ABSTRACT. Studies of the Grand Tour conventionally focus upon the art and antiquities of Italy rather than the urban environment in which the tourists found themselves, and they generally stop short in the 1790s. This article examines the perceptions and representations of Florence amongst British visitors over the course of the long eighteenth century up to c. 1820 in order to establish continuity between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It considers why it was that British travellers appeared to be particularly attracted to Florence: initially they responded to congenial and pleasant surroundings, the availability of home comforts, and a sparkling social life. In the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Florence acquired new meanings for the British, who began to identify and admire a civilization which had been based upon mercantile wealth and liberty: the foundations for the Victorian celebration of Florence were laid. But the experience of Florence as a city had also changed: it was no longer simply the showcase of the Medici dukes. As a consequence the buildings, monuments, and paintings of the republican period, as well as the history which they embodied, came into focus for the first time.

In the summer of 1785, Hester Piozzi left Florence with considerable regret: ‘But I must bid adieu to beautiful Florence’, she wrote, ‘where the streets are kept so clean one is afraid to dirty them, and not one’s self, by walking in them: where the public walks are all nicely weeded, as in England, and the gardens have a homeish and Bath-like look, that is excessively cheering to an English eye.’1 Piozzi’s strong attachment to Florence was far from being unique amongst English-speaking visitors, and as the quotation above suggests, was not simply based upon admiration of the ducal collections. Rather, it grew out of a sense that Florence was mercifully free of those qualities which rendered Italian cities, for all the magnificence of their art and antiquities, an alien and unfamiliar environment. Florence appeared to offer an oasis of home-like comfort in the midst of lengthy peregrinations in foreign lands: one of the most frequently repeated commonplaces of British travellers in Italy was the recommendation of Florence as a base for prolonged residence.
Piozzi’s comments are interesting, then, for indicating those qualities of urban life which were regarded as characteristically ‘English’ and for reminding us of the alienation and homesickness that could afflict the tourist even in the promised land of Italy. But it is worth examining the nature of this ‘English’ attachment to and interest in Florence rather further. The responses of English and, indeed, British travellers in Italy to the cities and sights which they encountered show remarkable continuity in many aspects over the eighteenth century, which is one of the factors that gives the ‘Grand Tour’ any kind of heuristic value as a concept. However, the standardization of the tourist itinerary and the formulaic nature of so much of the published and unpublished literature of the Grand Tour should not be allowed to obscure the fact that perceptions of and responses to the cities through which visitors travelled were constantly evolving over the eighteenth century. To generalize broadly: at the start of the eighteenth century the standard account of Florence by British visitors would present it simply in terms of the Medici dukedom. Florence’s identity and fame rested upon its place as the showpiece of the grand dukes’ patronage, taste, and power. The art and architecture that drew the admiration of the tourist was overwhelmingly that of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. The city’s republican past, along with the commercial wealth and artistic culture of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, were of minor interest. But by the end of the eighteenth century, we find a richer and more diverse range of responses to the city. The term ‘Renaissance’ had not yet been coined, but British travellers were now beginning to attach much more importance to Florence’s role in fostering the early revival of the arts and to appreciate how its commercial and manufacturing wealth had permitted patronage on a scale which even the wealthiest of the landed elite were bound to admire. Florence acquired a new set of associations for the British visitor, which in turn transformed the way in which it was viewed, experienced, and described as a city.

Symptomatic of these changing attitudes was William Roscoe’s best seller, The Life of Lorenzo de’ Medici, first published in 1795, which in itself was responsible

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2 In referring to Florence’s appeal to the English, it seems unlikely that Piozzi was deliberately drawing a distinction between the English and the British. The English tended to use the terms interchangeably in this period.


for enthusing a whole generation of British travellers with admiration for the achievement of Lorenzo de’ Medici and Florence. The influence of Roscoe’s volume may have been overrated, but it was certainly representative of changing cultural values amongst those who travelled to Italy. Roscoe was dazzled by the character and style of il Magnifico, but he also contributed to, and helped to reify, a perceptual shift in the image of Florence, away from the Medici dukes to the Medici bankers of the fifteenth-century republic: a republic with a flourishing cultural life based upon wealth derived from manufactures and commerce. Roscoe did not himself draw direct comparisons between Florence and Liverpool, although he was one of the prime movers in attempting to develop the artistic and cultural reputation of his native city. But the parallels were there to be drawn in the nineteenth century.

The objectives of this article are, therefore, to establish why Florence was so often preferred above Italian cities; to elucidate the shifting patterns in the representation of Florence through the eighteenth century and to evaluate the extent to which these would have been determined by cultural developments at home. In doing so, the eighteenth-century foundations upon which the nineteenth-century admiration for Renaissance Florence could be built will be established. The material upon which this article is based comes from a miscellaneous range of sources: printed tours and guides, unpublished journals and correspondence, itself coming from an equally varied range of writers. The classic image of the Grand Tourist is that of the young aristocratic male, attended by his clerical bearleader, but this should not blind us to the fact that the Grand Tour was never, and particularly not from around 1740, the preserve of the youth of the British aristocracy. As the century progressed the age range and the social background of travellers to Italy became increasingly varied, as older men, family groups, merchants, and professionals, and even single women, travelled to Italy in rising numbers, following the same route and visiting the same sights as their younger counterparts. The English were the most numerous amongst British travellers, but there was always a substantial minority from Scotland and Ireland (many attracted to the Pretender’s court) and a scattering of Welsh gentry. From the perspective of the Italians, however, they were all milordi inglesi.

5 William Roscoe, The life of Lorenzo de’ Medici, called the Magnificent (2 vols., Liverpool, 1795). It had been translated into Italian, German, and French by 1799 and had reached its tenth edition in English by 1851.


7 John Towner, ‘The Grand Tour: a key phase in the history of tourism’, Annals of Tourism Research, 12 (1985), pp. 297–333. Towner’s study is the only attempt so far to provide any kind of statistical breakdown of the age profile, gender, occupation, and social status of tourists. His sample, based upon 108 separate tours over the period 1547–1840 corroborates the more impressionistic findings of other studies.
In concentrating on a single city, the intention here is to direct attention away from more traditional areas of inquiry – such as the influence of Italy upon the development of domestic art and architecture, or its role in shaping the contemporary canon of taste – and to focus instead upon how British travellers reacted to a particular place. Whilst other centres of the Grand Tour, such as Rome and Venice, have attracted considerable attention, the experience of visiting the city of Florence itself, as opposed to the collections in the Uffizi, has never been considered at any length. Furthermore, despite the fact that the Grand Tour was an inherently urban experience, comparatively little attention has been directed towards considering how visitors responded to and described a city such as Florence, in which they would normally expect to spend a minimum of two weeks.

By the later eighteenth century, as this article shows, British tourists were displaying a better informed and more wide-ranging interest in the city of Florence and its history. Much of the information upon which they drew had always been available: the change in content was not so much the result of the discovery of new material, but rather a question of making better use of sources that had always existed, either in English or Italian. But it should also be recognized that the ‘re-evaluation’ of Florence that can be identified in the later eighteenth century coincided with a stronger sense of civic patriotism and a revival of interest in the Florentine republic that was developing within Florence itself at the same time. This article also considers, therefore, the extent to which British visitors’ perceptions of the city drew upon information derived from the printed guides and histories which they would have encountered in Italy, and the degree to which the changing sensibilities of the British were determined by the Florentine view of the city and its past.

I

British responses to Florence are remarkable for the consistency of their approbation. Rome, Venice, and Naples, the other major centres of the Italian tour, evoked much more equivocal reactions. Whilst there were many who admired Venice’s beauty and wondered at its extraordinary topography, there was equally a well-established tradition that complained of the ‘filthy heaps and nasty lakes’. Conventional taste in architecture was offended by the ‘awkward and irregular’ appearance of San Marco and the Doge’s palace. Once the novelty of the
floating city had worn off, visitors often complained that they felt oppressed by a
sense of claustrophobia: penned up within the confines of the city and surrounded
by the sea, they longed to be able to stretch their legs on dry land, with a view of
wide open spaces. For the first week, wrote James Boswell, he was charmed by the
novelty and beauty of the city, ‘but I soon wearied of travelling continually by
water, shut up in those lugubrious gondolas’.  

Rome was the ultimate goal of the
Grand Tourist, but the ruins aside, British visitors were frequently unimpressed,
or at least claimed to be unimpressed, by the modern city, not least because most
observers were locked into a system of thought whereby papal absolutism could
not be admitted to be capable of good government or benign rule.  

St Peter’s was
impressive, but the baroque curves of Bernini and Borromini did not appeal to
British tastes, whilst the social life and the entertainments on offer were often
found wanting. Naples, whither the tourists repaired to escape the rigours of a
Roman Lent, offered a livelier social scene, a benign climate, and a wealth of
curiosities, geological and antiquarian, in the surrounding campagna. But Naples as
a city failed to captivate the British imagination to the extent that Florence did.
The architecture was too florid; the Catholicism too overt; the lazzaroni too idle.

The tradition of writing favourably about Florence was established early in the
institutional development of the Grand Tour. Travellers in the late seventeenth
century always remarked upon the extent to which Grand Duke Cosimo III was
particularly well disposed towards the British and how he welcomed them more
warmly to Florence than any other nation, dispensing gifts of wine and fruit to all
new arrivals.  

Whilst it was clearly in his interests to maintain a friendly re-
lationship with Britain, if only with regard to the trading interests of the port of
Livorno, whose prosperity was heavily dependent upon the English factory, the
English at least chose to believe the friendly reception was in recognition of the
hospitality which Cosimo had himself received when he visited England as a


12 For a classic statement of this viewpoint, see Thomas Denham, The temporal government of the pope’s state (London, 1788).

13 See, for example, the earl of Winchelsea’s observation on Naples to his mother, Lady Charlotte Finch: ‘I never saw any think [sic] that surprises so much as Naples take it altogether it is so different from any thing one ever sees any where else, I mean the environs, the Town is nothing very extra-
ordinary the Number of people is ye only surprising thing in it but the number of things that surprise you about the country are amazing’ (Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland Record Office (LLRRO) Finch MSS Box 4953 Bundle 32, correspondence of George, earl of Winchelsea with his mother, letter dated 18 May 1773).

14 Bodleian Library Oxford (Bodl.) MS Douce 67, ‘Remarks on several parts of Flanders, Brabant, France and Italy in the year 1717’, fos. 82–3; Bodl. MS Eng. misc. e 206, ‘Journal of Thomas Twisel
don the continent, 1693–1694’, fo. 41.
young man in 1668–9. The warmth of his reception did much to temper the criticism which travellers were wont to level against an absolute ruler such as Cosimo, who kept cannons trained upon the city in the event of any unrest and oppressed his subjects with high levels of taxation. More trenchant criticism was directed against his successors, who did not enjoy the buffer of being thought a particular friend of Britain, but the sense of affinity with Florence was not eradicated.

The end of the Medici dynasty in 1737 ushered in the absentee rule of Francis Stephen, later Holy Roman Emperor, and the British could no longer expect such preferential treatment from the ruler or his representatives. They still contrived to find common ground, however: British visitors were ready to believe that the archduke and his nobility encouraged trade (they noted the custom amongst the nobility of selling wine from their own palazzi) and this, they argued, tempered both the absolutism and the poverty of the country. But Count Richecourt, Francis Stephen’s plenipotentiary, definitely did not favour the British: he was responsible, amongst other policies, for revoking the immunities of the British merchants at Livorno. This hostility from the ducal court was, however, less significant than it might have been because from 1740 British travellers could find a home from home at the house of Sir Horace Mann, who had assumed the role of British Resident in Florence. Mann’s boundless hospitality and courtesy to British visitors of all descriptions is well documented, both in his own correspondence and that of the tourists themselves, and does not need repetition. According to the earl of Cork, he was the only person he had ever known, whom ‘all Englishmen agreed in praising’. Mann died in 1786, but his successor, John, Lord Hervey, similarly appreciated the importance of hospitality, even if he won fewer golden opinions from the tourists whom he entertained.

The unusual longevity of Mann’s tenure provided a remarkable element of continuity in the experience of British travellers. Young men who enjoyed his hospitality in the 1740s were followed by their offspring a generation later, leading to some touching scenes, such as the occasion when Mann introduced the young Thomas Pelham, heir to the future earl of Chichester, to the Countess Acciaioli, to whom his father had acted as cavaliere servente twenty-five years before.

By the time that Thomas Pelham was making small talk with his father’s former mistress in 1777, there had been a change of ruler. Francis Stephen was
succeeded by Peter Leopold in 1765, who embarked upon a project of implementing the precepts of enlightened absolutism within the dukedom of Tuscany. British tourists generally warmed to Duke Leopold, as he was generally known: with his agricultural reforms, suppression of monasteries, codification of the law, abolition of excessive ceremonial and ritual, he was credited with bringing prosperity and progress to Tuscany. He appeared to be introducing the kind of enlightened tolerance and economic progress which the British associated with their own country. Unlike the Roman or Neapolitan campagna, which invariably gave rise to reflections on alternatively the pernicious effects of corrupt and absolutist government or the dead hand of feudalism on the affluence of a country, the prosperity which travellers claimed to detect throughout Tuscany, and the flourishing commerce at the free port of Livorno, vindicated their own belief in the benign effects of free trade, toleration, and enlightened principles.

Of more practical concern to the tourists was the fact that he opened up the Laurentian Library to visitors and abolished the custom of giving perquisites to the guides and servants.

Due to the presence of the English factory at Livorno, supplies of English food and other goods were more readily available in Florence than elsewhere – a matter of no small importance for travellers who often found normal Italian fare hard to stomach. John Swinton, a naval chaplain, who visited Florence during a sojourn in Livorno in 1731, was pleased to discover that the Florentine nobility had acquired a taste for English beer: ‘The Italian nobility and Cavaliers’, he noted, ‘make nothing of drinking 3 or 4 Bottles of the strongest English Beer in a Morning, but ys [this] is no Prejudice to them, their heads being in capable of suffering thereby.’ In addition to beer, as numbers of tourists found, the shops were better stocked than elsewhere in Italy, with imported luxuries such as Reading sauce and Woodstock gloves, whilst Mariana Starke, whose special concern was the care of travelling invalids, was pleased to reassure her readers that ‘Dr. James Fever Powders’ were readily available in

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22 For a recent overview of Leopold’s reforms in Tuscany see Carlo Capra, ‘Hapsburg Italy in the age of reform’, Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 10 (2005), pp. 218–33. The intellectual and social contexts to the Tuscan reform programme, and in particular the influence of French physiocratic thought is explored by T. Wahnbaeck, Luxury and public happiness: political economy in the Italian Enlightenment (Oxford, 2004).

23 The British would have been influenced by Leopold’s own propaganda machine, which produced statistics demonstrating the improvements he had wrought and outlining his plans for improvement. (Cochrane, Florence in the forgotten centuries, pp. 484–5). Leopold also convinced Arthur Young of the efficacy of his measures. Young became a member of Georgofili society and offered a very favourable assessment of Leopold’s improvements in Travels during the years 1787, 1788 and 1789 (Bury St Edmunds, 1792), p. 494. See also Robert Semple, Observations on a journey through Spain and Italy to Naples and thence to Smyrna and Constantinople (2 vols., London, 1807, ii, p. 36); Joseph Forsyth, Remarks on antiquities, arts and letters, during an excursion in Italy, in the years 1802 and 1803 (2nd edn, London, 1816), pp. 72–4, was equally full of praise for Leopold as a ‘philosopher king’ who carried out practical reforms.

24 Wadham College, Oxford, Wadham MS 11.5, ‘A diary or a daily journal containing all the most remarkable accidents and events that have happen’d to me, and the most material occurrences and observations that have fallen under my knowledge since July 29th O S 1730’, 27 Apr. 1731.
By the second half of the eighteenth century, there were several well-established hostelries which were famous amongst the British for being run by their own countrymen. One such was run by Charles Hadfield, who had determined upon establishing a hotel in Florence after his own negative experiences of travel in Italy. He ran his business, which eventually amounted to three different establishments in and around Florence, for thirty years. After his death, one of the hotels was acquired in 1779 by another Englishman, Meggit, who had been servant to Lord Maynard. Meggit continued to cater to the needs of the English for nearly twenty years. Vanini’s was run by Widow Vanini, an Englishwoman who had married an Italian and made a profitable living out of catering to the needs of visitors, such as Lady Miller, who relished the ‘true English elegance, civility and cleanliness’. Hester Piozzi revelled in the soft clean pillows, currant tarts, beans, and bacon, and Mrs Flaxman was delighted to be served good English fare of roast beef and plum pudding. Male travellers tended to be less specific about the creature comforts that they found at these places, but the clean beds and familiar food were as welcome to them as to women. There is a palpable sense of relief evident in their letters and journals as they found themselves amidst more familiar surroundings after the strains of travel. As the artist Thomas Jones remarked with relief on his arrival at Hadfield’s: ‘I could hardly help fancying myself in England and that increasing phantom – distance from home which continually haunted my Mind at every Other Stage, vanished an Instant.’ Comments such as these bring home the sense of estrangement and alienation which was as much a part of the Grand Tour as the emotional transports enjoyed on seeing the Venus de Medici. Florence, then, offered perhaps a higher degree of physical comfort than other Italian cities. But Piozzi’s remark, quoted at the outset of this article, reminds us

27 Ibid., pp. 652–3.
28 Anne, Lady Miller, *Letters from Italy, describing the manners, customs, antiquities, paintings etc of that country* (3 vols., London, 1779), ii, p. 74.
30 BL Add. MS 39787, correspondence of Ann Flaxman, fo. 30.
33 Lord Kildare wrote to his mother, Emily, duchess of Leinster: ‘I must own I long to be once more comfortable at Carton, but as travelling is a pleasant thing to have over, I am, thank God, very happy and enjoy being abroad much better than I expected’ (Brian Fitzgerald, ed., *The correspondence of Emily duchess of Leinster* (3 vols., Dublin, 1957), iii, p. 466).
that it was as much the physical appearance of the town that she found so ‘cheering’ as the quality of the accommodation. What impressed the British visitor in Florence was the ‘good figure’ made by the houses and buildings, the breadth of the main streets (beyond which few tourists penetrated), and the quality of the pavements and the cleanliness. For many tourists, the last place in which they would have made any extended stay in Italy – particularly those who had come by sea from the south of France – would have been Genoa. Here, the streets were notoriously narrow; so much so that they were impassable to carriages, and the elaborately decorated façades could barely be seen from the street. Florence, however, had the kind of broad avenues and spacious squares that were widely appreciated, both for their aesthetic qualities and the freer circulation of air and traffic that they allowed. Moreover, these thoroughfares were paved and cleansed, mitigating the perennial complaint of British visitors to Italy about the filthy state of the streets. ‘It is so perfectly clean’, the countess of Pomfret told the countess of Hertford in 1740, ‘that there is not the least ill smell in the streets all the year round.’ Even after a shower, noted Ann Flaxman, the streets were clean and dry enough for walking. With respect to architecture, British visitors, who found the baroque curves and columns of Rome and Naples in poor taste, were more in sympathy with the simpler Florentine aesthetic. The façades of the palazzi and other buildings built in the ‘Tuscan’ or ‘rustic’ order were in general widely admired, not least for their perceived similarity to the Palladian style made fashionable in Britain by the earl of Burlington. French visitors, by contrast, were less impressed: Charles de Brosses found the buildings’ façades excessively flat, lacking the relief and movement of columns which he admired in the architecture of Borromini and Bernini. Whilst there were no architectural glories to match St Peter’s or antiquities to compete with the Coliseum, the prevailing impression of Florence was of a city that was uniquely pleasant and agreeable. Even Samuel Sharp, one

35 Correspondence between Frances, countess of Hartford, (afterwards duchess of Somerset) and Henrietta Louisa, countess of Pomfret, between the years 1738–1742 (3 vols., London, 1805), 1, p. 211. This was a view that her grandson, the earl of Winchelsea, reiterated over forty years later. LLRRO Finch MSS Box 4953 Bundle 32, correspondence of George, earl of Winchelsea with his mother, letter dated 3 Apr. 1773.
36 BL Add. MS 39787, correspondence of Ann Flaxman, fo. 30.
37 Thompson, Travels of the late Charles Thompson Esq, 1, p. 99, observed of the Tuscan order exemplified in the Palazzo Pitti that ‘this Manner of Building is where great rough Stones are set jutting out beyond the plain Superficies; which has been imitated by several English Noblemen, particularly the Earl of Burlington, in the Pillars before his House in Piccadilly’. See also Wright, Observations, ii, p. 393, or R. J. Colyer, ‘A Breconshire gentleman in Europe, 1737–1738’, National Library of Wales Journal, 21 (1979–80), p. 285.
38 Lord Ronald Sutherland Gower, Selections from the letters of de Brosses (London, 1897), p. 71. French visitors were not uniformly admiring of Italian baroque architecture, however, particularly in its more extreme forms in Naples. As the eighteenth century progressed their attitude became progressively more critical of the ‘mauvais gout’ of Neapolitan ecclesiastical architecture (Anthony Blunt, ‘Naples as seen by French travellers, 1630–1780’, in Francis Haskell, Anthony Levi, and Robert Shackleton, eds., The artist and the writer in France: essays in honour of Jean Seznec (Oxford, 1974), pp. 1–14.
of the most critical and disaffected observers amongst the British travellers in Italy, judged Florence to be preferred to all other cities in Italy as a place of residence.\textsuperscript{39}

It is noticeable that some of the most positive commendations of Florence emanate from female travellers such as Pomfret, Miller, Flaxman, and Piozzi who have already been quoted. Their enthusiasm, and that of other women, seems to suggest that Florence was particularly attractive to the female traveller.\textsuperscript{40} There was more to this preference than simply feminine concerns with hygiene and domestic comfort. In other ways, too, Florence offered a more congenial atmosphere in which women could spend time than did Rome, for example, where the principal objective was supposed to be the study of antiquities. This is not to say that women did not admire antiquities or take an interest in them – for that was patently not the case. They were, however, generally at a disadvantage compared to men in the appreciation of antiquities, simply by virtue of their education. Rarely did they have the same level of familiarity with Roman history and the classical texts which framed the responses and determined the agenda of sightseeing for their male counterparts. Moreover, in Rome, many of the antiquities were in the disabatio (the areas within the city walls which were no longer inhabited) and less easily accessible to women, whose social position did not allow them to undertake the kind of lengthy expeditions on foot and horseback in variable weather which were part and parcel of a comprehensive course of antiquities.\textsuperscript{41} In Florence, however, the object was not so much the pursuit of antiquity, but the appreciation of art and the cultivation of polite sociability in the conversazione, the theatres, and the opera houses. Florence lent itself particularly well to the female visitor who, armed with a copy of Jonathan Richardson’s \textit{An account of some of the statues, bas-reliefs, drawings and pictures in Italy, with remarks} (1722) or Charles Nicholas Cochin’s \textit{Voyage d’Italie} (1758), could pronounce judgements on works of art as readily as any man – and frequently did.\textsuperscript{42} Zoffany’s conversation piece of Grand Tourists leering over the Venus de Medici, the Venus d’Urbino, and other choice specimens has helped to create a perception of the Grand Tour

\textsuperscript{39} Sharp, \textit{Letters from Italy}, p. 244.
\textsuperscript{40} Lady Mary Coke wrote that ‘I am much better pleased with the town [Florence] and country about it then [sic] I am with any other part of Italy I have seen’, quoted in Andrew Moore, \textit{Norfolk and the Grand Tour} (Fakenham, 1985), p. 68.
\textsuperscript{41} For example, Mary Berry noted that she and her sister were not allowed into the amphitheatre castrense because they were women (Lady Theresa Lewis, ed., \textit{Extracts of the journals and correspondence of Miss Berry from the year 1783–1852} (3 vols., London, 1865), I, p. 95); Lady Miller did not accompany her husband to view a bridge built by Augustus because access was said to be difficult, \textit{Letters from Italy}, ii, p. 174.
\textsuperscript{42} Much of Richardson’s success as a theorist lay in the fact that he argued that the ‘science of the connoisseur’ was dependent upon the exercise of rational faculties, rather than an innate quality of mind. Whilst he did not explicitly endorse female connoisseurship, those who followed Locke’s arguments for the essential equality of mind between the two sexes could find in Richardson ample justification for women venturing to pronounce upon art. Richardson’s theories of connoisseurship are discussed in Carol Gibson Wood, \textit{Jonathan Richardson} (London, 2000).
as a largely masculine experience. Zoffany, however, deployed considerable artistic licence in inserting many objects of virtù which did not normally reside in the tribuna; his representation of the space as the preserve of male connoisseurs was hardly any more accurate. Lady Miller, for one, provided a blow by blow account of how she and her husband measured every part of the Venus de Medici’s anatomy: ‘round her shoulders, passing the string under her arms across her breast, three feet’.  

There was also a well-established social life in which women, and men, could participate: Sir Horace Mann was attentive and assiduous in entertaining British travellers, even to the extent of rigging up lamps on green poles wrapped with vine branches in order to create the effect of Vauxhall Gardens. ‘I believe there is no place in Europe, where the nobility and gentry pass their time more agreeably than they do here’, wrote one visitor in 1756. In Venice, Rome, and Naples, the British found that the majority of the resident nobility were reluctant to entertain at home, preferring to exchange visits in the boxes of the theatre and the opera house. The Florentine nobility were similarly reticent, but the centrality of Mann’s entertainments to the Florentine social scene – to which Italians as well as British were invited – allowed for greater levels of social intercourse than visitors found in other major centres. Mann’s efforts were supplemented by the presence of other long-term English residents, such as the third Earl Cowper, Lord Tylney, and the countess of Orford, who similarly extended hospitality, although on a less inclusive basis. Perceptions were, perhaps, also influenced by the anglophile tone of Florentine culture: by the 1770s Italian histories of England, translations of Hume, Robertson, and Smollett were available, along with English grammars for those who wished to learn the language themselves. ‘I must own’, confessed the earl of Winchelsea to his mother, ‘it gives me great pleasure to see the French a little humbled as it is very evident how much the preference is given to the English’. The air of ‘cheerfulness and gaiety’ was still being offered as a defining characteristic of the city in the guides of the early 1740.

43 Nigel Llewellyn, “‘Those loose and immodest pieces’: Italian art and the British point of view”, in Shearer West, ed., Italian culture in northern Europe in the eighteenth century (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 67–100. Llewellyn’s focus on paintings of male tourists viewing works of art gives undue emphasis to the male gaze and underestimates the extent to which women travelled in the company of men, particularly in the period after 1740.  
44 Miller, Letters from Italy, II, p. 111.  
45 Alexander Drummond, Travels through different cities of Germany, Italy, Greece, and several parts of Asia (London, 1754), p. 41; Mann to Walpole, 4 July 1744, in Dr Doran, ‘Mann’ and manners at the court of Florence, 1740–1786 (2 vols., London, 1876), I, p. 186.  
46 Sacheverall Stevens, Miscellaneous remarks made on the spot, in a late seven years tour through France, Italy, Germany and Holland (London, 1756), p. 128.  
49 LLRRO Finch MSS Box 4953, Bundle 32, correspondence of George, earl of Winchelsea with his mother, letter dated 20 Dec. 1772.
nineteenth century. Hester Piozzi’s lament on leaving Florence illustrates the value that was placed upon the sociability and entertainment on offer: ‘Florence’ was, she wrote, ‘still the residence of sweetness, grace and the fine arts particularly; of these kind friends too, so amiable, so hospitable, where I had the choice of four boxes in each theatre.’

III

Voltaire’s description of Florence as a second Athens quickly became a clichéd observation amongst travellers. Florence was, as Piozzi said, above all the ‘residence of the fine arts’, and the places where these were to be appreciated were chiefly the duke’s gallery and the Palazzo Pitti. The Medici collections were the principal attraction drawing visitors to Florence and were likewise the justification for spending an extended period of time there. Florence was both described, and experienced, chiefly as a gallery of paintings and sculptures, rather than as an urban space of streets, piazzas, and buildings. Travellers’ diaries show that visitors went straight to the gallery before any other sight upon arrival in Florence, and once at the gallery, it was the treasures of the tribuna, and above all the Venus de Medici, which elicited the most extravagant praise. Two weeks were not enough, it was said, to appreciate the glories of that collection alone: Edward Gibbon found that he needed fourteen separate visits fully to appreciate its riches. Philip Yorke, anxious to impress his uncle (who was bankrolling his trip) with his seriousness of purpose, opined that there was sufficient in the gallery to occupy one for a couple of months. In the event, he tired of paintings after only two weeks.

Most visitors did, of course, visit more than the gallery and the Palazzo Pitti and took in a number of churches and other palazzi during their visit, but the tourist itinerary was a highly partial and selective one, which sought out monuments and buildings associated with a few key figures and the works of those artists only who were admired according to conventional eighteenth-century canons of taste. Amongst the Florentine artists, Raphael, Michelangelo, Andrea del Sarto, and Fra Bartolommeo were held in particular esteem, whilst Giotto and Cimabue deserved acknowledgement, if not admiration, as the first revivers of the art of painting. The duomo, along with the campanile and the baptistery, occupied almost as important a position on the tourist itinerary as did the Medici collections. It was Brunelleschi’s octagonal dome, renowned for being the

50 See, for example, John Milford, Observations, moral, literary and antiquarian made during a tour through the Pyrenees, South of France, Switzerland, the whole of Italy and the Netherlands, in the years 1814 and 1815 (2 vols., London, 1818), II, p. 122.
51 Piozzi, Observations, p. 168.
52 Voltaire, The general history and state of Europe (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1758), II, p. 5.
54 BL Add. MS 35378, correspondence of Philip Yorke with his uncle, Philip Yorke, second earl of Hardwicke, Philip Yorke to his uncle, 12 Oct. 1778, fo. 245.
forerunner to Michelangelo’s greater effort at St Peter’s, which was chiefly ad-
miréd. The marble clad exterior, by contrast, evinced very mixed responses and
only qualified admiration. Inside, the tomb of Giovanni Acuto, the English
condottieri (mercenary captain) Sir John Hawkwood, was one of the few objects
of notice in an interior which was generally deemed disappointingly drear. Few
visitors missed San Lorenzó where they would marvel at the unfinished riches of
the Medici chapel and Michelangelo’s Medici tomb in the sacristy. In Santa
Croce, Giotto’s frescos were invisible in the eighteenth century and its soaring
gothic proportions failed to impress, but the tombs of Galileo and Aretino, as well
as Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, made the church a site of pilgrimage, even
before Byron gave Santa Croce and the ‘all Etruscan three’ literary immortality
in Childe Harold’s pilgrimage. The conscientious tourist would go also to Santo
Spirito to admire Brunelleschi’s architecture; to Santa Trinità, famous for having
been Michelangelo’s favourite church; and to Santissima Annunziata, noted for
the frescos of Andrea del Sarto in the cloisters. With the exception of the baptis-
tery (which was persistently, but erroneously, said to have been originally a
Roman temple to Mars) and Giotto’s campanile, few buildings erected before the
era of Brunelleschi attracted any notice at all.

To a certain extent, this narrowness of vision was determined early on by the
nature of the guide books that became principal reference works for years to
come. Richardson’s Account of some of the statues, bas-reliefs, drawings and pictures in Italy
was one of the most influential works on art appreciation and art theory amongst
the English reading public, but it covered only the duomo and San Lorenzó
amongst all the Florentine churches in any detail. Subsequent visitors, therefore,
found themselves bereft of guidance when viewing other fabrics, and their com-
ments were correspondingly limited. Richardson’s preferences were perpetuated
by other widely used guides: Edward Wright and Thomas Martyn, for example,
whose published observations were separated by nearly sixty years, both confined
their comments on Florence to little more than a description of the duomo, the
gallery, and San Lorenzó.

In all these comments on the art and architecture of Florence, it is easy to
detect the influence of Vasari. Much of what Richardson conveyed to his readers
was in fact a condensed summary of the Lives of the artists. It is for this reason, one
may assume, that the campanile was so widely admired, given that its pink and
white marble design owed nothing to the classical orders of architecture that
normally determined the parameters of good taste. Vasari’s opinions were filtered
through into travellers’ observations in varying degrees of attenuation, but in the
process of translation and transmission, the expression of Florentine pride in the

55 Thomas Watkins, Travels through Switzerland, Italy, Sicily, the Greek Islands to Constantinople, Greece, Ragusa, and the Dalmatian Isles (2 vols., 2nd edn, 1794), I, p. 295, compared its appearance to a harlequin’s jacket. Watkins was offended by what he regarded as the medley of different architectural styles heaped together in confusion, but could find no fault with Brunelleschi’s dome.

56 Wright, Observations, ii, pp. 393–433; Thomas Martyn, A gentleman’s guide in his tour through Italy (London, 1787), pp. 320–9.
artistic achievements of his native city was diluted and lost, along with the anecdotes that enlivened his biographies. Whilst visitors were willing to accept Vasari’s overall argument that the recovery of art began in Florence and was largely the work of Florentine artists, they showed little interest in the stages by which that recovery took place. They largely ignored those artists whose work preceded that of the great masters Leonardo, Raphael, and Michelangelo, and showed no interest in the world in which they lived or the patrons for whom they worked. Their sights were focused instead upon the patronage of the Medici dukes.  

Thus many tourists never recorded anything in Florence beyond their visit to the gallery and the tribuna. There were, of course, lengthy guides published to take them through the collection and to structure their subsequent observations. But there were also plenty of guides to the city of Florence as a whole available for the visitor to purchase. Based upon the same text and published by Florence’s single printing house, the guide was repackaged and expanded in various editions through the eighteenth century. Those who read it would have been alerted to a city which comprised more than the collections of art and virtù of the Medici family. Even the versions produced in the earlier part of the century, at a time when Medici absolutism had effectively dampened Florentines’ interest in their own past, offered the visitor something more than a city which was simply a showcase for Medici patronage and collecting. The visitor was taken through a comprehensive tour of the churches, palazzi, and charitable institutions of the city. The guides divided the city up into quarters, and documented every church and building of significance within each area. Not only did British tourists ignore the majority of these buildings, but they showed a complete disregard for the topography and the history of the city.

Marco Lastri, the author of L’Osservatore Fiorentino (1776) wrote of how the stones and buildings of which the city was built could only come to life if connected to the historical events which gave rise to them and which took place within their walls. British visitors, however, preferred to remain oblivious to the history of the Florentine republic which was often dismissed simply as a series of revolutions. Florence had none of the enviable stability of the Venetian Republic whose buildings elicited rather more interest. Important republican structures such as the Piazza della Signoria (the Piazza del Gran Duca as it was then known), the Palazzo Vecchio, and its cycle of frescos celebrating the major events of

58 See for example, Giuseppe Bianchi, Ragguaglio delle antichità e rareità che si conservano nella Galleria Mediceo-Imperiale di Firenze (Florence, 1759).
59 Many British visitors, particularly those in Italy for educational purposes, took Italian lessons during their stay, but most seem to have been able to read Italian without any difficulty. Lady Miller, for example, directed her readers who wished for further information on the collections at the duke’s gallery to the ‘trumpery books’ sold at all the booksellers in Florence (Miller, Letters from Italy, II, p. 107).
60 Marco Lastri, L’Osservatore fiorentino sugli edifici della sua patria per servire alla storia della medesima (3 vols., Florence, 1776), I, p. 3.
Florentine history (always described in detail by the Florentines) seldom received anything more than a passing comment. When the frescos were mentioned, it was by virtue of having been painted by Vasari, rather than in recognition of the interest of their subject matter. The Palazzo Vecchio itself was almost universally condemned as an ugly gothic building, and its tower, extolled by various Florentine writers as a structure of outstanding beauty, was condemned as the clumsy ineptitude of a rude, uncultivated age. Even John Breval, one of the most sympathetic of English writers on Florence, found it ‘bold’, but ‘somewhat shocking to the Eye, from a Projection, in which the Builder made a Shew of his art at the Expence of his Judgment’. An appreciation of Florence as a picturesque city of ‘domes and turrets’ did not come until the nineteenth century.

Florentine pride in their city’s artistic achievement and the contribution of Florence to the development of the arts throughout the civilized world (in effect a distillation of Vasari’s argument) did not impress the British. Whilst the importance of Giotto and Cimabue in the narrative of the restoration of civilization was always acknowledged, this never extended to admiration for their works of art themselves. Their paintings, if described at all, were deemed dry, hard, and unpleasant. Typically British visitors would decline even to identify artists before the late quattrocento and the patronage of Lorenzo de’ Medici. Had they consulted Italian guides they could have discovered considerably more about the works of art to be found in the city’s churches and monastic foundations. It was not that the Florentine guides were celebrating the merits of early Renaissance artists in any great detail – the Florentines shared the same standards of taste and expectations as the British – but these guides provided considerably more information about the subject matter and design of such paintings. Whilst acknowledging the deficiencies in perspective, drawing, and composition of the early Renaissance artists, they also lauded them for having transcended the barbarity of i tempi bassi.

The short tourist guides were hardly espousing full blown Florentine civic republicanism in defiance of Medici absolutism, but the sense of Florentine superiority, civic identity, and pride, which looked back to the fifteenth-century traditions of civic republicanism, was never eliminated. There was a strong tradition of chronicling and history writing, ranging from the fourteenth-century chronicles of Villani to the sixteenth-century histories of Guiccardini and

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61 L’Antiquario fiorentino o sia guida per osservar con metodo le cose notabili della città di Firenze (Florence, 1765), p. 169.
64 See, for example, Francesco Bocchi and Giovannai Cinelli, Le bellezze della città di Firenze dove a pieno di pittura di scultura di sacri templi, di palazzi, i più notabili artifizj, e più preziosi si contengono (Florence, 1677).
65 L’Antiquario fiorentino, pp. 13, 93.
66 It is worth noting that most of the Florentine guidebooks were addressed to ‘viaggiatori and concittadini’ whereas none of the guidebooks to Rome published in the eighteenth century gave any indication that the authors or editors expected the inhabitants of the city to read them.
Machiavelli. Eighteenth-century Florentines were deeply conscious of this tradition which also provided the historical basis for the guidebooks. Florentines, like the citizens of any other city, attached considerable importance to the antiquity of its foundation, its fortunes under the Romans and decline of the Empire and the city’s resurgence under Charlemagne during \textit{i bassi tempi}. Most British visitors to Florence, however, were content simply to accept Machiavelli’s view that Florence had been founded by a colony of Romans under the triumvirate. Florence, noted the antiquary Francis Drake laconically, ‘is of a very modern date’.

The efforts of Florentine antiquaries such as Giovanni Lami or the Academy of Cortona to establish claims for an Etruscan civilization in Florence that preceded that of the Romans were of little concern to the British. Edward Gibbon’s interest in the Etruscan antiquities in the ducal collections and his keen admiration for the Florentine antiquaries, Lami and Anton Francesco Gori, was highly unusual. The British were similarly unmoved by the role of Charlemagne in refounding the city. What is more surprising, perhaps, is the muted interest in Florence’s history as a republic. The British were unimpressed by the traditions of republican freedom in Florence: the Florentines took great pride in this era of their history, it was said, but the general verdict was that they had allowed themselves to be enslaved by the Medici. The tendency was to be sternly dismissive of specious arguments that had failed to prevent the Florentine people from sinking into servile submission. Nor did they buy into the Florentine re-invention of themselves as the heirs of republican Rome. Whilst guidebooks claimed that the Florentines took great pride in this era of their history, it was said, but the general verdict was that they had allowed themselves to be enslaved by the Medici. The tendency was to be sternly dismissive of specious arguments that had failed to prevent the Florentine people from sinking into servile submission. Nor did they buy into the Florentine re-invention of themselves as the heirs of republican Rome. Whilst guidebooks claimed that the Florentines took great pride in this era of their history, it was said, but the general verdict was that they had allowed themselves to be enslaved by the Medici. The tendency was to be sternly dismissive of specious arguments that had failed to prevent the Florentine people from sinking into servile submission. Nor did they buy into the Florentine re-invention of themselves as the heirs of republican Rome.

The mercantile past and the prosperity of the Florentine republic similarly commanded little notice, particularly when compared with interest in, and

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68 ‘Mr Drake’s tour’, p. 77.

69 Giovanni Lami, \textit{Lezioni di antichità Toscane e specialmente della città di Firenze recitate nell’accademia della crusca} (Florence, 1766).


71 This attitude contrasts with the widespread interest in the history of the Venetian republic. Gibbon and the earl of Cork had both planned to write histories of the Florentine republic. Cork never completed his; Gibbon, however, was distracted by the rather larger task of writing the history of the decline and fall of Rome.

72 Duncombe, ed., \textit{Letters from Italy}, p. 110.

73 Raffaello del Bruno, \textit{Ristretto delle cose più notabili della città di Firenze} (5th edn, Florence, 1745), pp. 2–5. The British pronounced them the most effeminate of Italians, not only because the men played at cards, whilst their wives flirted with other men, but because they had tamely submitted to the Medici’s dismantling all traces of republican freedom (Breval, \textit{Remarks on several parts of Europe}, 1, p. 174).
awareness of, the rise of the Venetian or even the Genoese republics.\footnote{4} Given the emphasis on overseas trade in eighteenth-century perceptions of national identity, the fact that Florence was not a sea-going city state may have retarded appreciation of the city as a centre of trade and commerce.\footnote{5} None of the Florentine guides, of course, offered anything approaching an analysis of the economic history of the city, but they did draw attention to the wealth that ‘must have’ existed in the city in order to fund the massive building projects of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They also highlighted the role of the guilds as patrons of art and sources of funding for the architectural embellishment of the city. None of this influenced British perceptions of Florence. The rise of the republic and the late thirteenth-century flowering of wealth, during which many of the major churches were constructed and when the city clearly assumed its modern form, was not recognized by British tourists until late in the eighteenth century.

IV

These patterns did not, however, hold good for the entire eighteenth century. In the last two decades of the century, British perceptions of Florence became less narrowly concerned with the art and antiquities of the Medici. Instead they began to encompass rather more of the city’s history and its specifically urban qualities. As interest grew in the city before the period of the Medici dukedom, the British began to perceive new affinities between Florence – a city where liberty, commerce, and the arts flourished – and Britain.

Part of this is attributable to changes in the social background of those traveling to Italy. Over the course of the century, the profile of visitors, whilst still wealthy, grew steadily less aristocratic: by the 1780s it included many from a commercial or professional background. Indeed, in the last two decades, visitors from gentry, professional and other ‘middle-class’ backgrounds appear to have outnumbered their aristocratic counterparts.\footnote{6} One such was the agricultural writer, Arthur Young, who travelled to Italy in 1789. Young was not a typical tourist, of course. He was in search of economic information rather than virtù (although that did not mean that he was immune to the charms of the Venus de Medici or any of the other set pieces of the Grand Tour). It did mean, however, that he took a notably more informed interest in the state of the economy, and in particular that of Tuscany, which had seen significant improvements under the rule of Leopold. He noted that income from land was now far more important than that derived from trade, and that the major source of employment was domestic service, rather than manufactures. But he was also acutely aware of the

\footnote{4} On perceptions of Venice see Eglin, \textit{Venice transfigured}. Visitors to Genoa were generally very favourably impressed by the evidence of commercial wealth.

\footnote{5} Charles Philpot, \textit{An introduction to the literary history of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries} (London, 1798), did not mention Florence in the context of his analysis of the relationship between the rise of commerce and the arts, although he did refer to Venice and Genoa.

\footnote{6} Towner, ‘Grand Tour’, p. 310.
former importance of trade for Florence as the basis of her splendour and magnificence. Young drew an explicit connection between the grandeur of the palazzi and the churches and the flourishing state of the Florentine economy from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Rather than simply alluding to the Pitti Palace, for example, as yet another sign of Medici splendour or as the palace of a nobleman, which was the conventional description, he pointed out that the Pitti, and all the other palaces, had been built by private merchants, and marvelled at the wealth that must have sustained such conspicuous display. Merchants in London, he observed, might make a yearly profit of £20,000–30,000, but they just lived in brick cottages with a few daubed portraits and earthenware figures on their chimney pieces: they were, he admitted, contemptible in comparison. Young, *Travels during the years 1787, 1788 and 1789*, pp. 244–6.

J. E. Smith was similarly impressed by the scale of the private mercantile wealth which lay behind the construction of the palazzi. Smith, *Sketch of a tour*, I, p. 310.

The comments of other tourists offered comparable shifts in emphasis, so that buildings such as the Palazzo Strozzi or Palazzo Riccardo Medici were being described as a merchant’s, rather than a nobleman’s, house in the 1790s. Their observations were no doubt influenced by contemporary discussion of the relationship between wealth and virtue which had been encouraged under the auspices of Leopold, but as visitors contemplated the civilization of republican Florence and the contribution of private individuals in sustaining that culture, the conclusions to be drawn were obvious. Taste, genius, literature, and the arts fled Rome, to reappear in the Florentine and other Italian republics, and thence they passed to Holland. Their present sole abode, as Charlotte Waldie Eaton was to claim a few years later, was England.

V

The burgeoning interest in the history of Florence before the *cinquecento* was to some extent part of a much more general interest in the middle ages as a period of historical inquiry which was characteristic of the later eighteenth century. It was identified as a crucial stage in the development of society and the progress towards civilization, and in the emergence of the nation state. In his introductory essay to his *History of the reign of the Emperor Charles V* (1769), for example, William Robertson showed how, in the centuries following the end of the Crusades, feudalism was eroded, a spirit of industry revivéd, and commerce began to flourish; towns, and particularly the Italian cities, grew in population, wealth, and

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77 Young, *Travels during the years 1787, 1788 and 1789*, pp. 244–6.
79 Young, *Travels during the years 1787, 1788 and 1789*, p. 242.
80 Wahnbaeck, *Luxury and public happiness*, pp. 73–135. See also n. 23 above.
prosperity.\textsuperscript{83} Of more particular concern here, however, was the re-evaluation of the period’s art and literature and a recognition of its inherent interest as an era of singular cultural development and achievement. Abolitionism aside, William Roscoe is also notable for having shown a precocious taste in the collection of Italian primitives; an interest which stemmed not so much from an aesthetic appreciation of their distinctive qualities as from an ambition to illustrate the rise and progress of the arts.\textsuperscript{84} Not that he was the first to show this kind of interest: in the last three decades of the eighteenth century, a number of connoisseurs were beginning to direct attention towards the historical evolution of painting from the first ‘revival’ to what they perceived as the perfection of the \textit{cinquecento}, and were building up collections accordingly.\textsuperscript{85} This new direction in interest can be seen in part as a response to Winckelmann’s historical analysis of the stylistic development of Greek art: its rise to perfection and subsequent decline.\textsuperscript{86} There were also parallels with the antiquarian movement within Great Britain, with its interest in the developments of gothic art and architecture, which had likewise been regarded by the majority as rude and barbaric.\textsuperscript{87} But the Florentines themselves were also setting an example. In 1775, for example, Leopold had a room in his gallery hung with specimens of the first restorers of art arranged in chronological order: the \textit{Gabinetto de Antichi Quadri}. As successive editions of the Florentine guides became more and more detailed, one of the areas where additional information was most likely to be found was on the early Renaissance paintings and the central role played by Florence in the revival of arts and learning. Civic patriotism, which was beginning to blossom once more under the benign authority of Leopold, drew strength from the traditions of Florence’s artistic heritage in the centuries before the establishment of the Medici dukedom.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{83} William Robertson, \textit{The history of the reign of the Emperor Charles V: with a view of the progress of society in Europe, from the subversion of the Roman Empire to the beginning of the sixteenth century} (3 vols., London, 1769), 1, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{84} Roscoe, \textit{Life of Lorenzo de’ Medici}, ii, pp. 175–227, offered a detailed discussion of the artists of the trecento and quattrocento (largely drawn from Vasari), presenting them in a rather more positive light than had traditionally been the case.

\textsuperscript{85} These included Thomas Patch, author of \textit{The LIFE of Masaccio} (Florence, 1772); Charles Townley; Lord Ashburnham; and the earl of Bristol (see Ingamells, \textit{Dictionary}, for biographical details). It is likely that it was Patch who drew Reynolds’s attention to the Masaccio frescos in the Brancacci chapel of Santa Maria del Carmine when Reynolds was in Florence in the 1750s. Reynolds singled the frescos out for particular praise and noted their influence on Michelangelo in his twelfth discourse on art delivered to the Royal Academy in 1784 and published in 1785. Thereafter a visit to the Brancacci chapel entered the tourist itinerary, although prior to the 1780s it was rarely noted: not even Richardson had mentioned the frescos. Very few British observers, however, noted that the cycle of frescos was not the work of Masaccio alone, but a joint effort with Masolino, as the \textit{L’Antiquario fiorentino} (1765) pointed out, p. 218.


\textsuperscript{87} Rosemary Sweet, \textit{Antiquaries: the discovery of the past in eighteenth-century Britain} (London, 2004), pp. 238–76.

\textsuperscript{88} This trend had become even more pronounced by the early nineteenth century: see, for example, L. F. M. Gargioli, \textit{Description de la ville de Florence et de ses environs précédée d’un abrégé d’histoire Florentine...
Architectural observation of late medieval and early Renaissance architecture likewise became more perceptive and acute. This is not to say that there was a rejection of the aesthetics of classicism, but tourists became somewhat more discriminating in their vocabulary of architectural description, more attentive in their description and more precise with regard to dates, architects, and patrons. Sir Richard Colt Hoare, visiting Florence in 1789, delighted in the 'simplicity and grandeur' of the gothic architecture and the slender arches which were 'so far asunder that they appear scarce strong enough to support their weight'.

Travelling amidst the political and military uncertainties of 1815, Robert Finch singled out the side doors and lancet windows for their 'Greco-Gothic' taste.

Not everyone found the architecture attractive: it seemed to many eyes a muddle of different styles: the duomo was described in one publication in 1800 as a mix of 'Moorish' or 'lower Greek' with 'German gothic'. But the fact that visitors were now struggling to find adjectives to describe such buildings, rather than simply treating them with silent dismissal, is in itself indicative of changing sensibilities. Moreover visitors began explicitly to associate a particular style of architecture with the republican period, rather than merely as undistinguished specimens of an unenlightened age. Palaces, by the early nineteenth century, were being described as monuments to republican dignity. The contemporary Florentine interest in their own republican past was clearly a factor here, but it is also important to remember that at this time the British reading public – precisely the sorts of people who could afford to go to Italy – were becoming much better informed about the gothic style of architecture, its historical evolution, and the debates over its origins.

VI

This interest in the art and architecture of the middle ages – the term 'Renaissance' was not yet in usage – was also manifest in a more informed (2 vols., Florence, 1819). See also Luigi Lanzi, Storia pittrica della Italia (3 vols., Bassano, 1795–6). An English translation, by Thomas Roscoe, The history of painting in Italy was published in 1828.

89 CUL Add. MS 4155, ‘Sir Richard Colt Hoare’s notes on paintings’, fo. 82.
90 Bodl. MS Finch e 14, ‘Journals of Robert Finch’, fo. 238.
92 The antiquary Thomas Kerrich (who had travelled to Italy 1772-4) struggled to find adequate vocabulary with which to describe the twisted pillars characteristic of much Lombard and Tuscan architecture: he resorted to his own neologism of ‘twistifications’. Bodl. MS Douce d. 36, correspondence of Francis Douce, Kerrich to Francis Douce, 28 Mar. 1814, fo. 117.
93 Joseph Trapp’s English translation of A picture of Italy (London, 1791), p. 159, described the duomo as a ‘worthy monument of republican splendour’.
94 Henry Coxe, Picture of Italy; being a guide to the antiquities and curiosities of that classical and interesting country (London, 1815), p. 381.
95 Sweet, Antiquaries. The interest of Tuscans in their republican past was particularly evident in Pisa and concentrated upon the construction and ornamentation of the Campo Santo. See Robyn Cooper, ‘“The crowning glory of Pisa”’; nineteenth-century reactions to the Campo Santo’, Italian Studies, 37 (1982), pp. 72–100. Cooper also devotes considerable attention to eighteenth-century precursors.
interest in Florence’s claims to be the cradle of the revival of literature as well as painting, sculpture, and architecture. Florentine pride in the city’s literary heritage had always been closely linked to the origins of the artistic revival through the friendship between Dante and Giotto made famous in Vasari’s *Lives of the artists*. But amongst British travellers, interest in Dante had been muted to say the least. Of those who had read Dante’s verse there were many who could not overcome their aversion to what they perceived as his barbarism and impropriety. Interest in Dante, and also Boccaccio, was largely antiquarian. Petrarch, by contrast, had always commanded more respect due to his efforts to revive classical antiquity, his composition of Latin verse, and his invention of the Petrarchan sonnet. Yet around mid-century, interest in Dante and his near contemporaries began to revive, with a noticeable quickening amongst the broader reading public from the 1780s. The poetry of Dante, in particular, was made more accessible through translation and given greater immediacy through texts such as Thomas Warton’s *History of English poetry* (1774–81), which discussed Dante’s influence on English poets from Chaucer to Milton. Dante’s poetic debt to the troubadours of Provence meant that he could be rediscovered as a poet of the age of chivalry and as such, an enthusiasm for Dante was part of the more general European discovery of the chivalry and romance of the middle ages. In 1778, Philip Yorke was eager to tell his uncle that his Italian master, Abbé Pellori, had set him on reading the *Inferno*, well aware that this was a demanding and unusual text to study. It was not until 1782 that the first full English translation of the *Inferno* was published, to be followed by another in 1785 by Henry Boyd, who thereafter produced the first complete translation of the *Divine comedy* in 1802.

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97 Petrarch was more widely read in the early eighteenth century, but there was similarly a quickening of interest in the last third of the century. See, for example, Susannah Dobson’s widely read translation of Jacques de Sade’s *The life of Petrarch* (2 vols., London, 1776).


99 The development of interest in Dante and his influence upon English literature was surveyed by Toynbee, *Dante in English literature*. See also Valeria Tinkler-Villani, ‘Translation as a metaphor for salvation: eighteenth-century English versions of Dante’s *Commedia*’, *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies*, 1 (1991), pp. 92–101.


101 BL Add. MS 33378, correspondence of Philip Yorke with his uncle, Philip Yorke, second earl of Hardwicke, Philip Yorke to his uncle, 22 Sept. 1778, fo. 241.
ages had liberated minds and led to a revival of learning. But Boyd also placed considerable emphasis upon the Florentine republic as an oasis of liberty; on its prosperity which had arisen from trade; and how this, in turn, provided the conditions in which the arts could flourish. The translation was discussed and reviewed in literary periodicals and journals such as the *Monthly Review* and the *Annual Register*. Consequently, more people were at least familiar with the tenor of the *Divine comedy* and the broad outlines of its narrative, even if they were hardly Dante scholars. This much is apparent in the comments of visitors and in the tour guides themselves – references to set pieces from *Inferno* such as the story of the doomed love affair of Paolo and Francesca, as well as the macabre horror of Count Ugolino’s cannibalism (made famous by Reynolds’s painting exhibited in 1773) become more common. Dante’s portrait in the duomo was pointed out with greater frequency; and the white stone where he used to sit in the Piazza del Duomo became a site of reflection and veneration.

In 1819, the poet Samuel Rogers travelled from Florence to Rome: it was both a physical and historical journey, and one which took him from the world of Lorenzo de’ Medici to that of antiquity. Rogers, like most other early nineteenth-century travellers to Italy, was familiar with Roscoe’s idealization of the Medicean Florence: a city where a spirit of industry, the pursuit of wealth, and the extension of commerce were fully compatible with the cultivation of literature, the arts, and philosophy; where the favourable effects of freedom had strengthened the mind and allowed the arts to flourish. The Florentine history of internal dissensions, far from being evidence of fatal factionalism which would open the way for Medici tyranny, was rather presented as the active spirit of liberty. Roscoe’s evocation clearly influenced Rogers’s own perceptions as the latter observed: ‘at Florence we thought only of Modern Italy & of its golden age – As we approach Rome, Antient Italy rushes on the Imagination. Italy has had two lives! Can it be said of any other Country?’ This reference to Italy’s ‘two lives’ recognized the fifteenth century, and its physical embodiment in the city of Florence, not as a pale shadow of antique grandeur, but as a vibrant, dynamic, and creative era which could command admiration and inspire emulation in its own right. It is in clear anticipation of the subsequent Victorian idealization of Florence and the civilization of the Florentine republic. The sense of special affinity with Florence, to which commercial and manufacturing cities such as Manchester made claim through their architecture and their cultural ambition, was a distinctive nineteenth-century phenomenon, but one which can only be understood fully in terms of the particular admiration and favour with which Florence was regarded in the eighteenth century and which this article has

explored. But as we have seen, the specific reasons why Florence was found so ‘cheering to the English eye’ were not immutable. Travellers’ perceptions of Florence underwent a significant reorientation during the long eighteenth century, in keeping with changes in the composition of the tourist body and the different intellectual and social agendas of both the travellers and those who represented the city to them as guides and hosts. More broadly, Rogers’s recognition of Italy’s ‘two lives’ is highly significant as being indicative of a shift in the way in which European history was understood: the classical past was no longer the sole locus of authority and civilization and this had powerful implications for the way in which the history of towns and cities was viewed. The middle ages and the ‘Renaissance’ could equally demand attention and the historical process by which the culture of the Renaissance came about had also to be understood. \footnote{107} Thus an analysis of the literature produced by the Grand Tour may illuminate not just contemporary reactions to a particular city – in this case Florence – but also the process by which cities came to be described and represented, less as aggregations of individual buildings or collections, but as the products of historical processes. \footnote{108}

\footnote{107} This shift in focus was being made explicit in the travel literature of the 1840s. See, for example, the treatment of Florence in John Murray’s \textit{Hand-book for travellers in Northern Italy} (London, 1842).

\footnote{108} For a comparative study of some of these changes in the English context, see Rosemary Sweet, \textit{The writing of urban histories in eighteenth-century England} (Oxford, 1997).