“The Lodging House of All Memories”
An Accountant’s Home in Renaissance Florence

T
here is a small but rapidly growing body of relatively recent research on the structure, furnishings, and usage of space of Renaissance homes, particularly those in Italian cities. This new research raises novel questions about the role of the household in the creation of Italian Renaissance art and culture, focusing on previously neglected subjects such as utilitarian objects, the visual and spatial development of the house and its furnishings, and the relation of the house and its contents to the behavior, activities, and personalities of the inhabitants. However, comparatively little is known of domestic dwellings more modest than the much-studied patrician palaces. The present investigation opens a small window onto the home and lifestyle of Michele di Nofri di Michele di Mato (1387–1463), nicknamed Michele del Giogante, an accountant and poet who played a leading role in collecting and codifying the textual corpus of the popular culture of mid-fifteenth-century Florence. This study is based on Michele’s description of his own house in a memory treatise that he included in one of his many literary anthologies.

Using the House as Model for the Memory Treatise
The two traditional models for memory treatises were the wax tablet, embodying the notion of “engraving” information on the memory, and the “storage room,” which could be expanded into a house of memory. Michele’s treatise can be understood as a domestication by a nonpatrician Florentine of the “storage room” schema outlined in Marcus Tullius Cicero’s De oratore, Marius Fabius Quintilian’s Institutio oratoria, and the letter Ad Herennium, attributed erroneously to Cicero. The author of Ad Herennium recommended that, to train oneself in the art of memory, one should choose a well-lit, spacious house with a variety of rooms through which the mind could run freely. Begin by fixing the plan in your imagination; then order the ideas, words, or images that you wish to remember, placing the first thing in the vestibule, the second in the atrium, then move... into side rooms, and even onto statues or paintings. Once you have put everything in its place, whenever you wish to recall something, start again at the entrance and move through the house, where you will find all the images linked one to another as in a chain or a chorus.

Once inside his house of memory, a man could start anywhere and move either backward or forward from that point, for it was the spatial order of the storage that allowed for retrieval.

As Francis Yates regretfully observed in her classic study of the Ars memoria, in the postclassical period a memory treatise, “though it will always give the rules, rarely gives any concrete application of the rules, that is to say it rarely sets out a system of mnemonic images on their places.” Michele’s memory treatise does just that. As Michele explained in the introduction to his treatise:
Here I, Michele di Nofri di Michele di Mato del Giogante, accountant, will show the principle of learning the art of memory, which was explained to me by Maestro Niccolò Cieco of Florence in December 1435 when he came here, beginning by allotting places in my house according to the way he told me to, saying that the first five spaces should be called the first category, and then another five the second, and another five the third, and so on. And for each place I assigned a symbol on top of it which related to what was named underneath, and so I began with the first place outside the front door, on the bench, and then for the second, the entrance, and for the third, the large coffer (cassa grande) beside the entrance, and for the fourth the barred window above the cassa, and for the fifth the corner near the window, and this was the first group, and then the sixth was the woodwork along the floor, and the seventh the door of the cellar and so on, as I shall show. As far as I know, Michele's is the only example from Florence in the fifteenth century of a memory treatise that assigns images to places in a house, although there may be others awaiting discovery in the unplumbed depths of the city's archives and libraries.

Quintilian and Ad Herennium were well known in Florence in the early Renaissance, and Michele transcribed the general principles of their memory treatises into several of his anthologies. But for his sole demonstration of their practical implementation, he sought the advice of Niccolò Cieco, a fellow poet and performer at San Martino, the major venue for the presentation of popular culture in mid-fifteenth-century Florence. The entertainers who sang almost daily on the benches at San Martino were praised particularly for their extraordinary feats of memory. Their special skill was to extemporize new works based on a core of familiar themes, which necessitated the memorization and frequent rehearsal of a broad range of learning. Niccolò, the blind poet widely acknowledged as the most erudite of this group and known to his fellow poets as "the lodging house of all memories," was a native of Arezzo who, in 1432, moved to Florence and, in 1435, made Michele's home his own lodging house.

It is interesting that these Florentine popular poets, in the city that gave such impetus to the revival of classical literature and the development of the vernacular, chose to base their schema on the model of a building instead of a book when the latter might have seemed the natural choice of men steeped in the culture of the word, including the Scriptures, which were depicted in devotional art as open books displaying decipherable texts. Their choice is one more testimony to the immense popular interest in building in early Renaissance Florence, where the construction and renovation of churches, civic buildings, and patrician palaces that were transforming the city's face were major events in the life of its citizens.

In 1445, the Medici Palace began to rise ex novo on the huge block facing the Via Larga (now Via Cavour), dominating the view north from the piazza between the baptistery and the cathedral, and with its rear garden courtyard kitty-corner to the Church of San Lorenzo. The sheer scale of the site led Ser Alessio Pelli, a notary who for many years served as secretary and general factotum to Cosimo de' Medici when Cosimo still lived in the older Medici house (casa vecchia), to describe it in a letter to Cosimo's younger son Giovanni as "a magnificent thing to see." Alesso was regarded as something of an expert on building ("nel murare et nello edificare"), to the extent that Giovanni seems to have sought his help with the problem of procuring water for his villa on a steep hill near Fiesole, and the commune enlisted Alesso’s aid to stop the silting up of the port of Pisa. According to Alesso, Michele also wrote to Giovanni about the start of the construction of the Medici Palace, but his letter has not survived. Michele’s memory treatise offers a more negative comment on palaces, discussing the pleasure a man might take in imagining the beautiful palace of an enemy “set on fire today rather than tomorrow” and “reduced to ashes down to the foundations, together with him who had it built.”

Using the Treatise to Reconstruct the House

Compiling his treatise, Michele listed one hundred places or things in the left-hand column to which he assigned in the right-hand column various memorable associations, many of them visual or literary, civic or religious (Figure 1). For example:

1/70 ___ The place of Our Lady, when you come down again into my room ___ the 1/70 place, fourteenth category __ upon it David with an open book 1/81 ___ The well of the Samaritan woman, that is our well ___ the 1/81 place ___ Jesus upon it.

Elsewhere I have published an English translation of this treatise and discussed the unusual insights it offers, as an inventory of Michele’s mind and his home, into Florentine popular culture. My aim here is to use the entries in the left-hand column to reconstruct Michele’s house, just as architectural historians have relied on inventories of patrician palaces as major sources for their description. While many home owners apparently left the reviews of their possessions to functionaries whose lists in household invento-
Figure 1 Michele di Nofri di Michele di Mato's memory treatise, 1435, MS 2734, fol. 28r, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Florence
ries were often lackluster and vague, with the aid of his guest Niccolò, Michele produced a strikingly vivid and precise description of the notable places in his house. Moreover, in following the classical injunction to “start... at the entrance and move through the house,” he and Niccolò gave a logical account of its layout, which is absent from inventories merely listing the contents of houses under the headings of discrete rooms.

Occasional references to objects named in the right-hand column will be made in the understanding that these may well have represented the way in which Michele wished to see his house rather than how it actually was. Indeed, most of the entries in the right-hand column patently refer to imaginary objects. Many are signs or symbols drawn from a memory bank of elements from familiar Christian, classical, and popular literary traditions with a few exotic personal images thrown in. Obvious symbols include the flail on the arch of the granary (place 20), the cloud on the corner of the kitchen where the drains were located (place 43) —a reminder, perhaps, of overflows caused by heavy rain—and the face of Vulcan on the iron window bars in the study (place 78). Clearly the connection of place 93, the fireplace of the kitchen, with “a river to receive it” was a metaphorical one, and it was an imaginary witch who dwelt in an upstairs anteroom “called the dark one, because the window over the courtyard is closed off” (place 53). Similarly “King Herod” sat upon the pinewood stair from the sala up to the kitchen (place 27), and Hope, naturally dressed in green, was envisaged upon a door halfway up the stairs (place 23).

However, some objects mentioned in the right-hand column might well have been real. There may have been “a bronze mortar with a pestle” upon the new cupboard outside the door of the pantry of Michele’s room (place 61) and a broom in the new room (place 47), and it seems likely that “the (actual) keys of the door” lay upon “the large coffer beside the door” in the entrance hall (place 3) and that there was a lantern at the door to the cellar (place 7). With these caveats, I will proceed to interpret the left-hand column as an inventory that offers fascinating evidence of the similarities and differences between the established patterns for the design and furnishing of patrician houses and the home of a man who, if far above the social level of those poor artisans to whom “sorry little houses” were rented for a pitance, was nevertheless far below the social level of patricians with their spacious palaces equipped for luxurious living.

Locating Michele in Florentine Society

Members of the lesser professions of notaries and accountants such as Michele occupied a very particular and dynamic position in Florentine society, where status depended largely upon wealth (preferably old money), a tradition of service in high public office, and prestigious marriage alliances with families as distinguished as one’s own. Salaried employees like Michele or Alessio, without even an established family name or with one only recently acquired, lacked these essential qualifications for social distinction. But by virtue of their education, their responsibilities as administrators and assistants to the major public offices of the state, and their crucial role in the lives of their fellow citizens as indispensable facilitators of business and personal activity, they enjoyed considerable respect, and they were often on intimate terms with the patricians they served and whose houses they frequented. This was also true of poets employed as professional entertainers to the governing magistracy of the state (the Signoria) and in the private homes of leading citizens. Numerous personal letters and the rich literature of novelle, facetiae (collections of humorous anecdotes), and popular poems testify to the friendship and familiarity between men like Michele and Alessio, on the one hand, and leading families of the ruling elite, like the Medici and their friends, on the other.

As an accountant, Michele was entrusted with the task of reviewing the books and accounts of various banks and businesses, especially those involved in settlements or disputes. This seems to have been quite a flourishing and remunerative business. As Michele explained in his tax report, reviewing the books of a large firm or estate could take several months, and for some such jobs he was paid quite large sums, from thirty to fifty florins. He had partnerships with Paolo Fastelli and Bernardo di Niccolò and had a bottega (shop), with at least one employee, located in the district of San Martino near the church where he often performed or listened to popular poetry.

He served as the accountant to various state magistracies, including the officials responsible for the estates of wards (the Pupilli), and other institutions, such as the charitable hospital of Santa Maria Nuova. However, its residents, as he observed, were “all poor people” from whom he might not expect to recover much of the money owed to him.

Michele also did work for a wide range of individual citizens. Among them were a number of friends, neighbors, and men of various social ranks: several shoemakers, a casket maker named Giovanni di Bonifazio, the aristocratic Duccio Adimari, several members of the Della Casa family, Carlo Bonciani, and Ser Niccolo Tinucci, a high-profile notary and partisan of the Medici. More important associates of the Medici were prominent among his customers; they included Bartolomeo Neroni and Paolo Pagagnotti (whose kinsman Sandro became the factor at the Medici...
Villa of Trebbio), as well as Bernardo Portinari and the heirs of Sandro di Lipaccio (de’ Bardi), both members of dynasties from whom many managers of the Medici bank were drawn. Michele’s detailed explanations to the tax officials of his own debts and sums owed to him illuminate the operation of his business, which was characterized by complex personal trade-offs and accommodations between debtors and creditors. Perhaps this was why, in 1427, his net assets were only five hundred florins.28

In his capacity as poet and anthologist, Michele became very close to the Medici and, as a consequence, enjoyed the special status accorded their friends and families. Around the time that Cosimo’s opponents exiled him to Venice (1433–34) in a vain attempt to preempt the increase of his influence, Michele sent assurances of his absolute devotion: “I don’t even know how I can begin/ to set down either in prose or in verse what I want to say/ that I am yours in my very flesh and bones.” He transcribed this verse into one of his own compilations of literature (zibaldoni) and, later, long after the Medici had been repatriated, noted beside it: “Then . . . in November 1437, I sent him [Cosimo] from Castel San Giovanni a book of chess games, and reminded him in a little note of some business of mine about which I had spoken to him in Florence a few days before. And he replied very graciously on the 28th that he remembered it.” 29 The entry breaks off here, but there is a letter from Michele to Cosimo a couple of months later that may refer to the same matter. As befitted a man whose association with his patron was based on common interests such as poetry and chess—Michele had a chessboard hung on the wall above his bed, and according to Cosimo’s biographer Vespasiano da Bisticci, Cosimo often played with Magnolino, the acknowledged chess champion of his day—Michele’s tone is respectful but also confident and direct: “The reason for this letter is that you may be graciously pleased to remember this business of mine”—the hope that, with the Marchese of Ferrara or some other suitable person, “through your action I may expect at some time some appropriate position . . . of a status that will honor myself and others.” 30

Thanks to his eminence as a poet, performer, and anthologist of popular literature, Michele continued throughout his life to move in Medicean social circles. In 1450, when Piero de’ Medici was one of a group of ambassadors sent by the Florentine state to acknowledge Francesco Sforza’s accession to the lordship of Milan, Piero had Michele compile at short notice a quadernuccio (notebook) containing diplomatic and literary accounts of Sforza’s major military exploits, a work that constituted a briefing on the salient facts of the new duke’s career. 31 In 1454, Michele turned to Piero to promote the career of a particularly talented young singer, reminding Piero that “you already heard [him] sing in Lionardo Bartolini’s house, at a splendid dinner he gave for you, where I brought him: he recited a few stanzas, you must remember it.” 32

Whether or not he obtained the position he was seeking in 1437, Michele’s social status was both confirmed and elevated by the marriage in 1445 of his only son Piero to Felicie, daughter of Antonio di Ugolino Martelli. The sons of Niccolò di Ugolino Martelli, also Michele’s neighbors in the district of the Golden Lion, were among the Medici family’s closest allies and partisans, and they played a crucial role in running the Medici bank, which achieved the height of its success under Cosimo’s and their direction. Five of the brothers served as partners or managers of the various branches of the Medici bank; Roberto was manager of the most lucrative branch, in Rome, and Antonio served as assistant manager of the Venetian branch from 1435 to 1448. 33 Cosimo de’ Medici personally arranged and took responsibility for the terms of the union (parentado) between Michele’s family and the Martelli. When, five years later, Piero had not yet received the balance of Felicie’s dowry, Michele appealed to Cosimo to intercede with his father-in-law. As Michele explained, he was deeply in debt due to the illness and death of his own wife during an outbreak of plague, which had also forced his son and Felicie to flee from Florence; owing to problems in settling his wife’s estate, Michele had been obliged to borrow quite heavily from a number of friends and to obtain several advances against his salary from the Pupilli officials. 34 Michele wrote to Cosimo that “Antonio has some respect for us, and Piero considers him not a father-in-law but a father.” Yet he added, “[Because] I know him to be a good man, but also a little abrupt and peremptory, I thought it better to say nothing to him. . . . [Have] pity on me, for I’m afraid I will be disgraced.” 35

In fact, by 1457, Michele’s income, which had been sufficient to enable him to buy or at least to maintain his relatively large and comfortable house, had shrunk to almost nothing; since his deductions exceeded his income, his tax was reduced by the officials to only a few florins. Much of the property inherited by his now-dead wife had been alienated. 36

**Locating Michele’s House on the Urban Scene**

Despite his financial vicissitudes, Michele hung onto his house, which he described as situated in the quarter of San Giovanni, in the gonfalone (administrative district) of Lion d’oro (the Golden Lion) and the parish of San Lorenzo. The catasto, a revolutionary new taxation system instituted in 1427, required home owners to specify the confines or nearest neighbors of their properties on all sides. 37 Conse-
sequently, by piecing together information from Michele’s tax returns of 1427, 1430, 1433, 1446, 1458, and from those of all his near neighbors, we can establish the location of his house within the relatively small block bounded on the north by the modern Via Guelfa (formerly Via dell’ Acqua and the Canto alla Macine), to the west by Via San Orsola, to the south by Via Taddea, and to the east by Via Ginori (formerly in part Borgo San Lorenzo di Sopra and, in part between Via Taddea and the Canto alla Macine] the Canto al Bisogno or, vulgarly, “al Bigno”). Michele’s house faced onto upper Borgo San Lorenzo, between the corner of the modern Via Taddea (known as the Canto del Bigno) and the Canto alla Macine to the north. The street nearest the back of the property was the Piazza di San Orsola (Figure 2).

In 1427, Michele named his neighbors as “Piero di Spina,” “Ataviano the trumpeter,” and the “Piazza di Sant’ Orsua.” In 1430, he added a description of the properties at the rear of his house as occupied by the painter Ambrogio di Baldese and a filatoio (silk workshop), which he specified in 1446 as belonging to the Silk Guild. Piero di Spina declared two adjacent houses in the gonfalone of Lion d’oro in 1427, one for his own use located “at the head of the Via della Stufa”; he named “Michele di Nofri del Giogante” as neighbor to both houses and described the Silk Guild’s property as bordering on the house he lived in. Attavante
di Lupicino, a trumpeter to the Signoria with a more particular topographical sense, placed his own house precisely “between the Canto del Bigna and the Canto della Macina” and named his neighbors as “Michele di Nofri and Ambrusgio di Baldese.” The latter filed his 1427 return in the name of himself and his son Ser Baldese and also declared himself the owner of two adjacent houses located between the “Canto del Bigna” and the “Canto della Macina,” giving the confines of the first as the Piazza di San Orsola and the properties of “Attaviano di Lupicino” and “Michele di Nofri.” Michele, in his treatise of 1435, referred to a walled-up window (place 86) overlooking the home of Ser Baldese, still his neighbor in 1446; he also described one wall of his servant’s room (place 38) as being “above Piero [di] Spina.”

The sum of this information might imply that Michele’s property stretched effectively from Via Ginori to Via San Orsola, which would have made it implausibly large. The detailed depiction of Florence drawn by Buonsignori in 1584 shows several small houses and a couple of larger properties in the block facing Via Ginori between the corner of the Via Taddea and the Canto alla Macine (there are now nine houses, three of them quite substantial palaces dating from the fifteenth or early sixteenth century) and four or five houses facing north onto Via Guelfa (there are now seven or eight). The block is much shorter on the south side, where there are now only three large palaces, but in the fifteenth century, there was also an extensive area of open fields or gardens in the middle of the block as well as a large building that may have been the Silk Guild’s filatoio. Although the modern Via San Orsola is identified with the former Piazza San Orsola, in the fifteenth century the street might have begun at the point where Via della Stufa dead-ended in a widened stretch of modern Via Taddea and then curved north along modern Via San Orsola to meet Via Guelfa. As we know from many other examples, citizens in their tax reports recorded as their neighbors the owners of properties near to, but not necessarily right next to, their own.

Michele’s house cannot be identified with any surviving structure, but whatever its precise location, it was certainly in the Medici heartland. Almost the entire area bounded by Via Cavour (formerly Via Larga) on the east, Via de’ Gori on the south, Via Ginori on the west, and Via Guelfa and the Canto alla Macine to the north was occupied by property owned by the Medici family, including the site of the new palace, the casa vecchia, and the house of Bernardo d’Antonio de’ Medici (at the corner of Via Larga and Via Guelfa, which is still called the Canto di Bernardetto de’ Medici), or by the houses and possessions of their close friends and leading partisans. Shortly after the completion of the Medici palace, the Ginori family and several members of the Dietisalvi-Nerone family built smaller palaces of their own on the other side of Via Ginori.

In most of his tax returns, Michele described his house as being “near the Canto alla Macina,” clearly the most significant landmark of the district. The Canto alla Macine (the corner of the millstone) was named after an ancient mill situated there when the stream of the Mugnone still flowed in this area. In the early fifteenth-century it was a working-class neighborhood, anchored by a group of shops including a bakery, a butcher shop, and the tavern patronized by the residents of nearby houses. The canto was also associated with the plebeian festivity company of the Armenians, called the Company of the Millstone, who met there and in whose theatrical performances the Medici family and friends such as Alesso enthusiastically participated. In 1478, shortly after the Pazzi conspiracy to assassinate Lorenzo de’ Medici, Cosimo’s grandson, the Canto alla Macine became a rallying place for plebeian supporters of the Medici family.

Michele’s Description of his House

Michele’s description of his house and its contents in 1435 is extremely unusual. There are many descriptions of patrician houses in wills, inventories, and documents of property divisions and transfers, and the possessions of a wide social range of families, including artisans, are inventoried in judicial records and those of the Pupilli. But I know of no other narrative description of a house belonging to a man of similar rank and profession with which Michele’s account might be compared. In the sixteenth century, in a treatise on houses for families of various social levels, the architect Sebastiano Serlio formally articulated the Renaissance notion of the different types of homes appropriate to the respective social classes. In 1427, Ridolfo Peruzzi, a leading citizen of Florence, already had strong ideas on this subject. He complained to the tax officials in 1433 that he possessed only three quarters of his ancestral palace, while “every one of my equals (pari) has a house, some two, worth 1500 or 2000 gold florins,” observing that “there is a great difference between the needs of people of my rank, and what is unnecessary to those who are bakers or shoemakers.”

Sandra Cavallo, writing on the artisan house, suggests that “viewing the material worlds of different social strata as discrete separate entities is misleading” since many categories of objects, including devotional items and cooking implements, “were shared across social boundaries.” She warns against the view that “individual taste, variety and choice are exclusive prerogatives of the wealthy.” The evi-
idence of Michele’s treatise would support these observations. But although Michele clearly was closely integrated into his neighborhood, he did not share the high mobility Cavallo associates with artisans, which made the neighborhood their “real home.” More specifically, Michele’s living space was infinitely larger than that enjoyed by most artisans, and the accountant’s pattern of living was closer to that of the patrician. In several notable ways, although on a much smaller scale, the layout of the rooms in Michele’s house and their usage resembled that of most patrician palaces. Through his professional activities either as accountant or poet, Michele would have been quite familiar with a number of these palaces, particularly the Medici casa vecchia, their new palace, and those of the Da Cameretta, a study (place 71), and an adjacent cameretta situated above the studio, possibly on a mezzanine level, like those found in most late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century palaces. However, where many of these (including the Medici casa vecchia, their new palace, and those of the Da Uzzano and Alberti) had several such suites or apartments, Michele’s house had only one. That would have been quite sufficient for his rather small household, consisting in 1427 of himself, his wife Cosa, and their three-year-old son Piero. By 1446, it had expanded slightly to include Piero’s wife Felicie, aged sixteen, and a twenty-eight-year-old servant named Giuliana; presumably by then Piero and Felicie occupied what a decade earlier in his treatise Michele had described as the “new room” on an upper floor.

In addition to the suite and the studiolo, which was not just the desk or cupboard sometimes signified by this term but a separate room, the house had other features normally associated with patrician houses or palaces. There was a bench outside the front door and a number of cupboards (in a period when cupboards were just coming into vogue), a quantity of arms stored in various places, a well-stocked cellar and kitchen, several decorative objects, and some others used in the pursuit of leisure. Michele, it seems, had made ample provision for the defense of self and home, the preparation and consumption of food and wine, the entertainment of guests, study, and the practice of his professions, and for devotion and diversion—in other words, for a comfortable lifestyle not entirely dissimilar to that of Florence’s patrician elite, as reflected in the inventories of their possessions.

It is easy to follow Michele on his journey through the front door into the entrance hall, down the stairs to the cellar, up the main staircase (place 22) to the sala, camera, cameretta, and studio, and then up a pinewood stair (place 27) to the kitchen above. On this floor there was a terrace big enough to accommodate a large table (place 98), and adjacent to the kitchen, there was a covered porch (place 82). Later Michele descended the stairs again to the suite of rooms on the piano nobile before returning to the kitchen to identify the last of the requisite hundred places for his memory treatise.

It is more difficult to envisage the location and structure of the remaining less-important rooms, their description sandwiched between repeated visits to the kitchen and to Michele’s bedroom and study. Objects or images in the right-hand column associated with the hundred selected places on the left are described as being on top of them (“di sopra”), but in defining his hundred places, the accountant also makes liberal use of the phrases “di sopra” and “in su,” the latter often signifying in inventories “adjacent to” rather than literally above. However, in proceeding from the kitchen to describe a servant’s room (place 33) and a “new room” (place 47) as each being “su di sopra alla cucina” (up above the kitchen) together with a small antecameretta, a pantry or storeroom, and a terrace (places 50, 53, 35), Michele seems to insist that these rooms are indeed on another floor above the kitchen. Some of them might have been mezzanines, but the description of the antecameretta of the new room as having a big window overlooking the courtyard, although now closed off (places 53, 35), rather suggests that there were three floors above the ground floor entrance hall, the first and the uppermost consisting of two or three rooms, and the second occupied by a large kitchen with a fireplace, porch, and terrace. Michele’s reference to “the wall of the fireplace of the sala that goes up into the kitchen” suggests that the sala and the cucina had a wall or a fireplace in common. Since it was customary for houses of any pretensions to have a fireplace in the sala, the chimney for the large fireplace in the kitchen might have served a sala fireplace as well.

Several particular features enlivened the interior design of Michele’s house. There was an alcove (chibistro) between the door of Michele’s camera and that of his study (place 71), and there were various columns or pilasters such as that designated as place 90, “the black column, that is, a small column or pilaster on the wall next to the door of the camera,” or the “column on the wall” (place 99) that was “on the right of the terrace as you go out of the kitchen” (place 97), which he associated with Blind Samson, who notably pulled down the columns of the temple, causing it to collapse. Perhaps Michele was nervous about the possibility of structural damage to his house; his 1427 tax report indicates that expensive repairs to the roof had been necessary around this time:
“Because my roof is old and rotten I had to have it fixed, and the strut [sporto] as well, and the last few days the workman has been here continually. I don’t see how I can get out of it for less than 30 florins, which they’ll get from me, what with the mason, cement, bricks, wood, tiles, and stones, I’ll still owe 15 florins, that’s the plain truth.”

The original structure or structures that constituted Michele’s house had obviously been altered and adapted. Besides the closed-off window of the anticameretta of the new room above the kitchen, which had once looked over the courtyard (place 53), in the kitchen was “the customary [costumata] walled-up window, the only window still remaining that looks over the house of Ser Baldese” (place 86). There is no indication of how many bays the building comprised, although we do know that at ground level there was only an entrance hall, and even the piano nobile had only three main rooms. Nor do we know if Michele was the builder of his house or if he inherited it from his father. Either way, since theirs was not an old family, it is unlikely that the house was permeated by family memories and served in turn to create them in the way of patricians’ palaces so imaginatively evoked by Preyer in her “Florentine Palaces and Memories of the Past.” However, it might be that the patrician impulse to incorporate traditions bequeathed to the lineage was not entirely distinct from Michele’s use of his house to accommodate the memories of his cultural inheritance.

The first place Michele identified in his review of his house was the bench (pancha) outside it, “and I call it the first seat... and upon it a king... as a coat of arms.” From the mid-fifteenth century, monumental stone benches like those of public buildings were attached to the facades of palaces constructed by influential families for the convenience of friends and associates waiting to see them on business or fulfilling the “duty of the visit” owed by members of a network of patronage to their patrons. However, already in the fourteenth century, benches of perishable materials like wood or brick outside the houses of merchants are documented in account books and represented in street scenes from paintings and illuminated manuscripts (Figure 3). Since Michele was one of the cantori in pancha—those who sang on the benches of the Church of San Martino—he would have been fully aware of the possibilities offered by benches for entertainment and sociability. Given the elevated status of some of his associates, he may indeed have been one of those who actually fulfilled the ideal articulated by Leon Battista Alberti in his De re aedificatoria of patricians and plebeians meeting on benches “frequently and freely.”

Moving into the house, in the entrance hall were a number of objects, whether real or imaginary, associated with proprietorship and defense of the domestic stronghold. These included the large box or coffer (cassa; place 3) beside the door; “upon it,” in the right-hand column of Michele’s list, were “the keys of the door,” which certainly existed and may well have been kept conveniently on top of the box. The door to the street (place 2) was associated with “the sword,” and there was “the barred window [place 4] above the chest... hanging from it the arms for defense.”
Opposite “the wood along that wall on the ground” (place 6), Michele noted “a body-shield.” 77 These arms are all listed in the right-hand column, so they may have been figments of Michele’s imagination, but they appear there along with a number of objects which he very likely possessed, among them a lantern to light the cellar, placed on top of the cellar door (place 7), and a banner, presumably of a religious confraternity or neighborhood group, hung in a corner of the hall (place 5). 78 All these objects, several realistically described as hanging from the locations listed in the left-hand column, appear opposite the first handful of places listed; perhaps Michele took a little time to get the hang of the relation or distinction between real and unreal elements in his friend Niccolò’s prescriptions for compiling a memory treatise.

According to other treatises on ideal homes, one of the most appropriate places to keep arms was by the front door, as one would logically expect. 79 Michele, like many other citizens, also had a cache of arms upstairs in the small room (place 69) above his study, listed in the left-hand column of his treatise as “the place of the arms, that is, in a storage area for arm guards and other arms.” 80 The Medici from at least 1418 possessed a considerable collection of ceremonial armor for use in festivals and jousts, and like quite a few of the greater Florentine houses, they kept a large quantity of functional arms stored in the family palace, where they could also accommodate friends and retainers ready to spring to their patrons’ defense at a moment’s notice. 81

By far the largest single category of objects in Michele’s house was related to the storage, preparation, and consumption of food, suggesting, in view of the small size of his household, that Michele did a lot of entertaining or that he was extremely interested in eating and drinking. This certainly differentiates him from artisans who often consumed their food in taverns and bakeries and had few designated places within their homes for cooking and eating as well as few items in which to cook. 82 Wining and dining friends and neighbors was one means by which Renaissance Florentines of the middle and upper classes secured and maintained relationships essential to political and economic survival in a social system where the goodwill, support, and protection of personal associates was indispensable. 83 The world of the professional entertainer was by definition one of constant sociability and hospitality, such as Michele extended to his long-term guest Niccolò. We know that Michele’s friendship with the Medici and their circle, like many relationships between social unequals documented in Florentine letters and literature, involved dining together, often with groups of cronies of similar interests that might almost be described as “dining clubs.” 84

Michele’s cellar contained a variety of basic produce. He described one storage space (place 20) as “the large cof fer of the granary at ground level where today one gains access to it from the piazza,” possibly referring to a system of pouring grain into the cellar straight from the street. 85 Perhaps there was a similar way of maintaining “the supply of oil in that hollowed-out place facing the street” (place 14). 86 At the door to the cellar was a basin or water dipper and a shelf with a funnel for filling casks. Within, besides a basin of olives and a basket of dishes hanging on the wall, there were a number of casks of vinegar and two types of wine: white wine in small casks from four adjacent barrels and distilled red wine in the other casks alongside. By comparison with the Medici cellars, which in 1418 contained numerous barrels of white wine, malvasia, “and other fine wines, one of which is from Romania . . . and others from Cyprus and Rhodes, and a cask of cognac,” Michele’s cellar was modest indeed. 87 Nevertheless, the quantity of produce stored there, as in most patrician homes, indicated that he was far from living hand to mouth. 88

There are relatively few contemporary descriptions or historical studies of early fifteenth-century kitchens. 89 Michele’s kitchen, described in greater detail than any other room in his house, seems to have been quite large and to have contained somewhat more than the standard basic equipment. 90 It also had windows opening onto the front street as well as the courtyard, a rather unusual arrangement. 91 The major feature, and a focus to which Michele kept returning in his tour of his house, was “the large fireplace of the kitchen along the wall,” designated as place 40 and again as place 93 and mentioned in the description of place 41, “the small window above the canopy down in the kitchen near the big fireplace” (Figure 4). 92 It is unlikely that Michele’s fireplace resembled the increasingly elaborate wall fireplaces becoming fashionable in patrician palaces, but it was not simply a small object in the center of the room, of the type common in humbler homes. 93

In his kitchen, Michele identified a number of places referring to the customary supplies of bread, flour, vinegar, onions, and wood (the latter apparently in a “low cupboard” just outside the kitchen, perhaps under the stair), and to the water dipper, the dustpan, and the place where glass was stored. 94 But beyond noting these expected items, Michele dwelt on various details that suggest his kitchen caught his lively imagination and constituted for him a world of its own. One arrived in its “neighborhood” via a pinewood staircase that led up from the sala; on his way up the stairs, Michele imagined the main protagonist of a popular poem referring to the exotic journeys of a pair of scholars whom it satirized. At the top of the stairs was “the treasure cup-
board, that is the kitchen cupboard” (place 29). It seems likely that the treasures it contained were culinary rather than conventional valuables, especially as Michele imagined upon the cupboard a serpent, presumably signifying temptation. Also in the neighborhood of the kitchen, on the right-hand side, were the “piazza of the pots and pans” (place 83), a large shelf upon which Michele imagined “a tree of sausages,” and the “corner [canto] of the vinegar” (place 84); the “greasy door to the covered porch of the kitchen” reminded Michele of “a pig wounded by a spit,” and on the tray or shelf where the dishes or soup plates were kept, he envisaged a rabbit.

The kitchen was supplied with several shelves on which were stored bread, kitchen utensils, plates, etcetera, but there is no mention anywhere of a credenza, a piece of furniture that was increasingly used in the fifteenth century for the storage and display of silver and china and the carving and serving of food. Presumably, unlike his Medici friends, Michele had no valuable silver or china to display. He did, however, have an acquario (place 95) that, in view of the baldness of his reference to it, was probably a simple dish or sink for washing food rather than anything resembling the elaborate installations sometimes found in the patrician sala for washing the hands before meals. At the same time, the reference (place 43) to “the corner of the drains up in the kitchen next to the . . . window” implies an arrangement slightly more sophisticated for dealing with waste water than simply throwing it out the aforementioned window, which as legislation prohibiting this indicates, was still widely done in the early fifteenth century.

The kitchen had two windows looking over the front street (Borgo San Lorenzo). These were set on either side of a wooden column (place 42), and there was another above the canopy (tetto) next to the fireplace (place 41). It is not
clear whether place 92, “the barred window of the kitchen,” was one of these three or referred to a fourth window. There was also a bricked-up window (“finestra murata”; place 86).101 Places 84 and 85, “the corner of the vinegar, that is the corner on the right-hand side as you go into the kitchen, beside the stair to go down,” and “the place of the onion, that is, a bolt or bar above the said main street,” might imply an outside staircase accessible from Borgo San Lorenzo, at the top of which was a door secured by a bolt of the elaborate variety customarily used for outer doors and windows in this period (Figure 5).102

Most late medieval and early Renaissance houses had no room specifically devoted to eating meals. Food and drink might be consumed in different rooms at various times and seasons, in accordance with advice in medical and dietary texts that set out prescriptions for healthy eating.103 However, by the mid-fifteenth century, cooking and dining areas were beginning to be defined as distinct spaces even in quite humble dwellings. The austere half loaf that Michele saw in his study (place 73) was probably metaphorical, but “the bread box up in the salà next to the stairs” (place 24) was clearly real, and his description of place 98, “the large table laid out on the terrace,” is notably vivid.104 The terrace with its table seems to have been part of, or adjacent to, the covered porch off the kitchen, described as “the place of the pruning tool as you come out of the kitchen onto the porch [verone] on the right-hand side” (place 96).105 Place 97 was “the mirror, that is, because there was a mirror on the wall next to the terrace as you come out of the kitchen, and opposite the well,” indicating that the covered porch and terrace overlooked the courtyard where the well was situated.106 Michele’s observation that on the wall outside the new room there was a flask, “which [I] hung there to serve as a coat of arms,” (place 51) and that on it was “a sleeping man,” seems like an elaborate joke about his fondness for wine, which is certainly evidenced in the contents of the cellar, a considerable quantity for such a small household.107

Michele’s house was furnished, however, for occupations other than cooking, eating, and drinking. On the piano nobile, off the salà, was Michele’s camera and his adjacent study; above it there was a cameretta, probably at mezzanine level, where arms and linens were stored. After the kitchen, these rooms evoked the poet’s richest and most imaginative associations. Place 56 was “the door into my room from the...
“sala,” and in the right-hand column he envisaged “hanging above it, a French carpet,” which could have been real or a desired wall decoration such as he had seen in the homes of his wealthy friends but could not in fact afford. Beside the camera there was a storage room (guardaspensa) with a new cupboard outside it, which may account for the bedroom being fairly sparsely furnished with a large bed that reminded Michele of Adam and Eve and a large chest (cassone), possibly one of a pair, above which hung a chessboard. However, the camera did contain one luxury item. Places 62 and 63 Michele allotted to a daybed (lettuccio) and its backboard (capellinaio; Figure 6). Cassoni and lettucci were occasionally decorated with painted wooden panels, in which workshops such as those of Neri di Bicci and particularly Apollonio di Giovanni specialized, providing many patricians with an opportunity to embellish their houses. The picture of the elderly Cato, the epitome of Stoic wisdom, described in the right-hand column opposite “the backboard [capellinaio] of the daybed [lettuccio]” might just as well have been real as imagined, especially since painted panels, not being particularly costly, were among those domestic decorations most freely available to a wide swathe of the Florentine populace. Certainly, like most home owners of whatever rank, Michele had a domestic shrine or devotional image, described as “the place of Our Lady” (place 70), similar to Figure 7.
The separate study in Michele’s house was definitely a feature that distinguished it from most ordinary houses and aligned it with patrician palaces, although not all palaces had studies, whereas by the later fourteenth century, the houses of many merchants and professional people did. While some heads of distinguished families, like Leon Battista Alberti, kept important family papers in their studies and others, like Niccolò da Uzzano or Piero de’ Medici, used them to house precious objects or a connoisseur’s collection, Michele’s study probably most closely resembled that of the notary Ser Lapo Mazzei in the first decade of the fifteenth century. In his correspondence with his friend Francesco Datini, a merchant of Prato, Mazzei wrote of rereading his friend’s letters “at three o’clock in the morning, free and alone, in my study,” as well as poring over the library of books he kept there. Both patricians and professional men did some of their business from home, and just as his Medici friends ran the bank partly from their studies, presumably Michele used his own for accounting work that did not need to be done in his shop, the homes of clients, or public institutions.

Clearly, the study was also the site of Michele’s prolific imaginative and creative life. He referred to its door (place 72) as “the door of the laurel,” envisaging upon it a garland of laurel leaves like that customarily bestowed upon poets and victors of contests such as the vernacular poetry competition held in Florence’s cathedral in 1441, organized by Alberti and financed by Piero de’ Medici, in which Michele himself took part. The first named of the contents of the study (place 73), described as “the study with the scholar,” might most plausibly be construed as one of many well-known representations of scholars in their studies, typically Saint Jerome, an image perhaps similar to the painting now in Detroit resembling the object described in the Medici Palace inventory of 1492 (Figure 8). Place 74 Michele designated as “the cupboard . . . with many drawers” on which he envisaged “Averroes the philosopher, who wrote the great commentary;” this was another piece of furniture that would have been relatively unusual in Florence so early in the fifteenth century.

Also in the study was a chest (cassone) filled with bed linens. Beside it, next to the window, was place 76, described as “the corner of the arrow,” which presumably referred to a bow and arrow for hunting. Other arms, as mentioned earlier, were stored, along with more linens or clothing, in the small room above the study. This contained a window looking out over the courtyard; in one corner was a sword and in another a pair of boots, perhaps for hunting, as well as nets, presumably for fishing since Michele imagined a fisherman upon them. On the study wall hung an object that was probably a plaster image (“una tavola del giesso”). Although he envisaged “the master’s lectern” upon it, there is no mention of any actual chairs or desk. Like most houses before the mid-fifteenth century, apart from those of the extremely wealthy, Michele’s was quite sparsely furnished. The sala, by contrast with the camera, which was normally the first room of the house to be furnished and nearly always the most elaborate, was often comparatively empty, except in the houses of those very wealthy families who owned a large number of decorative objects. But Michele’s mention of only one item definitely there in the left-hand column—a bread box near the staircase, plus a French carpet in the right-hand column that he may not actually have possessed—suggests a room even sparser than most. Or perhaps he failed to mention the usual table and benches because he found them, understandably, unmemorable.
What Michele did find memorable were objects for diversion. Several were hung on the walls, among them the chessboard in the bedroom, the flask, the fishing nets and sword on the upper floor, and “the falconer’s lure attached to the wall as you go toward the door of our room...a falcon upon it.” This arrangement was no doubt for convenience, but the objects also seemed to serve as decoration. The possibly imaginary arms, shield, banner, and French carpet were also decorative. Notably, with the exception of the images of Our Lady and possibly of the gesso tavola, these objects were all secular by contrast, for example, with the predominantly devotional character of the objects in Giovanni de’ Medici’s house in 1418.

In the way of more conventional decoration, in a place described as “the column on the wall of the maid,” there had been “a damsel painted on a sheet of paper” (place 52); like the mirror on the wall of the terrace, this was a thing gone but still remembered. Of all the objects in the right-hand column that might have been real, that associated with place 63, “the corner of the swords in that anticamera above the study,” Hector painted [dipinto] upon it,” is one of the more likely candidates; Hector was the Trojan prince who faced the Greek hero Ajax in single combat in the Iliad, one of the sagas much favored by performers like Michele at venues such as San Martino. The accountant’s association of place 39, the flour supply on the shelf for bread in the kitchen, in the left-hand column with “abundance [l’abondanza] in the figure of a woman” in the column on the right was almost certainly evoked by a work of Donatello, the favorite artist of Michele’s friend and patron Cosimo de’ Medici. Abbondanza was the female figure, now lost, commissioned by the commune and installed atop an antique column in the marketplace of the Mercato Vecchio, probably to symbolize the charity of communal provision of grain for the poor. While the figure Michele saw on his kitchen shelf may have been a replica of the original, or merely imaginary, along with many other Florentine home owners, he did have a stone sculpture of a lion at the foot of the main staircase. The best-known and most distinctive representation of this popular heraldic beast and symbol of Florentine courage, the Marzocco, had been made by Donatello in 1420 for the newly renovated papal residence at the Convent of Santa Maria Novella (Figure 9).

Although Michele’s house was extremely modest by comparison with even a small patrician palace of the later fourteenth or early fifteenth century and its furnishing far predated the boom in consumer goods in domestic households of the later quattrocento, it was much more than just the best basic living space the accountant-poet could afford. Like his description of it, articulated with the precision of an accountant and the imagination of a poet, Michele’s house was quite lovingly elaborated and adorned, and the objects in it expressed his own distinctive occupations, personality, and proclivities. Both a memory treatise and an inventory—of the popular culture that Michele created and collected and of his home—this document is highly unusual and may even be unique among the rich records of the world of Renaissance Florence, offering rare evidence of the lifestyle of a comparatively unexplored segment of this society, the literate professional class that played such a crucial role in the development of Florentine culture.

Notes
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1. Much new work has been stimulated by a project titled “The Domestic Interior in Italy, 1400-1600,” jointly funded by the Getty Grant Program, the British Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) Centre for the...
Study of the Domestic Interior at the Royal College of Art, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Some of this work appears in Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis, eds., At Home in Renaissance Italy (London, 2006), but many of the studies are still in progress and currently unpublished.


7. See the miscellanies attributed to Michele, of indeterminate date: Magliabechiana (hereafter Magli.) XXV:650, Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence (hereafter BNF); Palatino 54, fols. 1–5, BNF; and Riccardiana 1159, fol. 12r. 8. The poet Anselmo Calderoni praised Niccolò Caezo as “albero di tutte le memorie” as well as “Cicerone in arti oratorie” and “nuovo l’Uivo Livio ad alte storie.” See Antonio Lanza, Lirici toscani del quattrocento (Rome, 1973), 1:343–44. On popular poets and performances at San Marco, see Francesco Spina, La lirica toscana del Rinascimento anteriore al tempo del Magnifico (1891; Florence, 1977), 177–92; and D. Kent, Cosimo di Medici, esp. chap. 5, 6.

9. See, for example, the admonitory text of the book in Fra Angelico’s east dormitory fresco for the Convent of San Marco in Florence:William Hood, Fra Angelico at San Marco (New Haven, 1995), 260; and D. Kent, Cosimo di Medici, 150–51.

10. A prime example of popular interest in building during the Renaissance era is the blow-by-blow description of the construction of the Strozzi Palace by the apothecary Luca Landucci, who was torn between admiration, annoyance at the inconvenience to the neighborhood, and the ironic reflection that the palace would long outlast its builder. See Diario Fiorentino dal 1450 al 1516 di Luca Landucci, continuato da un anonimo fino al 1542 (Florence, 1883), 57–58. “E tuttavolta si disfacevano le case, con grande numero di mastri e di manovali, chi’erano occupate tutte le vie intorno di montagne di sassi e di calcinacci e di mili, d’asini che portavano via e recavano ghiaia; per modo che con difficoltà di chi passava per queste vie. E noi altri artifici stavamo continuamente nella polvere e nella nosa della giente che si fermava per vedere, e chi per non potere passare colla bestie cariche.” In quite another vein, a poem by Filippo Lapaccini, a priest whose kinsman Lorenzo had chronicled the Medici building at San Marco, celebrated not the patron’s but the artisan workers’ achievement in the building of the Pitti palace; see Lanza, Lirici toscani, 2:19.

11. Ser Alesso Pelli to Giovanni de’ Medici, 13 Mar. 1444 (Florentine date; modern date 1445), Mediceo avant il principato (hereafter MAP) V, 509, Archivio di stato, Florence (hereafter ASF). “Della grandezza di colui non si crede. Vedrai quello Michelino [Michiel de Giogant] ti scrive et così del disfacimento del camo che è disfato da chasa Zanobi fino a ch’a Fruosino e sognarà tutto, che è una magnificentia a vedere.” This comment is discussed in Dale V. and Francis W. Kent, “‘Two Comments of March 1445 on the Medici Palace,” The Burlington Magazine 121, no. 921 (Dec. 1979), 793–96.

12. Ser Alesso Pelli to Giovanni de’ Medici, undated, MAP VII, 253. 13. See the letter cited in n. 11. On Alesso, see D. Kent, Cosimo di Medici, and D. Kent, “A Window on Cosimo di Medici, Paterfamilias and Politician, from within his own Household: The Letters of his Personal Assistant, Ser Alesso Pelli,” in Florence and Beyond: Culture, Society and Politics in Renaissance Italy, ed. David S. Peterson with Daniel E. Bornstein (Toronto, forthcoming). For Alesso’s expertise in building and his advice to Giovanni, see Alesso, undated, MAP VII, 253. On Giovanni’s villa and his problems with the water supply, see Amanda Lillie, “‘Giovanni di Cosimo and the Villa Medici at Fiesole,” in Piero di Medici, il Gottuso (1416–1469). Kunst im Dienste der Medicier, ed. Andreas Beyer and Bruce Boucher (Berlin, 1993), 189–206. For Alesso’s service in Pisa, see his letters to Giovanni de’ Medici of the last four years of his life: MAP VI, 238 (21 May 1457); 545 (25 May, 1461); 546 (25 May, 1461); 574 (11 Jun. 1461); and 749 (undated). 14. Michele, Riccardiana 2734, fol. 32r.

15. Ibid.

16. See D. Kent, “Michele del Giogante’s House of Memory” (see n. 3). 17. See particularly Saalman and Mattox, “The First Medici Palace” (see n. 2); and Preyer (see works cited in n. 2). In addition to inventories, Preyer also uses a wide range of other sources, including tax records, account books, ricorsi, wills, and documents describing the division of houses.

18. Piero di Cosimo de’ Medici’s 1456 inventory of his personal possessions, as distinct from the general contents of the palace, is a notable exception that reflects his proud connoisseur’s appreciation of his precious manuscripts and other valuable items in the collection housed in his camera, anticamera, and studiolo. For his inventory, see Marco Spallanzani, Inventari Medici, 1417–1465. Giovanni di Ricci, Cosimo e Lorenzo di Giovanni, Piero di Cosimo (Florence, 1996), 85–161. On Piero’s studiolo and its precious objects, see Wolfgang Liebenwein, Studiolo. Storia e tipologia di uno spazio culturale, ed. Claudia Cieri Via (1977; Moderna, 2005), esp. 105–16.

19. An example of the limitations of inventories for the reconstruction of houses is the inventory of the Medici casa di 1418 (MAP 129, cc. 54–78), published in Spallanzani, Inventari Medici, 1–72, which Saalman and Mattos, “The First Medici Palace,” used as the basis for the reconstruction of the Medici casa vecchia. It is, as they observe, simply a listing of rooms in a “hierarchical sequence beginning with the family rooms on the piano nobile, continuing with secondary rooms on the upper floor, and continuing with an
apartment of service rooms on the ground floor,” 336.
20. Michele, Riccardiana 2734 (see n. 3). Vulcan, the Greek and Roman god of fire, was blacksmith to the gods and heroes; see James Hall, Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art (New York, 1979), 338.
21. Michele, Riccardiana 2734.
22. Ibid.
23. On artisans’ houses, see the tax reports cited by Francis W. Kent, “Palaces, Politics and Society in Fifteenth-Century Florence,” I Tatti Studi 2 (1987), 41–72. For details of patrician domestic arrangements, see, for example, Amedeo G. West and Dennis, At Home in Renaissance Italy (see n. 1); Preyer (see works cited in n. 2); and D. Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, chaps. 11, 12.
25. See, for example, Antonio di Tuccio Manetti, Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi, preceduta dalla Novella del Granos Legnanesi, ed. Domenico de Robertis and Giuliano Tanturli (Milan, 1976); for commentary on this novella, see Lauro Martines, An Italian Renaissance Sextet: Six Tales in Historical Context (New York, 1994), 171–241; and Piwowaro Arloth, Motivi e Frazioni, ed. Gianfranco Folena (Milan, 1993). Michele also had dealings with the lord of Urbino, at whose court many Florentine entertainers were employed and to whom Michele owed money in 1430, see his tax report from that year, Catasto (hereafter Cat.) 375, fol.143v, ASF (see n. 11).
26. See Michele’s tax report, 1933, Cat. 469, fol. 656v; Flaminia, La lirica toscana, 238–39 (see n. 8); and D. Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 46–50.
27. Michele, 1413, Cat. 469, fol. 655v; see also Michele, 1430, Cat. 375, fol. 143v.
28. See Michele, 1427, Cat. 50, fol. 515r–16r, for his debtors and creditors and the agreements between them to postpone, reduce, or commute payments into other services. See also Michele, 1430, Cat. 375, fol. 143r–44r; and Michele, 1443, Cat. 469, fol. 655r–56v. On Bernardo Portinari and the Bardi bankers who worked for the Medici, see Raymond De Roover, The Rise and Decline of the Medici Bank (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 59–60, 248.
29. Michele, Riccardiana, 2735, fol. 171r (see n. 3); verse published in Lanza, Lirica toscana, 1,670 (see n. 3).
32. Michele to Piero de’ Medici, 24 May 1454, MAP XVII, 117; published in Flaminia, La lirica toscana, 600–1.
33. On the Martelli brothers and the Medici bank, see De Roover, Rise and Decline. On Antonio, see ibid., esp. 247–53. See the tax report of Ugolino Martelli, 1427, Cat. 51, 594r and 1366v–1369v, for a description of the Martelli household, which in 1427 consisted of the ten sons of Niccolò d’Ugolino, ranging in age from eight to twenty-eight; his widow, Mona Fioretta, aged fifty; a sister, Nera; “grande di marito”; and the wives and children of the older brothers. To accommodate this enormous household of almost thirty family members (plus five nurses, a tutor, two slaves, two other household servants, a factor for their villa, and two full-time messengers [presumably for the bank’s business]), the Martelli brothers required three houses, all of which must have been bursting at the seams. The fact that eight of the fifteenteen children were girls, and like their sister, would need to be married off, might help to explain why the Martelli family was willing to contract an alliance with an accountant’s son, who would expect a lesser dowry than grooms of higher status with whom most Martelli marriage alliances were made. On these, see Anthony Molho, Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), app. 6, 427–32; and Ugolino di Niccolò Martelli, Ricordanze del 1453 al 1483, ed. Fulvio Pezzarossa (Rome, 1989). 34. For example, in both 1430 and 1433, Michele listed among the creditors from whom he had borrowed substantial sums his neighbor Nofri of Giovanni di Michele di Ser Parente; this loan he had in part worked off by reviewing Nofri’s papers after the death of his father. See Michele, 1433, Cat. 469, fol. 656v. For his salary advances, see Michele, 1427, Cat. 50, fol. 516r.
35. Michele to Cosimo de’ Medici, 18 Jan. 1449–50, MAP XII, 207. In 1448, Michele was elected to a position with the Guild of Armormakers, but he was disqualified for unpaid debts. By 1442 when he was reelected, there was no such impediment to his appointment. This information is from the Brown University website, www.stg.brown.edu/projects/tratte, that makes available electronically the late David Herlihy’s database created from the Tratte archive.
36. Michele, 1457, Cat. 821, fols. 273r–76v.
37. The catasto was adopted as a more equitable means of tax distribution than previous levies, and probably for this same reason it was allowed to fall into abeyance with the establishment after 1434 of the Medici regime, whose partisans expected their patrons’ assistance with the amelioration of taxes. To appease the growing opposition to the Medici in the mid-1450s, the catasto was re instituted in 1458. The surveys of 1427, 1430, and 1433 are the most informative for Michele’s lifetime. For the demographic and topographical information available from these surveys and their uses, see David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch, Les Tuscons et leurs familles. Une étude du catasto florentin de 1427 (Paris, 1978). After 1434, a variety of levies were based on information provided in the format of the catasto reports.
38. See Comune di Firenze, Stradario storico e amministrativo della città e del comune di Firenze (Florence, 1929), esp. 14, 50, 58, 67, 84. For Michele’s catasto reports, see nn. 34, 36, 37; and Michele, 1427, Cat. 76, return no. 400, fols. 85v–86r, microfilm Bobina 1601.
39. Michele, 1427, Cat. 50, fol. 523r.
40. Michele, 1430, Cat. 375, fol. 143r. On Ambrogio di Baldese, see Mikloso Bukovskis, Pittura fiorentina alla vigilia del Rinascimento (Florence, 1975), 199–207. See also Sonia Chiiodo, “Dell’Arredo trecentesco della Cappella Giuochi in Santa Maria Novella a Firenze e di un politico del Maestro della Madonna Straus,” Studi di Storia dell’Arte 7 (1996), 295–303; Chiiodo identifies the Maestro della Madonna Straus with Ambrogio di Baldese, of the school of Agnolo and Taddeo Gaddi, whose books Michele reviewed for a relatively small sum. See Michele, Cat. 50, fol. 515v.
41. Piero di Spina, 1427, Cat. 51, fol. 890v.
42. Attivante di Lupicino, 1427, Cat. 48, fol. 182v: “Io Attivante di Lupicino trombetta de’ nostri Signiori vi fo raporto dela mia possibilite (sic). . . . Io isto . . . tra l’ Chanto del Bengnia [Bigno] e l’ Chanto della Macina in una chasa chonperò il mio padre Lupicino nelle mille 355 e io naquì nella detta chasa adì 22 de gennaio 1357 e miei chonfino Michele di Nofri di Michele di Mato all’altra parte Ambruogio di Baldese.” By 1446, Attivante the trumpeter, already seventy years of age in 1427, was dead, and his son Giovanni, only fourteen years old in 1427, can probably be identified as the Giovanni d’Attavano, merciaio, to whom Michele referred in 1446; by that time, Giovanni d’Attavano had acquired his father’s house and a profession and transformed his patronymic into a family name. His 1446 report (Cat. 76, fols. 127v–29v) confirms the details of his father’s 1427 return.
43. Ambruogio di Baldese, 1427, Cat. 48, fol. 211r.
44. Michele, Riccardiana 2734.
45. There were several other property owners on the same block, among them Bartolo Macinghi and Ser Bartolomeo di Bamboo Ciai, a neighbor to Piero di Spinola’s second house; see Ciai, 1446, Cat. 675, fol. 572r; microfilm Robin 1652.

46. See the “Pianta di Firenze eseguita da Don Stefano Buonsignori, Monteleoneto nel 1584,” insert in Stradari storici.

47. See, for example, Cat. 51, fol. 148v; for the 1427 tax return of Piero di Ser Francesco di Ser Gino Ginori, who gave as his nearest neighbor Giovanni de’ Medici, Cosimo’s father.


49. See Cat. 48, fol. 154v, for the 1427 tax return of “Antonio di Boni fornaiolo al Canto alla Macina,” who rented his baker’s shop from the nuns of Santa Caterina in Via di San Gallo; among his neighbors was Giuliano di Francesco di Ser Gino (Ginori), and his debtors (probably his customers) included Franceschione of the Osteria di San Gallo, Bachino di uno dei soldati del commune di Firenze, Nanni d’Andrea, trumpeter, Zanobi d’Andrea Bartolini, and Ambrusgo di Baldese. See Baldesi, 1427, Cat. 48, fol. 212v, for money owing to “Antonio fornaiolo al Canto alla Macina.” The pezziagno at the Canto alla Macina, on the other hand, owed money to Michele for grain he had given him; see Michele, 1433, Cat. 375, fol.143v.

50. See D. Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 66, 314 (see n. 1).


52. See, for example, Magistrato dei Populi avanti il Principato 28, 243v: Giuliano di Pierozzo (apothecary and spice dealer), 31, fol. 87r: Taddeo di Piero (coppersmith), and 42, fol. 171v: Francesco di Giovanni Cavallaro (old clothes dealer). ASF. Blake, in his “Everyday Objects,” points out that many of these objects have recently been unearthed by archaeologists, throwing light on the domestic arrangements of men and women of every class.


55. See CavaIIo, “The Artisan’s Casa,” esp. 66–71 (see n. 2).

56. The definitive description of the layout, contents, and usage of space in the patrician palace is by Preyer, “The Florentine Casa” (see n. 2). She observes that, while the fifteenth century saw developments in architectural style, the arrangement of rooms did not change substantially from that prevailing in palaces from 1370 through the 1420s and that “Palazzo Medici . . . despite its atypical richness is representative of the general organisation of interior space,” 50, 53.

57. See Saalman and Mattox, “The First Medici Palace,” 337–38 (see n. 2), for the suggestion that Cosimo’s study in the Medici casa vecchia was “over the armario [a safe room for money and weapons] in a mezzanine” and the description of the mezzanine over Lorenzo’s study used for storage of books and letters pertaining to the Medici bank. See Preyer, “Il palazzo di messer Benedetto degli Alberti,” 90 (see n. 2), for “a camera a mezza schala,” and Preyer, “The Florentine Casa,” 52.

58. According to the inventory of 1418, the Medici casa vecchia had thirty-two rooms; see Kent Lydecker, “II patriziato fiorentino e la committenza artistica per la casa,” in I versi dirigenti nella Toscana del Quattrocento, ed. Comitato di studi sulla storia dei ceti dirigenti in Toscana (Florence, 1987), 209–21. However, one of the major Alberti palaces had only a dozen or so principal rooms, albeit rather large ones; see Preyer, “Il palazzo di messer Benedetto degli Alberti.”

59. Michele, 1446, Cat. 76, fol. 86r; Michele, Riccardiana 2734, fol. 28v, place 48 (see n. 3).

60. On studies, see Liebenwein, Studio (see n. 18), and Dora Thornton, The Scholar in His Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy (New Haven, 1988).

61. On cupboards, see Peter Thornton, The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400-1600 (London, 1991), 220–23. For the furnishing of the Renaissance home in general, see ibid., Kent Lydecker, The Domestic Setting of the Arts in Renaissance Florence (Ann Arbor, 1987); and Ajmar-Wollheim and Dennis, At Home in Renaissance Italy (see n. 1). But as Luke Syson, “Representing Domestic Interiors,” in Ajmar-Wollheim and Dennis, At Home in Renaissance Italy, 86–101, observes, not a single scheme for interior decoration remains intact, and representations in paintings are highly problematic.

62. The most conspicuous difference between Michele’s inventory and those of patrician householders was that while patrician inventories were filled with elaborate descriptions of expensive items of clothing stored in numerous large chests (cassoni), the only apparel mentioned in Michele’s treatise was a couple of pairs of boots. In his tax reports, he referred to the “household goods and clothes for our use” that his house contained (1427, Cat.50, fol. 523r) and to money owed to a tailor and cloth merchants (risaltatori; 1430, Cat. 375, fol.144r). Perhaps because garments were hidden away in storage, they simply did not lend themselves to serving as memory markers. However, although CavaIIo, “The Artisan’s Casa,” observes that clothes were the most valuable component of artisans’ assets (72–73), in his treatise, Michele mentioned only two or three of the large cassoni in which garments were customarily kept.

63. Michele, Riccardiana 2734.

64. This meaning of “adjacent to” instead of “above” is clear from the inventory of the Rucellai Palace, which can be coordinated with the palace floor plans; see Preyer, “The Rucellai Palace,” 171–74 (see n. 2).

65. Michele, Riccardiana 2734. In addition, place 34 is described as “the servant’s bed in the room above”; cf. place 50: “the pantry of the new room above the kitchen.”

66. Ibid., place 45: “La faccia del cerchio allato a detto muro del camino di sala in cinacula suuo.”


68. Michele, Riccardiana 2734. On Samson, see Hall, Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols (271 (see n. 20).

69. Michele, 1427, Cat. 50, fol. 524v.

70. Michele, Riccardiana 2734.


72. Michele, Riccardiana 2734, place 1: “La pancha di fuori e chiamola il primo Seggio il primo luogo e di sopra Un Re”; above the line, Michele added “quello é posto sopra a questi luoghi per arme.”

73. On benches, see Yvonne Elet, Seats of Power. The Outdoor Benches of Early Modern Florence, JSAM 61, no. 4 (Dec. 2002), 444–69, esp. 466 for a 1414 ledger entry concerning expenses for “a bench at the houses where Donato d’Andrea lives, for cement, bricks, a binding strip and other things and for the workmanship one lira, fifteen soldi, and for the chestnut
boards for the bench one lira, two soldi paid to Nicholaio." See also Attilio Schiaparelli, *La casa fiorentina e i suoi arredi nei secoli XIV e XV* (Florence, 1983), 1:40, fig. 55; referring to several representations of such benches, including one in an illustrated manuscript of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (MS Riccardiana 492, fol. 87r, BRF [see n. 3]), and figs. 32–39, referring to monumental stone benches outside palaces such as that of the Medici. On this latter topic, see Preyer, “L’architettura del palazzo mediceo,” in Cherubini and Fanelli, *Il Palazzo Medici Riccardi*, 58–75 (see n. 2), and Preyer, “Planning for Visitors” (see n. 2).

7. Leon Battista Alberti quoted in Elet, “Seats of Power,” 450. See also F. W. Kent, “Palaces, Politics and Society,” 60 (see n. 23), for the observation that “The very benches surrounding patrician houses and public buildings drew [a] tide of civic life towards them,” citing Machiavelli’s remark that “every evening we sit on the Capponi bench talking about this marriage.” See also Gene A. Brucker, *Firenze nel Rinascimento* (Florence, 1980), 305: “On the first of last November, in the evening at the hour of the Ave Maria, while I was sitting on Rinieri Bagnesi’s bench with him, Simone came there.”

75. Michele, Riccardiana 2734.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid.


80. Michele, Riccardiana 2734.

81. See D. Kent, *Cosimo de’ Medici*, 292–93 (see n. 3). Also see F. W. Kent, “Palaces, Politics and Society,” 63–64, on “private armies,” describing the Medici and Pitti palaces in 1466 as two opposing fortresses.

82. Cavallo, “The Artisan’s Casa,” 75 (see n. 2).


84. See p. 448 of this essay for Michele’s reference to the Bartolini dinner. For accounts of such dinners in novelle, in addition to the prime model of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, see Laura Martinone, *A Renaissance Secrete*, esp. 215 (see n. 2), and *Miti e Faccie di Piccolo Aristoi*, ed. Gianfranco Folema (Milan and Naples, 1953).

The role of food in Renaissance domesticity and sociability is only just beginning to receive the attention it deserves. See Allen Grieco, “Meals,” in Ajmar-Wollheim and Dennis, *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, 244–53; and Grieco, *Alimentation et classes sociales à la fin du Moyen Age et à la Renaissance*, in *Histoire de l’alimentation*, ed. Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari (Paris, 1996), 479–90. Some of the newer work related to the procurement, preparation, and serving of special foods is associated with the rituals of childbirth, see Jacqueline Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven, 1999), esp. chap. 2. Much remains to be done with the abundant evidence on food as tribute and gift, on which the Medici correspondence is particularly rich; see, for example, Bartolommeo Sassetti to Giovanni de’ Medici, 5 Aug, 1441, MAP V, 412 (see n. 11), concerning some veal Sassetti had sent to a sick friend: “Andrea Bartolini sent a message to us here, recommending himself to you and saying that the veal had entirely restored his appetite.” Deborah Krohn presented a paper in June 2003 at a symposium for the AHRB Centre for the Study of the Domestic Interior (see n. 1) entitled “Say It with Eels: Towards the Material Culture of Food in Early Modern Italy.”

85. Michele, Riccardiana 2734, place 20: “L’archetto del granaio ch’era in terreno ove oggi l’accessa dal piazza.”

86. Ibid., place 14: “Munizion d’olio in quel luogo cavato sopra llavela.”

87. For the Medici cellars, see Spallanzani, *Inventari Medici*, 46–47 (see n. 18).


89. However, see Pier Nicola Pagliara, “‘Destri’ e cucine nell’abitazione del XV e XVI secolo, in specie a Roma,” in *Aspetti dell’abitate in Italia tra XV e XVI secolo*. Distributione, funzioni, impianti*, ed. Aurora Scotti Tosini (Rome, 2000), 39–92. For two inventories of patrician palaces that describe the “masserie da cucina” in great detail, see Carlo Merkel, *I beni della famiglia di Puccio Pucci. Miscellanea Nuziale Ronti-Trivio* (Trento, 1897), esp. 53, and Walter Goetz, *Naablass-Inventare des Angelo da Uzzano und des Ludovico di Gino Capponi mit Einleitung und Anmerkungen herausgegeben von Walter Bombe*. Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters und der Renaissance herausgegeben von Walter Goetz, Band 36 (Leipzig, 1928). The latter even specifies the purposes for which objects are used; for example, p. 53 lists “a baking dish for ravioli” and “an iron pan for making poached eggs.”

90. On kitchen furnishings, see Pagliara, “‘Destri’ e cucine,” 53; the minimal requirements were a fireplace, a sink, and a cupboard.

91. According to ibid., 53, kitchens never, in either palaces or in much smaller houses, occupied the more prestigious locations along the facade, but they were always near the courtyard. In other respects, being near to a stairway and having its own covered loggia, Michele’s kitchen conformed to the norm.

92. Michele, Riccardiana 2734, place 41: “La finestretta sopra il tetto giotto in cucina allato al camino grande.”

93. Ibid., place 93: “Il camino grande di cucina seguendo il muro e scendendo la scala”; place 40: “il camino di cucina.” For other mentions of the fireplace that dominated the kitchen and Michele’s view of it, see place 45. On patrician fireplaces, see Preyer, “Wall Fountain and Fireplace” (see n. 67). On a range of fireplace forms, including earlier and more modest ones, see Schiaparelli, *La casa fiorentina*, 1:chap. 2 (see n. 73); and Pagliara, “‘Destri’ e cucine.”

94. Michele, Riccardiana 2734, place 30: “Munizion de legne cioè l’armaro di sotto di cucina.”

95. Ibid., place 29: “L’armaro del tesoro cioè l’armaro della cucina di sopra...il serpente di sopra.” Place 28 was: “L’uscio della guardia da mezzane scala in cucina...il Gieta di sopra.” *Geta e Birria* was a Florentine version of a ribald Gothic tale; see D. Kent, *Cosimo de’ Medici*, 77, 82 (see n. 3); and John Najemy, *Between Friends* (Princeton, 1993), 225–30.

96. To most medieval Christians, the serpent would have brought to mind the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, a subject that at this time was graphically represented by Masaccio and Masolino in their fresco cycle for the Brancacci Chapel in the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine; see most recently Nicholas Eckstein, ed., *The Brancacci Chapel: Form, Function and Setting* (Florence, 2007).

97. Michele, Riccardiana 2734, place 83: “La piazza delle pentole cioè quel piano di quel deschaccio grande a mano ritta e entrare in cucina...il serpente delle saluccie.”

98. Allen Grieco, “Dining Rituals, the Credenza and the Birth of the Dining Room,” paper presented at the conference “A casa: People, Spaces and Objects in the Renaissance Interior,” Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 7–8 May, 2004. However, as P. Thornton, *Italian Renaissance Interior*, 220 (see n. 64), observes, the Italian credenza in the early to mid-fifteenth century might sometimes be called an armario, although “this term was usually reserved for taller forms like a wardrobe rather than a piece on the top of which you could rest an elbow.”

99. On washing basins in the *sala*, see Preyer, “Wall Fountain and Fireplace.”
For the not entirely successful, and therefore oft-repeated, legislation prohibiting the disposal of waste water in the streets, see Paglara, “Destri e cucine,” 57.

For the use of such shrines, see Giovanni Morelli, Le Ricordanze del primo Certame coronario di due appicato.”

Very few examples of the somewhat mysterious lettuccio survive, none with painted panels; see Fausto Calderai and Simone Chiarugi, “The Lettuccio (Daybed) and Cappellinaio (Hat Rack),” in Ajan-Wollheim and Dennis, At Home in Renaissance Italy.

For the use of such shrines, see Giovanni Morelli, Le Ricordanze, ed. Bruno Santi (Pisa, 1976); and Anabel Thomas, The Scholar in His Study.

On the Certame Coronario, see D. Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 234, 291–92 (see n. 3).

The Medici Palace, see D. Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 239, 248–49.

Lo scrittoio. See Lydecker, “Il patriziato fiorentino,” 219 (see n. 58); and Lydecker, Domestic Setting of the Arts (see n. 61). An example of the sparsely furnished sala that is that of Bartolommeo Sassetti, the redecorating of this room, finished in the late 1440s, consisted of little more than the provision of tavole e panche. See Carte Strozziane, serie V, 1749, ASF (see n. 11): “Libro di debitori e creditori e ricordanze di Bartolommeo di Tomaso Sassetti, 1440–1445,” ff. 55, 58, 61.

On Piero de’ Medici’s precious possessions, many of which were kept in his study, see Spallanzani, Inventari Medici, 92–99, 107–20, 139–57 (see n. 18).

Il patriziato fiorentino.”

On this subject, with reference also to the new palace, see also D. Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 249–49.


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On the Certame Coronario, see D. Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 238, 280–86, and Neri di Bicci, Le Ricordanze, ed. D. Kent, Cosimo de’ Medici, 239, 291–92 (see n. 3).

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Figure 6. Museo Horne, Florence

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Figures 1, 3. Biblioteca Riccardiana Florence; photographs by Donato Pineider

Figure 2. Adapted from Caroline Elam, “Il Palazzo nel contesto della città,” in Il Palazzo Medici, ed. Giovanni Cherrubini and Giovanni Fanelli (Florence, 1990), fig. 78

Figures 4, 5, 9. Ministero per i Beni e le Attività culturali, Italy; Fig. 9: housed at Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence

Figure 6. Museo Horne, Florence

Figure 7. Berenson Collection, Villa I Tatti, Florence

Figure 8. Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit

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