

## ABSTRACT

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GRAND DUKE: CARAVAGGIO'S ROMAN  
PATRON DEL MONTE AS A FLORENTINE  
COURTIER AND AGENT

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While Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte is celebrated as Caravaggio's first major patron in Rome, his primary activities at the turn of the seventeenth century were, in reality, centered much more around his role as a courtier and an artistic agent working on behalf of Ferdinando I de' Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany. In order to further the grand duke's propagandistic agenda for himself and his state, the cardinal, from his position in Rome, advised Ferdinando on opportunities to buy and commission works of art. He also gave gifts to the sovereign, such as Caravaggio's *Medusa*, always with the grand duke's artistic aims in mind. Del Monte should indeed be thought of as a patron of the arts; however, his relationship with the Florentine court sheds light on an essential but perhaps understudied position within the mechanism of Italian patronage—that of the agent who works on behalf of another.

IN THE GRACES OF HIS HIGHNESS THE GRAND DUKE:  
CARAVAGGIO'S ROMAN PATRON DEL MONTE AS A FLORENTINE  
COURTIER AND AGENT

By

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## Introduction

Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte is famous in the field of Art History today for acting as Caravaggio's first major patron in Rome (Fig. 1). Del Monte was the man who welcomed Caravaggio into his home, connected him with other prestigious patrons, and most probably helped him to finagle his way out of numerous troubles and tribulations both during and after their cohabitation. Little else is commonly known or discussed about Del Monte, and scholars tend to associate him purely with his Roman environment and with his social and religiopolitical circles of influence there.

However, Cardinal Del Monte was, in reality, an incredibly dynamic character and one who was, in fact, tied as closely, if not more so, to the Florentine court during his lifetime. Many of his daily activities and engagements were actually conducted on behalf of the Medici, and particularly for the benefit of his close friend Ferdinando I de' Medici, who became the third Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1587 (Fig. 2). In truth, Del Monte owed much of his success—his reputation and status, his upscale Roman accommodations and lifestyle, and in all probability even his title as Cardinal—to Ferdinando. In return, Del Monte demonstrated a remarkable sense of devotion to the grand duke and to his regime. He became an employee of Ferdinando and of the grand duchy and acted as both a political and artistic advisor to the court from Rome and a representative of Tuscan interests in the papal city.

While Del Monte did pursue a number of personal interests in Rome in areas such as music, science, and the education and promotion of young artists like Caravaggio, it seems apparent from his actions and from his personal correspondence that much of his time was dedicated to the advancement of the propagandistic agenda that Ferdinando had designed to elevate the status of his own image and that of his grand ducal state. This thesis, therefore, will demonstrate that Del Monte should be thought of not merely as a cardinal and a dilettante on the Roman art scene but instead more accurately as a sophisticated courtier and agent who worked to satisfy the aims of the grand duke of Tuscany. To conclude a discussion of Del Monte's activities with his role in Caravaggio's success would be a considerable truncation of his significance in the artistic environments of both Rome and Florence at the turn of the seventeenth century.

The pages that follow will provide a detailed interpretation of Del Monte's activities and motivations as a patron and a player in the Roman art world, particularly in relation to the court of Ferdinando de' Medici. Del Monte was indeed a patron of art, and yet in many senses, he might more appropriately be called an agent or a scout who acted on behalf of the grand duke. This model of patronage differs rather dramatically from the methods discussed in traditional patronage studies. Many of these earlier investigations into late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Italian patrons and their commissions examined the collecting practices of wealthy elites who sought to further their own prestige or that of their family through their purchases of art. Cardinal Del Monte, in contrast, acted not for himself in most cases, but instead for another—Ferdinando

de' Medici. Therefore, Del Monte, from Rome, served a foreign court and supported the political agenda of a foreign regime with his patronage activities. An examination of Del Monte's position in relation to the Florentine grand duchy thus provides a non-traditional angle from which to consider the various roles of patrons and also a more comprehensive picture of the mechanism of patronage as a whole as it functioned at the turn of the century and particularly in Florence.

To set the stage for an analysis of Del Monte's activities as a grand ducal agent, Chapter One presents a discussion of the artistic environment in Florence during the reign of Ferdinando I de' Medici (1587-1609). Contemporary trends in Florentine art are considered, particularly the activities of the Florentine Reformers. The role of the Florentine Accademia del Disegno in the latter part of the sixteenth century will also be examined. The majority of the chapter, however, focuses on Ferdinando's propagandistic agenda and specifically on his desire to fashion an image of himself as an opulent and princely ruler.

Building upon this understanding of Ferdinando's aims and desires, Chapter Two places Del Monte in the grand ducal environment. By taking the biographical information on Del Monte that has been collected by Zygmunt Ważbiński a step further, it illustrates the ways in which the cardinal assisted the grand duke with the attainment of his goals, particularly through the use of works of art. Del Monte's personal letters, as published by Ważbiński, provide significant insight into his devotion to Ferdinando's agenda and his dedication to the completion of related artistic projects.

Chapter Three serves as a case study of a particular work of art that Del Monte selected for Ferdinando. It examines the motivations behind the cardinal's commission of Caravaggio's *Medusa*, painted on a shield and given as a gift to the grand duke. A close study of the painting lends significant support to the theory that Del Monte gave much consideration to Ferdinando's dynastic agenda when selecting works for the grand ducal collections, and it also suggests that the cardinal was able to satisfy many of his personal passions from his privileged position, as well.

The following text as a whole seeks to shed new light on the dynamic activities of Cardinal Del Monte. When Caravaggio becomes a side-note in a long-term career devoted to the Florentine grand ducal court, a vastly different picture of this man emerges.

## Chapter 1: The Artistic Environment Surrounding Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici

### *The Reform of Florentine Painting*

Ferdinando I de' Medici assumed the title of Grand Duke of Tuscany at a time when Florentine artists were exploring a number of new creative avenues. Michelangelo had been dead for more than two decades, and while still revered, he was no longer a representative of the cutting edge of artistic style. Furthermore, his greatest Florentine advocate and promoter, Giorgio Vasari, had also died thirteen years before Ferdinando became grand duke. In light of the absences of these powerful forces in the art world, Florentine artists were left to seek out other forms of inspiration.

Mannerism began to lose its crystalline grip on artistic production in Florence during the 1570s and 1580s as artists initiated the pursuit of more naturalistic modes of representation once again. This likely resulted, in part, from the Counter-Reformation discourses on artistic production that occupied the thoughts, pens, and paintbrushes of so many Italians in the latter part of the sixteenth century. Edicts on the proper methods of representing religious images, such as those put forth by the Bolognese cardinal and archbishop Gabriele Paleotti in his *Discorso Intorno alle Immagini Sacre e Profane* of 1582, emphasized the importance of legibility and credibility in artistic production. As Paleotti wrote, “Il fine della pittura...è quello di rendere somigliante alla realtà il soggetto

rappresentato, cosa che taluni definiscono l'anima della pittura.”<sup>1</sup> These expectations required artists to part ways with the artifice and abstraction that typically characterized Mannerist art.

At the same time, Florentine artists found inspiration from a number of Northern Italian sources. Venetian art, and specifically the works of Titian and Tintoretto, offered much for artists to consider, particularly in terms of light and color.<sup>2</sup> Emilian artist Antonio Allegri, better known as Correggio, also inspired young Florentine artists with his sfumato effects and his measured transitions between light and shadow.<sup>3</sup> Tuscan painters received further stimulation from the work of Federico Barocci, an artist from Urbino, who was himself strongly influenced by Correggio's work. A prime example of Barocci's painting technique and style was available for artists to view in Arezzo. His *Madonna del Popolo* was installed as the altarpiece in the Church of the Pieve in 1579, and as the biographer Filippo Baldinucci explained, many Tuscan artists flocked to the church to study it (Fig. 3). He specifically related the tale of the trip that the young artists Gregorio Pagani and Lodovico Cardi, known as Il Cigoli, made to Arezzo expressly for this purpose. According to Baldinucci, Barocci's altarpiece

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso Intorno alle Immagini Sacre e Profane* (1582; repr., Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002), 66.

<sup>2</sup> S. J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy 1500-1600* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 606. See also Francesca Baldassari, "I pittori fiorentini a Roma dall'Anno Santo 1600 fino all'avvento del papato di Urbano VIII," in *Luce e Ombra: caravaggismo e naturalismo nella pittura toscana del Seicento*, ed. Pierluigi Carofano, 79 (Pisa: Felici Editore, 2005). Baldassari discusses the trip Domenico Cresti (il Passignano) made to Venice from 1583 to 1587. She states that the lessons he learned regarding Venetian color and lighting would become influential among other artists in Florence after his return to the Tuscan capital. His frescos in the Church of San Marco in Florence, completed in 1589, served as objects of careful study for Gregorio Pagani and Ludovico Cardi (il Cigoli).

<sup>3</sup> Giovanni Maria Fara, "Appunti per una storia critica della pittura Toscana dal naturale fra Cinque e Seicento," in *Luce e Ombra: caravaggismo e naturalismo nella pittura toscana del Seicento*, ed. Pierluigi Carofano, 33 (Pisa: Felici Editore, 2005).

served as a major catalyst for the significant shift towards naturalism that appeared in the paintings of the two artists as they progressed in their careers.<sup>4</sup>

Cigoli, in many ways, represented the ideal of the Florentine Reform artist. Born in 1559 in Castello di Cigoli, the town that provided him with his moniker, Cigoli traveled to Florence as a youth and came under the tutelage of the artist Alessandro Allori.<sup>5</sup> He also pursued academic studies with such prestigious classmates as Don Giovanni de' Medici and Galileo.<sup>6</sup> His talents were rewarded with admission to the Florentine Accademia del Disegno at the age of nineteen, and he soon became one of the preferred artists for the Medici family.<sup>7</sup> Cigoli was often called upon for projects ranging from architecture to painting to the ephemeral and theatrical decorations for the Medici family weddings. He was further respected as an accomplished musician, engineer, and theoretician, and he was known to have a strong interest in the sciences.<sup>8</sup> With a reputation as a well-rounded and intelligent individual, Cigoli was welcomed into the Accademia Fiorentina in 1597 and the Accademia della Crusca in 1603.<sup>9</sup> His successes placed him on equal footing with the major literati and scientists in Florence at the turn of the seventeenth century. Cigoli was, however, recognized first and

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<sup>4</sup> Fara, "Appunti per una storia critica della pittura Toscana dal naturale fra Cinque e Seicento," 35. Fara cites Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie dei professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua, per le quali si dimostra come, e per chi le belle arti di pittura, scultura e architettura, lasciata la rozzezza delle maniere greca e gotica, si siano in questi secoli ridotte all'antica loro perfezione*, ed. P. Barocchi, vol. 3 (1681; repr., Florence, 1975), 399-400.

<sup>5</sup> Novella Barbolani di Montauto, "Lodovico Cigoli: I committenti figlinesi, l'amicizia col Pagani e il 'colorire naturale e vero,'" in *Colorire naturale e vero. Figline, il Cigoli e i suoi amici*, eds. Novella Barbolani di Montauto and Miles Chappell, 19-25 (Florence: Edizioni Polistampa, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Miles Chappell, "Il Cigoli e Figline: da apprendista a maestro," in *Colorire naturale e vero. Figline, il Cigoli e i suoi amici*, eds. Novella Barbolani di Montauto and Miles Chappell, 44 (Florence: Edizioni Polistampa, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>8</sup> Miles Chappell, "Cigoli, Galileo, and *Invidia*," *The Art Bulletin* 57, no.1 (March 1975): 93.

<sup>9</sup> Chappell, "Cigoli, Galileo, and *Invidia*," 93. See also *Mostra del Cigoli e del suo ambiente*, Mario Bucci, et al. (San Miniato: Accademia degli Euteleti, 1959), 34.

foremost as a superlative painter. Galileo called him “il primo pittore de’ suoi tempi,” while Baldinucci later referred to him as “il Tiziano e l’Correggio fiorentino.”<sup>10</sup>

Paintings such as Cigoli’s *Martirio di San Lorenzo* of 1590 provide strong illustrations of the rationale behind his designation as one of the major reformers of painting in Florence and perhaps in all of Italy (Fig. 4). The work, originally painted for the altar of the Church of San Lorenzo in Figline Valdarno, conveyed a sense of boldness and theatricality through its dramatic use of light and shadow.<sup>11</sup> Evidence of the influence of Correggio’s soft forms still existed; however, these traces were countered by a new kind of expressive naturalism replete with emotion and a sense of pathos. A similar form of naturalism, albeit with its own nuances, was soon to take hold in Rome, as evidenced by the work of artists such as Caravaggio, whose *Medusa* will be discussed in Chapter Three. Relevant to the immediate discussion is the praise that Cigoli’s naturalism garnered in Florence at the end of the century.

Cigoli’s paintings also found favor in Rome, and he spent the final decade of his life in the papal city occupied with prestigious commissions there.<sup>12</sup> Even in Rome, Cigoli was still a prize representative of Florence and of the grand

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<sup>10</sup> See Chappell, “Cigoli, Galileo, and *Invidia*,” 93 for Galileo’s quote. See also Montauto, “Lodovico Cigoli: I committenti figlinesi, l’amicizia col Pagani e il ‘colorire naturale e vero,’” 19. Montauto cites Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie de’ professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua*, ed. F. Ranalli, vol. 3 (1681; repr., Florence, 1845-47), 30.

<sup>11</sup> *Colorire naturale e vero. Figline, il Cigoli e i suoi amici*, eds. Novella Barbolani di Montauto and Miles Chappell (Florence: Edizioni Polistampa, 2008), 110.

<sup>12</sup> Chappell, “Cigoli, Galileo, and *Invidia*,” 93. Cigoli received commissions in three of the major churches in Rome. He created a large painting entitled *St. Peter Healing the Cripple* for St. Peter’s (1604-06) and a painting of the *Burial of St. Paul* for the high altar in San Paolo fuori le Mura (1609-13). Cigoli was also commissioned to paint the dome of the Cappella Paolina in Santa Maria Maggiore (1610-12). It merits note that Cardinal Del Monte knew Cigoli and may have assisted with the attainment of these commissions. This is discussed further in Chapter Two.



duchy itself, and the Medici provided him with lavish accommodations in the Villa Medici on Trinità dei Monti.<sup>13</sup> It was perhaps Cigoli's reputation as a true "jack-of-all-trades" that above all merited the pride the Medici had for him. As such, he exemplified the ideal of the Florentine courtier as well as that of the intriguing avant-garde and naturalistic artist.

*Ferdinando's Early Activities as a Patron of the Arts in Rome*

Ferdinando de' Medici was not the first in line to assume the title of the Grand Duke of Tuscany from his father, Cosimo I. In fact, he was the fourth of Cosimo's six sons, and it was only after the deaths of his two older brothers Giovanni and Garzia that he was even able to assume the role of the representative of his family in the Church, the position of the future grand duke being reserved for his eldest brother Francesco.<sup>14</sup> Ferdinando was ordained as a cardinal in 1563, and he resided in Rome from 1569 until he was called to assume the Grand Ducal title in 1587.<sup>15</sup> Although he was an active member of the college of cardinals, it seems that Ferdinando wished to be viewed, first and foremost, as a Medici prince. During his years in Rome, he lived at the Villa Medici. His Roman residence sat atop one of the highest hills in Rome, the Pincio, and was

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<sup>13</sup> Baldassari, "I pittori fiorentini a Roma dall'Anno Santo 1600 fino all'avvento del papato di Urbano VIII," 82.

<sup>14</sup> Suzanne B. Butters, "Ferdinando de' Medici and the Art of the Possible," in *The Medici, Michelangelo, and the Art of Late Renaissance Florence*, eds. Marco Chiarini, Alan P. Darr, and Larry J. Feinberg, et al., 67 (New Haven: Yale University Press, in association with the Detroit Institute of Arts, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Suzanne B. Butters, "'Magnifico, non senza eccesso': riflessioni sul mecenatismo del cardinale Ferdinando de' Medici," in *Villa Medici: Il sogno di un cardinale: Collezioni e artisti di Ferdinando de' Medici*, ed. Michel Hochmann, 23 (Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 1999). See also Butters, "Ferdinando de' Medici and the Art of the Possible," 69.

easily visible from most parts of the city.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the villa was lavishly decorated, and Ferdinando augmented it significantly over time with precious art objects as his tastes and his skills for collecting matured. Ferdinando's early commissions for the Villa Medici foreshadowed much of the patronage that was to come from him in Florence as grand duke.

In accordance with his religious appointment, Ferdinando hung paintings in his villa that conformed satisfactorily to Counter-Reformation ideals. In contrast, however, the painted ceilings and the sculptures found throughout the residence were often more sensual in their themes and in the way in which the subjects were rendered. Ferdinando, for example, was known to have a number of Venuses and other female nudes, both contemporary and antique, on display throughout the villa (Fig. 5). Moreover, the ceilings in the apartment over the loggia were decorated with images of the pagan gods painted by Jacopo Zucchi, including scenes representing the theme of the loves of the gods. These works, however, were reserved for the more private rooms in the villa.<sup>17</sup> Ferdinando also possessed an admirable collection of fine glass and porcelain objects. Glass held a particular significance for the young cardinal, and he would later establish glass factories in Florence to rival those of Venice.<sup>18</sup>

Above all, Ferdinando decorated his villa with thoughts toward the celebration of his Florentine lineage. The paintings of Andrea del Sarto hung in

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<sup>16</sup> Christopher Hibbert, *The House of Medici: Its Rise and Fall* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1975), 279.

<sup>17</sup> Michel Hochmann, "La collezione di villa Medici: i primi esperimenti museografici del cardinale Ferdinando," in *Villa Medici: Il sogno di un cardinale: Collezioni e artisti di Ferdinando de' Medici*, ed. Michel Hochmann, 17-18 (Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

places of honor in every room, and works by Florentines such as Pontormo, Francesco Salviati, and Beccafumi occupied other significant posts throughout the villa.<sup>19</sup> Ferdinando also hung many works by prominent Venetian artists, particularly those of Jacopo Bassano and of Titian. Curiously, not a single painting by Raphael was displayed at the Villa Medici, although his works would hang later in Ferdinando's Tribuna in the Uffizi.<sup>20</sup> Ferdinando did, however, commission and display works by other artists who were not from Tuscany or Venice, such as the portrait of himself as a cardinal by Scipione Pulzone (Fig. 6).<sup>21</sup> Even these early examples of Ferdinando's predilections as a patron serve as evidence of his desire to promote the prestige of the Medici family and, above all, that of Tuscany. This wish that Tuscany be considered as an equal of the other great states of Italy and of Europe would remain with Ferdinando, and would, moreover, become his primary goal once he assumed the title of Grand Duke.

#### *The Artistic Agenda of Ferdinando as Grand Duke of Tuscany*

As a result of the sudden death of Francesco de' Medici in October 1587, Ferdinando quickly left his post in Rome and returned to Florence to become the third grand duke of Tuscany. In his new position, he immediately initiated a campaign to reinforce and to further strengthen the image of his native state, both within Tuscany and internationally. The desire to convey a sense of *magnificenza* was evident in almost every public move that Ferdinando made.<sup>22</sup> In fact, Piero

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Butters, "'Magnifico, non senza eccesso,'" 27.

<sup>22</sup> Eric Cochrane, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries: A History of Florence and the Florentines in the Age of the Grand Dukes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 129-30.

Usimbardi, a contemporary biographer of Ferdinando, described the grand duke as “magnifico, non senza eccesso.”<sup>23</sup> The office of the Grand Duchy acquired a performative quality for Ferdinando. He wished to define himself as a sophisticated and worldly ruler, and he envisioned Florence as the ideal capital of the Medici domain. As a member of a family that knew well how to formulate artistic propaganda and as an accomplished patron of the arts himself, Ferdinando relied heavily upon works of art to communicate this political message.

Early in his reign, the grand duke initiated a very conspicuous propagandistic campaign in the streets and piazzas of his Tuscan cities. As his first public gesture, he relocated the grand ducal residence from the Palazzo della Signoria to the Palazzo Pitti, an edifice that had previously been used only to house illustrious guests.<sup>24</sup> For the first time under Ferdinando, then, the Medici resided in a royal palace. This change spoke loudly both to Tuscan citizens and to foreign courts and strongly suggested the imperial status that the grand duke desired.

Francesco also employed numerous artists in the creation of busts and other effigies of himself, his father Cosimo I, and the Medici seals that were displayed in prominent public locations throughout Tuscany. The images were hung on the facades of palaces, on street corners, and within arcades, such as

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Ferdinando even engineered very public spectacles out of his acts of public charity. He inaugurated a new and extravagant annual ceremony at San Lorenzo in which he personally handed out dowries to poor girls. Moreover, he was met with great celebration when he himself crossed a flooded valley by boat to distribute supplies in the neighborhoods affected by the disaster.

<sup>23</sup> Butters, ““Magnifico, non senza eccesso,”” 30. Butters cites G. E. Saltini, *Istoria del Gran Duca Ferdinando I, scritta da Piero Usimbardi* (“Archivio Storico Italiano,” 1880), 367-69.

<sup>24</sup> Marcello Fantoni, *La Corte del Granduca: Forme e simboli del potere mediceo fra Cinque e Seicento* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1994), 28.

those of the hospitals of San Paolo and the Innocenti, all very much designed for the public view in an attempt to advance the image of the grand duke.<sup>25</sup>

Ferdinando's extravagant patronage was also exemplified by his appropriation of the symbolism of the equestrian monument, used by rulers since antiquity to further their grandiose schemes of dynastic representation. In 1601, the grand duke commissioned a bronze image of himself on horseback from Giambologna (Fig. 7).<sup>26</sup> Completed in 1608, it was erected in the Piazza Santissima Annunziata in Florence in full view for the public. He also commissioned another equestrian monument in bronze from Giambologna, this one of Cosimo I, for the Piazza della Signoria (Fig. 8)<sup>27</sup>. These sculptures served as strong reminders not only of the magnificence of the Medici grand dukes but also of their commanding omnipotence. Ferdinando wanted to ensure that his presence was felt beyond his Tuscan capital, as well, and he therefore commissioned additional statues of himself, larger than life-size, for the cities of Pisa, Arezzo, and Livorno.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> J. R. Hale, *Florence and the Medici: The Pattern of Control* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 159. In the vaulting of the arches at the Ospedale degli Innocenti, Ferdinando commissioned the artist Poccetti to paint images of significant events in the reign of Cosimo I, including the foundation of the fortifications at Porto Ferraio on the island of Elba, his coronation as Grand Duke, his creation of the Order of Santo Stefano, and the establishment of the Accademia del Disegno. By locating these images at a hospital, Ferdinando linked the Medici family with the virtue of Charity, again in a very public fashion.

<sup>26</sup> Butters, "Ferdinando de' Medici and the Art of the Possible," 69, 72.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>28</sup> Butters, "Ferdinando de' Medici and the Art of the Possible," 75, n. 73-75. The sculpture in Pisa was created by Pietro Francavilla after a design by Giambologna between 1593 and 1595. The sculpture in Arezzo was also completed by Francavilla after a design by Giambologna in approximately 1595. The work bears an inscription stating that it was erected by the citizens of Arezzo in return for the recovery of the countryside surrounding the city and for its well-being. The sculpture for Livorno was commissioned from Giovanni Bandini in 1595; however, it was transported to Livorno only in 1601 and was not erected until the reign of Cosimo II.

Throughout Ferdinando's reign as grand duke, significant events in the Medici family, and particularly weddings, were fashioned as great public spectacles designed to impress both Tuscans and the many international guests who traveled to Florence for the festivities. Ferdinando's wedding in 1589 reportedly cost over 200,000 scudi.<sup>29</sup> His bride Christina of Lorraine's extravagant journey to Florence initiated several months of activities that incorporated grandiose artistic, architectural, theatrical, and musical endeavors. Members of the Accademia del Disegno, including Cigoli and other Medici favorites, were employed to create elaborate ephemeral imagery designed to promote the status of Florence and of the grand duke himself.<sup>30</sup> Decorations created by Taddeo Landini for the entrance to the via del Proconsolo, for example, celebrated Ferdinando's imperial power by ostentatiously depicting the victory of the grand ducal fleet over the Turks.<sup>31</sup> As one witness to the events stated with regard to the decorations, "Their splendor cannot be described, and anyone who did not see it could not believe it."<sup>32</sup> The wedding festivities provided yet additional examples of Ferdinando's *magnificenza* and his use of art forms to further his propagandistic goals for himself and for his state.

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<sup>29</sup> Butters, "Ferdinando de' Medici and the Art of the Possible," 73.

<sup>30</sup> Anna Maria Testaverde, "Spectacle, Theater, and Propaganda at the Court of the Medici," in *The Medici, Michelangelo, and the Art of Late Renaissance Florence*, eds. Marco Chiarini, Alan P. Darr, and Larry J. Feinberg, et al., 125 (New Haven: Yale University Press, in association with the Detroit Institute of Arts, 2002). The deputy of the Accademia, Niccolò Gaddi, was responsible for crafting the iconographic program to promote Tuscany and the reign of Ferdinando.

<sup>31</sup> Testaverde, "Spectacle, Theater, and Propaganda at the Court of the Medici," 125.

<sup>32</sup> James M. Saslow, *The Medici Wedding of 1589: Florentine Festival as Theatrum Mundi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 2. Saslow cites *Li sontuosissimi apparecchi, trionfi, e feste, fatti nelle nozze della Gran Duchessa di Fiorenza: con il nome, e numero de duchi, precipi, marchesi, baroni, et altri gran personaggi: postovi il modo di vestire, maniere, e livree. Et la descrizione de gl'intermedi....Aggiuntovi l'ordine, e modo che s'è tenuto nel coronare l'Altezza della Serenissima Gran Duchessa* (Florence and Ferrara: Baldini; Venice: Larduccio, 1589), 6.

As mentioned, many members of the Florentine Accademia del Disegno were called upon to create the splendid decorations for Ferdinando's wedding. Under Ferdinando, the academy, in fact, might be thought of most accurately as an "organ of the state," even a courtly entity.<sup>33</sup> It was during Ferdinando's reign that the academy began to mark its headquarters with the Medici *palle*, the easily-recognizable insignia of the grand ducal family.<sup>34</sup> Although the grand dukes were not involved directly in the academy's affairs, they regulated the institution's activities and exerted their will through the *luogotenente*, or lieutenant, who represented the grand duke and his agenda within the academy.<sup>35</sup> The *luogotenente* was so important for the academy (or perhaps for the grand duke) that without his presence or that of an appointed substitute, no business could be conducted.<sup>36</sup>

Academicians like Cigoli were the instruments that Ferdinando used to spread his propagandistic message, and with their assistance, he fashioned a grand ducal ideology. Works of art were created to convey a message of Medici supremacy both within the Tuscan state and beyond. They professed the authority of the grand duke and also affirmed his legitimacy as a princely ruler. Furthermore, by tying himself and his family to the arts, Ferdinando was able to assert the notion of cultural preeminence, an essential quality for any ruling dynasty.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Karen-edis Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State: The Discipline of Disegno* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 73, 209.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72.

The grand duke also knew that artistic preservation and patrimony lent further prestige to his state. For this reason, in 1602 the Accademia issued a decree prohibiting the export from Tuscany of the artwork of a specified list of the great masters who were no longer living. Paintings by some artists were deemed too precious even to leave Florence.<sup>38</sup> Works by living Tuscan artists, in contrast, could freely be exported in order to promote the spread of their creator's renown.<sup>39</sup> In conjunction with the decree, the academicians were placed in charge of verifying the authenticity of works of art and of regulating the export of all artistic objects.<sup>40</sup> In this capacity, they satisfied yet another need of the court, thereby directly serving the aims of the grand duke.

In addition, soon after becoming grand duke, Ferdinando consolidated much of the artistic activity in Florence within the walls of the Uffizi, the administrative center of the Tuscan government.<sup>41</sup> He first transferred all of the grand ducal workshops to the Uffizi, creating a space for them that became known as the Galleria dei Lavori.<sup>42</sup> This was both a political and a cultural maneuver on

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<sup>38</sup> Francesco Adorno and Luigi Zangheri, eds., *Gli Statuti dell' Accademia del Disegno* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1998), 65. According to the order issued on the 6th of November 1602, it was forbidden to export works by the following artists: "1. Michelagnolo Buonarruoti 2. Raffaello da Urbino 3. Andrea del Sarto 4. Mecherino 5. Il Rosso fiorentino 6. Lionardo da Vinci 7. il Francia Bigio 8. Perino del Vaga 9. Iacopo da Pontormo 10. Titiano 11. Francesco Salviati 12. Agnolo Bronzino 13. Daniello da Volterra 14. fra Bartolomeo di S. Marco 15. fra Bastiano del Piombo 16. Filippo di fra Filippo 17. Antonio Coreggio 18. Il Parmigianino." [The spelling here accords with the original order.]

<sup>39</sup> Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State*, 77.

<sup>40</sup> Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State*, 77. The *luogotenente* was responsible for authorizing the exportation of paintings. After verifying the identity of a painting and its creator, in conjunction with one of the highly-esteemed painters from the academy, the *luogotenente* would then issue an export license for the work.

<sup>41</sup> Detlef Heikamp, "Le sovrane bellezze della Tribuna," in *Magnificenza alla corte dei Medici: Arte a Firenze alla fine del Cinquecento*, eds. Cristina Acidini Luchinat, Mina Gregori, and Detlef Heikamp, et al., 329 (Milan: Electa, 1997).

<sup>42</sup> Kirsten Aschengreen Piacenti, "The Medici Grand-ducal Family and the Symbols of Power," in *The Medici, Michelangelo, and the Art of Late Renaissance Florence*, eds. Marco Chiarini, Alan



the grand duke's part, as it centralized the production of art under the wing of the Medici regime. He hired the Roman nobleman Emilio de' Cavalieri to serve as the Galleria's director.<sup>43</sup> Ferdinando also continued to augment the gallery of works on the third floor of the Uffizi, a project initiated by his elder brother Francesco. In the gallery, Ferdinando brought together both new works and many existing works from the Medici family collections. In doing so, he was able to gather in one space a significant representation of his family's *magnificenza*, and he was then able to appropriate it for his own dynastic glory.

Ferdinando also supervised the construction of the Tribuna and the Armeria. Only select, highly-esteemed guests would be taken through these rooms, very probably with the intention that they come away with an impression of the power of the grand duchy both culturally and militarily.<sup>44</sup> These rooms became showplaces for a wide variety of prized art objects and other curiosities.<sup>45</sup> Agostino del Riccio, a monk and friend of the artists Bernardo Buontalenti and Jacopo Ligozzi who were working on the rooms, described the Tribuna as a place in which "si tiene le più preziose gioie ed altre delizie onorate e belle che abbi il Granduca di Toscana" (Figs. 9-10).<sup>46</sup> Referred to as "il fulcro della Galleria" by Detlef Heikamp, the Tribuna housed paintings by the most highly-esteemed

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P. Darr, and Larry J. Feinberg, et al., 32 (New Haven: Yale University Press, in association with the Detroit Institute of Arts, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> Maria Sframeli, "'Bellissimi segreti e mirabili modi': la 'grand'arte dell'oreficeria' nell'età di Francesco e Ferdinando," in *Magnificenza alla corte dei Medici: Arte a Firenze alla fine del Cinquecento*, eds. Cristina Acidini Luchinat, Mina Gregori, and Detlef Heikamp, et al., 388 (Milan: Electa, 1997).

<sup>44</sup> Heikamp, "Le sovrane bellezze della Tribuna," 329.

<sup>45</sup> Giovanna Gaeta Bertelà, *La Tribuna di Ferdinando I de' Medici: Inventari 1589-1631* (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini Editore, 1997), X. These works are now housed in the Museo degli Argenti, the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, the Museo di Mineralogia dell'Università, and the Galleria degli Uffizi.

<sup>46</sup> Heikamp, "Le sovrane bellezze della Tribuna," 329. Heikamp cites A. del Riccio, *Istoria delle pietre*, eds. R. Gnoli and A. Sironi (1597; repr., Torino: 1996), 144.

Florentine artists, including those of Andrea del Sarto.<sup>47</sup> Ferdinando also kept a collection of medals depicting ancient and modern rulers in the Tribuna. These served as symbols not only of the grand duke's knowledge of and reverence for his predecessors and contemporaries but also of his equal footing with the individuals portrayed.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, sculptures depicting the various labors and trials of Hercules lined the walls in an effort to emphasize the strength and virtue of the grand duke.<sup>49</sup> Every addition to the room was carefully selected to augment the overall message of Medici power.

The Armeria, in turn, accommodated a vast collection of weapons and armor. It had a rather eclectic feel, as Ferdinando even included objects from the Americas and Japan.<sup>50</sup> Here again, the grand duke was very careful to express precise political messages. He avoided the exhibition of objects that might call to the minds of certain visitors memories of unpleasant battles. He wisely suppressed, for example, any references to the atrocities committed by the troops of Cosimo I against the Sienese, who had since become faithful subjects.<sup>51</sup> Instead, it seems that Ferdinando, who was also the Grand Master of the Order of Santo Stefano, wished to glorify the activities of his knights, and therefore, he displayed many of the spoils brought back to Florence from battles against the Turks and Berbers.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Heikamp, "Le sovrane bellezze della Tribuna," 329. The first inventory of the Tribuna from 1589 listed seven paintings by Raphael and nine by Andrea del Sarto.

<sup>48</sup> Heikamp, "Le sovrane bellezze della Tribuna," 335.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Mario Scalini, "L'armeria europea e orientale," in *Magnificenza alla corte dei Medici: Arte a Firenze alla fine del Cinquecento*, eds. Cristina Acidini Luchinat, Mina Gregori, and Detlef Heikamp, et al., 397 (Milan: Electa, 1997).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

As a ruler, Ferdinando had a very specific artistic agenda in mind for the promotion of himself and the grand duchy. He relied on the projects discussed here and others that will be introduced in the following pages to fashion his image and that of his domain. Through these works, he strove to present a sense of splendor and *magnificenza* to the public and to all esteemed visitors to his Tuscan state. His efforts, however, could not have met with success without the help of a team of intelligent and loyal advisors and supporters. His Roman agent and close personal friend, Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, was just such a person.

## Chapter 2: Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte as a Florentine Agent and Courtier

### *Del Monte's Upbringing and Early Professional Experiences*

Francesco Maria del Monte was born into a family that was deeply involved in arts and culture. His father, Ranieri del Monte, served Guidobaldo della Rovere at the court of Urbino and interacted often with Pietro Aretino, Titian's agent, on the duke's behalf. In fact, according to an eighteenth-century source, Aretino, Titian, and other prominent figures in the Venetian and Urbinate art worlds were present to witness the infant Francesco del Monte's baptism. This same source suggests that "Tiziano gl'influisse [a Francesco Maria] nel battesimo il suo genio e spirito pittoresco; da che quel cardinale seppe tanto di pittura quanto altro mai."<sup>53</sup> It seems, then, that Del Monte entered the world under great auspices.

As a youth, the future cardinal studied alongside Prince Francesco Maria della Rovere at the court of Urbino as well as with his brother Guidobaldo del Monte and their fellow classmate Torquato Tasso.<sup>54</sup> He pursued further studies at the University of Padua and received his doctorate in *utriusque leges* in October

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<sup>53</sup> Zygmunt Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, *Mecenate di artisti, consigliere di politici e di sovrani* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1994), 13-16.

Ważbiński cites a letter from the priest Giovanni Francesco Lancellotto to Annibale degli Abati Olivieri, 24<sup>th</sup> of July 1774, Biblioteca Oliverana, f. 354, c. 143, Pesaro. The letter discusses Del Monte's baptismal ceremony of 1549 and provides the quote mentioned above. Ważbiński states that the original baptismal documents have not been found.

<sup>54</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 18.

of 1570.<sup>55</sup> While at the university, he studied under Marco Mantova Benavides, a passionate art collector and protector of young artists. Benavides established a museum in his palazzo in the district of Porciglia, and it quickly became known as a place for discussions and debates on current issues in the arts and sciences.<sup>56</sup> Benavides' influence on Del Monte must not be overlooked. It seems quite likely, in fact, that much of the cardinal's later activities in the Roman art world were modeled, at least in part, on this early mentor.

Del Monte relocated to Rome in the early 1570s and established himself in the Roman curia with the assistance of family members and close allies.<sup>57</sup> When Francesco II della Rovere assumed the duchy of Urbino, Del Monte accepted a position as a representative of the new duke's court in Rome, and in this early post, he first began to establish himself as an artistic advisor.<sup>58</sup> He often counseled the Duke of Urbino on ways in which he might augment his library and his art collection. Della Rovere was not always responsive to the young priest's ideas; however, his suggestion of establishing a collection of prints met with a favorable reception.<sup>59</sup> Del Monte also engaged in his first activities as a promoter of artists during this period. On behalf of the court of Urbino, he created an educational program in Rome for the young artist Antonio Cimatori (il Visaccio)

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>57</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 39. Del Monte was assisted in Rome by his father Ranieri and by a relative, Monsignore Pietro Giacomo del Monte, who was a friend of Ugo Boncompagni (Pope Gregory XIII).

<sup>58</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 39.

<sup>59</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 53-56. Del Monte proposed that Della Rovere acquire the archaeological collection of Orazio Muti; however, the duke decided against the purchase. Ważbiński believes that Del Monte suggested this collection to the Della Rovere court because he considered there to be a significant shortcoming in the existing family collection of antiquities. The duke was, however, more receptive to collections of coins and other antique medals.

from Urbino, a student of Federico Barocci.<sup>60</sup> Numerous endeavors with other young students were to follow in Del Monte's future.

Through his activities as a mediator between the courts of Urbino and Tuscany, Del Monte made the acquaintance of Ferdinando de' Medici, who was, at the time, representing the Medici family as a cardinal in Rome. The two men soon became quite close, and in 1586, the priest accepted an official position in the Medici court.<sup>61</sup> He served as Ferdinando's close personal assistant and advisor and spent a significant amount of time in Florence with his employer and friend.<sup>62</sup> After Ferdinando became the Grand Duke of Tuscany in 1587, and possibly with some tugs on political strings by the Medici, Del Monte was made a cardinal, and he returned to Rome in 1589 to assume the position left vacant by Ferdinando.<sup>63</sup>

#### *Del Monte as a Representative of the Medici Court*

Cardinal Del Monte was now the primary representative of the grand duke's interests in Rome and particularly within the papal curia, a position independent of the Tuscan ambassador.<sup>64</sup> Although he was not Florentine by birth and never resided in Tuscany on a permanent basis, it is essential to

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<sup>60</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 61-62. Ważbiński supports this discussion of Cimatori's Roman education with a number of letters written by Baldo Falcucci, the Della Rovere's ambassador in Rome, to the duke.

<sup>61</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 47-48.

<sup>62</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 79, 84, 90. Del Monte made a number of trips to Florence between 1574-87, both with Ferdinando de' Medici and on his own. He again stayed in Florence for a period of two years from 1587 through 1589, returning to Rome to assume Ferdinando's vacant position. Del Monte also sojourned in the Tuscan capital from the 25th of July 1598 through the 30th of January 1599.

<sup>63</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 78-79. Del Monte experienced a significant amount of hostility from his Tuscan rivals after being chosen as Ferdinando de' Medici's successor in Rome.

<sup>64</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 79.

recognize that Del Monte was a Florentine courtier in every sense of the word. He was incredibly devoted to Ferdinando, and the grand duke reciprocated with similar emotion. Tommaso Contarini, the ambassador from the Venetian Republic in Florence, described the relationship between the two men in a report to the Venetian Senate in 1588. He stated that,

[Ferdinando] mangia sempre ritirato, né ammette alcuno alla sua tavola, né che sia presente al suo mangiare, all'infuori di Monsignor Del Monte, che è partecipe di tutti suoi più secreti pensieri, e il quale, non si discostando mai della persona del principe, anco a tavola gli fa compagnia...Monsignor abate Dal Monte si è introdotto, già molti anni, nella grazia di Sua Altezza, ed è stato così indefesso al suo servizio, che né alla campagna, né alla città, né per alcun accidente, mentre era in Roma, abbandonava mai la sua persona.<sup>65</sup>

Del Monte wrote frequently to Ferdinando, relaying to him news of all activities, political and otherwise, that were of interest in Rome. As a political representative of the grand duke, the cardinal maneuvered on behalf of Ferdinando and of Tuscan interests among his religious and political colleagues in Rome and particularly during papal conclaves. Accordingly, Ludwig von Pastor described Del Monte as “Ferdinando’s confidant” and as “an intermediary between Rome and Florence.”<sup>66</sup> Del Monte, for example, was a member of the *Congregazione per la flotta militare pontificia*. In this position, he worked to ensure the continued collaboration between Tuscany and the papacy, for although the *Congregazione* was formed to develop a military fleet belonging to the

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<sup>65</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 77. Tommaso Contarini’s quote is taken from A. Segarizzi, ed., *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato* (Bari, 1916), III/2, 82-88.

<sup>66</sup> Ludwig von Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages: Drawn from the Secret Archives of the Vatican and Other Original Sources*, vol. 21 (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, Ltd., 1952), 240.

papacy, all agreed that cooperation with other military orders, including that of Santo Stefano, the knights of Tuscany, was necessary.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, Ferdinando saw this relationship as an opportunity to offer the services of Tuscan military and naval experts and to sell weapons and other military implements from his arsenals to the papacy. Del Monte likely facilitated such exchanges.<sup>68</sup> In addition, while he was a member of this committee, Del Monte made the acquaintance of many individuals who he recommended to Ferdinando for admission to the Order of Santo Stefano. His letters reveal that he also endorsed a significant number of explorers, engineers, and cartographers who he felt would be beneficial servants of the grand ducal court.<sup>69</sup>

#### *Del Monte as a Promoter of Artists*

As mentioned, Cardinal Del Monte wrote to Ferdinando about more than purely the political happenings of the papal city. Many of his letters to the grand duke, in fact, reveal his immense interest, what could reasonably be called a passion, for the arts and for the promotion of young artists. Much of the artistic activity in which Del Monte was involved in Rome actually occurred at his own residence, the Medici Palazzo Madama. Within weeks of his arrival at the palazzo in 1589, Del Monte began to invite esteemed guests to his home for celebrations of art and for lively cultural and scientific discussions, very much in

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<sup>67</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 250-51.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 252-53, n. 28. Ważbiński cites a letter from Cardinal Del Monte to Ferdinando de' Medici, 6th of March 1599, Mediceo del Principato 3760, c. 882v, Archivio di Stato, Firenze. In the letter, Del Monte recommends to the grand duke "Fabritio [Mordente] ingegnere che è stato nelle Indie di Portogallo, et ha visto grandissimi paesi, è buon Matematico...et credo sia huomo di gusto p[er] haver visto assai, et intelligente."



the style of a salon.<sup>70</sup> Medici supporters and members of the grand ducal court are thought to have been among the most frequent visitors, although as Zygmunt Ważbiński describes it, the Palazzo Madama was a bustling “centro maggiore dell’attività artistica,” open to diverse visitors and residents in Rome.<sup>71</sup>

Del Monte is almost certainly best known in present-day art-historical discourses for his promotion of young artists, and of one in particular—Michelangelo Merisi, better known as Caravaggio. In fact, many of Del Monte’s other activities as a patron and promoter of artists are often overlooked. Scholars agree that Caravaggio resided at Palazzo Madama roughly from 1595 until 1601.<sup>72</sup> However, he was not the only artist who the cardinal took under his wing. Del Monte became the Protector of the Accademia di San Luca in Rome in 1595, and in that position, he frequently interacted with young artists.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, he regularly invited them to his home, and descriptions of Palazzo Madama suggest that the residence was often crowded with artists making drawings of objects and copies of paintings in Del Monte’s collection.<sup>74</sup> A number of these artists likely lived in the palazzo, as well, including Andrea Sacchi and Ottavio Leoni.<sup>75</sup> In his *Vita di Andrea Sacchi*, for example, Giovan Pietro Bellori stated that Del Monte, “looking upon Andrea with kindly inclination and recognizing that he was needy

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<sup>70</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 138. Only three weeks after arriving at Palazzo Madama, Del Monte hosted the nephew of Sixtus V in his musical salon.

<sup>71</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 118, 140. Medici supporters who frequented Palazzo Madama included Ciriaco and Girolamo Mattei, Tiberio Ceuli, and Vincenzo and Benedetto Giustiniani, among others.

<sup>72</sup> No precise documentation of Caravaggio’s arrival at or departure from Cardinal Del Monte’s home exists. The timeframe of 1595-1601 represents a general consensus of scholarly opinions.

<sup>73</sup> Creighton E. Gilbert, *Caravaggio and His Two Cardinals* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 114. Del Monte took the title of Protector of the Academy upon the departure of Cardinal Federigo Borromeo in 1595 for Milan.

<sup>74</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 202-3.

<sup>75</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 198-203.

and not well off as to the necessities of life, first of all clothed him anew very respectably and gave him room and board in his house, so that no cares should hamper his talent.”<sup>76</sup> Del Monte also supplied lodging and support to a young castratto, Pedro Montoya.<sup>77</sup> This gesture provides evidence of the fact that his interest in artistic talent even spread to the performing arts. While Caravaggio may be Del Monte’s greatest success story in the eyes of modern observers and critics, it is essential to remember that Caravaggio was one of many artists in Del Monte’s circle. In other words, the cardinal’s artistic interests and concerns stretched far beyond Michelangelo Merisi.

While Del Monte pursued his passion for the arts for his personal benefit and enjoyment, he also employed it fully in his commitment to Ferdinando and to the grand duke’s artistic agenda in Florence. Del Monte was unquestionably recognized by his peers as a representative of the Medici court in Rome, and as such, his actions, even in the Roman art world, reflected upon the grand duchy and upon the *magnificenza* of the Tuscan state. It is essential to recall, for example, that Del Monte’s popular gatherings were held at a *Medici* residence, a fact that provides an immediate link to the ruling family of Florence. Moreover, Del Monte was one of the official members of the welcoming committee for illustrious guests of the Medici at Ferdinando’s villa on the Pincio. He hosted

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<sup>76</sup> Giovan Pietro Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, tr. Alice Sedgwick Wohl (1672; repr., New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 376.

<sup>77</sup> Franca Trinchieri Camiz, “Music and Painting in Cardinal del Monte’s Household,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 26 (1991): 218-19.

lavish banquets there on behalf of the grand duchy alongside the Tuscan ambassador Giovanni Niccolini.<sup>78</sup>

Cardinal Del Monte's actions as a protector of artists might also have lent support to the grand ducal artistic agenda, as evidence suggests that he may have provided assistance to a number of Florentine painters. During Ferdinando's reign, for example, several of the Florentine Reformers, including Cigoli, Domenico Cresti (il Passignano), Andrea Boscoli, and Gregorio Pagani all traveled to Rome to work and study.<sup>79</sup> It is very possible that Del Monte may have organized an educational program for them in similar fashion to the program he had structured for Antonio Cimatori, the young artist from Urbino. For the more seasoned artists like Cigoli, he may also have assisted with the attainment of commissions in Rome. The cardinal probably first made the acquaintance of the artists during one of his sojourns in Florence during the 1580s and 1590s, and he almost certainly would have interacted with them as they prepared the decorations for the festivities surrounding Ferdinando's wedding in 1589.<sup>80</sup>

Although documentation for an organized system of support for promising Florentine artists in Rome has not yet come to light, it would seem that such a program would fit well with Ferdinando's propagandistic aims. By providing the means for Florentine painters to study and work in Rome, the grand duke, with the help of his ally Del Monte, could achieve two goals. The renown of

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<sup>78</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 118. Ważbiński cites a letter from Cardinal Del Monte to Ferdinando de' Medici, 15th of July 1600, Mediceo del Principato 3762, Archivio di Stato, Firenze. In the letter, Del Monte tells Ferdinando that "Giovedì toccò a me, et diedi da mangiare al Giardino di V[ostra] A[ltezza] et fecci meglio che sappi."

<sup>79</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 86.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Florentine artists would be given the opportunity to spread beyond the borders of Tuscany through commissions obtained in Rome, and at the same time, these artists would typically return to their native state equipped with a knowledge of the most current techniques and trends in painting. As a result, their future works would lend a sense of cultural esteem and a stylish appeal to Ferdinando's court and specifically to his art collection.

One additional note of interest is that it seems quite possible that Del Monte also brought some of the artists he supported in Rome with him on his trips to Florence. In a letter to Ferdinando that described a portrait of Margherita Aldobrandini that he was sending to the grand duke, Del Monte stated, "lo mando ancora, acciò la veda l'eccellenza del Pittore, che è un giovane mio allievo quale lavora meglio, più diligente, e più somigliante senza comparatione...et come vengo a Fiorenza lo voglio menare acciò mi facci il ritratto della Signora Principessa Caterina."<sup>81</sup>

While the idea of bringing a student from Rome to Florence may not have had a direct impact on Ferdinando, it is notable in that it suggests the esteem held by Del Monte for the Florentine artistic environment. He may have brought artists with him to Florence in order to have them copy works from the grand ducal galleries for his own collection. In addition, his young *allievi* would have benefited from the opportunity to study the many significant works in Florence.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 95. Ważbiński cites a letter from Cardinal Del Monte to Ferdinando de' Medici, 10th of December 1599, Mediceo del Principato 3760, cc.nn., Archivio di Stato, Firenze. "Caterina" refers to Caterina de' Medici, Duchess of Mantua.

<sup>82</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 96. Ważbiński also rightly suggests that such trips would have allowed the cardinal to introduce his students to prospective patrons outside of Rome.

In either case, the act of bringing students to Florence demonstrated the importance and the value of the works in the grand ducal collection. In conjunction with this, it seems almost certain that such trips and the resulting works of art would have been topics of conversation among both the elites and the artists who frequented the Palazzo Madama. Therefore, the copies made for Del Monte's Roman collection and the studies and observations of the cardinal's young pupils further promoted the cultural potency of Tuscany in Rome.

*Del Monte as an Artistic Advisor and Agent to Ferdinando I de' Medici*

As discussed in the previous chapter, Ferdinando de' Medici led the initiative to consolidate the grand ducal workshops and art collections within the walls of the Uffizi soon after returning to Tuscany in 1587. Del Monte, as Ferdinando's closest personal advisor and friend, returned to Florence with the new grand duke and was present during much of the period in which the Uffizi were being renovated and expanded.<sup>83</sup> Given his unique position within the court, Del Monte would likely have been intimately familiar with the grand duke's plans and aims for his new artistic program in Florence. Therefore, he was able to contribute significantly to the attainment of Ferdinando's propagandistic goals and to the enhancement of the prestige of the grand ducal art collections, even after returning to Rome in 1589.

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<sup>83</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 84. From October of 1587 until October of 1589, Del Monte remained in Florence with the exception of two short trips he took to Rome. The first, from the 27<sup>th</sup> of April through the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 1588, was made to take care of certain needs on behalf of the court. The second trip was made for Del Monte's official promotion to the rank of cardinal on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 1588.

Both Del Monte and the grand duke had a strong interest in finely-crafted objects made of glass and crystal. The Tribuna housed a large number of crystal vases, and others were displayed in a second small room in the Uffizi alongside many fine examples of glass objects (Fig. 11).<sup>84</sup> As a loyal courtier and servant, the cardinal assisted the grand duke with his collection by providing interesting or technically-advanced examples to Ferdinando and to the glass workshops when he came across them. Arriving in the Tuscan capital after a trip to Venice in 1598, for example, Del Monte shared with Florentine glass-makers a number of examples of innovative glasses that he had obtained in Venice.<sup>85</sup>

Beginning during his cardinalship, Ferdinando also collected portraits, including those of important historical figures and of his contemporaries.<sup>86</sup> The subject of one work, for example, was the Turkish sultan Suleman the Magnificent (Fig. 12), while other images represented members of the Medici family such as Lorenzo de' Medici, the Duke of Urbino from 1516 to 1519 (Fig. 13).<sup>87</sup> Ferdinando also owned a collection of sixty-six portraits of *gentildonne* that he kept at his villa at Artimino.<sup>88</sup> The grand duke's portrait collections served as yet another integral part of his propagandistic agenda, as the figures in the images represented allies, ancestors, and other historical figures considered to be worthy role models.

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<sup>84</sup> Hochmann, "La collezione di villa Medici," 19.

<sup>85</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 88-89.

<sup>86</sup> Butters, "'Magnifico, non senza eccesso,'" 27.

<sup>87</sup> Butters, "'Magnifico, non senza eccesso,'" 27. See also *Villa Medici: Il sogno di un cardinale: Collezioni e artisti di Ferdinando de' Medici*, ed. Michel Hochmann (Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 1999), 242-43.

<sup>88</sup> Butters, "'Magnifico, non senza eccesso,'" 27.

In the collecting of portraits, Del Monte again played a role. He himself possessed a large collection of portraits of individuals ranging from popes to scientists to saints. His collection, which included approximately 340 paintings, was even larger than that belonging to the grand duke.<sup>89</sup> Ważbiński proposes that Del Monte's extensive collection can be attributed to his close ties to the students of the Accademia di San Luca, who could have made portraits for the cardinal as a part of their educational program.<sup>90</sup> If so, this meant that Del Monte had access to a copious supply of portraits for Ferdinando. He did, in fact, send numerous paintings of popes, princes, and other individuals to the grand ducal court in addition to the image of Margherita Aldobrandini that Del Monte mentioned in a letter discussed earlier in this chapter.

Additional letters written by Del Monte shed further light on the supporting role that he assumed in the augmentation of the grand ducal portrait collection, which included examples both in painting and in other media. In one particular missive sent in July of 1600 to Belisario Vinta, a long-time Medici diplomat and one of Ferdinando's envoys in Rome at the time, Del Monte wrote,

Nell'altra lettera V[ostra] S[ignoria] mi scrisse che li mandi un Ritratto del Papa co[n] la mitra di maniera cruda p[er] poterne fare uno di pietre comesse; io no[n] intendo come V[ostra] S[ignoria] lo voglia se in pietra, in stucco o in pittura però V[ostra] S[ignoria] mi scriva più chiaro accio no[n] habbi da errare.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Zygmunt Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 2, *Il "dossier" di lavoro di un prelado* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1994), 517. Del Monte possessed approximately 280 portraits of popes, dukes, and other virtuous leaders. He also owned roughly sixty images of important figures such as saints, chemists, and mathematicians.

<sup>90</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 2, 517.

<sup>91</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 2, 518-19. Ważbiński cites a letter from Cardinal Del Monte to Belisario Vinta, 29th of July 1600, Mediceo del Principato 3762, cc.nn., Archivio di Stato, Firenze.

This letter illustrates certain key points with respect to Del Monte's efforts on behalf of the grand duchy. First, it is important to note that in 1600, when the letter was written, the cardinal was writing from Rome; therefore, his association with Ferdinando's artistic agenda in Florence remained strong even a decade after the completion of the renovations at the Uffizi. Furthermore, the letter illustrates the fact that Del Monte preferred to operate on precise instructions from Florence so as to avoid any error when commissioning a portrait of the pope. The letter also reveals the fact that the cardinal considered himself to be in the employ of the grand duke's carefully planned artistic program, and he acted accordingly as a loyal servant and courtier.

Del Monte assisted Ferdinando with the collection of ancient sculptures, as well. The grand duke understood that the intellectual and cultural status of a ruler could be significantly enhanced by the possession of superlative antiquities. As a cardinal in Rome, Ferdinando had acquired a reputation for owning one of the finest collections of ancient sculptures in the city.<sup>92</sup> When he became grand duke, he sent a number of the works to Florence, and during his reign, he continued his quest for additional treasures.

Letters written by Del Monte to Ferdinando illustrate the cardinal's role in the search for and acquisition of antiquities for the Florentine court. They conveyed a detailed summary of archaeological events in Rome, including news of important discoveries and of attractive antiquities available for sale.<sup>93</sup> An

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<sup>92</sup> J. R. Hale, *Florence and the Medici: The Pattern of Control* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 152.

<sup>93</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 2, 541-43. Ważbiński cites a letter from Cardinal Del Monte to Ferdinando de' Medici, 6th of November 1592, Mediceo



epistle from March of 1599, for example, illustrates the fact that Del Monte was directly involved with the valuation and purchase of objects for Ferdinando's collections. The cardinal wrote that "Quanto alla statoa di porfido costoro stanno su le pazzie, di mille scudi, dicendo che no[n] l'hanno voluta dare al Riccardi che gl'offerse ottocento scudi però V[ostra] A[ltezza] comandi; io l'ho rivista et è cosa degna veramente."<sup>94</sup> As he stated in this particular letter and in many others, Del Monte typically viewed the works himself before sending a report to Florence. Such statements suggest that his authority in the valuation of antiquities was respected by Ferdinando.

Another letter sent from the Roman collector Pierfrancesco Vanelli to Belisario Vinta detailed the activities surrounding certain sculptures of muses. Del Monte paid a visit to Vanelli to see the statues, and as Vanelli described,

L'Il[ustrissi]mo dal M[on]te più giorni sono mi mandò a chiamare dicendo di haver ord[in]e da S[ua] A[ltezza] S[erenissima] vedere le Muse. Io resposi che p[er] XV giorni non potevo mostrarle per non essere finite dallo scultore di risercir certi mancham[en]ti, disse volerle ved[e]re così p[er] rispondere à detta A[ltezza] S[erenissima] et così lo condussi et mostro restarne molto soddisfatto et non ci corse altre parole.<sup>95</sup>

Vanelli's correspondence sheds additional light on the structure of the professional relationship between Del Monte and Ferdinando. The cardinal had explicit orders from his grand duke to see the statues and to report on their

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del Principato 3759, cc. 492-93r and v, Archivio di Stato, Firenze; and a second letter from Cardinal Del Monte to Emilio de' Cavalieri, 8th of November 1596, Mediceo del Principato 3760, c. 431r and v, 434v, Archivio di Stato, Firenze. The two letters include detailed lists of antiquities in collections for sale in Rome.

<sup>94</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 2, 545. Ważbiński cites a letter from Cardinal Del Monte to Ferdinando de' Medici, 13th of March 1599, Mediceo del Principato 3760, c. 866v-889, Archivio di Stato, Firenze.

<sup>95</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 2, 545-46. Ważbiński cites a letter from Pierfrancesco Vanelli to Belisario Vinta, 28th of June 1602, Mediceo del Principato 909, c. 759, Archivio di Stato, Firenze.

condition, and he would not be turned away until he had satisfied the requirements of his assignment.

Del Monte also played a part in the completion of what might be thought of as Ferdinando's most elaborate project, the Cappella dei Principi, a chapel for the Medici grand dukes in the church of San Lorenzo in Florence. The idea of the chapel had been proposed during the reign of Ferdinando's father, Cosimo I, but it was not brought to fruition until 1604 under Ferdinando's directive.<sup>96</sup> The chapel served as the ultimate exemplar of the craft of *pietre dure*, or work completed in hard stone, as it was entirely enveloped in colorful stonework from floor to ceiling (Fig. 14). This form of artistry had been celebrated during the grand duchy of Francesco de' Medici; however, Ferdinando elevated it to an even greater level of splendor and refinement after incorporating the *pietre dure* workshop into the Galleria dei Lavori in the Uffizi. The decorative creations in *pietre dure* from the Medici workshop would, in fact, achieve international fame.<sup>97</sup>

To complete the chapel, the grand ducal workshop required immense amounts of labor and precious stone materials, and Del Monte acted as a scout in Rome for opportunities to acquire the needed resources. His letters to Florence regarding these endeavors again reveal his devotion to the grand duke's projects. In one item of correspondence to Emilio de' Cavalieri, dated the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 1596, Del Monte related the tale of his efforts to acquire the services of a Roman stoneworker for Ferdinando's workshop, stating that,

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<sup>96</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 2, 498.

<sup>97</sup> Annamaria Giusti, "The Origins and Splendors of the Grand-ducal *Pietre Dure* Workshops," in *The Medici, Michelangelo, and the Art of Late Renaissance Florence*, eds. Marco Chiarini, Alan P. Darr, and Larry J. Feinberg, et al., 103 (New Haven: Yale University Press, in association with the Detroit Institute of Arts, 2002).

Ho domandato se troveremo dei porfidi assai da poter lavorare [in Toscana], mi ha risposto, che se S[ua] A[ltezza] volesse coprire tutta Fiorenza de' porfidi, che gli basta l'animo di trovarli, et mi ha detto che io veda in ogni modo di buscare due colonne grand[issi]me che ha il Cardinale Ascanio, il quale non le stima, et sono la più bella cosa, che sia in Europa, et che lui le ridurrebbe a tutta perfectione.<sup>98</sup>

Other letters regarding the acquisition of *pietre dure* illustrate the fact that Del Monte, in similar fashion to the way in which he had completed other assignments from Ferdinando, was greatly attentive to the precise details of his tasks. In December of 1603, he sent a list of stones to the grand duke to ascertain which ones might best satisfy the desires of the workshop. In describing the list, Del Monte said,

È ben vero che no[n] so se saranno giusto de colori che desidera il Mastro che non riescano più o meno colorite di quello ch'egli vuole, ne saranno tutte di una grandezza, come vederà nella lista, et de prezzi si vedrà levarne il più che sia possibile, se bene pretendono di havere messo li ultimi.<sup>99</sup>

The letter reveals Del Monte's concern for the color and quality of the stones he found as well as their prices, all of which would have been important considerations for the chapel. In his capacity as a servant to the grand duke, the cardinal was well aware of the desired outcome of the project as well as the level of perfection it demanded in order to satisfy the grand duke's propagandistic agenda.

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<sup>98</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 2, 502. Ważbiński cites a letter from Cardinal Del Monte to Emilio de' Cavalieri, 15th of March 1596, Mediceo del Principato 3760, c. 249v, Archivio di Stato, Firenze.

<sup>99</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 2, 500. Ważbiński cites a letter from Cardinal Del Monte to Ferdinando de' Medici, 5th of December 1603, Mediceo del Principato 3761, cc.nn., Archivio di Stato, Firenze. The list that accompanied Del Monte's letter has not been found.

In the instances discussed here as well as in many others, Del Monte shared in the artistic aims of Ferdinando and worked arduously to assist the grand duke in bringing them to fruition. The bond between the two men allowed them to work together to achieve the goals the grand duke had set for himself and for his reign. Del Monte's letters suggest that the time they spent in collaboration was an exhilarating period for both and that the cardinal had a genuine interest in elevating the cultural status of the Florentine court.

### Chapter 3: Caravaggio's *Medusa* as a Gift to Ferdinando

Because of Del Monte's dedication to Ferdinando's artistic and political agenda, the cardinal would have thought very carefully about the paintings he chose to give to the grand duke as gifts. Caravaggio's *Medusa* (Fig. 15), created c.1597-98, served as a testament to the strong understanding that existed between the two men, and it also exemplified the manner in which Del Monte was able to satisfy both his own goals and those of Ferdinando in his position as an artistic advisor and political agent.

The arrival of the *Medusa* at the grand duke's Armeria was recorded by Antonio Maria Bianchi on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1598. The work was described as “una rotella o scudo tondo con fregio attorno arabescato d'oro e dipinto in mezzo la testa di Medusa in campo verde con la sua imbracciatura di velluto tané.”<sup>100</sup> The biographer Giovanni Baglione stated that Del Monte “sent” the work to Florence, indicating that he did not deliver it personally.<sup>101</sup> However, the cardinal was in Florence from the 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1598 until the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 1599 and could possibly have presented the painting to Ferdinando in person.<sup>102</sup> In either case, all

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<sup>100</sup> Luigi Spezzaferro, “La *Medusa* del Caravaggio,” in *Caravaggio: la Medusa. Lo splendore degli scudi da parata del Cinquecento*, ed. Dario Cimorelli, 19 (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2004). Spezzaferro cites the Guardaroba Medicea 204, c. 18 s., Archivio di Stato, Firenze.

<sup>101</sup> Giovanni Baglione, *Le Vite de' Pittori, Scultori, et Architetti: Dal Pontificato di Gregorio XIII del 1572 in fino a' tempi di Papa Urbano Ottavo nel 1642*, eds. Jacob Hess and Herwarth Röttgen (1642; repr., Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1995), 136. Baglione described the painting as “una testa di Medusa con capelli di vipere, assai spaventosa sopra una rotella rapportata, che dal Cardinale fu mandata in dono a Ferdinando gran Duca di Toscana.”

<sup>102</sup> Giacomo Berra, “La ‘Medusa tutta serpeggiata’ del Caravaggio: fonti mitologico-letterarie e figurative,” in *Caravaggio: la Medusa. Lo splendore degli scudi da parata del Cinquecento*, ed. Dario Cimorelli, 55 (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2004).

sources agree that this work was intended to be a gift from the cardinal to his employer and friend the grand duke.

Painted on the convex surface of a shield, the decapitated head of the Gorgon still exhibits signs of life. Her eyes are alert to her fatal injury, and her open mouth emits one final angry shriek. The blood still spurts from her wounded neck. At first sight, the work may seem a bit gruesome to serve as a gift; however, a closer examination of the painting and its possible sources of inspiration sheds light on the reasons behind Del Monte's commission of the work.

Images of Medusa, with her gruesome face and serpentine locks of hair, had decorated works of art since ancient times (Figs. 16-17).<sup>103</sup> Of particular interest for the Medici was a piece now known as the *Tazza Farnese* (Fig. 18). This work, thought to originate from the first century BC, was created in agate-sardonyx and has variously been referred to as a cup, a bowl, and even a cameo. Circular in form, it features the head of Medusa at its center. Swirls of her hair cover the surface of the piece, and snakes writhe along its edges, their tails entwining beneath the figure's chin. The *Tazza Farnese* was acquired by Lorenzo de' Medici in 1471, but after a series of tumultuous events, it left Florence permanently around 1537 and entered the Farnese collection.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Antonella Romualdi, "La Testa di Medusa nell'Arte Antica," in *La Medusa del Caravaggio Restaurata*, ed. Caterina Caneva, 64-69 (Rome: Retablo Cultura-Arte-Immagine, 2002).

<sup>104</sup> John Varriano, "Leonardo's Lost Medusa and Other Medici Medusas from the *Tazza Farnese* to Caravaggio," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 130, no. 1544 (1997): 73-74, 78 n. 9. The *Tazza Farnese* was seized by the Florentine Commune in 1494 upon the failure of the Medici bank and given to the Tornabuoni family in order to settle a debt. Alessandro de' Medici later reacquired the piece; however, upon his death, the work entered the hands of his widow, Margarita of Austria, who soon married Ottavio Farnese.

Leonardo da Vinci also helped to solidify the ties between the Medici collections and the image of Medusa. In his biography of Leonardo, Giorgio Vasari mentioned a painting of the Gorgon that had been made by the artist and that was, during Vasari's time, in the collection of Cosimo I de' Medici. Although Leonardo left the work unfinished, it must have been quite striking, as Vasari stated that it was "la più strana e stravagante invenzione che si possa immaginare mai."<sup>105</sup> Gian Paolo Lomazzo provided additional descriptive information in his treatise on art of 1584 by stating that Leonardo painted two versions, the first for Lodovico Sforza, the Duke of Milan, and the second that could be found in Florence. Both, according to Lomazzo, were painted "sopra una rotella."<sup>106</sup> Interestingly, the work was last recorded in an unpublished inventory of the Medici collections in 1587 and therefore seems to have been lost sometime soon after this final notation. It was no longer included in the inventory of 1596-97.<sup>107</sup>

It may be possible to gain insight into the appearance of Leonardo's Medusa through a careful study of a particular work by the engraver Cornelis Cort. Cort was a printmaker from the Netherlands who spent time in Italy from 1565 to 1578. He specialized in reproductive prints rather than original works; therefore, his engraving of a Medusa figure was most likely based on a painting by another artist (Fig. 19). Although Cort's work does not reveal the name of the

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<sup>105</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' Più Eccellenti Pittori Scultori e Architettori*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini, vol. 4 (1568; repr., Florence: Studio per Edizioni Scelte, 1966), 23.

<sup>106</sup> Berra, "La 'Medusa tutta serpeggiata' del Caravaggio," 61. Berra cites Gian Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scoltura et architettura*, in Gian Paolo Lomazzo. *Scritti sulle arti*, vol. 2, ed. R. P. Ciardi (1584; repr., Florence, 1974), 586.

<sup>107</sup> Varriano, "Leonardo's Lost Medusa and Other Medici Medusas from the *Tazza Farnese* to Caravaggio," 78 n. 3. Varriano cites the Guardaroba Medicea 126, fol. 138v, Archivio di Stato, Firenze; and the Guardaroba Medicea 190, Archivio di Stato, Firenze.

subject's creator, it is quite possible that the print was based on Leonardo's painting, as Cort served Cosimo I de' Medici from 1569 to 1570 and could have seen Leonardo's work during that time.<sup>108</sup> Cort's image shares certain traits with the *Tazza Farnese*, such as the serpents enlaced around the figure's neck. However, unique to Cort's print, the head of Medusa confronts the viewer from a three-quarter stance, and her face expresses the fury she feels upon realizing her dire fate. Such characteristics suggest a source other than the antique work, and Leonardo's painting, "strana e stravagante" like Cort's print, does come to mind as a possibility.

After this brief consideration of a selective history of the Medusa image in relation to the Medici collections, the motivations behind the commission of Caravaggio's painting by Del Monte for Ferdinando may begin to become more evident. It is first important to consider the fact that the Farnese family members were great rivals of the Medici in Rome. They competed with each other on both political and cultural terms.<sup>109</sup> The Farnese, as mentioned, had taken possession of a prized piece of antiquity that had once belonged to the Medici. It seems feasible, then, that Caravaggio's *Medusa* might have been intended as a work meant to call to mind and perhaps to surpass the *Tazza Farnese* in terms of significance and rarity. The ancient work may still have been in Rome while Caravaggio resided there, and some scholars suggest that it could have served as a

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<sup>108</sup> Varriano, "Leonardo's Lost Medusa and Other Medici Medusas from the *Tazza Farnese* to Caravaggio," 76, 79 n. 21.

<sup>109</sup> Butters, "Ferdinando de' Medici and the Art of the Possible," 70. During his years in Rome, Ferdinando particularly competed with Cardinal Alessandro Farnese for prestige at the Roman court.



model for the young artist's rendition of the Gorgon.<sup>110</sup> This, however, would have been dependent on the state of the relations between Del Monte, as a Medici representative, and the Farnese family at the time.

It could also be possible that Caravaggio's work may have been intended to serve as a replacement for the lost Leonardo painting. Because the Medici inventories still recorded the work in 1587, Del Monte would have had ample opportunity to see Leonardo's creation during one of his many stays in Florence. He was most likely also aware of the circumstances surrounding its loss. Interestingly, Caravaggio's work arrived in Florence within ten years of the first painting's presumed date of disappearance, possibly then functioning as a relatively timely replacement.

If Cort's engraving is, in fact, based on Leonardo's painting, a comparison of the print with Caravaggio's painting lends further support to the theory that Del Monte's gift was meant to be a substitute for the lost work. To most accurately compare the pieces, it is necessary to reverse Cort's image in order to view a closer approximation to the painting on which the engraving was based (Fig. 20). When evaluated in this manner, it becomes evident that the figures in both works exhibit the same furrowed brow and very similarly-shaped mouths. The mouths are open in the midst of an enraged shriek, and both the top and bottom rows of teeth are visible in each image. Moreover, the shapes of the faces seem to resemble one another, with rather square jaw lines and pronounced cheekbones. Additional attention should also be given to Lomazzo's statement that Leonardo

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<sup>110</sup> Romualdi, "La Testa di Medusa nell'Arte Antica," 70. The *Tazza Farnese* was listed in an inventory of the Palazzo Farnese completed at the time of Alessandro Farnese's death in 1592.

painted the Medusa on a shield. Caravaggio did the same. While Del Monte's artist may not have seen Leonardo's work himself, he could have viewed drawings of the piece or even prints such as the one completed by Cort. Alternatively, it may have been Del Monte who advised Caravaggio on the details of the painting, a deed not impossible given the probability that the cardinal had most likely carefully studied Leonardo's work himself.

In either case suggested above, whether Del Monte gave Caravaggio's painting to Ferdinando in order to compete with the Farnese family or to replace Leonardo's lost work, the cardinal would have been acting in the interests of Ferdinando's dynastic agenda. In accordance with the first theory, Caravaggio's *Medusa* was unquestionably an exotic work created to stand out among others in any collection. If the painting was indeed meant to serve as a showpiece, it would then have been understood as a symbol of the excellence and the inimitable quality of the works in the Medici collection, thereby placing the cultural hegemony of the grand duke at a level on par with his rivals and with other heads of state.

If Caravaggio's *Medusa* instead served as a replacement for the Leonardo work, it would still have been meant to lend prestige to the Medici art collection. Leonardo was one of the artists whose works were prohibited from leaving Florence.<sup>111</sup> A loss of one of his masterpieces, even an unfinished one, must have been a great disappointment. With Caravaggio's work, Del Monte may then have attempted to fill the void left by Leonardo's painting and to prevent any decrease in the collection's esteemed status.

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<sup>111</sup> Adorno and Zangheri, eds., *Gli Statuti dell' Accademia del Disegno*, 65.

While it is true that Caravaggio was a relatively unknown artist at the time that he painted the *Medusa*, it is very likely that Del Monte would have made a comparison between Merisi and Leonardo. Del Monte himself seems to have been quite knowledgeable about the work of Leonardo in general. The inventory of the cardinal's personal collection, completed in 1627 shortly after his death, listed four paintings by Leonardo.<sup>112</sup> While these works may not have been originals by the old master, they apparently merited at least the characterization of "Leonardesque," revealing Del Monte's interest in Leonardo's technique and style.

The cardinal was also most probably quite well-versed in Leonardo's scientific writings on optics and perspective. It appears that he may have learned of Leonardo's studies through, or in conjunction with, his brother Guidobaldo del Monte. Guidobaldo, in fact, published a treatise in 1600 entitled *Perspectivae libri sex* in which he relied upon the writings from Leonardo's *Codex Urbinas 1270* and which he dedicated to his brother Francesco.<sup>113</sup> Such a gesture seems to link Del Monte quite definitively to these visual sciences in which Leonardo experimented. Leonardo also placed great emphasis on facial expressions and the conveyance of emotion, as evidenced by his many figural studies (Fig. 21). This alludes to the artist's significant interest in the detailed workings of both the human body and the psyche.

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<sup>112</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 2, 579. The works in the inventory included: "Una Testa di L. Da V. mezzo ovato...e che si chiude (45cm.);" "Una testa (22 cm.);" "Un quadro di una Marta, e Maddalena in tavola (78 x 67 cm.);" and "Una testa (65 x 45 cm.)."

<sup>113</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 59-60. The *Codex Urbinas 1270*, also known as Leonardo's *Trattato della pittura*, is a compilation of the artist's writings that was put together by his student, Francesco Melzi, after his death in 1519.

Caravaggio's paintings, particularly those created once he was officially in the employ of Del Monte, reflect similar concerns. Whether these were the interests purely of the artist's patron is a subject that merits further discussion; however, the fact remains that Caravaggio's works, and particularly the *Medusa*, exhibit great skill in these areas. The artist, for example, carefully crafted the painting so that the severed head seems almost to project forth from the shield's surface into the room. This feat displays the skill of the artist with regard to the use of perspective and to the manipulation of light and shadow, especially in consideration of the shield's curved surface. Moreover, the naturalistic expression on the Gorgon's face suggests a thorough study of human emotions and a meticulous attempt to give life to the subject, even at the moment of her demise.

This interest in naturalism and in scientifically accurate representations of man and his surroundings also accords with the artistic trends that interested the Florentine artists and academicians at the end of the sixteenth century. As mentioned in Chapter One, the Florentine Reformers, many of whom were also members of the Accademia del Disegno, strove to return to a more naturalistic representation of their subjects. In conjunction, as exhibited by the works of Cigoli, they were renegotiating both the effects of light and shadow and the use of color to produce clearer, more precise imagery. Within the academy, moreover, students focused increasingly on studies of the human body, particularly through dissections and through the use of treatises on anatomy that served as the

foundations for their course work.<sup>114</sup> It is also possible that they had access to a number of anatomical analyses by Leonardo himself.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, it is significant to note that during Ferdinando's reign, the academy renewed its focus on instruction in mathematics and related fields, including perspective. Such studies were designed to teach students how to render their subjects accurately and in a fashion more true to nature.<sup>116</sup>

Del Monte was intimately familiar with these trends in Florentine art as a result of his long sojourns in the Tuscan capital. His commission of the *Medusa* from Caravaggio, with its naturalistic detail, aligns itself on many levels with these contemporary artistic interests. The primary difference is perhaps the extreme to which Caravaggio took his naturalistic depiction. While the Florentine Reformers still clung to the softness and gentle grace presented in the works of Barocci and Correggio, Caravaggio instead preferred to render nature in graphic detail. This, however, would have made the piece a unique gem in the Medici collection at the time, especially if the Leonardo work no longer existed. As such, the painting could achieve three goals at once. It appealed to the contemporary

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<sup>114</sup> Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State*, 165-66. The treatises often served as substitutes for the unpleasant experience of dissections as the academy became a more courtly institution. Influential treatises included Juan Valverde's *Historia de la composicion del cuerpo humano*, written in 1556 and published in Italian in 1560; and Vesalius' Latin work entitled *De humani corporis fabrica* of 1543.

<sup>115</sup> Zygmunt Ważbiński, *L'Accademia Medicea del Disegno a Firenze nel Cinquecento: Idea e Istituzione*, vol. 1 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1987), 190-91. Ważbiński discusses a number of theories about the presence of Leonardo's anatomical analyses in Florence in the late sixteenth century. He suggests that Benvenuto Cellini may have brought some of Leonardo's writings back to Florence from France. He also states that Leonardo's student, Francesco Melzi, carried his master's writings with him through Italy as he searched for a publisher for the works and that Florentine artists may have had access to them at that time. Ważbiński then discusses a quote of c.1540 by an "Anonimo Gaddiano" who states that Leonardo had left many of his anatomical studies at the Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova, the site at which the academy's dissections took place. Ważbiński cites the Cod. Magl. XVII, 17, c. 88, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze.

<sup>116</sup> Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State*, 73.

Florentine taste for naturalistic art, hinted at the influence of the great master Leonardo, and also exhibited the flavor of something exotic and avant-garde. As a result, it was a fitting piece for Ferdinando's princely collection.

The political significance of the *Medusa* becomes more strongly apparent upon a consideration of the manner in which it was displayed. The work was recorded as a part of the Armeria's first official inventory of 1631, although it was likely housed there shortly after its arrival in Florence in 1598.<sup>117</sup> Caravaggio's painted shield was soon paired with an extravagant suit of armor that was given to Ferdinando as a diplomatic gift in 1601 by ambassadors visiting Tuscany on behalf of Shah Abbās of Persia.<sup>118</sup> To exhibit the works, a life-size horse and rider were crafted out of wood and fully dressed and adorned with the Persian armor and with weapons appropriate for a joust. As the inventory described, the knightly mannequin boldly displayed Caravaggio's *Medusa* in his hand.<sup>119</sup> To further heighten the drama of the arrangement, a second life-size wooden horse and rider faced the first in the center of the room, suggesting that both figures awaited the commencement of their duel. More than sixty suits of armor lined the walls of the room to complete the impressive scene.<sup>120</sup> This was the picture that presented itself to the illustrious visitors who were given a tour of the grand duke's Armeria, and Caravaggio's painted shield was strategically positioned at

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<sup>117</sup> Detlef Heikamp, "La Medusa del Caravaggio e l'armatura dello Scià `Abbās di Persia," in *La Medusa del Caravaggio Restaurata*, ed. Caterina Caneva, 105 (Rome: Retablo Cultura-Arte-Immagine, 2002). Previously published in *Paragone* 17, no. 199 (September 1966): 62-76.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>119</sup> Heikamp, "La Medusa del Caravaggio e l'armatura dello Scià `Abbās di Persia," 106. The 1631 inventory of the contents of the Armeria specifically referred to Caravaggio's painted shield when describing the wooden figure. The records stated that "nell'altra mano [of the mannequin] uno scudo entrovi drento dipinto una testa di Medusa tutta serpeggiata di mano del Caravaggio." Heikamp cites the *Guardaroba* vol. 513, c. 1v-2v, Archivio di Stato, Firenze.

<sup>120</sup> Heikamp, "La Medusa del Caravaggio e l'armatura dello Scià `Abbās di Persia," 106.

the very center of the arrangement, a principal showpiece amidst the other showpieces.

Del Monte could not have known that the shield would be displayed in such a fashion when he commissioned the work, as the Persian suit of armor arrived in Florence only three years after the cardinal gifted the painting to Ferdinando. However, the original significance of the work, the sentiments intended by Del Monte, likely played a role in its later placement in the hands of the armored figure. The poet Giovanni Battista Marino alluded to the shield's possible meaning when he wrote about the piece in his work entitled *La Galeria del cavalier Marino distinta in pitture e sculture*, published in 1620 but likely written around 1601.<sup>121</sup> His final phrase in the poem regarding Caravaggio's painting was directed toward the grand duke and stated, "Ché la vera Medusa é il valor vostro."<sup>122</sup> This allusion to Ferdinando's courage and bravery could easily apply in a militaristic sense, especially considering the fact that the shield was displayed with armor and other weapons. However, it could also serve as a glorification of the grand duke's moral values. Maurizio Marini believes that Cesare Ripa's iconographic description of *Virtù Insuperabile* in his *Iconologia* of 1593 supports this interpretation.<sup>123</sup> Ripa's emblem for this type of Virtue consisted of a female figure armed with a staff and a shield. A holly tree painted

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<sup>121</sup> Maurizio Marini, *Caravaggio: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio "pictor praestantissimus"* (Rome: Newton Compton Editori, 2001), 416. Marino's work, *La Galeria del cavalier Marino distinta in pitture e sculture*, was published in Venice in 1620; however, Marino visited Florence in 1601 and would most likely have seen Caravaggio's *Medusa* at that time. He would, therefore, probably have written about it shortly thereafter.

<sup>122</sup> Maurizio Marini, *Michelangelo da Caravaggio Gaspare Murtola e "la chioma avvelenata di Medusa"* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2003), 169. Marini cites G. B. Marino, *La Galeria...Distinta in Pitture e Sculture* (Venice, 1620), 40.

<sup>123</sup> Marini, *Caravaggio: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio "pictor praestantissimus,"* 415.

on the shield symbolized, by its durability and resilience, the stability and equanimity required to endure trials and tribulations resulting from any unexpected assault. Ripa suggested that the concept of Virtue, represented by the shield, possessed the same qualities that belonged to the holly.<sup>124</sup> In accordance with Marini's theory then, the shield could have served as an indication of the traits of a wise and just ruler, one who governed with reason rather than being guided by passions and vices.<sup>125</sup> In conjunction with this interpretation, it is significant to note that Del Monte was one of Ripa's protectors at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>126</sup> He would, therefore, almost certainly have been intimately familiar with Ripa's work, including his descriptions of the emblem of *Virtù*. Del Monte's selection of an image painted on a shield for Ferdinando then likely alluded to these qualities of a sovereign, thereby lending further support to the grand duke's dynastic image and propagandistic aims. Here again with this painted shield, Del Monte, as a loyal courtier, was acting to promote the Tuscan ruler.

While the gift of Caravaggio's *Medusa* was likely intended for Ferdinando from its inception, Del Monte's personal interests and goals were also satisfied by its creation. As mentioned, the cardinal possessed significant knowledge and a strong curiosity with respect to the sciences. He was passionate about alchemy,

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<sup>124</sup> Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia: ovvero descrizione di diverse imagini cavate dall' antichità, e di propria inventione* (1593; repr., New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1970), 509-10.

<sup>125</sup> Marini, *Caravaggio: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio "pictor praestantissimus,"* 415.

<sup>126</sup> Ważbiński, *Il Cardinale Francesco Maria del Monte 1549-1626*, vol. 1, 229-30. See also Ripa, *Iconologia*, 254. Ripa wrote of Del Monte in *Iconologia* in his personification of Tuscany. This particular placement in the text further solidifies Del Monte's strong presence in Florence. With regard to Del Monte, Ripa spoke of the "heroiche virtù dell' Illustrissimo Francesco Maria Cardinal dal Monte, non meno da tutti ammirato, e riverito per la maestà del Cardinalato, che per le qualità Regie della sua persona, che ben lo dimostrano, disceso come egli è, da una delle più nobili stirpe del mondo."



particularly its more practical aspects, and he himself conducted experiments from his small alchemical distillery at his garden villa at Porta Pinciana in Rome.<sup>127</sup> The subject of Medusa would likely have had a particular appeal for an alchemist given that her visage had the power to transform its observers from one material state to another.<sup>128</sup> As discussed, a work like Caravaggio's painted shield also called for significant experimentation with optics and perspective as well as a careful study of nature and its phenomena. It seems quite likely that Del Monte himself participated in the planning and revisions required to bring this work to fruition. The final result, however, served as a showcase of the virtuosity of the cardinal's student. By giving the work to Ferdinando, Del Monte could be assured that it would be viewed by illustrious visitors to Florence. As a patron of promising young artists, he undoubtedly would have hoped that the placement of Caravaggio's work in the grand ducal collection would help to spread the artist's reputation. The painted visage of Medusa therefore served its creator and its patron as well as its recipient, and through this work, Del Monte yet again demonstrated his talents as a savvy artistic promoter, advisor, and courtier.

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<sup>127</sup> Gilbert, *Caravaggio and His Two Cardinals*, 124-25.

<sup>128</sup> Marini, *Michelangelo da Caravaggio* Gaspare Murtola e "la chioma avvelenata di Medusa," 165.

## Conclusion

This thesis has served to establish the nature of the relationship that existed between Ferdinando I de' Medici and his courtier and agent, Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte. In particular, it emphasizes Del Monte's devotion to the advancement of Ferdinando's propagandistic agenda, especially with regard to the employment of the arts in the attainment of the grand duke's goals. This analysis, however, provides merely a framework for further study of the many factors active in the Florentine environment that influenced and directed the artistic decisions made by Ferdinando and Del Monte.

It would prove fruitful, for example, to delve further into the political circumstances that concerned the grand duke during his reign. He evidently believed that there was a need to prove himself and to present the image of a princely figure to foreign courts and to visitors to Florence, and these relationships merit additional investigation. Moreover, Ferdinando seems to have felt a sense of competition with other courts in terms of culture and the arts. It would undoubtedly be worthwhile to study the commissions and suggestions made by Del Monte in light of possible rivalries between the artists and artisans of Florence and those of other courts and schools, particularly at a time when Florence was losing its preeminent position as the premier city for artistic production and all eyes were turning to Bologna and Rome.

It would also be beneficial to engage in further studies of the literary and scientific ideas circulating in Florence during Ferdinando's reign so as to discover

their influence on Florentine art. At the end of the century, for example, debates raged in the Accademia della Crusca over the value of the literary style exhibited by Torquato Tasso's poetry in comparison to that of Lodovico Ariosto. It also merits note that both Ferdinando and Del Monte had a significant interest in scientific experimentation and that both had a relationship with Galileo. The commissions made for the grand duchy beg further investigation in light of circumstances such as these.

In many ways, this study has been more successful at raising further questions and uncovering additional avenues for exploration than it has been at providing a definitive set of answers about the nature of patronage during the reign of Ferdinando de' Medici. Del Monte, however, may now receive his due recognition as a rich and versatile figure in both the Roman and Florentine artistic environments at the turn of the seventeenth century. The art world is without doubt incredibly grateful for everything that the cardinal did to spur the career of Caravaggio; however, it seems that additional gratitude is due for the masterly assistance he lent to the arts in Florence.

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