

# LATIN INSCRIPTIONS IN MEDICI FLORENCE AND THE EARLY MODERN VIEWER



By William Stenhouse

*Early modern authors took a keen interest in inscriptions, including the Latin examples in Medici Florence. Guidebooks quoted famous texts, travellers to Florence recorded inscriptions that they saw in the city, and the editors of collections of famous epitaphs or notable inscribed verses included plenty of Florentine examples. This article examines which texts these authors chose to reproduce and what attracted them: their selection celebrated the cultural achievements of fifteenth-century Florence at the expense of later examples, and at the expense of the Medici family who did so much to promote themselves using this medium.*

One of the great pleasures of Patrick Kragelund's *The Latin Inscriptions of Medici Florence* is that it reminds us just how much inscriptions mattered in early modern Europe. This period was 'L'âge de l'inscription', as the title of Florence Vuilleumier Laurens and Pierre Laurens' study of the phenomenon rightly puts it.<sup>1</sup> Inscriptions celebrated and commemorated, entertained and informed. Practised epigraphers produced manuals that promised to teach the ability to write an incisive, witty, and elegant inscription and rulers employed scholars who mastered the skill: Piero Vettori, who promoted Cosimo, was just one example.<sup>2</sup> As Kragelund shows, Vettori used inscriptions to establish a connection between his patron and the Roman Emperor Augustus. This points to one fundamental reason for inscriptions' significance: composed and inscribed appropriately, they were an effective way of evoking ancient Rome. In Florence and beyond, they are an important indication of the spread of humanism.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vuilleumier Laurens and Laurens 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Kragelund 2021, esp., 175-77.

<sup>3</sup> Kragelund 2021, 8-9.

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One index of inscriptions' centrality in the early modern intellectual world is the number of collections of examples on paper that survive from the era. Travellers made transcriptions of the inscribed texts that they saw; their friends copied material for their own notebooks; and publishers printed what these people had gathered. This is a phenomenon that has been widely studied for the ancient inscriptions disseminated in this period: modern ancient historians and archaeologists have long mined early modern records for evidence of monuments that have since been damaged or lost. But as many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century *curiosi* copied and published contemporary inscriptions as they did ancient ones, and their work has attracted less modern attention.<sup>4</sup> Just as in the case of ancient Roman inscriptions, early modern collectors of medieval and contemporary inscriptions gathered these texts for a variety of reasons. Some wanted examples of good latinity; others wanted records of famous people, culled from their tombs; others wanted historical or cultural information about the place in which inscriptions were to be found. For people interested in an elegant verse, or in a pithy summary of a distinguished artist, seeing the text or examining its setting were not important, and often – as far as we can tell today – they derived their information from previous printed collections. Their records of material from Florence tell us about cultural preferences, and about the fame of Florentine Renaissance men, but little about the actual city and its stones. Other collections, however, made by residents of Florence or visitors to the city, are more likely to be based on transcriptions made *in situ*, and can give us some idea of how inscriptions appeared to contemporary viewers, and which caught the eye of contemporary guides.

In what follows I will look at some examples of how early modern visitors and writers recorded the inscriptions of Florence, especially in print, why they did so, and which examples they chose to record: their work provided one route through which information about the city was disseminated across Europe, and their choices played an important role in shaping armchair travellers' perceptions of the city and its scholars. No one in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries published a collection of inscriptions from Florence alone: there is no early modern equivalent to *The Latin inscriptions of Medici Florence* – though there are rough parallels for Padua and Treviso, which cited Latin texts on stone from antiquity to the present, and extracted

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<sup>4</sup> Important exceptions include Sparrow 1969; Petrucci 1993; Kajanto 1994; Petrucci 1998; and Hendrix 2018.

information about the histories of their cities from them.<sup>5</sup> But plenty of scholars included material from Florence in their books, and these fall into two obvious categories: travel guides and travel accounts that mention the city; and works collecting inscriptions on various themes.

### **Travel guides and *journals de voyage***

From around 1550, trips to Italy became increasingly popular among the learned elite from north of the Alps. Many of these proto-grand tourists kept records of where they went and what they saw, and some published their impressions, offering an opportunity for their fellow northerners to learn what they had done. At the same time, speculative authors and publishers began to produce guidebooks to let visitors know what to do and see.<sup>6</sup> Clearly there is some overlap between the two genres, as when a traveller's *journal de voyage* provided recommendations for his peers who were about to undertake a similar trip. Some accounts dealt with trips across Europe, and some focused on Italy.<sup>7</sup> Some guidebooks aimed at an international learned readership and were in Latin; more were in the vernacular.<sup>8</sup> There are also three widely-distributed early modern guidebooks to Florence, all in Italian: Francesco Bocchi's *Le bellezze della città di Firenze* (1591, and revised by Giovanni Cinelli for a 1677 edition), Ferdinando Leopoldo del Migliore's *Firenze città nobilissima* (1684) and Raffaello del Bruno's *Ristretto delle cose più notabili della città di Firenze* (1689).

One problem with studying guidebooks and travel narratives is that the guidebooks tend to be written with one eye on their predecessors, and visitors tend to go to see what those guidebooks tell them to: as a result, a canon of sites can form quickly. And it is true that some early modern guidebooks copy material from others, particularly when a writer is producing something in a different language from his source or when he has not actually been to all the places he covers. In addition, many early modern tourists were escorted by local guides, who presumably would direct them on an established itinerary. Given this general pattern, the variety in how travel writers and guides

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<sup>5</sup> Scardeone 1560; Burchelati 1583.

<sup>6</sup> Schudt 1959 remains an invaluable guide to this literature; for some reflections on the genre, see Hendrix 2014. The series "Biblioteca del viaggio in Italia", published by the Centro interuniversitario di ricerche sul Viaggio in Italia, includes useful edition of many accounts of travel to Florence. For English travellers, see also the survey by Giosuè 2004, and various works by Edward Chaney, including Chaney 2014.

<sup>7</sup> For examples of the former, see Moryson 1617, Coryate 1611, or Ray 1673 in English, and Spon and Wheler 1678 or Monconys 1665 in French; examples of the latter include Raymond 1648 and Lassels 1670.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Schott 1600 and Pflaumern 1628; for a German example, Kranitz 1599.

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approach inscriptions is striking. Some writers ignore them; some have information that suggests that they have read them; some refer explicitly to them; and some quote them.

Responses to Florentine inscriptions illustrate this variety. John Evelyn, for example, the famous English diarist who visited Florence in 1643, referred to Cosimo I's bronze statue inscription without quoting it, and the Frenchman Jean Antoine Rigaud talked about the four bronze tablets on the statue and their contents – for example, that the Pope made him Grand Duke – but did not cite the words.<sup>9</sup> Jacques de Villamont quoted only one inscription, and wrongly, recording “Decreto publico patriae” from the monument to Cosimo de' Medici in San Lorenzo, missing out the “pater” and so denying Cosimo his patriarchal authority.<sup>10</sup> Martin Zeiller, who visited Italy in 1628 and 1629, published his *Itinerarium Italiae* in 1640, which blurred travel account and travel guide. He did not actually visit Florence, but he provided his readers with a thorough account of what he had managed to learn; he cited a few inscriptions directly, and sent the reader to his sources for further details.<sup>11</sup> One of Zeiller's sources was Johann Heinrich von Pflaumern, who had first published his account of his travels, the *Mercurius Italicus*, in 1625.<sup>12</sup> On the Duomo in Florence, von Pflaumern wrote that “Monumenta clarorum hominum in hoc templo non pauca exstant, quae ego non omnia, praecipua duntaxat memoro” (a considerable number of monuments to famous men survive in this church; I will not recall them all, just the most prominent), before giving the inscriptions to Ficino, Dante, Brunelleschi, Giotto, and then the memorial to Pope John XXIII from the Baptistery.<sup>13</sup> Pierre Bergeron, an early seventeenth-century French visitor,

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<sup>9</sup> Evelyn 1955, 92-93; Rigaud 1601, 77-78 (“à l'un y est escriteau à la teste faisant mention de celui qui l'a faicte eriger à l'honneur de Cosme de Medicis premier Grand Duc de Toscane. A celui du costé droit est figuré lors qu'il fut fait grand Duc à Rome par le Pope Pio...”) on Kragelund 2021, IX.41-44. See also, e.g., the anonymous French visitor whose account of Florence in early 1612 is in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France MS Fr. 19013, 232v-233r, who refers to tombs and their elogias, and lists some of the people buried, but does not quote the texts.

<sup>10</sup> Villamont 1604, 2r, on Kragelund 2021, VII.2. Thomas Lambton, an English traveller who came to Florence in the late 1640s, had a similar approach: he mentions, e.g., ‘a Monument of a Patriarch of Constantinople’ in Santa Maria Novella (Joseph II, Kragelund 2021, II.14b), but only quotes the Cosimo inscription in San Lorenzo, correctly, and the epitaph to Pico della Mirandola (Kragelund 2021, VII.5; New Haven, Beinecke Library MS Osborn b74, 109 and 111).

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Zeiller 1640, 113, citing Schraderus 1592 and Chytraeus 1594 as well as quoting the inscription from the tomb of Pope John XXIII (Kragelund 2021, II.9).

<sup>12</sup> For an introduction to this figure, see Pflaumern 2010, 470-79.

<sup>13</sup> Pflaumern 1628, 143.

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took a similar approach, quoting the inscriptions to Bruni and Michelangelo from Santa Croce, to Pico della Mirandola from San Marco, but mentioning the memorials to the Medici in San Lorenzo.<sup>14</sup>

Von Pflaumern, Zeiller, and Bergeron quoted the inscriptions in lower case, and did not reproduce the shape of the letters, or, often, their arrangement in lines, unless they were in verse. Their approach was typical for publications of this period, even when, as in the cases of von Pflaumern and Bergeron, writers had probably seen the texts themselves. Richard Colebrand, who was to become a chaplain to King Charles II of England, visited Florence in 1659, away from England during the last years of the Commonwealth. In his diary he gave a relatively short account of his stay. He recorded an inscription to Ferdinand II, one to Cosimo II, and Michelangelo's epitaph, all in lower case, showing no interest in the form or arrangement of the letters.<sup>15</sup> One exception is the effort made by John Raymond's printer to reproduce the hand illustrating the height of the water in the inscription recording the 1557 flood. Unfortunately, he showed the hand, using a manicure resembling those contemporary annotators used to highlight passages in their texts, without demonstrating how it appeared half-way up the inscription, and then either he, or Raymond, mistranscribed the date and misspelled "oppida" (fig. 1).<sup>16</sup> Despite the mistakes, the inclusion of the hand and the rarity of this text in other sources are strong evidence that Raymond saw it himself. Later on the same page, Raymond summarized, rather than quoting, the epitaph for a horse: "there is a Marble, which I found of no great consequence; yet set by a Venetian Ambassador as a Monument to a horse there buried, which had done him good service in the siege of the City."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France MS Fr. 5560, 19v-20r = Bergeron 2005, 86-87.

<sup>15</sup> New Haven, Beinecke Library MS Osborn b266, pp.154-57.

<sup>16</sup> Raymond 1648, 38 on Kragelund 2021, I.2.

<sup>17</sup> Raymond 1648, 38 on Kragelund 2021, IV.13.

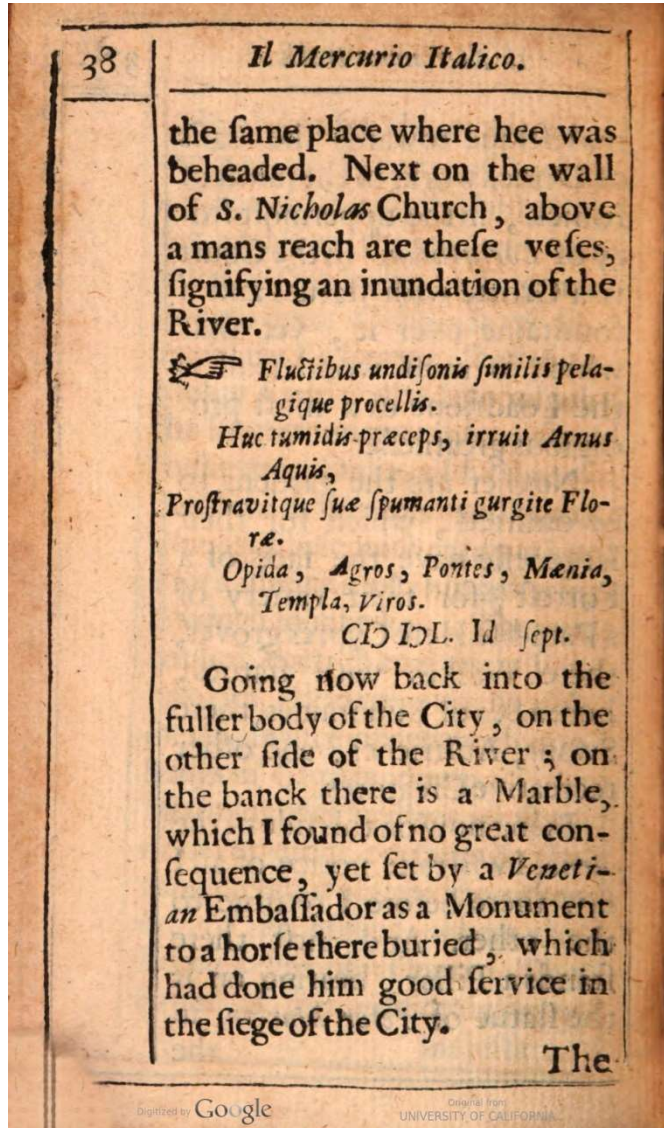


Fig. 1 The inscription recording the level of the Arno's flood in 1557, in Raymond 1648, 38. The date is mistranscribed<sup>18</sup>

Von Pflaumern, Colebrand, and Raymond seem to have looked out for inscriptions, therefore, and quoted some that they had seen when they prepared their accounts for publication. Other travellers went further: they had more of what Harald Hendrix has termed the “epigraphical gaze”, and made an effort to document what they read more widely, or more precisely.<sup>19</sup> Arnoldus Buchelius, for example, a visitor from the Low Countries whom

<sup>18</sup> For more information about the figures, see Illustrations below.

<sup>19</sup> Hendrix 2018, 391.

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Hendrix discusses, included many ancient and modern inscriptions in the *Diarium* he kept of his voyages from the 1580s and 1590s; Florisel de Claveson, who visited Italy in 1608, used capital letters in the fair copy of his journal de voyage to represent the select inscriptions that he recorded.<sup>20</sup> Between 1663 and 1666, the Englishman Philip Skippon travelled around Europe with his teacher John Ray and two other Cambridge students. He kept a detailed journal of what they saw, and made sure to include many inscriptions, both ancient and modern. In Florence, he gave the texts from the Porta Romana, recording the entries of Leo X and Charles V, the Medici family epitaphs in San Lorenzo, and inscriptions from the monuments to Michelangelo, Aretino, and Carlo Marsuppini in Santa Croce.<sup>21</sup> Ray also recorded his impressions of the trip, which he published and dedicated to Skippon, and like Skippon he copied down many texts: inscriptions recording the building and dedication of the Duomo, and well as the 1438 memorial of the general Council, and the inscriptions to Marsilio Ficino, Giotto, and Filippo Brunelleschi; the epitaphs of Michelangelo, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and Giambologna; and the text from the monument to the Medici family in San Lorenzo.<sup>22</sup>

The guidebooks to Florence specifically also vary. Francesco Bocchi was attentive to art and architecture, and his work played an important role in promoting Florence as a centre for artistic excellence, which made it attractive to visitors such as von Pflaumer, who was particularly interested in buildings and referred to Bocchi regularly in his *Mercurius*.<sup>23</sup> Bocchi tended to describe monuments without citing the texts on them. In his section for the Duomo, for example, he quoted Poliziano's verses in praise of Giotto, but mentioned the monuments and achievements of Marsilio Ficino and Antonio Squarcialupi, using information from the inscriptions but not quoting them.<sup>24</sup> Cinelli's revision of Bocchi kept the same approach. Bruno cites only one inscription, from Cosimo's statue.<sup>25</sup> Migliore, in contrast, both cites inscriptions and, unusually, gives comments on them. Before quoting the memorial to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, he pointed out the references to

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<sup>20</sup> Buchelius, Utrecht Universiteitsbibliotheek MS Hs. 798, e.g., fol. 83r-83v; Claveson, Paris Bibliothèque nationale de France MS Clairambault 1006, e.g., fol. 19v. Claveson's work appears in a modern edition, Claveson 2001. On Buchelius' description of Florence, which he visited in 1588, see de Jong 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Skippon 1732, 632-36; see Daly Davis 2009, a modern edition, with useful introduction, and Sparti 1998 for an account of Skippon in Italy.

<sup>22</sup> Ray 1673, 326-31. On Ray's work, see the brief note in Cianflone 2014.

<sup>23</sup> On Bocchi, see the introduction to Bocchi 2006, 3-22.

<sup>24</sup> Bocchi 1591, 49-50.

<sup>25</sup> Bruno 1689, 94.

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the Tagus and the Ganges, saying that the inscription “expressed with a metaphor his most striking quality.”<sup>26</sup> He argued that Cosimo had the letters of the inscription from the Mercato nuovo gilded, to demonstrate that “all the things that are left by the sovereign rulers are of gold.”<sup>27</sup> This detail of the inscription’s appearance is unusual, and good evidence of Migliore’s first-hand research. He invited readers to appreciate the gravity of the inscription in honour of Pope John XXIII, which “in a few words says much, keeping away from that unpleasant prolixity, that sometimes debases the actions of distinguished men instead of illustrating them,” and again confirmed his attention to the details of the text by confirming that “così stà” beside the reading “FLORENTIE”.<sup>28</sup> When he looked at the column inscribed with details of Saint Zenobius’s miracle of the elm tree, Migliore acknowledged that the wording and the style of the lettering did not match the date of events that it described, as Vincenzo Borghini had noticed: but there was no doubt, he went on, that a column was erected at the same time as the miracle, or just after. Using Villani and Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, he argued it had been restored after the floods of 1333.<sup>29</sup>

What are we to make of this variety? The range of responses suggests that inscriptions were important to many curious visitors to Florence, but that they were not part of a “must-see list”. Some visitors were more interested in relics and religious ceremonies, some in art and architecture, and some in the temporary pageantry and spectacles that the city offered; others, humanistically-trained tourists, who would have been aware of Roman models and were very familiar with Latin, would have been more likely to take note of texts on the city’s walls and floors. But it is hard to generalize, in part because the reasons for travellers’ voyages varied; several went to Italy for primarily religious reasons. And why did the people whose eyes were drawn to texts copy what they saw? Some of the visitors to Florence give us an idea. Inscriptions offered testimony for famous early modern figures. Ray,

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<sup>26</sup> Migliore 1684, 218: ‘L’iscrizione è la seguente, esprimiendo assai sotto metafora, la notissima qualità di lui’, on Kragelund 2021, VII.5.

<sup>27</sup> Migliore 1684, 562: ‘...che quelle lettere fossero messe d’oro, come d’oro son tutte le cose che da’ Principi sovrani si staccano’, on Kragelund 2021, IX.18.

<sup>28</sup> Migliore 1684, 96: ‘Notisi la gravità dell’Iscrizione intagliata nella Cassa, appropriata a quel lodevol vso praticato in que’ tempi con tanta lode, in poche parole dir molto, recedendo da quella prolissità odiosa, che in cambio d’illustrare, rende a vil talvolta l’azzioni, per altro d’Uomini celebratissimi,’ on Kragelund 2021, II.9. He makes similar comments (311-12) on Vincenzo Borghini’s epitaph.

<sup>29</sup> Migliore 1684, 115. See Kragelund 2021, II.4 and, Paolini, *Repertorio ad loc.* (<http://www.palazzospinelli.org/architetture/stampa.asp?ID=2090>, consulted October 21, 2022).



for example, introduced his transcription of Ficino's memorial in the Duomo as follows: "Some Monuments also I observed in this Church: the Inscriptions whereof they being of considerable persons it may not be amiss heer to set down."<sup>30</sup> They could be admired for their linguistic and rhetorical prowess: del Migliore said that Poliziano's memorial to Giotto was worthy of inclusion "for the loftiness of its style, its conception, and the appropriate register of speaking in the language."<sup>31</sup>

### Collections of inscriptions

Ray and del Migliore were not the only early modern readers to look to inscriptions as evidence for style and celebrity. A series of early modern publications of inscriptions provided testimony for famous personalities or offered epigrammatic texts for pleasure and imitation. In addition, some editors collected inscriptions alongside other jokey and light-hearted texts for diversion and entertainment; some explicitly presented collections of epitaphs alongside funerary odes as opportunities to reflect on fate and death, of both the prominent and the obscure; and others included genuine examples in manuals advising how to compose inscribed texts. Some of the people involved in these books had been to Florence, but most had not. They used the evidence that travellers and published guidebooks provided, and built on each other's compilations. These works spread information about Florentine inscriptions across Europe and cemented the cultural importance of the city, without usually contributing any real information about her monuments. Almost inevitably, given the way they were put together, these books also spread errors in their transcriptions.

The three fullest collections were Laurentius Schraderus's *Monumentorum Italiae... libri* of 1592, Nathan Chytraeus' *Variorum in Europa itinerum deliciae seu... monumenta* of 1594, and Franz Sweets' *Selectae Christiani orbis deliciae* of 1608; Chytraeus' and Sweets' books were subsequently reprinted in several editions. Each of these authors arranged their material geographically, so armchair travellers could roam between major cities, and each included sections devoted to Florence: these books include around 95, 60, and 50 post-classical examples, respectively. Schraderus went to Italy in the 1550s, and again in 1567, where he collected material himself. Although he had travelled, Chytraeus selected some examples from Schraderus, and Sweets readily admitted to using both.<sup>32</sup> Their dependence on one another is

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<sup>30</sup> Ray 1673, 327.

<sup>31</sup> Migliore 1684, 18: "degnà per l'altezza dello stile, per il concetto, e del proprio modo del favellare in quella lingua," on Kragelund 2021, VI.7.

<sup>32</sup> On Chytraeus, with useful comments on the genre in general, see de Jong 2019.

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clear from the way in which they record the epitaph of Filippo Brunelleschi in the Duomo, which caused them problems because it gave his name only as Philippus. Schraderus recorded it under the title “Philippi Architecti de Burbenesco”, and then gave the first few words correctly as “Quantum Philippus architectus arte Daedalea valuerit” (Just how successful Filippo was in the art of Dedalus). Perhaps he misread his notes, or misheard a guide explaining who the Philippus was (fig. 2); but it is also possible that he found the inscription in Vasari, who included Brunelleschi’s epitaph in the first edition of his *Vite*.<sup>33</sup> In 1594, Chytraeus gave the first line as “Quantum Philippus de Burnebesco Architectus arte Daedalea valuerit,” combining Schraderus’s title and first line, and swapping the N and B, and then in 1608 Sweerts gave the same reading as Chytraeus.<sup>34</sup> Neither Chytraeus and Sweerts necessarily have any value as independent witnesses to inscriptions from Florence, therefore, but when they gave them correctly, they were important transmitters of information about the city’s texts to a learned public.

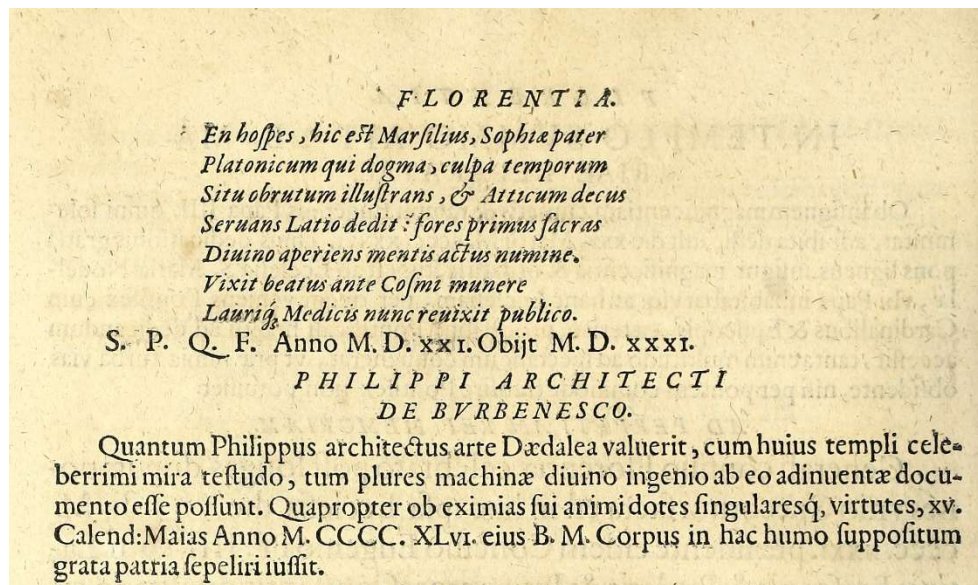


Fig. 2. The reproduction of Brunelleschi’s funerary epitaph in Schraderus 1592, 80v

Several Florentine inscriptions regularly turned up in more focused collections of modern epitaphs.<sup>35</sup> Many books responded to a thirst for information about famous men in the second half of the sixteenth and

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<sup>33</sup> Schraderus 1592, 80v, on Kragelund 2021, VI.5; Vasari 1550, 331-32.

<sup>34</sup> Chytraeus 1594, 142; Sweerts 1608, 238.

<sup>35</sup> On the composition of epitaphs in this period, see Kajanto 1993.

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seventeenth centuries.<sup>36</sup> Some authors provided portraits or summaries of people's achievements, Marco Mantova Benavides' illustrated collection of lawyers, for example, or Fulvio Orsini's edition of portraits from antiquity.<sup>37</sup> The most famous example of this genre, Giorgio Vasari's *Vite*, included his subjects' epitaphs, where available, at the end of each biography; given the centrality of Florentine artists to Vasari's account, Vasari's work is likely to have played an important role in distributing and popularising the texts of funerary inscriptions for those figures who were buried in Florence, and in prompting visitors (such as Schraderus, above) to look for them. Seyfried Rybisch and Tobias Fendt's 1574 *Monumenta sepulcrorum cum epigraphis* was the first printed collection devoted to illustrations of funerary monuments; the authors included the tombs of humanists, lawyers, and writers ancient and modern. Rybisch was a Silesian who had undertaken a *peregrinatio academica* around Europe between 1548 and 1554, including a stop in Florence in 1554 on his way back home to Breslau.<sup>38</sup> A long time after Rybisch's return, Fendt engraved some of what he recorded, and combined that with material from other sources to create a collection of illustrated memorials.<sup>39</sup> The book includes the monuments to Ficino, Leonardo Bruni, Pico della Mirandola, Angelo Poliziano, and Paolo Giovio from Florence; Rybisch had copied the dedications to Ficino and Giovio in the notebooks from his trip, but had only mentioned the monument to Pico, and had not included any information about Bruni, suggesting Fendt's information about these two came from elsewhere.<sup>40</sup> Wherever he found them, Fendt's were decent sources; his renditions show that he, the engraver, was interested in some aspects of the settings as well as recording the texts accurately, if not the letter shapes (figs. 3 and 3a). The contraction of -qve in line 3 suggests that Fendt was working from a manuscript copy of the text made by someone accustomed to abbreviations.<sup>41</sup> This work, printed in the relatively minor publishing centre of Breslau, is testament to the market for epitaphs in early modern Europe: it was reprinted in 1584, and then issued in new editions in Frankfurt (1585 and 1589), Amsterdam (1638), and Utrecht (1671).

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<sup>36</sup> Guthke 2003 (revised and translated as Guthke 2006) provides an essential account of the history of epitaph collecting, with details on many of the figures mentioned here; Guthke 2001, 25-37 is a useful introduction.

<sup>37</sup> Giovio 1546, subsequently reprinted in 1549, 1551, and 1554; Benavides 1566; Orsini 1570. See, in general, Hagedorn 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Hiernard 2017, 19-57.

<sup>39</sup> For details of the contents, see Hiernard 2017, 395-99.

<sup>40</sup> Hiernard 2017, 383-94, Temps modernes 74 and 75.

<sup>41</sup> I am very grateful to the anonymous reviewer for making this point.

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**Fig. 3. Bernardo Rossellino's tomb for Leonardo Bruni,  
in Rybisch and Fendt 1574, 23**

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**Fig. 3a. Detail of the epitaph on Rossellino's tomb**

Rybisch and Fendt's work was extremely unusual in giving a sense of the monuments to famous men as objects. Most other collections simply gave the texts with no sense of how they physically appeared. Part of the reason for this was pragmatic, clearly: texts were easier to copy and reproduce. And as I suggested above, this probably also reflects the philological backgrounds of the humanists who recorded them. But it also is a reminder of an important aspect of the way in which early modern intellectuals celebrated and remembered the dead. Vasari wrote that after Michelangelo died, "great minds, of which there have always been many in Florence, began to attach above [his] sepulchre verses both in Latin and Italian... those compositions that were printed at that time were only a small part with respect to the many which were written."<sup>42</sup> In some cases, the epitaphs that Vasari included himself in

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<sup>42</sup> Cit. and tr. by Wellington Ghatan 2011, 1.

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his biographies seem to have come from the tomb, but for some figures he gave more than one epitaph, or couplets that were written on painters' deaths, or verses that he had commissioned himself.<sup>43</sup> One reason for Paolo Giovio's fame, and so for his inclusion in Rybisch and Fendt, was his published *Elogia* of famous men, which included verse tributes that would have accompanied the men's portraits in Giovio's museum; there were not necessarily epitaphs, and some figures received multiple poems. Early modern scholars, therefore, would have been used to reading several verse tributes to notable deceased men, and the editors of collections of epitaphs, like Vasari, often included more than one example, inscribed or not.

We can see how this could affect the transmission of inscriptions when we look at the way editors presented funerary tributes to two Florentine cultural giants, Angelo Poliziano, and Giovio himself. In his *Elogia*, Giovio gives three epitaphs for Poliziano: one composed by Poliziano's pupil Pietro Crinito and, Giovio tells us, attached to the tomb; a very interesting poem on Poliziano's death by Pietro Bembo, entitled "Politiani tumulus"; and then a couplet by an unknown author, playing on Poliziano's name and linguistic ability, as follows: "Politianus in hoc Tumulo iacet Angelus, unum/ Qui caput, & linguas, res nova, tres habuit" (Angelo Poliziano lies in this tomb, who had one head and – a new phenomenon – three tongues).<sup>44</sup> The first of these seems to have been a temporary addition, around the time of Poliziano's funeral, and the third was inscribed on the tomb in S. Marco. The couplet appears in Rybisch and Fendt (fig. 4); the rendition of his name as Policianus, rather than Politianus, could again suggest that Fendt was using a hand-written copy as his source. In Schraderus's version, there are two further lines of verse, after a date: "Obiit anno M.D.IX Sept XXIII./ Angelus hic clausit cineres varia arte politus/ Ut vix inveniat Ausonis ora parem" (He died on 24 September 1509. Angelo left his ashes shut away here, who was so distinguished in a range of arts, that the Ausonian land can barely find an equal). Chytraeus, Franz Schott, and Philippe Labbe all followed Schraderus in giving the longer version.<sup>45</sup> Sweerts included the first, two-line version, along with a different date ("M.CCCC.XCIIX. Septemb. XXIV. Aetat. XLIV" [24 September 1498, at the age of 44]), and then Crinitus' tribute; Pietro Andrea Canoniero gave the two-line version, and another couplet: "Pieridum columen, Phoebeae gloria turbae/ Angelus

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<sup>43</sup> Wellington Ghatan 2011, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Giovio 1546, 25r-25v. For the appended epitaph, see Wellington Ghatan 2015; for Bembo's poem, see Castagna 1995; and more generally on Bembo, Giovio, and the afterlife of Poliziano, Stewart 1997, 8-19.

<sup>45</sup> Schraderus 1592, 82v; Chytraeus 1594, 146; Schott 1620, 301; Labbe 1666, 188.

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hoc saxum Politianus habet” (First of the Muses, glory of the host of Phoebus,/ Angelo Poliziano has this tomb).<sup>46</sup> In his guide to Florence, Migliore recorded the two-line version, which he said was behind a confessional; he wrote that Poliziano died in 1498, but had 1499 in his transcription, along with a different form for his age (“MCCCCLXXXIX. SEPT. XXIV. AETATIS VIL” [24 September 1489, at the age of 44], fig. 5).<sup>47</sup> By the early eighteenth century, French visitors could identify Poliziano’s tomb, but claimed that it had no epitaph.<sup>48</sup> The tradition thus preserved a variety of testimonials in verse, along with more than one death date, and suggested that the problems were insoluble. Friedrich Otto Mencke, who wrote a biography of Poliziano in 1736, was understandably exasperated, especially as he had read letters from Poliziano’s colleagues recording his death in 1494. But he established that the second couplet that appeared in Schraderus actually derived from collections of *etiosticha* (chronograms) published by Joseph a Pinu and Bernhard Sturm, who wrongly posited that Poliziano died in 1509.<sup>49</sup> Then he discovered from his brother Karl Otto, who, luckily, was in Florence, that the first two lines, along with a date of 1484, and giving Poliziano’s age as 40, did actually exist on a small stone, by the much larger epitaph of Pico della Mirandola (fig. 6).<sup>50</sup> By reviewing the tradition, Mencke the historian was able to reject, to his satisfaction, the “*dubiae fidei Epitaphium*” from Schraderus and others.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Sweerts 1608, 242; Canoniero 1613, 19 and 484.

<sup>47</sup> Migliore 1684, 218.

<sup>48</sup> De Rogissart 1707, 272. See also the account of Jean Mabillon (1724, i.176), who visited in 1686, and claimed that in the vicinity of Pico’s tomb “sepultus est, sed sine inscriptione, Angelus Politianus, Johannis amicus, qui obiit anno M. CCCC. XCIV” (Angelo Poliziano, friend of Giovanni, was buried, but without an inscription, who died in 1494). Poliziano’s bones had actually been moved in 1663, and the small inscription created then: see Chiaroni 1939, 483.

<sup>49</sup> Mencke 1736, 464-65 on Pinu 1561, C3r and Sturm 1580, vi.13.

<sup>50</sup> Mencke 1736, 466. See also the earlier discussion in Clausius 1718, 66-70.

<sup>51</sup> Mencke 1736, 464.

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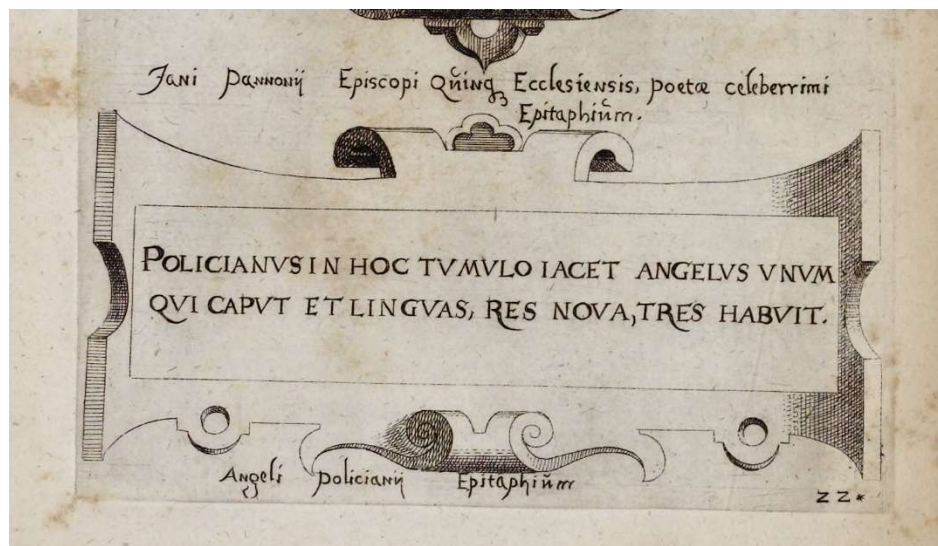


Fig. 4. Poliziano's funerary epitaph. Rybisch and Fendt 1574, 23, detail

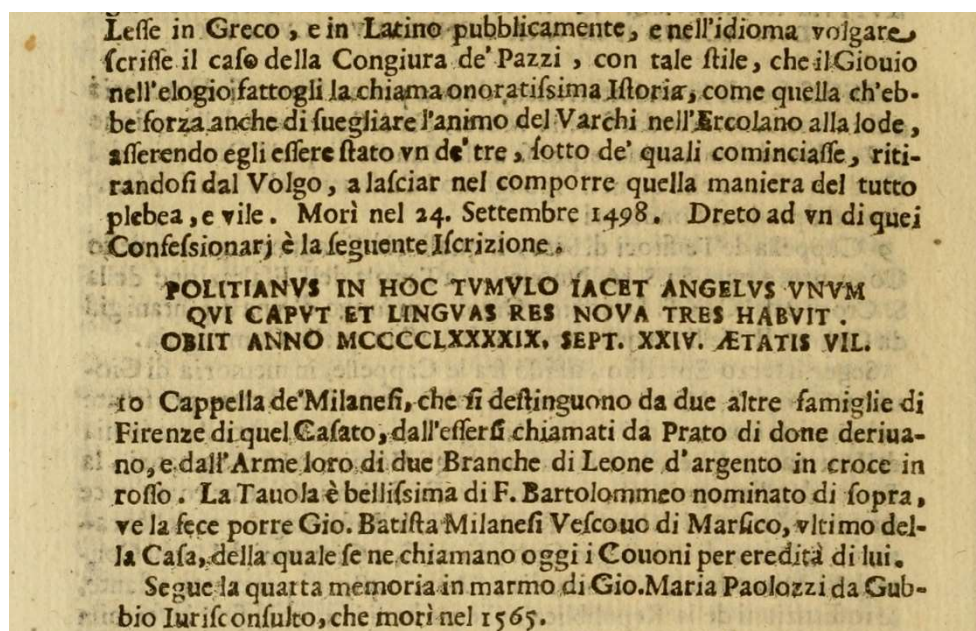


Fig. 5. Poliziano's epitaph in Migliore 1684, 218, detail



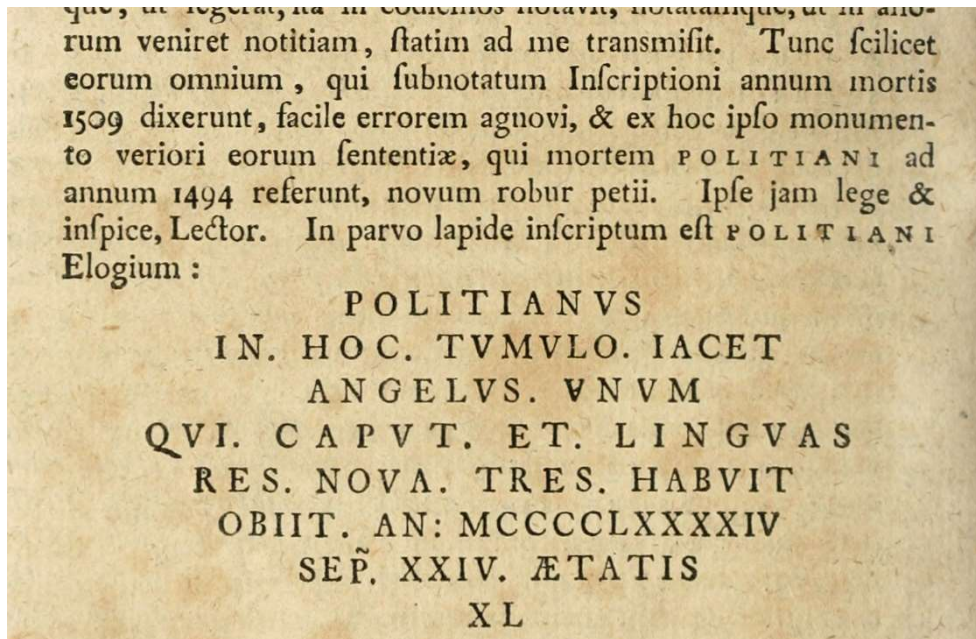


Fig. 6. Poliziano's epitaph in Mencke 1736, 466, detail

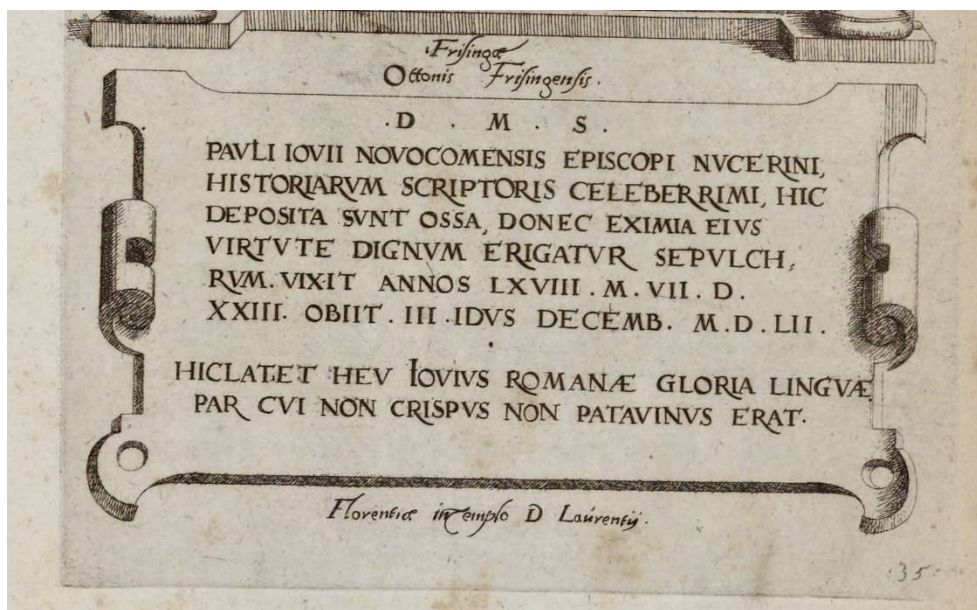
Giovio, who did so much to preserve Poliziano's memory, died in 1552. Soon after, a temporary inscription commemorating him appeared, recording where his bones were at rest "donec... dignum erigatur sepulcrum" (until a suitable monument was built), with a couplet recording his eloquence (fig. 7).<sup>52</sup> Francesco da Sangallo then created a statue of Giovio, which he completed in 1560. In 1574 that was installed by the entrance to the Biblioteca Laurenziana in the Chiostro dei Canonici, with the new inscription placed underneath that is still there today. (Fig. 8; Shortly after it was installed, Nicolas Audebert copied the text, and commented that Giovio's statue had "a thin face, and was of a very simple nature, entirely different from how his writings present him.")<sup>53</sup> When Rybisch and Schraderus visited Florence, in the 1550s, they both saw the temporary inscription, and so recorded that. This meant that it became part of the tradition, and so even when the 1574 inscription replaced it, both continued to appear in collections. Sweerts, for example, has both – with the useful note under the second that "ibidem hodie

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<sup>52</sup> Price Zimmerman 1986-87.

<sup>53</sup> Audebert 1983, i.255: "le pourtraict est un visage maigret, et comme de nature fort simple, tout aultre que ses escripts ne le demonstrent."

legitur” (today, there, it reads thus) – but Labbe, in 1666, only the first.<sup>54</sup> Thus an inscription recording its impermanence won immortality.



**Fig. 7.** Temporary inscription recording Paolo Giovio, San Lorenzo. Rybisch and Fendt 1574, 23, detail

What motivated this gathering of epitaphs? The editors of other collections did not limit themselves to famous cultural figures, and their works give us a sense of why else people might have been interested in works in this genre. Pietro Andrea Canoniero published a *Flores illustrium epitaphiorum* in 1613, in which he argued explicitly, and stoically, that his collection would be helpful in assuaging the fear of death. He dedicated this to a Florentine patrician, Leonardo Bontempo, and included various epitaphs from the city, including those to Giotto, Poliziano, Pico della Mirandola, Giovio, and Carlo Marsuppini.<sup>55</sup> Despite the fact the texts are organised geographically by city, and despite the Florentine connection – Canoniero had visited the city – in his book he gives no indication that he had seen the texts himself, and on the inner titlepage he records that they came “Ex quodam qui Italica collegit”

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<sup>54</sup> Sweerts 1608, 240; Labbe 1666, 204.

<sup>55</sup> Canoniero 1613, 18-19.

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**Fig. 8. Francesco da Sangallo, Statue of Paolo Giovio, in the cloister of San Lorenzo, Florence**

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(from someone who collected Italian examples).<sup>56</sup> Gaspard Meturas presented his *Hortus epitaphiorum selectorum, ou iardin d'epitaphes choisies* as an opportunity to witness epitaphs to all sorts of people – young and old, dévot and libertine, husband and wife – and reflect on our mortal condition.<sup>57</sup> Building on the success of his 1608 general collection, however, Sweerts took a more irreverent approach. He published a selection of epitaphs which he called *Epitaphia ioca-seria* (1623), aiming to provide pleasure: he included the epitaph to Bruni, perhaps attracted to the line “Historia luget, eloquentia muta est” (History mourns, eloquence is mute).<sup>58</sup> In his *Thesaurus epitaphiorum* (1666) Philippe Labbe similarly claimed to want to entertain his readers, giving them Florentine examples including the memorials to Pico, Ficino, Bruni, Marsuppini, and Giovio, but also the dedication celebrating the mule’s role in the construction of Palazzo Pitti, from the courtyard of the palace. In his *Theatrum funebre* in 1673, Otto Aicher presented his material as a sort of dramatic performance, highlighting the dead from across the social spectrum, among them the tomb of the Greek patriarch from S. Maria Novella (in the section on cardinals, archbishops, and bishops) and the inscription from the equestrian statue of Cosimo I (in the section on dukes and princes).

We can see from other guides and general collections that readers, like del Migliore, looked to epigraphy for examples of eloquence and poetry, and tried to identify famous authors of individual texts. In his 1600 guidebook, Franz Schott identified the memorial to Giotto as being by Poliziano; the fact that he did not provide his readers with a transcription suggests that he was highlighting the celebrity of the writer, as well as that Poliziano’s role was well known.<sup>59</sup> Authors who included the Giotto memorial in their general collections of inscriptions also tended to record Poliziano’s authorship.<sup>60</sup> Not surprisingly, when authors composed manuals aiming to teach how to write inscriptions, they included genuine examples. Jakob Masen, for example, a Jesuit from Cologne, cited the epitaph of Pico in his 1649 *Ars nova argutiarum honestae recreationis*.<sup>61</sup> Only very occasionally do we get a sense of how people might have read epitaphs. For example, the Portuguese physician to the Medici grand dukes, Stephanus Castrensis, wrote a letter to

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<sup>56</sup> Canoniero 1613, 1. On Canoniero, better known as a political theorist interested in Tacitean reason of state, see D’Alessio 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Meturas 1648.

<sup>58</sup> Sweerts 1623, 124.

<sup>59</sup> Schott 1600, 174. Repeated in e.g., Pflaumern 1628, 144 and Bocchi 1677, 50.

<sup>60</sup> E.g., Labbe 1666, 288.

<sup>61</sup> Masen 1649, 205.

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Paganino Gaudenzio, a fellow professor at Pisa, on the elegiac couplet celebrating the Palazzo Pitti mule. He was not wholly impressed: “*Ingenue loquar, arte poetica non admodum elaborata mihi carmina visa sunt.*” (speaking frankly, these verses did not seem to me to be sufficiently worked out with poetic art).<sup>62</sup> Before he left the palace courtyard, Castrensis’ muse “gave birth to – or rather miscarried” eight other options, which he provided for Gaudenzio’s enjoyment.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps he felt able to criticise a memorial to an animal in ways that he would not for a human subject.

When editors presented inscriptions as examples of wit or striking sentiment or expressive power, they tended to divorce them from their historical context. The site in which the inscription was to be found, and even the identity of the dedicatee was not necessarily important. As we saw above, Schraderus’s mistranscription of Brunelleschi’s name was repeated in later collections of inscriptions (guides to Florence, however, identified his memorial correctly).<sup>64</sup> Carlo Marsuppini, whose surname also did not appear in his epitaph, became simply *Carolus poeta* in Schraderus, and in those authors who took material from him, such as Sweerts and Canoniero; Labbe described his inscription as “*Carori [sic] poetae et philos.*”<sup>65</sup> In these collections, inscriptions from Florence become less Florentine inscriptions than diverting texts. But early modern historians sometimes cited fifteenth- and sixteenth-century inscriptions as evidence. Paolo Mini, for example, in his 1593 *Discorso della nobiltà di Firenze*, simply quotes lines from the memorial to Marsuppini, but cites the epitaph of the humanist Niccolo Niccoli to illustrate his importance in reviving the study of Greek, and the epitaph of Luigi Marsili, dedicated by the “*Florentina civitas*” for his exceptional eloquence; unfortunately Mini claims that this Luigi Marsili (d.1394) demonstrated his skills in the Council of Florence (1431-49).<sup>66</sup> In his genealogical history of Tuscan and Umbrian families, which he began publishing in 1668, Eugenio Gamurrini cited plenty of inscriptions, and recorded the coats of arms of prominent clans; his examples tend to come from outside Florence, a testament to Medici power within the city, though

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<sup>62</sup> Castro 1639, 25. See Kragelund 2021, I.5, with photograph.

<sup>63</sup> Castro 1639, 25-26.

<sup>64</sup> E.g., Ray 1673, 328, introduces the inscription in the Duomo thus: “Of Philipppo Brunelleschi, a famous Architect, who designed the Cupola of this Church, and also that of S. Laurence’s.”

<sup>65</sup> Schraderus 1592, 84r; e.g., Sweerts 1608, 245; Labbe 1666, 241. Skippon (1732, 636) also knew him as “*Carolus, a poet*”, but Bocchi (1591, 164) was well aware who he was.

<sup>66</sup> Mini 1593, 109; 92-93; 89. For the Marsigli inscription, see Kragelund 2021, VI.2. A Luigi del Sala Marsili was present at the council: see McManus 2008, 253. For the context of Mini’s work, see van Veen 2005.

he includes, for instance, the epitaph to Ferdinand Pandolfini in the city.<sup>67</sup> Non-Florentine historians used inscriptions from the city to chart lineages: *Le mausolée de la toison d'or*, for example, a 1689 collection of aristocrats' memorials, includes Cosimo I's epitaph and the inscription from his equestrian statue to illustrate the honours that he received from Pope Pius V.<sup>68</sup>

### **And finally, which inscriptions?**

Which texts caught the eyes of travellers, or were reprinted in inscription collections? Given the ways in which authors of works mentioning Florence the city and editors of inscription collections cite inscriptions – sometimes mentioning them, sometimes quoting them from autopsy, sometimes taking them from other published collections – it is impossible to produce simple tallies from the material that I have surveyed. As the examples that I have mentioned so far suggest, however, these works undoubtedly tend to cite inscriptions related to cultural figures, and mainly figures from the fifteenth century: texts mentioning Brunelleschi, Brunni, Poliziano, Marsuppini, Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and others. We can draw two simple conclusions. First, visitors and inscription enthusiasts seem to have preferred to record the memorials of poets, artists, and scholars than those of rulers – in Florence, that is, than those mentioning members of the Medici family. One clear exception is Pierre le Monnier, a notary from Lille, who wrote about his travels through France, the Italian peninsula, and back through German-speaking territories, in 1614. In Florence, his eyes seem to be drawn to famous historical figures and the way in which the Medici appropriated public spaces; he copied the inscriptions on the Porta Romana, for example, recording the triumphal entries of Leo X and Charles V, but not epitaphs in churches.<sup>69</sup> But most visitors and editors focused on the cultural sphere, with the regular exception of the epitaph of Cosimo the Elder and the statue of the Cosimo the Grand Duke. Second, already by the seventeenth century, the canon of notable Florentines focuses on the Quattrocento; the only sixteenth-century figures whose memorials feature regularly are Giovio and Michelangelo. Later erudites and poets – Benedetto Varchi, Vincenzo Borghini, and Piero Vettori most notably of all – do not appear, whether as authors or dedicatees of elogia. Already, perhaps, these collectors of inscriptions suggest Florence's most golden age had passed. Late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century works maintain the same basic

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<sup>67</sup> Gamurrini 1685, 127.

<sup>68</sup> *Le mausolée* 1689, 159-60.

<sup>69</sup> Le Monnier 1614, 76.

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focus, despite more material becoming available.<sup>70</sup> Ironically, policies to present Florence as a great renaissance cultural centre seem to have been all too successful, in that they occluded the political achievements and cultural patronage of the sixteenth century Medici.

The early modern period was indeed the age of the inscription, a genre that delighted baroque sensibilities, and served as a fundamental tool to record, celebrate, and commemorate notable figures. The number of books that quoted inscriptions gives some idea of the fascination that they commanded, a fascination that is largely alien to the twenty-first century. Early modern readers turned to inscriptions to appreciate sentiments well expressed, to reflect on the lives of famous people, and to ponder death. As *The Latin Inscriptions of Medici Florence* makes clear, the Medici and their followers devoted much effort to celebrating the regime and their city by carving texts in stone; the accounts of early modern visitors and early modern inscription collections make clear that they were only half successful. Viewers eagerly transmitted inscriptions that evoked the triumphs of Quattrocento humanism, and that made apparent the artistic riches of Florence; but they had less time for the rulers who did so much to promote her.

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<sup>70</sup> See, e.g., Mabillon and Germain 1687, 165-72, and the extra examples in Mabillon's notebook, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France MS Lat. 14187, 123r-124v; Veryard 1701, 240-44; and De Rogissart 1707, i.263-75.

## Illustrations

Fig. 1: The inscription recording the level of the Arno's flood in 1557, in Raymond 1648, 38. The date is mistranscribed (HathiTrust, Public Domain; <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31822038212411&view=1up&seq=82> [consulted 3 November, 2022]). For the original, see Kragelund 2021, fig 1.2 and <https://schedaturalab.altervista.org/epigrafe-con-indicazione-della-piena-dellarno-del-1557/> (consulted 3 November, 2022).

Fig. 2: The reproduction of Brunelleschi's funerary epitaph in Schraderus 1592, 80v, detail (HathiTrust, Public Domain; <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=gri.ark:/13960/t8nd3742t&view=1up&seq=162> [consulted 3 November, 2022]).

Fig. 3: Bernardo Rossellino's tomb for Leonardo Bruni, in Rybisch and Fendt 1574, 23 (HathiTrust, Public Domain; <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=gri.ark:/13960/t6838x19z&view=1up&seq=75> [consulted 3 November, 2002]). We can compare the representation of the lettering with the original.

Fig. 3a: Detail of the epitaph on Rossellino's tomb (Wikimedia Commons, © sailko CC-BY-SA-3.0).

Fig. 4: Poliziano's funerary epitaph. Rybisch and Fendt 1574, 23, detail (HathiTrust, Public Domain; <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=gri.ark:/13960/t6838x19z&view=1up&seq=73> [consulted 3 November, 2022]).

Fig. 5: Poliziano's epitaph in Migliore 1684, 218, detail (HathiTrust, Public Domain; <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=gri.ark:/13960/t5p85mq0w&view=1up&seq=246> [consulted 3 November, 2022]).

Fig. 6: Poliziano's epitaph in Mencke 1736, 466, detail (HathiTrust, Public Domain; [consulted 3 November, 2022]).

Fig. 7: Temporary inscription recording Paolo Giovio, San Lorenzo. Rybisch and Fendt 1574, 23, detail (HathiTrust, Public Domain; <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=gri.ark:/13960/t6838x19z&view=1up&seq=99> [consulted 3 November, 2022]).

Fig. 8: Francesco da Sangallo, Statue of Paolo Giovio, in the cloister of San Lorenzo, Florence (Wikimedia Commons, © sailko CC-BY-SA-3.0).



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