolomeo several times with regards to his collection, containing works by Giotto (1266/67-1337) and Fra Angelico (1395-1455), among others. The same

⁴⁴ Morolli 2013: 130-134; Crociani 2011: 12-13.

⁴⁵ Vasari 2015: 611.

⁴⁶ Pellicchia 2003: 77.

⁴⁷ Florence, State Archives, Notarile modern, 7029 (*Francesco Quorli, Testamenti*, 1609-1616), fols.8 *recto*- 10 *verso*. A meticulously drafted inventory like this is quite unusual, which makes it a valuable source.

names subsequently occur in Benedetto's inventory.⁴⁸ Therefore, it looks like a significant part of Benedetto's collection was previously acquired by his late father.

During most of Bartolomeo's adult life, Cosimo I de' Medici held sway over Florence. Like his grandfather Carlo di Silvestro, Bartolomeo was very dedicated to the Medici cause.⁴⁹ He held several important positions in Cosimo's government, such as: *Provveditore della Gabella delle Macine e della Carne*, *Provveditore della Frabbrica de' Tredici Magistrati* and *Operaio dello Spedale degli Innocenti*.⁵⁰ Perhaps through these political functions his large art collection attracted the attention of Giorgio Vasari, a close associate of the duke.⁵¹ Vasari elaborately praised Bartolomeo Gondi in his *Lives*, addressing him as "gentiluomo fiorentino, amatore di queste nobili arti e di tutte le virtù".⁵² Since the writer mentions him in several 'lives' as the owner of these painter's pictures, Vasari must have visited Bartolomeo's collection before 1568.⁵³ The collection was probably located in the residence Bartolomeo inherited from his father, which appears in the latter's tax records as "Una chasa posta nel popolo di Santa Maria Novella e nella via detta la Croce al Trebio, a primo via, 2e Andrea d'Antonio di Vicho, 3e chapella di Santa Maria del Fiore. È per nostro abitare."⁵⁴

Besides Vasari's endorsements of Bartolomeo's collection, the Medici superintendent also involved him in the process of constructing and decorating the new Uffizi in the 1560s.⁵⁵ Hence Bartolomeo seems to have developed interest in architecture too. Additionally, records concerning one particular work of art reveal his engagement in commercial activities – Giambologna's bronze *Bacchus* (ca. 1565) (IMG. XV) commissioned by Lattanzio Cortesi. Documents show that the statue was handed over to Bartolomeo Gondi rather soon after its creation, apparently serving as collateral for a non-resolved debt.⁵⁶ Moreover, Bartolomeo's family 'banker roots' are evidenced by a ledger he kept of his financial transactions between 1541-1553.⁵⁷ Another hint at commercial endeavours can be found in business records showing that Bartolomeo was a business partner of Florentine nobleman Bernardo Vecchietti (1514-1590). Both Florentine businessmen collected art (including that of Giambologna), and both the Gondi and Vecchietti families were already active as bankers in Lyon.⁵⁸ What

⁴⁸ Vasari 2015: 383. For example in the 'life' of Fra Angelico: "...e Bartolomeo Gondi amatore di queste arti al pari di qual si voglia altro gentiluomo, ha un quadro grande, un piccolo et una croce di mano del medesimo."

⁴⁹ *Carlo Gondi* in DBI: <[⁵⁰ Morolli 2013: 43.](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-gondi_(Dizionario_Biografico)/></p></div><div data-bbox=)

⁵¹ Vasari dedicated his *Lives* to the Grand Duke in 1550, and painted the ceilings of his *Sala di Cosimo I* in the Palazzo Vecchio.

⁵² Vasari 2015: 158.

⁵³ Corti 1976: 630. Vasari mentions Bartolomeo Gondi in connection to works of Giotto, Fra Angelico, Donatello, Perugino, and Sogliani.

⁵⁴ Florence, State Archives. Decima Granducale, 3622, fol.194 *recto*.

The mansion was thus located on Piazza Santa Maria Novella, on the corner leading towards Via dei Banchi.

⁵⁵ Morolli 2013: 43. Vasari informed him about matters regarding the quality of marble his patron wished to use.

⁵⁶ Paolozzi Strozzi 2006: 155.

⁵⁷ <http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/medren/pageturn.html?q=bartolomeo%20gondi&id=MEDREN_4638543&doubleside=0&rotation=0¤tpage=1>

⁵⁸ Morolli 2013: 43, 173.

these examples seem to expose is commercial businessmen employing art as financial means, utilizing its monetary value in addition to its obvious artistic (aesthetic) value.

Benedetto Gondi followed closely in his father's footsteps. After Bartolomeo's death in 1577, Benedetto maintained – and enriched – his father's precious art collection at Piazza Santa Maria Novella.⁵⁹ Probably through Bartolomeo's vast network he soon acquainted Florentine patricians with similar cultural interests – most importantly the Medici, the Vecchietti and the Salviati. In the same way, Benedetto became one of the closest friends and patrons of the previously mentioned sculptor Giambologna.⁶⁰ Among other things, their friendship is attested by the sculptor selecting Benedetto to execute his last will.⁶¹ Whereas Bartolomeo only knew Giambologna in his younger years, Benedetto's relationship with the sculptor started around the same time the latter had already joined the Accademia del Disegno (1573) and had become the Medici court sculptor.⁶² In the 1580s Benedetto and Giambologna would first pursue a major joint endeavour – decorating the St. Antoninus Chapel in the church of San Marco (IMG. XVII).⁶³ Here Benedetto's role as connoisseur and sponsor is properly reflected, for, firstly, Averardo and Antonio Salviati entrusted him with the task of supervising all aspects of the project, and secondly, Benedetto financed the major part of the construction – his name turns up in the majority of payment records.⁶⁴

While the major part of Benedetto's collection seems to have been part of an inheritance, the inventory does also attest to his role as supervisor and financier of the Salviati project and to his friendship with Giambologna. Among the objects listed are two canvases by Il Passignano, twenty-two watercolour cartoons by Alessandro Allori, and a painted sketch of Battista Naldini – all these were studies for the St. Antoninus Chapel project in which these artists participated.⁶⁵ Furthermore it lists no fewer than eighteen works by Giambologna, among those one model for the chapel. Other works by the sculptor comprised in the inventory are primarily bronze statuettes and wax models.⁶⁶ Among these are a "Mercurio" (IMG. XVI) in bronze and a wax study for Giambologna's *Rape of the Sabines* (1582: Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence).⁶⁷

All things considered, what did Bartolomeo and Benedetto gain? What were the purposes of their collections and commissions? On the one hand, more than his father, Benedetto appeared to have had great affection for the collection, apart from it just being a status symbol. As stated in his testament, he begged his beneficiary relatives, for he was without a direct heir, not to disperse the wonderful objects.⁶⁸ Bearing in mind that he devoted special attention to artistic endeavours for most of his life, he

⁵⁹ Morolli 2013: 43.

⁶⁰ Cornelison 2012: 125.

⁶¹ Corti 1976: 630.

⁶² Cornelison 2012: 125. For Francesco de' Medici and Cosimo I de' Medici he would execute numerous statues, for example the bronze equestrian statue of Cosimo I (1587).

⁶³ Ibidem: 131. Giambologna signed the contract on 8 September 1582 for the execution of seven marble statues of saints and six bronze reliefs. The total cost was 4000 gold ducats.

⁶⁴ Jestaz 1995: 12.

⁶⁵ Cornelison 2012: 131.

⁶⁶ Corti 1976: 633.

⁶⁷ Avery 1978: 69. For the complete list, see Gino Corti's article (1976).

⁶⁸ Florence, State Archives, Notarile modern, 7029, fol.10 *recto*: "Pregando detti heredi di non distrarre, ma mantenere unite tutte le cose delitiose di detto testatore, descritte in un inventario rogato da me notaio infrascritto questo di." (Mentioned in Corti 1976: 630)

must have been a passionate connoisseur and collector. On the other hand, much like his father, Benedetto's position in the art world must have been a deliberate, perhaps even 'commercial', choice. Both he and his father befriended contemporary artists and members of prestigious patrician families. It was the patrician milieu they were born into that seemed a mandatory condition for operating within these artistic circles. Engaging in artistic endeavours apparently went hand in hand with this stature. Additionally, especially for Bartolomeo, some artistic endeavours simply gained him good money. Similarly, Benedetto, with regards to the Salviati project, seemed to be anxious for self-promotion. Even though ostensibly it seemed to have no gain for him – on the contrary, for he even financed it –, many believe that he is depicted in the Naldini frescoes (IMG. XVIII).⁶⁹ Altogether, collecting and commissioning art seemed a lucrative avocation on many levels, money, status, networks and self-promotion – perfect for patrician businessmen.

Conclusion

In the previous chapters I have addressed cultural endeavours of the Gondi family, in response to the main questions: *To what extent do the artistic projects the Gondi family engaged in express the position they occupied within the political and cultural milieu in cinquecento Florence? What purpose did these endeavours serve?*

For the benefit of answering these questions, I have assessed how this patrician family operated within the cultural and political networks of cinquecento Florence. More specifically, I touched on the purpose their particular artistic commissions and collections served.

In the first chapter, I sketched a general context on the Gondi and their contemporary social and political milieu. Amassing their fortune through lucrative businesses, they became known as wealthy patricians. In the cinquecento they added political posts to their résumé, being employed by the Medici courts in Italy and in France. On the one hand, the Medici courts consolidated their power – allowing them to fill important political posts. Yet on the other hand, the Gondi provided loans for the court and provided political endorsement with their vast network, thus becoming indispensable.

With regards to the first chapter, it is not surprising that Palazzo Gondi, assessed in chapter two, resembles the façade of the Medici Palazzo. Wealthy businessman Giuliano Gondi commissioned the palazzo in the late quattrocento after finding a strong autonomous position as banker in Naples. Both the palazzo itself and the wish he expressed in his last will clearly elucidate Giuliano's main purpose – displaying wealth and power. To that end, he had a majestic façade built on a convenient location. Moreover, he adorned the façade and the interior with coat of arms, personal devices and allegorical motifs. Altogether, Giuliano Gondi occupied an important social position as banker. Therefore, he was wealthy enough to obtain Cappella and Palazzo Gondi as a means to display the power, wealth and glory of the Gondi family.

In the third chapter, the collections and commissions of Bartolomeo and Benedetto Gondi were reviewed. In the light of his political employment and friendship with Vasari, Bartolomeo appears to have been a true 'Medici-man'. As evidenced by laudations in the *Lives*, his art collection contributed tremendously to his status.

⁶⁹ Codini 1996: 22; Cornelison 2012: 272.

Business records and pledges in the form of artworks reveal his engagements in the financial world. Benedetto's career corresponded to his father's in many ways. He adopted a similar network of art commissioning patricians and artists. His friendship with Giambologna and the Salviati project reveal his role as a cultural sponsor and provides an image of his network. Assuming he was depicted in one of the Naldini frescoes and the fact that he was listed as main donor and overseer in records, attests to his purpose besides being a passionate art collector: status. Altogether, Bartolomeo's and Benedetto's artistic endeavours reflect both their social position as Florentine patricians operating in 'higher' circles as well as their purpose of maintaining that congenital status.

All things considered, the Gondi family operated within a network that thrived on mutual benefits. Their commercial skills gained them a strong autonomous position. For them, the quintessential way to uphold and confirm this powerful position was art and architecture. Ultimately they seemed to have accomplished their goal, for today, their palazzo is still part of Florence's streetscape, the Gondi chapel is still in perfect condition, and of course, the family itself still triumphs over the sands of time.

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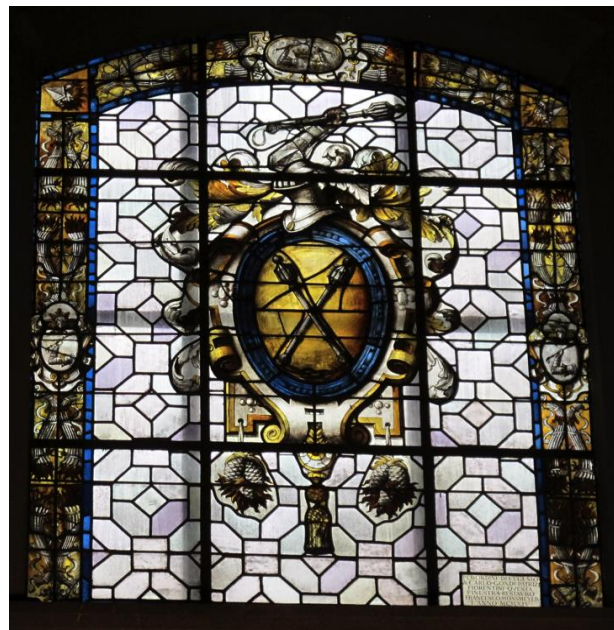
Images



(I) Giuliano da Sangallo. *Cappella Gondi*. Ca. 1480-1500. Marble, stone, glass. Santa Maria Novella, Florence.



(II) Filippo Brunelleschi. *Crucifix*. Ca. 1410. Wood. Cappella Gondi, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.



(III) *Gondi Coat of Arms*. 1913. Stained Glass. Cappella Gondi, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.



(IV) Giuliano da Sangallo. *Palazzo Gondi*. Ca. 1480-1884. Stone, wood, glass. Florence.





(V) Benedetto da Maiano. *Palazzo Strozzi*. Ca. 1489. Stone, glass, wood. Florence.



(VI) *Palazzo Pitti*. Ca. 1458. Stone, glass. Florence.



(VII) Michelozzo. *Palazzo Medici-Riccardi*. 1444. Stone, glass, wood. Florence.



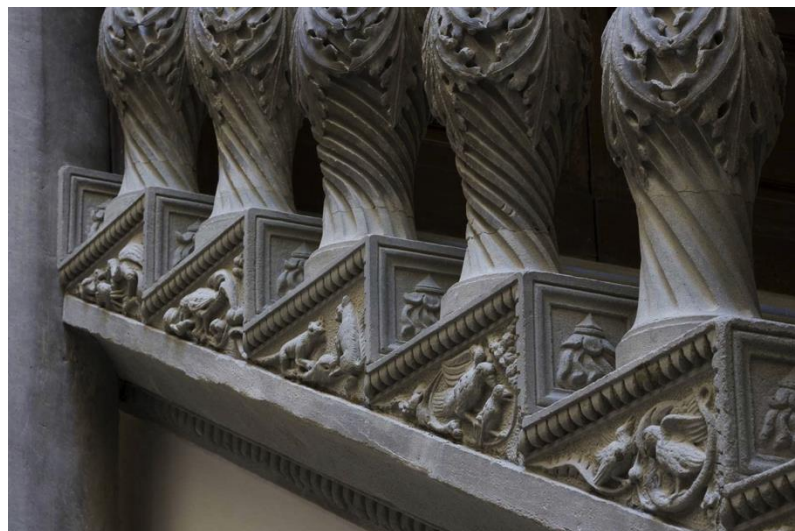
(VIII) *Gondi Coat of Arms*. Ca. 1500. Stone. Palazzo Gondi, Florence.



(IX) *Ring with Giuliano Gondi's Device*. Ca. 1500. Iron. Palazzo Gondi, Florence.



(X) *Courtyard*. Ca. 1480. Stone. Palazzo Gondi, Florence.



(XI) *Staircase (detail)*. Ca. 1480. Stone. Palazzo Gondi, Florence.



(XII) Giuliano da Sangallo. *Camino*. Ca. 1501. Pietraforte (limestone). Palazzo Gondi, Florence.



(XIV) Giuliano da Sangallo. *Camino* (detail frieze). Ca. 1501. Palazzo Gondi, Florence.



(XIII) Giuliano da Sangallo. *Camino* (detail right column). Ca. 1501. Palazzo Gondi, Florence.



(XV) Giambologna. *Bacchus*. Ca. 1560. Bronze. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.

(XVI) Giambologna. *Mercurio*. Ca. 1580. Bronze. Museo di Capodimonte, Naples.



(XVII) *St. Antoninus Chapel*. Ca. 1580-1610. Marble, stone, wood, canvas, bronze. Chiesa di San Marco, Florence.

(XVIII) *St. Antoninus Chapel* (detail left wall)