

**From the Library:  
Florentine Publishing in the Renaissance**

February 1 – August 2, 2015  
National Gallery of Art





Paolo Giovio, 1483–1552, *Iscrittioni poste sotto le vere immagini de gli huomini famosi*, Florence: Appresso Lorenzo Torrentino Impressor Ducale, 1552, David K. E. Bruce Fund.

## From the Library: Florentine Publishing in the Renaissance

With neither a unified state nor even a common vernacular language among the various regions of the Italian peninsula, printing presses were established in every city and in many smaller towns. The needs of the population, the disposition of the scholarly community, and the availability of source material would all have affected local book markets. As a city at the heart of Tuscany, a region with an insular culture and close ties to the church as well as a humanist tradition dating to the late thirteenth century, Florence thus had both her own printing industry and a unique relationship with the more prolific Venetian presses. Florence may have been secondary to Venice and Rome in terms of the number of books printed by its presses, but as the cultural beacon of Europe the city had an important impact on the development of language and Renaissance ideals.

Early on, most books that appeared in Florence were short, pious works; there were very few works of literature, and books were rarely illustrated. Given the literary traditions of the city and the artistic talent it nurtured, this seems odd to us. Did the lack of a major figure like Venice's Aldus Manutius, who contributed great advances to the printing trade itself, keep Florence in the shadow of its neighbors? Or did the strong manuscript tradition of Tuscany, with its attendant industry of scribes, illuminators, and rubricators, and a wariness about the authenticity and authority of printed texts suppress development? Or perhaps investment in a new venture may have seemed too risky at a time when the Medici bank had begun to lose money. It was not until 1546, when Cosimo I invited Lorenzo Torrentino from Bologna to become the first official ducal printer, that the Medici harnessed the power of the printed word. In fact the most successful press, and the only one that survived the entire sixteenth century, was that of the Giunti family, who first established a press in Venice in the fifteenth century and only later transitioned their Florentine stationers shop into a printing business.

Whatever the reasons, book production in Renaissance Florence differs from that of most other cities in Italy and is worthy of its own study. This exhibition presents a variety of books of the type published by Florentine presses that are germane to the study of Western art and architecture. Scholarly treatises, literary and historical works, and festival books were all popular fare that evolved over time. Especially relevant to art history are the editions of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives*, which first appeared in Florence in the sixteenth century, the material published in conjunction with Michelangelo's funeral in 1564, and theoretical works by the likes of Leon Battista Alberti and Benedetto Varchi.

## A City for the Arts

1 Leon Battista Alberti, 1404–1472, *De re aedificatoria*, Florence: Accuratissime impressum opera Magistri Nicolai Laurentii Alamani, c. 1485, Mark J. Millard Architectural Collection.

2 Leon Battista Alberti, 1404–1472, *L'Architettura di Leonbatista Alberti Tradotta in lingua Fiorentina da Cosimo Bartoli Gentil'huomo & Accedemico Fiorentino*, Florence: Appresso L. Torrentino, 1550, Mark J. Millard Architectural Collection

The first printing press was introduced in Florence in 1471, and several establishments were set up over the next two decades, though none lasted very long. One of these early printers was Nicolai Laurentii Alamani, who published the first edition of Leon Battista Alberti's treatise on architecture, written in Rome around 1450, edited by Poliziano, and dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici. Based on Vitruvius, the dense Latin tome was influential in intellectual circles, establishing Alberti among the pantheon of Medici-sponsored artists. But the 1485 edition appeared without illustrations, thus the book had little influence on practical architecture.



It was Cosimo Bartoli's Italian translation of *De re aedificatoria*, published in 1550 by Lorenzo Torrentino and dedicated to Cosimo I de' Medici, that finally brought Alberti's work to a wider audience. The first edition to include illustrations, its eighty woodcuts integrated into the text made the "Florentine Vitruvius" more accessible to professional architects and builders. The frontispiece border for the title page and the portrait of Alberti on the verso were both designed by Giorgio Vasari, whose *Lives* was published with Torrentino the same year. This same border appeared in several other sixteenth-century books, including the 1551 edition of Pausanias in the case opposite.

**3** Pomponio Gaurico, c. 1482–1528, *De sculptura*, Florence: printer unknown, 1504, David K. E. Bruce Fund

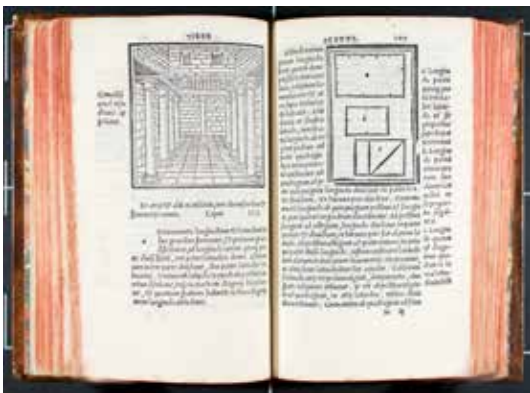
This small book on sculpture was typical of the books seen in Florence in the early sixteenth century. There is very little decoration and the book is set almost entirely in italics, a new typeface introduced in Venice in 1501. In addition to presenting the text with a more scribal quality, the use of italics saved space and, combined with the small margins, show that the anonymous printer was mostly concerned with economy. Note that just as in the Alberti edition of 1485, spaces were left for initial letters to be drawn by hand.



Though this copy was never illuminated, the wealth of talented miniaturists allowed this practice to endure longer in Florence than in most other places, where such hand lettering was replaced by the 1490s with woodcut initial letters that could be set and printed along with the rest of the text.

**4** Vitruvius Pollio, 1st century BC, *De architectura libri decem nuper maxima diligentia castigati atq;*, Florence: Per haeredes Philippi Iuntae, 1522, David K. E. Bruce Fund

By the 1520s printing had been fully accepted in Florentine intellectual circles and the last vestiges of the manuscript tradition were disappearing, but lavish letterpress productions like those found in Venice and Rome were rare. Most books were small, economical volumes. Literary classics and religious works dominated the market, but books on art were an important subset of the former category. This 1522 edition of Vitruvius printed by Philippi Giunti is one of the few books of this period to be illustrated. Small woodcuts demonstrating the architectural principles are set into the text, though they are adapted to local tastes and customs rather than ancient Roman examples.

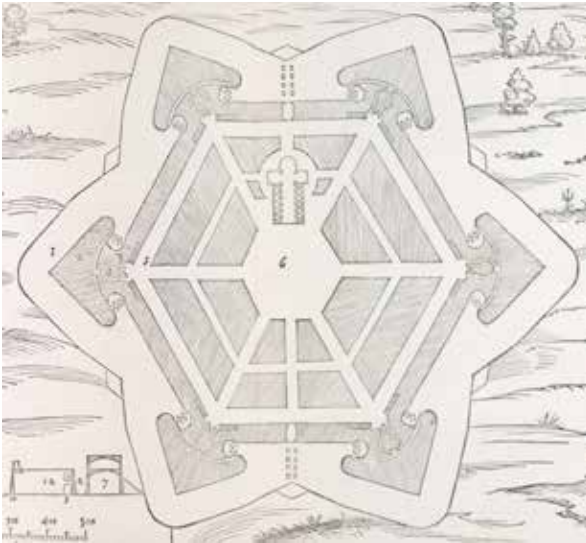


**5** Benedetto Varchi, 1503–1565, *Due lezioni*, Florence: Appresso Lorenzo Torrentino, 1549, J. Paul Getty Fund in honor of Franklin Murphy

In 1547 Lorenzo Torrentino was invited from Bologna to Florence by Cosimo I de' Medici to set up a printing press. Torrentino was designated the official printer of the Medici court, and this position as ducal printer afforded him special privileges. Torrentino received some of the best commissions available in Florence, including treatises by the city's most important intellectuals of the period, like this work by Benedetto Varchi. It comprises an essay on sculpture, an essay on painting, and a series of letters on these topics solicited by Varchi from leading artists of the day, including Michelangelo, Vasari, Cellini, and others. Despite this, the Torrentino press was near ruin when Lorenzo died in 1563 and passed it to his sons who printed few books and eventually shut down, selling their material to the Giunti press.

**6** Antonio Lupicini, c. 1530–c. 1598, *Architettura militare*, Florence: Appresso Giorgio Marescotti, 1582, David K. E. Bruce Fund

By the end of the sixteenth century illustrations began to appear in Florentine books more regularly. They also grew more elaborate, constituting full page spreads or even folding plates. Often they were printed separately on higher quality paper, as in this work on military fortifications by Lupicini published in 1582 by Giorgio Marescotti, one of several new printers who entered the market in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.



## Foundations of Art History

**7** Giorgio Vasari, 1511–1574, *Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori et scultori italiani*, Florence: Appresso Lorenzo Torrentino, 1550, David K. E. Bruce Fund

Painter and architect Giorgio Vasari is often referred to as the first art historian, publishing his *Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Architects, Painters, and Sculptors* in 1550 with a dedication to Cosimo I de' Medici. The first edition was printed by Torrentino and spans two volumes. It presents a discussion of the three main branches of art—architecture, painting, and sculpture—followed by chronologically arranged biographies from Giovanni Cimabue in the thirteenth century through Vasari's contemporary, Michelangelo. Crediting Florentines with almost all the important developments of the Italian Renaissance, particularly those artists supported by the Medici family, Vasari's work established the first canon of important Italian artists.

**8** Giorgio Vasari, 1511–1574, *Vite de' piu eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, Florence: Appresso i Giunti, 1568, Gift of E. J. Rousuck

In 1568 Vasari published a revised edition of his *Lives*, expanding it to three volumes from its original two and including more contemporary artists. Though still biased toward Florentine artists, the edition published by Giunti gives more attention to Venetian artists and includes Titian for the first time. Vasari also added an autobiography and a lengthy entry on the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno, established by Cosimo I de' Medici in 1563, under the influence of Vasari. The second edition is also the first to include woodcut portraits of most of the artists, like the one of Piero di Cosimo shown here.



9 Giorgio Vasari, 1511 – 1574, *Vita del gran Michelagnolo Buonarroti*, Florence: Nella Stamperia de' Giunti, 1568, David K. E. Bruce Fund

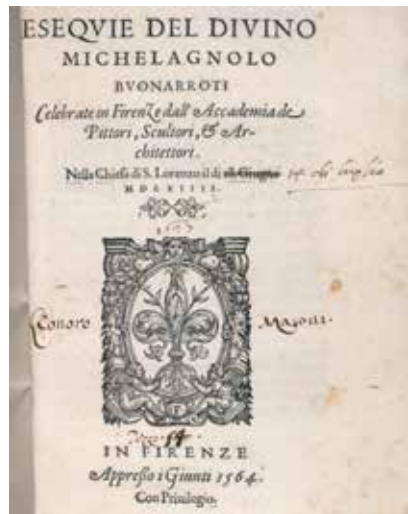
At the same time that the revised version of the *Lives* appeared, the Giunti Press also issued what has been credited as the first offprint in history. Vasari's biography of Michelangelo from the *Lives* was printed separately with its own title page and a new introduction claiming that the book is intended "for those who find the larger work too expensive." Michelangelo had died only four years earlier, and many of his projects were still progressing, some under the supervision of Vasari. This offprint remains not only a testament to the stature of Michelangelo as an artist, but an example of shrewd business practice that allowed the Giunti family to remain successful through several generations.





**10** Jacopo Giunta, fl. 1564, *Esequie del divino Michelagnolo Buonarroti*, Florence: Appresso i Giunti, 1564, Gift of Seyla Martayan. **11** Benedetto Varchi, 1503–1565, *Orazione funerale di M. Benedetto Varchi fatta, e recitata da lui pubblicamente nell'essequie di Michelagnolo Bvonarroti in Firenze, nella Chiesa di San Lorenzo*, Florence: Appresso i Giunti, 1564, David K. E. Bruce Fund. **12** Lionardo Salviati, 1540–1589, *Orazione di Lionardo Salviati nella morte di Michelagnolo Buonarroti*, Florence: Appresso i figliuoli di Lorenzo Torrentino, 1564, David K. E. Bruce Fund. **13** Giovanni Maria Tarsia, *Oratione o vero discorso*, Florence: Appresso Bartolomeo Sermartelli, 1564, David K. E. Bruce Fund

Michelangelo died in Rome in 1564. A small funeral was held there, but Cosimo I de' Medici, who had tried for many years to lure Michelangelo back to his native Florence, convinced the great artist's nephew to bring the body to Florence, where a more elaborate funeral and burial service could be held. Four books were published for the occasion. The first is Vincenzo Borghini's overall plan for the event. Though the dedication is signed by Jacopo Giunta, Borghini was the agent of the Medici family tasked with organizing the venue, choosing speakers, and commissioning artists to design decorations, including Vasari and many others in the circle of



the newly founded Accademia delle Arti del Disegno. Though unillustrated, this volume outlines these preparations, and this particular copy has been annotated with changes that reflect the appearance of the second issue of the text, most notably the change in the date on the title page from the originally planned June 8 to July 14, when the funeral actually took place. The other three books contain the text for the funeral orations performed by Florentine notables. All three were published by different printers. That of Benedetto Varchi, along with his introduction by Borghini, was done by Giunti, while the sons of the now deceased ducal printer Torrentino printed the speech of Lionardo Salviati with an introduction by Piero Corrosecchi. Bartolommeo Sermartelli, whose press was a relatively new venture, printed the oration of Giovan Maria Tarsia with an introduction by Agnolo Bronzino, and added to the end an important discourse on the hierarchy of the arts and Michelangelo's mastery of them all by Benvenuto Cennini.

**14** Pausanias, 2nd century AD, *Pausaniae veteris Graeciae descriptio*, Florence: L. Torrentinus ducalis typographus excudebat, 1551, David K. E. Bruce Fund

Pausanias was a Greek writer who lived in the Roman empire from the time of Hadrian to Marcus Aurelius. Classical literature such as this 1551 edition of his description of Greece in the second century remained one of the mainstays for printers throughout the Renaissance. Used by members of various humanist academies and students at the newly established universities in Italy, texts like these were in constant demand. Though this is a Latin edition, vernacular translations were particularly important in Florence because the Tuscan dialect was considered the highest form of Italian. Even the larger Venetian printers often paid Florentine editors to prepare their texts. The title page shown here reuses the border designed by Vasari for Bartoli's 1550 translation of *De re aedificatoria* in the case opposite.



**15** Paolo Giovio, 1483–1552, *Iscrittioni poste sotto le vere imagini de gli huomini famosi*, Florence: Appresso Lorenzo Torrentino Impressor Ducale, 1552, David K. E. Bruce Fund. **16** Paolo Giovio, 1483–1552, *Pauli Iouii Nouocomensis Episcopi Nucerni Elogia virorum literis illustrium*, Basel: Petri Pernae typographi, 1578, A.W. Mellon Foundation New Century Fund

The literary tradition of Florence, dating back to the early fourteenth century, was an important area of interest for local scholars, and printers catered to their needs with editions of Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch, along with editions of the classics of ancient Rome and Greece. The Tuscan dialect became the standard for modern Italian in large part because of these writers, who used the vernacular rather than Latin, and the scholarship that went into editing their work. Historian and biographer Paolo Giovio relocated to Florence in 1552, and in that same year an edition of his biographies of important Florentine writers was published. Like Vasari's *Lives*, it was produced by the ducal printer in a small, unillustrated format. It was later expanded and woodcut portraits were added. But unlike Vasari, Giovio's work had already enjoyed successful printings throughout Italy and France, and when it was printed in a larger format with woodcuts it appeared in Basel rather than Florence.

**17** Giovanni Villani, d. 1348, *La prima [-seconda] parte delle historie universali de suoi tempi*, Venice: Ad instantia de Giunti di Fiorenza, 1559, David K. E. Bruce Fund

At the same time that a new literary tradition was burgeoning in fourteenth-century Florence, there was also an interest in recording the city's history as its power grew. The first great chronicler of Florence was Giovanni Villani, who began a manuscript called the *Nuova Cronica* detailing events in the city. He died of the plague in 1348, and his brother Matteo and nephew Filippo continued his work. Like contemporary literary authors, such as Dante and Boccaccio, the Villanis wrote in the vernacular. Giovanni's work only appeared in print once before 1550, in a Venetian edition of the first ten books in 1537. But in 1554 Torrentino published the last two books and the first part of Matteo's work, and in 1559, because the privilege granted to Torrentino had not yet expired, the Giunti used their Venetian connections to print this edition of all twelve books in two volumes. By 1577 the privilege had expired, and the Giunti printed the chronicle of Matteo in Florence.



**18** Lionardo Salviati, 1540–1589, *Primo libro delle orazioni del caualier Lionardo Salviati*, Florence: Nella stamperia de' Giunti, 1575, David K. E. Bruce Fund

Contemporary writers and scholars also became increasingly important. This volume comprises fifteen speeches by noted humanist and philologist Lionardo Salviati, who was an important figure in the 1582 founding of the Accademia della Crusca, an institution devoted to the study of Italian linguistics. It includes his funeral orations for Michelangelo and Benedetto Varchi, his address at the coronation of Cosimo II, Grand Duke of Tuscany, in 1570, and his speech at the ceremonies welcoming Joanna d'Austria to Florence for her marriage to Francesco I de' Medici in 1565.



## Florence Goes Baroque

**19** Domenica Mellini, c. 1540–c. 1610, *Descrizione dell'entrata della sereniss. reina Giouanna d'Austria*, Florence: Apresso i Giunti, 1566, A.W. Mellon Foundation New Century Fund

This book describing the entrance of Joanna d'Austria, sister of Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II, into Florence in 1565 for her marriage to Francesco I de' Medici, is an example of a typical sixteenth-century festival book. Usually minor publications, especially in Florence, they were rarely illustrated, often more concerned with reproducing the oratorical aspects and recording the event through textual descriptions. This particular work is important, however, because Vasari was the artistic director of the festival and it remains the only record of the ephemeral architecture designed by Vincenzo Borghini with decorations composed of sophisticated visual puzzles. This is the last and most complete of three editions of this work produced by the Giunti in the same year.

**20** Giuliano Giraldi, *Esequie d'Arrigo quarto cristianissimo re di Francia, e di Nauarra: celebrate in Firenze dal serenissimo don Cosimo II granduca di Toscana*, Florence: Nella stamperia di Bartolommeo Sermartelli e fratelli, 1610, David K. E. Bruce Fund

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, festival books were more elaborate. In addition to being commissioned to provide decorations for such events, artists were now commissioned to record them through drawings and engravings. Marie de' Medici was the daughter of Francesco I and Joanna d'Austria and became the second wife of Henry IV of France. When he was assassinated in 1610, Marie's cousin, Cosimo II, now Grand Duke of Tuscany, arranged an elaborate funeral service in Florence that included the commissioning of twenty-six paintings of scenes from Henry's life by Florentine artists. The paintings were then reproduced as etchings by Aloys Rosaccio for this book.



**21** Andrea Salvadori, *Gverra d'amore: festa del serenissimo gran dvca di Toscana, Cosimo secondo, fatta in Firenze il carneuale del 1615*, Florence: Nella Stamperia di Zanobi Pignoni, 1615, David K. E. Bruce Fund

Carnival festivities in Florence became increasingly elaborate affairs with all manner of performance sponsored by the ruling elite. This festival book comprises the libretto for the performance of a mock tournament in the form of a ballet on horseback. The music for the production was composed by Jacopo Peri, also credited with creating the world's first opera, *Dafne*, that was performed in Florence in 1598 but has since been lost.

**22** Benedetto Buommattei, 1581–1647, *Descrizon delle feste fatte in Firenze per la canonizzazione di s.to Andrea Corsini*, Florence: Nella stamperia di Zanobi Pignoni, 1632, David K. E. Bruce Fund

In addition to state visits, marriages, funerals, and royal births, religious events were also the subject of many festivals. Saint Andrea Corsini (1302–1373) of Tuscany was canonized by Pope Urban VIII in 1629, but it took three years for the commemorative book to be published. The twenty-one plates depicting scenes from the life of the saint were etched by Stefano della Bella, presumably in 1629, making them among his earliest works.



**23** Giovanni Carlo Coppola, 1599–1652, *Le Nozze degli Dei. Favola*, Florence: Amadore Massi e Lorenzo Landi, 1637, David K. E. Bruce Fund

This is the only edition of a play presented in Florence on the occasion of the marriage of Ferdinando II de' Medici and Vittoria della Rovere, Princess of Urbino. It is a special presentation copy, bound in the decorative binding of Marcello Lante della Rovere, a cardinal in the Catholic church and family member of the bride. The text is the libretto for the play and the foldout plates etched by Stefano della Bella after drawings by Alfonso Parigi show the elaborate stage sets for each act.

## Further Reading

Brian Richardson. *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470–1600*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Brian Richardson. *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Elizabeth L. Eisenstein. *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Andrew Pettegree. *The Book in the Renaissance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

William A. Pettas. *The Giunti of Florence: Merchant Publishers of the Sixteenth Century*. San Francisco: B. M. Rosenthal, 1980

J. R. Mulryne et. al., ed. *Europa triumphans: Court and Civic Festivals in Early Modern Europe*. London: MHRA, 2004.

Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly and Anne Simon. *Festivals and Ceremonies: A Bibliography of Works Relating to Court, Civic, and Religious Festivals in Europe, 1500–1800*. London and New York: Mansell, 2000.



Andrea Salvadori, *Guerra d'amore: festa del serenissimo gran duca di Toscana, Cosimo secondo, fatta in Firenze il carnevale del 1615*, Florence: Nella Stamperia di Zanobi Pignoni, 1615, David K. E. Bruce Fund

Checklist of the exhibition *From the Library: Florentine Publishing in the Renaissance*,  
February 1 – August 2, 2015.

Copyright © 2015 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington.  
Written by Yuri Long.

The Gallery website features highlights from the exhibition and links to exhibition  
related activities at [www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/exhibitions/2015/florentine-publishing-in-the-renaissance.html](http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/exhibitions/2015/florentine-publishing-in-the-renaissance.html).

