

# The Medici-Tornabuoni *Desco da Parto* in Context<sup>1</sup>

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THE BIRTH OF A CHILD was much desired and often lavishly celebrated in Renaissance Italy. During this period, large families were valued for demographic, economic, and political reasons. In many cases, these celebrations were magnified by an awareness of the inherent dangers any successful birth had to overcome. A significant percentage of deaths among young married women was associated with childbearing, and an equally large number of infants died within days of birth.<sup>2</sup> This situation resulted in the production and use of numerous objects to encourage, celebrate, and commemorate childbirth. Although relatively few such objects survive today, we can learn about them from contemporaneous household inventories. These objects retained their birth-related identity, signified by their common designation *da parto*, years after the actual event.<sup>3</sup> The typical Renaissance birth chamber was elaborately furnished with embroidered sheets and pillows, painted tables and birthing chairs, and ornate tablecloths. New mothers wore special clothing and head coverings, and distinctive mantles, swaddling clothes, and gowns were made for babies to wear at baptism.

From the evidence it seems that members of most social classes used childbirth objects. Naturally, the wealthiest families had the most impressive array. For example, Francesco Inghirrammi, an employee of the Medici bank, was a very wealthy man at his death in 1470.<sup>4</sup> He left seven children, ranging in age from a few months to twelve years; the inventory of his estate in Florence included two painted birth trays, a box containing birth charms, a birth mantle, two sets of embroidered birth sheets, two embroidered birth pillows, and a birthing chair.<sup>5</sup> However, not every consumer had the financial resources of Inghirrammi. As a result, birth objects were available in a variety of price ranges. In 1551 the estate of a blacksmith in Livorno included six embroidered pillowcases of soft white linen for use during confinement.<sup>6</sup> The employer of a servant woman in Florence gave her clothing, chick-

ens, and wine when she was pregnant in 1476.<sup>7</sup> And throughout the fifteenth century the Ceppo, a charitable foundation in Prato, purchased candies, nuts, and candles for various poor families on the occasions of births and baptisms, stating in their records that it was done “for the love of God.”<sup>8</sup>

Many of these childbirth objects are known to us primarily through documentary evidence. But one important type of childbirth object does survive today: the painted wooden tray, usually referred to as a *desco da parto*, which is best exemplified by the Medici-Tornabuoni tray in the Metropolitan Museum (Figures 1, 2).<sup>9</sup> Evidence indicates that this tray was made to celebrate the birth of Lorenzo di Piero de’ Medici, known as *il Magnifico*, who ruled the city of Florence from 1469 to 1492. The tray was painted by the prolific Florentine artist Giovanni di Ser Giovanni, known as Scheggia (1406–1486), and it seems to have been presented by Piero di Cosimo de’ Medici to his wife, Lucrezia di Giovanni Tornabuoni, at Lorenzo’s birth in 1449. Lorenzo was the firstborn son, and as such his birth must have been lavishly celebrated with the full range of childbirth objects favored at that time. Until this century, none of these was thought to survive; the vast majority of the objects were ephemeral and have long since disappeared. However, in 1905, Aby Warburg used the inventory of Medici possessions made at Lorenzo’s death to establish that the childbirth tray listed in Lorenzo’s room was in fact the Museum’s tray, which was then in the collection of the New-York Historical Society.<sup>10</sup> This inventory listed “a round childbirth tray painted with the Triumph of Fame” in Lorenzo’s personal quarters, valued at ten florins.<sup>11</sup> Further details regarding its provenance, unknown until now, appear below.

Household inventories regularly listed painted childbirth trays during this period. They were relatively common objects, so no further description or reference to figural content was provided. This very fact emphasizes the unusual qualities of the Medici-Tornabuoni tray, since its iconography was so precisely identified in Lorenzo’s inventory. As the inventory states, the front of the tray depicts the Triumph of

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Figure 1. Giovanni di Ser Giovanni (1406–1486). *The Triumph of Fame* (front of a childbirth tray), ca. 1448. Tempera, silver, and gold on wood, Diam. 92.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase in memory of Sir John Pope-Hennessy: Rogers Fund, The Annenberg Foundation, Drue Heinz Foundation, Annette de la Renta, Mr. and Mrs. Frank E. Richardson, and The Vincent Astor Foundation Gifts, Wrightsman and Gwynne Andrews Funds, special funds, and Gift of the children of Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Joshua Logan, and other gifts and bequests, by exchange, 1995, 1995.7

Fame, largely based on both Boccaccio's *Amorosa visione* (1342) and Petrarch's *Trionfi* (1354–74), two vernacular texts popular during the Renaissance.<sup>12</sup> The growing humanist interest in classically inspired literature, and its dissemination in both manuscript and printed form, led to the prominence of this type of secular iconography on domestic objects like marriage chests and birth trays. As triumphal images were often utilized as moral examples, their representation on domestic art was particularly relevant. Several child-

birth trays, in fact, were painted with individual triumphs.<sup>13</sup> But the composition on the front of the Medici-Tornabuoni tray is different from that of any other childbirth tray and even slightly different from other representations of the subject.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the Triumph of Fame is usually represented on domestic art in a series with other triumphs, rather than by itself.

That is clearly not the case with the Museum's tray, since the image is entirely autonomous. It is carefully constructed according to the newly promulgated



Figure 2. Verso of Figure 1, showing device of Piero de' Medici with the Medici and Tornabuoni coats of arms

tenets of linear perspective. In the center is a fantastically articulated pedestal, which combines disparate elements of classical architecture to render a complex pastiche structure. On top of the pedestal is a fluted globe, no doubt meant to signify the orb of the world. This globe may take the place of the mandorla within which the figure of Fame often stood in more traditional representations of the subject.<sup>15</sup> The use of the mandorla followed Boccaccio's description in *Amorosa visione*, which read,

And among the other things which I noticed there around about this supreme lady, in her magnanimous breast the enemy of death, was a perfect circle rotating lofty and round, from beneath her feet and over her head. I do not believe there can be anything in the whole world, town or country, domestic or foreign, which would not appear within that circle.<sup>16</sup>



Figure 3. Detail of Figure 1, showing Fame



Figure 4. Detail of Figure 1, showing frame

But the circular shape of the Medici-Tornabuoni tray itself may have worked here as Boccaccio's "perfect circle," encompassing everything painted on this tray—both nature and humankind—within the orbit of Fame.

The globe is punctuated by six portholes, and from these project six winged trumpets, a feature common to earlier representations of the subject. The globe supports a winged figure of Fame (Figure 3), whose stiff frontal pose, hieratic posture, and serious expression are strikingly medieval in inspiration, in contrast to the innovative architectural construction on which she stands. Her arms are outstretched, and she holds a sword in her right hand and a statuette of a cupid in her left.<sup>17</sup> Because of the high platform, Fame dominates the surrounding figures and landscape and stands outlined against the distant mountains, river, sea, and sky. On each side of her, set into the landscape, is a walled city, and around her are twenty-eight knights and men on horseback, fourteen on each side, dressed in a variety of flamboyant clothing and armor. Unlike other versions of the Triumph of Fame, the men are not identified by individual labels. But their worth as men of virtue and renown is clear by their appearance and by their proximity to the figure of Fame herself. Those closest to the platform raise their right hand to Fame, in order to become part of her themselves.<sup>18</sup> Those farthest away observe the action with a more detached calm. At the base of the platform are two retainers, one centrally placed and staring out at the viewer, the other barely visible because of the cluster of men on horseback.<sup>19</sup> In the immediate foreground, which is dotted with tufted plants and

striped with different grasses, are three rather ungainly hounds, one white, one black, and one a rich brown.

The reverse of the Medici-Tornabuoni tray is dominated by Piero de' Medici's prominent personal device, composed of a diamond ring, three feathers, and a scroll inscribed with the motto "Semper." The diamond ring with feathers had been used by Cosimo de' Medici, Piero's father and Lorenzo's grandfather, but Piero added several details to make the device his own. He incorporated the colors of the Theological Virtues (red, green, and white) into the feathers, and added his motto to the arrangement. The Medici-Tornabuoni tray seems to be the earliest example of this complete device.<sup>20</sup> On each side of the device, near the top of the tray, is a coat of arms. On the left are the eight red *palle*, or balls, of the Medici, and on the right is the rampant lion of the Tornabuoni. The obvious dynastic message on the reverse is continued by the garland of red, green, and white feathers on the elaborate front frame (Figure 4).

Despite the extremely high quality and historical interest of this tray, childbirth trays in general have remained relatively unknown. Surviving examples and documentary citations indicate that these wooden trays were of several distinct types. The first and best-known type is the painted tray, which initially appeared about 1370, in the first generation after the Black Death, and continued to be used through the third quarter of the sixteenth century.<sup>21</sup> The Medici-Tornabuoni tray is an example of this type. Although statistical evidence is not conclusive, inventories suggest that nearly half of late-fourteenth- and fifteenth-century households had at least one of this type of birth tray among their

possessions.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, wooden childbirth trays, like the other birth-related objects mentioned earlier, were part of birth celebrations at almost every level of Renaissance society. The Medici were following a well-established tradition popular even in families of much lesser economic means. The main evidence we have regarding this tradition is the numerous wooden trays that have survived. But equally important evidence for the presence and the popularity of the childbirth tray comes from the inventories in the Florentine Magistrato dei Pupilli, the government agency that inventoried and processed the estates of deceased citizens for the protection of their minor heirs.<sup>23</sup> These sources, combined with occasional literary, documentary, and artistic references, can reveal a great deal about the role, appearance, production, and patronage of these trays in Renaissance Italy.

The primary role of the childbirth tray was, above all, utilitarian: it was used to carry food and gifts into the confinement chamber and to hold items at the new mother's bedside.<sup>24</sup> In his *Lives of the Most Excellent Architects, Painters, and Sculptors*, Vasari described a drawing made by the painter Francesco Salviati (1510–1563) in the early 1540s, which was used “to paint on one of those round panels on which one carries food to confined women.”<sup>25</sup> Descriptions in inventories confirm Vasari's statement that these trays were actually employed and were not simply decorative accessories; they were occasionally identified as trays for women to use during their stay in bed after childbirth.<sup>26</sup> Such a tray often appeared in painted scenes of confinement. In Paolo Uccello's fresco of the Birth of the Virgin, the attendant carries a tray to the mother's bedside; on the tray, which is draped with a white, embroidered cloth, are two carafes of wine, no doubt to fortify the new mother following labor (Figure 5).<sup>27</sup> Images on several surviving childbirth trays also indicate their use. One tray shows a mother sitting up in bed to receive guests with a draped tray on the coverlet beside her (Figure 6). The use of special cloth covers to protect the painted surface reinforced the importance of these objects to the childbirth ritual. Documents further confirm this practice; several inventories cite special covers to protect—and, no doubt, enhance—the trays.<sup>28</sup> These accessories indicate the high esteem in which childbirth trays were held by contemporaries.

We can learn much about the production of birth trays by a close physical examination. Most surviving examples measure between fifty and sixty centimeters in diameter.<sup>29</sup> Although contemporary inventories do not provide exact measurements, a standard is implied when the clerk described a tray as large or small.<sup>30</sup> Their size probably made it easy to construct them



Figure 5. Paolo Uccello (1397–1475). *The Birth of the Virgin*, ca. 1436. Fresco. Prato, Cathedral (photo: Alinari/Art Resource, N.Y.)

from a combination of smaller wood remnants available in the workshop.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, it appears that shapes were standardized. The earliest surviving trays are twelve-sided or sixteen-sided. But documentary evidence suggests that round birth trays appeared by the late fourteenth century, although the earliest example dates from about 1430.<sup>32</sup>

According to both surviving examples and documentary evidence, the early trays were painted with



Figure 6. Bartolommeo di Fruosino (1366/69–1441). *Confinement Room Scene* (front of a childbirth tray), 1428. Tempera, gilt, and silver on panel. Private collection (on loan to The Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Figure 7. Verso of Figure 6

tempera on both sides and usually had gilt frames or moldings.<sup>33</sup> The frames were attached to one or both sides of the tray. Evidence of paint overlap on intact frames and the painted outlines visible on trays that have had their frames removed indicate that the trays were painted with their frames already attached. Although this procedure made the panels unwieldy, it was practical, since the painted surface would be damaged if the



Figure 8. Detail of Figure 2

frame was attached later.<sup>34</sup> Frames prevented damage to the painted surface when the tray was hung on a wall or rested on a surface, and their raised edges kept small objects from falling off when they were carried. As a result, the frames were subject to considerable stress, and only a few original examples survive. Very few of these are known to have hooks in them, but it seems logical that the trays would hang on the wall in this manner. The Medici-Tornabuoni tray has the remains of a broken hook in the top of its frame, on the reverse (Figure 8). There is no such device on the recto, which implies that the reverse of the tray was not necessarily meant for prolonged display.<sup>35</sup> In fact, it is clear from the entry in the Medici inventory, which specifies only the triumphal scene, that the Museum's tray was hanging front forward at the time of Lorenzo's death.

More specific information about the production and sale of childbirth trays is rare. The Medici-Tornabuoni tray is attributed to Scheggia, the brother of Masaccio and a skilled artist in his own right, who painted a number of other birth trays and marriage chest panels.<sup>36</sup> Although Scheggia executed several religious panels and sacred frescoes, he is best known today for his domestic, secular paintings. His formal training was with the painter Bicci di Lorenzo, as well as, more informally, with his brother, with whom he lived for an extended period of time.<sup>37</sup> Scheggia was also somewhat influenced by Domenico Veneziano, as can be seen in certain features of this birth tray.<sup>38</sup> But Scheggia was not the only painter who executed childbirth objects; others can be associated, for example, with Masaccio, Neri di Bicci, and Pontormo.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Vasari stated that no early Renaissance artist looked upon furniture painting as a shameful activity.<sup>40</sup>

Inventories and painted representations indicate that the often elaborate interiors of Renaissance homes contained a wealth of objects, some entirely unknown to us today.<sup>41</sup> To furnish these homes expediently and affordably, most consumers had to turn to a variety of sources. There were a significant number of artists who produced uncommissioned objects in quantities to sell on the open market, displaying different kinds of ready-made paintings and sculpture in their shops for examination and purchase by the public.<sup>42</sup> The tradition of stock production was surprisingly strong for domestic art, and childbirth objects were no exception. There must have been a considerable demand for birth trays, since childbirth was a regular and a widely celebrated event. Most birth trays do appear to have been made for the open market. For example, in 1383, the wool dealer Benedetto degli Albizzi purchased several paintings, including two small birth

trays, from the workshop of a deceased painter and then sold them at a profit. The fact that there were completed but unclaimed trays in this painter's shop when he died indicates that they were executed with no specific buyer in mind.<sup>43</sup> This was no doubt common; in his *ricordanze*, Neri di Bicci described a painted birth tray made at his own expense as a stock item.<sup>44</sup>

Given this sort of testimony, as well as the evidence of the trays themselves, it is probable that the majority of childbirth trays were workshop productions, executed in multiples according to patterns in loose sheets or model books. The availability of these patterns would have facilitated the reuse of specific motifs within the workshop. The iconographic range for birth trays was relatively limited, and almost all known trays can fit into specific categories. Similar serial production is evident in the marriage chest panels and devotional images from Apollonio di Giovanni and Marco del Buono's popular shop, which was a major source for domestic furnishings of all types in the fifteenth century.<sup>45</sup> Motifs were taken from various sources and adapted as necessary to each composition. With this piecemeal method, a shop could keep a staff large enough to complete commissions during busy periods, yet still have work to do in slower times.<sup>46</sup> Designs were also passed between shops, a practice that is especially noticeable in the group of childbirth trays that illustrate Petrarch's *Triumph of Love*. Several of these trays feature similar motifs, even though they originated in different workshops.<sup>47</sup>

Standardization of this sort guaranteed that the customers received what they wanted. The addition of small coats of arms at purchase time was all that was necessary to particularize many of these stock childbirth trays. The small heraldic shields were usually placed to the sides of the main scenes, or in an otherwise unobtrusive position. In a tray by Bartolommeo di Fruosino, on loan to the Metropolitan Museum, there are small heraldic shields on both the front and back, as well as a small inscription on the front with the date (Figures 6, 7). Such inconspicuous locations allowed for the insertion of heraldic devices with minimal difficulty once the tray was purchased. Coats of arms loudly proclaim one of the major reasons behind the birth celebrations and the trays themselves: the new child, who extended the lineage, with the two coats of arms representing the *parentado* between the two families.<sup>48</sup>

Of course, not everyone purchased birth trays from stock supplies. Some buyers resorted to secondhand dealers.<sup>49</sup> We know that Niccolò Strozzi bought a secondhand birth tray for his wife, Francesca, who was eight months pregnant, for a mere seven lire.<sup>50</sup> At the

same time, but from another dealer, Strozzi bought Francesca a pink nightshirt lined in white fur and a small mantle for their newborn.<sup>51</sup> Clearly, the sale of all kinds of childbirth objects through secondhand dealers was quite common, although payment records are rare. Sometimes, Pupilli inventories would provide a valuation of individual estate items for sale purposes. But it is often difficult to determine if the object was sold at that price or simply appraised for accounting purposes. Nevertheless, the most inexpensive tray listed in the Pupilli was valued at a mere ten soldi in 1418,<sup>52</sup> while the costliest was valued at three florins in 1441.<sup>53</sup>

The wide range of prices and the constant demand indicate an active market in both stock and secondhand trays. But the wealthier Renaissance patrons must have commissioned their childbirth trays directly. One of the better-known cases appears in the workshop ledger of Apollonio di Giovanni and Marco del Buono.<sup>54</sup> This ledger includes a reference to Giovanni di Amerigo Benci's request in 1453 for a round birth tray painted with the story of Solomon and Sheba, which cost him nine florins.<sup>55</sup> But surely this was not a great expense for Benci; he was the general manager for the Medici bank from 1440 to his death in 1455, and as a close colleague of the Medici he was a similarly ostentatious patron of the arts.<sup>56</sup> In fact, with the example of Piero, less than five years earlier, commissioning an elaborate and unique tray for the birth of his son, Benci may have felt a certain degree of pressure to commission a similarly impressive tray for a birth in his own family.<sup>57</sup> Because this was a special commission, the nine florins Benci paid was considerably more than he would have had to spend otherwise.

It is within this context that we must consider the Medici-Tornabuoni birth tray. Like Giovanni Benci, Piero di Cosimo de' Medici was not the type of man who purchased his art on the open market or from the secondhand dealers. He was, instead, a significant and influential art patron, and one with an obvious desire for expensive and glorifying effects.<sup>58</sup> Francis Ames-Lewis has characterized Piero's taste during this period as one focused on delicate surfaces, rich details, bright color, and specific Medicean symbols.<sup>59</sup> All four characteristics can be seen quite clearly in the Museum's tray, which must have been commissioned by late 1448 to be ready for Lorenzo's birth on New Year's Day, 1449. The finely detailed composition on the front is carefully designed according to linear perspective, the colors are brilliant, and the gilding is extensive. This tray, which is about thirty centimeters wider than most surviving trays, was constructed in an extravagant fashion, making it much too expensive a



Figure 9. Fra Filippo Lippi (ca. 1406–1469). *The Annunciation*, ca. 1448. Tempera on panel. London, National Gallery

venture for a mere stock item. And the large-scale device and coats of arms make a deliberate reference to Medicean pride and lineage.

In fact, Piero's public commissions, including the tabernacles in San Miniato and Santissima Annunziata, always incorporate his devices and the family coat of arms into the design. He had a great desire to extol his lineage in this public manner.<sup>60</sup> But, as the Medici-Tornabuoni tray indicates, he also wanted to surround himself with objects emphasizing that lineage—and its prominence—in his own domestic space. Piero seems to have exhibited these same interests in the commission of Fra Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation*, which includes his device of a diamond ring surrounding three feathers on the low balustrade between the figures (Figure 9).<sup>61</sup> Lippi's painting was probably intended for a room of the Medici palace where it would have been seen by visitors, rendering the dynastic significance of the device unmistakable.<sup>62</sup>

There is considerable further evidence for associating this childbirth tray with Lorenzo de' Medici's birth. The image of the Triumph of Fame is unique among both surviving and documented childbirth trays, implying that it was used in this case by special request. Clearly, the image of Fame was an appropriate subject for a child destined to be the leader of the city of Florence. And, in fact, it is possible that the numerous schematic walled cities in the background signified Medici dominion over surrounding lands in Tuscany. The iconography of these childbirth trays was not mere gratuitous ornamentation. Each subject must have had a special meaning to contemporaries, although its nu-

ances are often lost to us today.<sup>63</sup> In several cases, the same subjects were depicted on both marriage chests and birth trays, a logical overlap, given the very intimate link between the two events in Renaissance thought.<sup>64</sup>

There seems to have been a close connection between this subject and Scheggia as well. An intriguing group of four curved panels attributed to Scheggia also illustrates *Trionfi*. In this case, there is an individual panel for the Triumph of Love, Fame, Death, and Eternity.<sup>65</sup> These panels, dated to about 1450, probably made up part of a piece of furniture that has since been dismantled. But the depiction of the Triumph of Fame on this panel differs considerably from its depiction on the Medici-Tornabuoni birth tray (Figure 10). On the panel, the figures are arranged in a frieze facing right. The white-robed figure of Fame is surrounded by a mandorla and seated on a chariot, which is pulled, as Petrarch specified, by elephants. The chariot is surrounded by both male and female figures, some of whom are labeled for easier identification. Fame holds a sword in her right hand and a large book in her left. Certain details, such as the horses with their elaborate caparisons, the clumps of grass, the winged trumpets, and the high-waisted white robe of Fame, are depicted in both the panel and the birth tray. But the tray is considerably more innovative and detailed, and it stands on its own as an independent entity, rather than as a part of a continuous processional image that is carried through more than one panel.

Piero de' Medici is also known to have had a particular fondness for *Trionfi*. A letter from the artist Matteo de' Pasti indicates that Piero commissioned an

illuminated manuscript of Petrarch's *Trionfi* sometime in 1441.<sup>66</sup> At this time, Piero was beginning to accumulate important texts for his library; this may have been one of the first. Both the 1456 and 1464 inventories of Piero's estate included such a volume covered in green velvet and closed with silver fastenings.<sup>67</sup> This reference has been associated with a manuscript in Paris, now unfortunately missing its illuminations.<sup>68</sup>

But Piero's interest in triumphs went beyond the actual texts. To celebrate his wedding to Lucrezia Tornabuoni in 1448, he seems to have purchased a pair of marriage chests painted with a series of triumphs. These chests were apparently passed down to Lorenzo; just such a pair was recorded in Lorenzo's room at his death.<sup>69</sup> The two panels now in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, attributed to Francesco Pesellino (1422–1457), probably came from this pair (Figure 11).<sup>70</sup> These panels show evidence that they were originally from the front of marriage chests. Their size corresponds to the long, low format used for marriage chests at this time, and each one has visible damage in the central top area, most likely from keys that once hung from the now-removed locks that secured their contents. One of the panels depicts the Triumphs of Love, Chastity, and Death, and the other depicts the Triumphs of Fame, Time, and Eternity. All but Eternity share a continuous landscape background, as if the triumphal carts are in a ceremonial parade.<sup>71</sup>

Taken together, these factors point to Piero de' Medici as the patron of the Museum's tray. He was certainly able to afford such an unusually large and carefully executed object, with its ostentatious metallic leaf and finely detailed figural scene. His Petrarchan manuscripts and marriage chests prove that he was particularly fond of the subject, and his personal devices decorate both the front and the back of the tray. Although evidence for the purchase of birth trays is extremely rare, as a proud father Piero would have



Figure 10. Giovanni di Ser Giovanni. *The Triumph of Fame*, ca. 1450. Tempera on panel. Florence, Palazzo Davanzati (photo: Alinari/Art Resource, N.Y.)

been the perfect patron for this tray.<sup>72</sup> So Piero had the means, the interest, and the desire to celebrate his firstborn son in the most appropriate manner possible, according to popular custom.

Whether for sentimental, aesthetic, or even political reasons, it is clear that Lorenzo continued to value the birth tray given to his mother on the occasion of his birth. It was hanging in his room when he died in 1492, at the age of forty-three. Childbirth trays were usually listed in inventories alongside paintings or works of art that hung on the wall or rested in small niches; one gets the impression that the clerk simply listed all the works of art in the order he saw them as he looked around the room.<sup>73</sup> And, in fact, Lorenzo's tray is listed between two paintings, apparently topographical views of the Holy Land and of Spain (both valued at several florins less than the tray), which implies that it hung on a wall between the two, with its heraldic side hidden from view.<sup>74</sup> This would explain



Figure 11. Francesco Pesellino (1422–1457). *The Triumphs of Fame, Time, and Eternity* (panel from a marriage chest), ca. 1448. Tempera on chestnut wood. Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (photo: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum)

why the clerk did not describe the elaborate device in any way; he simply did not see it.<sup>75</sup>

This birth tray was in Lorenzo's room long after his own birth, his mother's death, and even the birth of his own children and the death of his wife. But this was not unusual. Birth trays remained in the home for a long period of time, pre-, post-, and even in-place-of-partum. Documents indicate that childless couples had birth trays.<sup>76</sup> Many homes even had more than one.<sup>77</sup> Most families kept their trays for decades; years after a child was born, these trays were still a significant part of the household furnishings, which could be handed down from generation to generation.<sup>78</sup> Judging from the great number of documented households that had these trays, one can assume that many have been lost in the intervening centuries. Some of these must have been the ones described in contemporaneous inventories as bad, used, or broken; in 1426, Salvestro di Francesco's estate even included a tray that was described as *tristo*, or sad.<sup>79</sup> An object so damaged that it was described as sad in 1426 would hardly have survived to the present day. But these descriptions of condition are important; they suggest that the trays were valued as dynastic reminders that were still worth having in the household (and worth assessing) even when they were in very poor condition. The presence of Lorenzo's birth tray in his personal quarters at his death can therefore be explained as popular custom.

The Medici family was under a great deal of strain following Lorenzo's death. His twenty-two-year-old son, Piero, was largely incompetent as a ruler and quickly alienated the Florentines with his excessive, indulgent behavior. The continual condemnation by the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola furthered popular animosity and in 1494 after a series of disastrous decisions, Piero and his family were exiled from the city of Florence.

A year after this exile and the confiscation of their remaining possessions, the new Florentine government held a sale of Medici property. There were surprisingly few contemporaneous references to this event. The pharmacist Luca Landucci made note of this sale, which took place at Orsanmichele during the summer of 1495. In his usual philosophical manner, Landucci observed that the great wealth of objects revealed "what fortune may do in this transitory life, or rather divine permission, to the end that man may recognize that all comes from God, who gives and takes away."<sup>80</sup> Surely, seeing the treasures of the Medici family for sale would have made the reflective Florentine citizens a bit more cautious overall. Others, of course, were not so philosophical as Landucci. They looked at

the sale as an excellent way to build up their own collections. Alessandro Gondi noted in his account book that he purchased a beautiful marble Madonna at this sale for an excellent price.<sup>81</sup>

Government officials kept careful accounts of this sale, which raised a considerable amount of money. The accounts indicate that the Medici-Tornabuoni tray was bought by a gentleman named Ser Bartolomeo di Bambello for slightly more than three florins.<sup>82</sup> In the three years since Lorenzo's death, and with the subsequent change in government, the tray had depreciated by more than two-thirds. Without the original commission document, we may never know how much Piero paid for the tray. But the inventory of 1492 does reveal that, over forty years after it was made, the tray was valued at the not insignificant sum of ten florins. The price Ser Bartolomeo paid was in accord with prices paid for other secondhand birth trays in the late fifteenth century. Given its elaborate nature, it would seem that the Museum's tray was a relative bargain. It is likely that the negative associations of the Medici family helped bring down the value by 1495.

Shortly after Ser Bartolomeo di Bambello purchased the Medici-Tornabuoni tray, surviving examples and documentary evidence indicate that the production of painted trays declined considerably. But the birth tray as a genre of domestic art did not disappear. A few were made, and many were still mentioned in household inventories throughout the sixteenth century, no doubt objects handed down from generation to generation. The Museum's tray was no exception. When Ser Bartolomeo di Bambello died in 1543, his estate was handled by the Magistrato dei Pupilli, a typical occurrence if minor heirs were involved. In June of that year the tray was specifically consigned to his widow, Lucrezia.<sup>83</sup> Like many widows, she received a variety of household goods, perhaps as partial retribution for her dowry, perhaps as a way to allow her to set up a new home. The consignment of this birth tray to Lucrezia kept it separate from the wider group of goods from which Pupilli officials pulled salable objects to raise money to settle the estate's debts.<sup>84</sup> And perhaps the Pupilli officials, noting its extravagance, assigned the tray to Lucrezia so that she could protect it for Ser Bartolomeo's heirs. By this date, nearly fifty years after the Medici sale, the tray had lost its immediate identification with that family and was described only perfunctorily, as a round, painted, childbirth tray.

The Medici-Tornabuoni tray remained in Ser Bartolomeo di Bambello's family for at least one more generation. Sometime after 1543 it was passed on to Ser Bartolomeo's heir, his son Jacopo. This probably

occurred at Lucrezia's death or at Jacopo's marriage; the records do not reveal the exact date. However, when Jacopo himself died in 1579, the inventory of his estate revealed that he left a round birth tray painted with a hunting scene.<sup>85</sup> This tray is surely the Museum's tray, with its iconography misconstrued. Painted child-birth trays were relatively rare in the late sixteenth century; by that time, it had become more typical to use inlaid or plain wooden trays, or even maiolica wares.<sup>86</sup> Painted birth trays had become so common and standardized in the fifteenth century that it perhaps sufficed to state their presence in inventories, without describing their iconography.<sup>87</sup> But in the sixteenth century, when painted trays became much rarer and perhaps more of a curiosity, it was necessary to describe them in greater detail.<sup>88</sup> As a result, the Medici-Tornabuoni tray was worthy of special note in the otherwise routine inventory of Jacopo's estate. Because it was so unusual, the Pupilli officials attempted, albeit inaccurately, to identify the iconography.

This error is understandable; the figures on the front of the Museum's tray are on horseback, armored and armed, and dogs occupy the front plane, suggesting a hunting scene. But this mistake indicates two important facts. First, the officials were obviously unfamiliar with Boccaccio and Petrarch, whose texts were not as popular as they had been a century earlier. And second, Jacopo's family, a member of which would have been present when the inventory of his estate was conducted, may not have known either the subject or the origin of the tray. This would not be unusual; after all, more than a century had passed since its production, and over eighty years since Ser Bartolomeo di Bambello purchased it at the Medici sale. It had become a family heirloom, but its provenance and iconography were presumably forgotten. As a result, the tray was singled out by the Pupilli officials as something worthy of more than a cursory description, even though they did not know exactly what they were describing.

The Medici-Tornabuoni birth tray is clearly a special case, and its unique nature rendered it identifiable through several transfers of ownership. Nevertheless, there are no known references to its whereabouts between 1579 and 1801. Presumably it remained in Florence, perhaps in the possession of further descendants of Ser Bartolomeo di Bambello. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a great many ancient Italian families sold off valuable objects from their ancestral collections to pay bills and settle debts. The market for early Italian painting, in particular, was quite strong. And an object as spectacular as this tray would surely be an attractive acquisition; it is likely that it changed hands during this period.

The tray is documented in Florence again by 1801, in the collection of Abbé Rimani. It was sold to the collector Alexis-François Artaud de Montor of Paris about this date. He published the tray in 1811 and 1843 as, oddly enough, a painting by Giotto.<sup>89</sup> Artaud de Montor died in 1849; his estate went to auction in 1851, when the Medici-Tornabuoni tray was sold to Thomas Jefferson Bryan of New York.<sup>90</sup> Bryan donated it to the New-York Historical Society in 1867, where it remained until the society deaccessioned it in 1995.

As the example of this tray indicates, the production and use of childbirth trays was a long-standing custom that had strong roots in the ideology of post-plague Italy. The popularity of such elaborate and oftentimes costly objects to encourage, celebrate, and commemorate childbirth emphasizes the importance of the event to the Renaissance family in a tangible and revealing manner.

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## NOTES

1. This article arose from my dissertation, "The Art & Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1995). Unless otherwise stated, all manuscript citations are from the Archivio di Stato, Florence, and all transcriptions and translations are my own.

2. D. Herlihy and C. Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and Their Families. A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven, 1985) pp. 274–279.

3. For example, at his death in 1475, Andrea Bucelli's estate included "3 paia di schodelle di maiolicha da donna di parto"; at this date, his children were fifteen and sixteen years old (*Magistrato dei Pupilli avanti il Principato* [henceforth MPAP] vol. 172, 336r).

4. Much of his wealth came from his involvement in the Medici bank; see R. de Roover, *The Rise and Decline of the Medici Bank 1397–1494* (Cambridge, 1963) pp. 17, 71–72, 235.

5. MPAP, vol. 173, 265r–274r.

6. *Magistrato dei Pupilli del Principato* (henceforth MPP) vol. 2650, 153v: "3 paia di federe sottile da parto di lino con sue reticelle biancha."

7. *Carte strozziane*, ser. V, vol. 1751, 125r: "e non le contiamo nulla pane e vino e pollastri e pipioni logoro a Nuovoli nel suo parto." For

more information on this particular case, see J. M. Musacchio, "Pregnancy and Poultry in Renaissance Italy," *Source* 16 (1997) pp. 7–8.

8. Archivio di Stato, Prato, *Ceppi*, vol. 211, 32 right: "Giuliano d'Anbruoio speciale . . . E de'avere a di 15 di novembre [1440] soldi tredici per una libra di chandele li dettono per lo amore di Dio a Monna Checha del Ghuazerino."

9. Major bibliography for this important tray is listed in Sotheby's New York, Jan. 12, 1995, lot 69. The historiography of birth trays in general is relatively limited. The earliest studies treated the trays as charming novelties; see U. Rossi, "I deschi da parto," *Archivio storico dell'arte* 3 (1890) pp. 78–79, and E. Müntz, "Les plateaux d'accouchées et la peinture sur meubles du XIV<sup>e</sup> au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Fondation Eugène Piot. Monuments et mémoires* 1 (1894) pp. 203–232. Subsequent publications included birth trays within the larger category of Renaissance painted furnishings; primary among these is P. Schubring, *Cassoni: Truhen und Truhenbilder der italienischen Frührenaissance* (Leipzig, 1915 and 1923). The only monographic treatment of childbirth trays as an independent genre is M. E. Fitzgerald's "Deschi da Parto: Florentine Birth Trays of the Quattrocento" (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 1986), which includes a summary catalogue. See also D. C. Ahl, "Renaissance Birth Salvers and the Richmond Judgement of Solomon," *Studies in Iconography* 7 (1981) pp. 157–174. I was not able to consult C. De Carli, *I deschi da parto e la pittura del primo rinascimento toscano* (Turin, 1997), while preparing this manuscript.

10. A. Warburg, "Della impresa amorose nelle più antiche incisione fiorentine," *Rivista d'arte* 3 (1905) p. 5.

11. M. Spallanzani and G. G. Bertelà, eds., *Libro d'inventario dei beni di Lorenzo il Magnifico* (Florence, 1992) p. 27 ("uno descho tondo da parto dipintovi il trionfo della fama"). The fact that the tray was found in Lorenzo's rooms signified his intimate connection to it and all but excluded the possibility that the tray was commissioned for the birth of his younger brother Giuliano in 1453.

12. On the prevalence of these texts, see C. Bec, *Les livres des Florentins (1413–1608)* (Florence, 1984). Copies were widely owned; for example, in 1497, Lorenzo Tornabuoni's estate included "1<sup>o</sup> libro de' Trionfi del Petrarca" (*MPAP*, vol. 181, 141v). Coincidentally, Lorenzo was the son of Giovanni Tornabuoni, Piero de' Medici's brother-in-law.

13. For the link between this theme and marriage and childbirth, see A. Jacobson-Schutte, "Trionfi delle donne: rovesciamento dei ruoli nella Firenze rinascimentale," *Quaderni storici* 44 (1980) pp. 474–496.

14. For triumph iconography in Renaissance art, see G. Carandente, *I trionfi nel primo Rinascimento* (Turin, 1963), M. Salmi, "I Trionfi e il *De viris illustribus* nell'arte del primo Rinascimento," *Atti dei Convegni Lincei* 10 (1976) pp. 23–47, and L. S. Malke, "Contributo alle figurazioni dei Trionfi e del Canzoniere del Petrarca," *Commentari* 28 (1977) pp. 236–261. E. Callmann recently compiled a list of Boccaccian themes in Italian painting, which includes triumph images within the larger group; see E. Callmann, "Subjects from Boccaccio in Italian Painting, 1375–1525," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 23 (1995) pp. 19–78, esp. 41–46.

15. For examples, see D. C. Shorr, "Some Notes on the Iconography of Petrarch's *Triumph of Fame*," *Art Bulletin* 20 (1938) pp. 100–107.

16. G. Boccaccio, *Amorosa visione*, R. Hollander, T. Hampton, and M. Frankel, trans. (Hanover, 1986) pp. 28–29.

17. This statuette, although common in representations of the Triumph of Fame, may be a mistranslation; see Shorr, "Some Notes," p. 104, but also E. Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni* (London, 1974) p. 12.

18. To link this gesture to Boccaccio's text, see Shorr, "Some Notes," p. 104.

19. Although rather disheveled and barefoot, these two young men are not the shackled prisoners who often appear in such scenes and are discussed in D. C. Shorr, "The Identification of the Captives in Petrarch's *Triumph of Fame*," *Die graphischen Künste* 2 (1937) pp. 41–44.

20. For Medici devices, see F. Ames-Lewis, "Early Medicean Devices," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 42 (1979) pp. 122–143, and, most recently, F. Cardini, "Le insegne Laurenziane," in *Le tems revient. Il tempo si rinnova. Feste e spettacoli nella Firenze di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, P. Ventrone, ed. (Florence, 1992) pp. 55–74.

21. The later types are described in Musacchio, "Art & Ritual," pp. 116–128.

22. D. C. Ahl found a birth tray in almost 42 percent of the predominantly 15th-century inventories she examined; see Ahl, "Renaissance Birth Salvers," p. 158. My own archival research seems to indicate an even higher percentage; however, the repetition of many of the inventories throughout several volumes of the Pupilli and across many years makes it difficult to provide a definitive number.

23. For the statutes defining the Pupilli during this period, see F. Morandini, "Statuti e ordinamenti dell'Ufficio dei Pupilli et Adulti nel periodo della Repubblica Fiorentina (1388–1534)," *Archivio storico Italiano* 113 (1955) pp. 522–551; 114 (1956) pp. 92–117; 115 (1957) pp. 87–104.

24. There is no evidence to support the common assumption that trays were made in celebration of a marriage. In my examination of inventories and account books from a wide variety of social and economic backgrounds, I never encountered a *desco da nozze*. Marriage was celebrated with an extensive range of objects, but trays were not among them. Occasionally, however, birth trays were included in the list of a new couple's domestic furnishings. In 1493, Tommaso and Bartolommea Minerbetti gave their son Andrea and his bride, Maria, a number of items to set up their new home, including a round painted birth tray with a gold frame; see G. Biagio, *Due corredi nuziali fiorentini 1320–1493 da un libro di ricordanze dei Minerbetti* (Florence, 1899) p. 19. But this tray was specified as a birth tray, even at the marriage, and may have been presented to the new couple for its talismanic properties; see J. M. Musacchio, "Imaginative Conceptions in Renaissance Italy," in *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, S. M. Grieco and G. Johnson, eds. (Cambridge, 1997) pp. 42–60.

25. G. Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori*, G. Milanesi, ed. (Florence, 1882) VII, pp. 20–21 ("per dipignerlo in un di que tondi nei quali si porta da mangiare alle donne di parto").

26. For example, in 1413, the estate of Maestro Tommaso di Maestro Donati included "unum deschum ad usum mulierum in partu" (*MPAP*, vol. 24, 207r).

27. Both Michele Savonarola and Paolo da Certaldo recommend-

ed fragrant and digestible white wines for pregnant women; see M. Savonarola, *Il trattato ginecologico-pediatrico in volgare. Ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septennium*, L. Belloni, ed. (Milan, 1952) p. 131, and P. da Certaldo, *Libro di buoni costumi*, A. Schiaffini, ed. (Florence, 1945) p. 125.

28. For example, in 1593, the estate of Andrea Cianno had “uno tondo da donne di parto anticho con sua coperta di pano verde” (MPP, vol. 2656, 859v). Furthermore, the clerk who made the inventory of Lorenzo Vanni’s estate in 1429 took care to note the presence of “1° descho da parto senza inviltura,” suggesting that cloth covers were normally expected with childbirth trays (MPAP, vol. 160, 422r).

29. The smallest tray is the unframed *Amorous Hunt* at the Yale University Art Gallery (48.7 cm), while the largest is the elaborately framed Medici-Tornabuoni tray (92.7 cm). Dimensions are problematic, however; many trays no longer have their original frames, while others have no frames at all.

30. For example, in 1423 Andrea Mazuoli’s estate included “1° deschetto da parto” and “1° descho da parto” (MPAP, vol. 39, 223r), which implies that the first tray was smaller than the second.

31. An X-ray examination of a tray at The Art Museum, Princeton University, shows that it was made from two pieces of wood. The join goes from the bottom left corner diagonally up to the right, adding on only a small piece. This neat, dowel-less join was covered by four strips of a light, open-weave cloth and would have been braced by the original frame or molding.

32. In 1388 Filippo Quartucci’s estate had “1 tavola tonda da parto” (MPAP, vol. 4, 138r). For the earliest round tray, see L. Berti and A. Paolucci, *L’Eta di Masaccio. Il primo quattrocento a Firenze* (Milan, 1990) pp. 102–103. The relation between tondi and birth trays is discussed in R. J. M. Olson, “Lost and Partially Found: The Tondo, a Significant Florentine Art Form, in Documents of the Renaissance,” *Artibus et historiae* 14 (1993) p. 34. There must have been considerable freedom with shapes, however; in 1418 Arrigo Rondinelli’s estate included “uno descho da parto quadro” (MPAP, vol. 28, 255v).

33. For example, in 1404 the estate of Lorenzo Schiattini included “uno descho da parto messo ad’oro fine” (MPAP, vol. 15, 184v).

34. Marriage chests were also constructed in their entirety before they were painted; see Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, p. 27. This practice was adopted from monumental altarpiece production techniques; see D. Bomford et al., *Art in the Making. Italian Painting before 1400* (London, 1989).

35. The same is true for another tray by Scheggia, now at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. This tray has a nail surmounted by a ring driven into the frame. Examination indicates that this device was inserted before the linen ground was laid on the back of the panel, making it an integral part of the panel.

36. The identity of this artist was merged with the Master of the Adimari Cassone, also known as the Master of Fucecchio, by Luciano Bellosi in 1969; see L. Bellosi, D. Lotti, and A. Matteoli, *Mostra d’arte sacra della diocesi di San Miniato* (San Miniato, 1969) pp. 56–57. His oeuvre was compiled largely by R. Longhi, “Fatti di Masolino e di Masaccio,” *Critica d’arte* 5 (1940) p. 187, and G. Pudelko, “Studien über Domenico Veneziano,” *Mitteilungen des kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 4 (1934) pp. 163–164. Scheggia’s

work with intarsia is outlined by M. Haines, *La Sacrestia delle Messe del Duomo di Firenze* (Florence, 1983) pp. 107–108. For documentary references to Scheggia, see J. Beck, *Masaccio. The Documents* (Locust Valley, N. Y., 1978) pp. 5–12, 19, 24–29; U. Procacci, “Le portate al catasto di Giovanni di Ser Giovanni detto lo Scheggia,” *Rivista d’arte* 37 (1984) pp. 235–257; and M. Haines, “Nota sulla discendenza di Giovanni di Ser Giovanni,” *Rivista d’arte* 37 (1984) pp. 257–268.

The Medici inventory of 1492 also includes a three-part *spalliera* painted by Scheggia with the story of Lorenzo de’ Medici’s joust; see Spallanzani and Bertelà, *Libro d’inventario*, p. 73. It is probably safe to assume that this refers to the joust of 1469, which Luigi Pulci commemorated with his famous poem. This *spalliera*, unfortunately, does not seem to survive. But its appearance may have been similar to Uccello’s three panels of the *Battle of San Romano* (ca. 1450), which served as *spalliere* in Lorenzo’s own bedchamber. The 1492 inventory describes both Scheggia’s panels and Uccello’s panels as positioned high on the wall, framed in gold, and set apart by thin colonnettes. For the most recent discussion of Uccello’s panels, see F. and S. Borsi, *Paolo Uccello*, E. Powell, trans. (New York, 1994) pp. 307–312.

37. See F. Zeri, “Un appunto su Tommaso di Ser Giovanni, detto Masaccio, e suo fratello, Giovanni di Ser Giovanni, detto Scheggia,” *Prospettiva* 33–36 (1983–84) pp. 56–58, for an example of the artistic interchange between the two brothers.

38. The tray was associated with Domenico most recently by C. Eisler, “A Window on Domenico Veneziano at Santa Croce,” in *Scritti di storia dell’arte in onore di Federico Zeri*, M. Natale, ed. (Milan, 1984) p. 131.

39. For the tray attributed to Masaccio, see L. Berti and R. Foggi, *Masaccio. Catalogo completo dei dipinti* (Florence, 1989) pp. 197–201. Neri di Bicci listed two trays in his *ricordanze*; see N. di Bicci, *Le ricordanze*, B. Santi, ed. (Pisa, 1976) pp. 167–168, 175. Pontormo executed two birth bowls depicting the naming of John the Baptist; see A. Bruschi, *Un Pontormo ritrovato. Il descho da parto Ughi-Antinori, già della collezione Elia Volpi* (Florence, 1992).

40. Vasari, *Le vite*, II, p. 149. Vasari also described how Ghirlandaio instructed his apprentices to paint baskets for women; see *ibid.*, III, pp. 269–270.

41. Several scholars have dealt with this problem. See A. Schiaparelli, *La casa fiorentina e i suoi arredi nei secoli XIV e XV*, M. Sframeli and L. Pagnotta, eds. (Florence, 1983); J. K. Lydecker, “The Domestic Setting of the Arts in Renaissance Florence” (Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1987); and P. Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400–1600* (New York, 1991).

42. See B. Cole, “The Interior Decoration of the Palazzo Datini in Prato,” *Mitteilungen des kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 13 (1967) p. 61; and F. Sacchetti, *Il trecentonovelle*, A. Lanza, ed. (Florence, 1984) pp. 166–172. The anonymous 15th-century carnival song of the Florentine sculptors also implies this practice; see C. Singleton, ed., *Canti carnascialeschi* (Bari, 1936) p. 10.

43. G. Corti, “Sul commercio dei quadri a Firenze verso la fine del secolo XIV,” *Commentari* 22 (1971) p. 89.

44. Neri di Bicci, *Le ricordanze*, pp. 167–168.

45. Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, pp. 30–35.

46. E. Callmann, “Apollonio di Giovanni and Painting for the Early Renaissance Room,” *Antichità viva* 27 (1988) p. 12. Evidence

indicates that this workshop executed the majority of the chest before a specific order was received; see Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, pp. 25–38.

47. See the discussion in Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, pp. 36–37, 58–59.

48. The use of small heraldic shields was common in domestic art, indicative of the open-market origin of many of these objects. They are found, for example, on some of the stucco and terracotta Madonna and Child reliefs associated with Lorenzo Ghiberti's workshop; for a partial list, see J. Harris, ed., *The Mount Holyoke College Art Museum: Handbook of the Collection* (South Hadley, Mass. 1984) p. 22.

49. Several trays have anachronistic coats of arms, which were probably repainted when ownership changed. Buying used goods and repainting them was a cheaper option than purchasing a new object outright. For an example of this, see C. M. Kauffmann, *Catalogue of Foreign Paintings* (London, 1973) I, pp. 13–14.

50. *Carte strozziane*, ser. IV, vol. 71, 22v.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *MPAP*, vol. 28, 283v.

53. *MPAP*, vol. 61, 153r. For information on the value of the florin, which varies by 14 soldi in the period between these two valuations, see R. A. Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence: An Economic and Social History* (Baltimore, 1980) p. 430.

54. The ledger is transcribed in Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, pp. 76–81. It exists today as an incomplete 17th-century copy of a lost document; evidence for this is provided in Callmann, "Apollonio di Giovanni and Painting."

55. Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, p. 79. This tray does not survive today; however, for further information about the use of this particular subject on domestic art, see C. C. Wilson, *Italian Paintings XIV–XVI Centuries in the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston* (Houston, 1996) pp. 214–229.

56. For information on Benci, see de Roover, *Rise and Decline*, pp. 57–58, and F. Ames-Lewis, "Art in the Service of the Family: The Taste and Patronage of Piero di Cosimo de' Medici," in *Piero de' Medici "il Gottoso" (1416–1469)*, A. Beyer and B. Boucher, eds. (Berlin, 1993) p. 209.

57. Benci may have been buying the tray for a pregnant daughter, since he had purchased a pair of marriage chests to celebrate the wedding of a daughter a year earlier; see Callmann, *Apollonio di Giovanni*, p. 79.

58. Piero's art patronage was first analyzed in E. H. Gombrich, "The Early Medici as Patrons of Art," in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, E. F. Jacob, ed. (London, 1960) pp. 279–311. For recent studies on Piero, see the essays in Beyer and Boucher, *Piero de' Medici*.

59. Ames-Lewis, "Art in the Service," p. 209.

60. See, in particular, Ames-Lewis, *ibid.*, and L. Gnocchi, "Le preferenze artistiche di Piero di Cosimo de' Medici," *Artibus et historiae* 18 (1988) pp. 41–78.

61. Ames-Lewis, "Art in the Service," esp. pp. 209–217.

62. M. Davies and, more recently, F. Ames-Lewis have suggested that Lippi's *Annunciation* may also be associated with the birth of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, which places it in an interesting relationship with the Medici-Tornabuoni birth tray. See M. Davies, "Fra

Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* and *Seven Saints*," *Critica d'arte* 8 (1950) p. 360, and Ames-Lewis, "Art in the Service," pp. 216–217.

63. Vasari implied as much in regard to 16th-century wooden trays when he described Francesco Salviati's drawing for a birth tray. According to Vasari, the complex iconography of Salviati's drawing, which incorporated the ages of man and the temple of Athena, shows that "for newborns one should above all else pray for knowledge and goodness" (Vasari, *Le vite*, VII, p. 21: "ai nati figliuoli si dovrebbe innanzi ad ogni altra cosa pregare sapienza e bontà").

64. For information on Renaissance marriage, see esp. C. Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, L. G. Cochrane, trans. (Chicago, 1985), and A. Molho, *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence* (Cambridge, 1994).

65. G. Landolfi, "I 'Trionfi' petrarcheschi di Palazzo Davanzati: un esercizio di lettura iconografica," *Antichità viva* 32 (1993) pp. 5–17.

66. This letter was first published by G. Milanese, "Lettere d'artisti italiani dei secoli XIV e XV," *Il Buonarroti* 4 (1869) pp. 78–79. An English translation is in D. S. Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance* (London, 1970) pp. 94–95. Although Matteo does not specify exactly what medium he is working in, F. Ames-Lewis has presented a convincing case analysis that Matteo was, in fact, illuminating one of the earliest manuscripts for Piero de' Medici's library; see F. Ames-Lewis, "Matteo de' Pasti and the Use of Powdered Gold," *Mitteilungen des kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 28 (1984) pp. 351–362.

67. See M. Spallanzani, ed., *Inventari medicei, 1417–1465: Giovanni di Bicci, Cosimo e Lorenzo di Giovanni, Piero di Cosimo* (Florence, 1996) pp. 113, 117, 157. There were two illustrated *Trionfi* in Lorenzo's estate at his death, perhaps representing the volumes Piero owned and then passed to his son; see Spallanzani and Bertelà, *Libro d'inventario*, pp. 49, 50.

68. F. Ames-Lewis, "The Library and Manuscripts of Piero di Cosimo de' Medici," (Ph.D. diss., Courtauld Institute, London, 1977) pp. 336–337.

69. Spallanzani and Bertelà, *Libro d'inventario*, p. 26.

70. For these panels, see P. Hendy, *European and American Paintings in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum* (Boston, 1974) pp. 176–178. Both panels have been cut down, now measuring a maximum of 158 cm, while 3.5 braccia would be 204 cm. There is no mention of these panels in the incomplete inventories that exist of Piero's possessions during his lifetime. But we know that Piero patronized Pesellino, and we know that Piero appreciated this particular iconography. Furthermore, Pesellino died in 1457, well before Lorenzo de' Medici would have been an active art patron. So it is quite likely that this pair of chests was made for Piero and Lucrezia's wedding and passed on to Lorenzo with the death of his parents.

71. This was often the case; see B. Witthoft, "Marriage Rituals and Marriage Chests in Quattrocento Florence," *Artibus et historiae* 5 (1982) pp. 43–59.

72. The case of Giovanni Benci mentioned earlier seems to be an example of a grandfather purchasing a birth tray. But there is no reason to believe that the Medici-Tornabuoni tray was ordered by Cosimo de' Medici, Piero's father, since the device on the reverse of this tray was used first by Piero.

73. Such a process is described in Lydecker, "The Domestic Setting," p. 22.

74. Spallanzani and Bertelà, *Libro d'inventario*, pp. 26–27.

75. This was often the case; there are relatively few references in inventories to the reverse images on childbirth trays.

76. In the late 14th century Francesco and Margarita Datini of Prato had a birth tray, but they had no legitimate children; see I. Origo, *The Merchant of Prato. Daily Life in a Medieval Italian Village* (London, 1992) pp. 233–234. In my examination of Archivio di Stato, Prato, *Archivio Datini*, 236, the collection of various Datini inventories from ca. 1390–1405 that Origo consulted, I found reference to one birth tray, although Origo states that the Datini had two. There is evidence that the Datini valued this tray; an undated notation made alongside one reference stated that they brought the tray with them to Florence while living there temporarily.

77. For example, in 1469, Piero Cioni's estate included "1<sup>a</sup> tavoletta da dona di parto dipinta vecchia" and "1<sup>a</sup> tavoletta da dona di parto dipinta nuova" (MPAP, vol. 173, 201v). Many inventories, in fact, record more than one tray, contradicting the traditional assumption that the birth tray was offered only at the birth of the firstborn; see M. Wackernagel, *The World of the Florentine Renaissance Artist*, A. Luchs, trans. (Princeton, 1981) p. 168.

78. In 1487, Marco Parenti consigned, along with other household items, "uno desco da parto dipinto" to his son Piero and Piero's wife, Onesta (*Carte strozziane*, ser. II, vol. 17 bis, 79r).

79. MPAP, vol. 44, 257v: "1 desco da parto tristo."

80. L. Landucci, *Florentine Diary from 1450 to 1516*, A. de Rosen Jervis, trans. (London, 1927) p. 93.

81. *Carte Gondi*, vol. 33, 116 left. In 1506 an inventory of Alessandro's home recorded six different Madonna statuettes, but the Medici one is not specified, indicating that it lost its associations with the exiled family almost immediately; see *Carte Gondi*, vol. 36, 247.

82. *Mediceo avanti il Principato*, vol. 121, 357r: "A Ser Bartolomeo

di Bambelo. 1 tondo da parto dipintovi su il Trionfo della Fama (fiorini 3.6.8)."

83. MPP, vol. 2663, 336r: "1<sup>o</sup> tondo da donna di parte dipinto."

84. These activities are outlined in Morandini, "Statuti e ordinamenti."

85. MPP, vol. 2647, 594v: "uno tondo da donna di parto dipintovi una caccia."

86. For a discussion of these later manifestations, see Musacchio, "The Art & Ritual," pp. 116–163.

87. In fact, the earliest known references to iconography are in the Medici inventory, which cited, along with the *Triumph of Fame* tray, a lost tray with a battle scene by Masaccio, and two other trays specified only as painted and, in one case, round (Spallanzani and Bertelà, *Libro d'inventario*, pp. 80, 104, 152). Because this inventory was undertaken partly to indicate the vast wealth of the Medici, it was especially detailed; other inventories were considerably more prosaic.

88. In the hundreds of household inventories examined, the only references to iconography that I have found date from the 16th century. In addition to the Medici-Tornabuoni tray in Jacopo di Bartolomeo di Bambello's estate, there was "1<sup>o</sup> tondo da parto dipintovi diretto Cupido" in 1540 (MPP, vol. 2648, 525r) and "1<sup>o</sup> tondo di legno da donne di parto con 6 figure dipinte" in 1581 (MPP, vol. 2655, 141v). In 1518 the estate of Alessandro Rinuccini included a round birth tray painted with a Roman history scene; see C. Klapisch-Zuber, "Les femmes dans les rituels de l'alliance et de la naissance à Florence," in *Riti e rituali nelle società medievali*, J. Chiffolleau et al., eds. (Spoleto, 1994) p. 17. Each of these cursory descriptions reveals little about the actual appearance of a particular tray, although each does describe a popular surviving type.

89. See A. F. Artaud de Montor, *Considérations sur l'état de la peinture en Italie* (Paris, 1811) pp. 80–82, and idem, *Peintres primitifs* (Paris, 1843) pp. 34–36.

90. Place de la Bourse, Paris, Jan. 16–17, 1851, lot 57.