

## **From Via della Scala to the Cathedral: Social Spaces and the Visual Arts in Paolo Uccello's Florence\***

This article reconstructs the experience of Florence's urban spaces from the point of view of one of its most important and intriguing early Renaissance artists: Paolo Uccello. It assesses the evidence for his personal life and social status, and discusses his professional activity along an itinerary from his home on Via della Scala in the west of Florence to the Cathedral in its centre. In so doing, it illustrates the significance of urban spaces as socially charged sites in the life of an artist and the web of associations that connected Florentine society with its communal spaces and artworks. Special attention is given to Uccello's *Nativity* mural painting from the cloister of the hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, whose iconography may reflect the support given by Florentine families and government to orphans — a significant aspect of Uccello's own family history.

As every visitor to the city knows, Florence retains the imprint of its history in its densely packed urban character, its streets lined with imposing Renaissance palaces, forbidding medieval towers, crooked alleyways, paved squares, and the Arno river bisecting the city east to west, in a valley bounded by hills to the north and south. Rising above the city, now as in the fifteenth century when it was built, the terracotta tiles, marble ribs, and lantern of the cupola of the Cathedral can be seen from most parts of the city, a constant reminder of the pre-eminent achievements of the early Renaissance period. Nevertheless, the city has undergone a constant process of transformation, involving the opening up of communal spaces within its urban fabric, such as piazzas, churches, convents, hospitals, cloisters, and loggias. Moreover, streets have been straightened, and intersections widened to aid the flow of traffic. Such disruptions to the urban fabric inevitably cause the loss of built heritage, however, they also create opportunities for urban regeneration, and in particular the employment of the visual arts to adorn new spaces. But how did the life of a Florentine early Renaissance artist intersect with the city's network of communal spaces?

At the end of the nineteenth century, Guido Carocci, Royal Inspector of Excavations and Monuments for the city of Florence and one of the most intrepid scholars of its Renaissance history, created a map of the centre of the city showing the names of the heads of the city's households where they lived in 1427.<sup>1</sup> It was informed by *catasto* records, a vast archive of tax

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documents now housed in the Florentine State Archive. These documents are rich in information about the material lives of the city's population. Few artists were included in Carocci's map, as few were sufficiently wealthy to own valuable real estate near the city centre. An exception is Filippo Brunelleschi, artist, architect, and engineer, whose family home was opposite the small church of San Michele Berteldi in the inner part of the northwest quarter of the city.<sup>2</sup> Carocci's map shows that on his way to work at the Cathedral Brunelleschi would have left his house, turning left into the Piazza degli Agli, and then right into the Via dei Guidalotti, subsequently leading into the Canto dei Pecori. His view of the Cathedral would have been blocked by the building over the archway, called the Volta dei Pecori (demolished in the nineteenth century), adjoining the archiepiscopal palace on Piazza San Giovanni. Upon entering the piazza, the most important project of his career would have come into view: the cupola of the Cathedral.<sup>3</sup> Although the street names have changed, as well as the configuration of the city blocks and many of the buildings surrounding them, it would be possible — approximately — to follow in Brunelleschi's footsteps today.

If such historical reconstruction seems merely picturesque, or even banal, it is nevertheless pertinent to a discussion of the way artists negotiated Florentine society through its spaces. The intense competition for influence over space in the city by individuals, families, the church, guilds, and government bodies is brought to light in the individual's journey through the city. Their progress embodies a negotiation of social boundaries, from the individual's quarters within the family home to that of the nuclear or extended family (in Brunelleschi's case he grew

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<sup>1</sup> Guido Carocci, 'Il centro di Firenze nel 1427', in *Studi storici sul centro di Firenze in occasione del IV Congresso Storico Italiano* (Florence: Arnaldo Forni, 1979; orig. ed. Florence: 1889), pp. 17–75.

<sup>2</sup> The northwest section of Florence within the first city wall belonged administratively to the San Giovanni quarter of the city, although geographically it constituted the innermost section of the northwest quarter of the city, corresponding for the most part to the Santa Maria Novella quarter. Its residents (including those discussed in this article, such as Deo Beccuti, Paolo Carnesecchi, and Filippo Brunelleschi) belonged to the Gonfalone Dragon of the San Giovanni quarter.

<sup>3</sup> The building over the Volta dei Pecori was demolished in the nineteenth century. On this archway and the history of the adjacent archiepiscopal palace, see: Maureen C. Miller, 'The Medici Renovation of the Florentine Arcivescovado', *I Tatti Studies*, 9 (2001), 89–117.

up with his brothers in the paternal home he eventually inherited),<sup>4</sup> into the neighbourhood dominated by the most powerful landowners (the Agli and Guidalotti families who gave their names to its streets and piazzas), and moving towards the centre where the city's major religious and communal institutions held sway (for example, the administration of the Cathedral's construction was delegated by the *Signoria* to the wealthy and powerful Wool Guild).

For artists less closely tied to the Florentine establishment than Brunelleschi,<sup>5</sup> their social experience of the city could be marginal despite their culturally important works and posthumous fame, and, indeed, it was sometimes further marginalised by the city's writers. The sixteenth-century art historian, Giorgio Vasari, peppered his *Le Vite de' piú eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori italiani* (*Lives of the Most Excellent Italian Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*) with accounts of the friendships, love affairs, and rivalries of his subjects, set in the urban mis-en-scène of the city. Vasari's anecdotes cast certain early Renaissance artists in a negative light through the literary strategy of setting them in humble domestic or street settings.

Although the painter Andrea del Castagno is documented living near the Cathedral at one point of his life, he was not a citizen of Florence, and so was something of a social outsider.<sup>6</sup> In Vasari's *Vite* his character becomes positively malevolent. According to Vasari, while painting the *Equestrian Monument for Niccolò Tolentino* in the Cathedral, a boy passing by knocked Andrea's ladder and for his carelessness was chased by the artist all the way to the Canto de' Pazzi.<sup>7</sup> Since 'Canto de' Pazzi' literally means 'corner of the madmen', and is located around the corner from the Cathedral, Vasari seems to be implying that Andrea's preciousness eventually drove him round the bend! Further on in the same life Vasari claimed that Andrea became so jealous of Domenico Veneziano's much-praised tabernacle painting *Virgin and Child with God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Saints*, located at the Canto de' Carnesecchi near the church of Santa Maria Novella, that he plotted falsely to become Domenico's friend, winning the secret of

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<sup>4</sup> Eugenio Battisti, *Filippo Brunelleschi*, revised edition (Milan: Electa Architecture, 2002; orig. ed. Milan: 1976), p. 329.

<sup>5</sup> On Brunelleschi's relatively high social status, see: Diane Finiello Zervas, 'Filippo Brunelleschi's Political Career', *Burlington Magazine*, 121, 919 (1979), 630–39.

<sup>6</sup> Rufus Graves Mather, 'Documents Mostly New Relating to Florentine Painters and Sculptors of the Fifteenth Century', *Art Bulletin*, 30, 1 (1948), 20–65, p. 28. In 1444 when Castagno matriculated in the Doctors and Apothecaries' Guild, he was recorded as living in the parish of the Cathedral.

<sup>7</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' piú eccellenti pittori scultori e architettori italiani, nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, text, 6 vols, G. Mardersteig (ed.) (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1966–87), III (1971), p. 356: appearing in the 1550 and 1568 eds.

oil painting from him by deception, and then mortally wounding him in the street.<sup>8</sup> That the latter episode was fictitious became apparent in the nineteenth century when it was discovered that Veneziano outlived Castagno.<sup>9</sup>

There has been considerable scholarly interest recently in the idea of space as a means of investigating social relations in history. In particular, spaces outside buildings seem alluring for their potential to focus attention on less well known aspects of history, that is, history relating to subjects other than large state, church, or family institutions, especially concerning the lower classes, and behaviours viewed as anti-authoritarian, anti-social, or criminal.<sup>10</sup> For art history too, locating the residences of Florentine Renaissance artists, describing their neighbourhoods, recreating their social networks, and identifying the original locations of their artworks, are important for creating a detailed and historically meaningful picture of their lives. Moreover, this approach is essential for providing a context within which to interpret their works, not merely as isolated aesthetic objects, but as part of the rich fabric of personal and social relations in which they were created.

This approach has been applied with an emphasis on artists' social connections with each other at the neighbourhood level, as Nicholas Eckstein has done for the community of mostly lower-class artists of the Gonfalone (one of four administrative sub-divisions of each of the city's quarters) of the Green Dragon.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, it has been applied with an emphasis on the social connections of an artist's patrician patrons, as John Spencer has done for Andrea del Castagno.<sup>12</sup> Bill Kent has since identified a need for the investigation of the relationship between the social

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<sup>8</sup> Vasari, III, pp. 358–59. The surviving fragments of the tabernacle paintings are now housed in the National Gallery, London.

<sup>9</sup> On Vasari's characterisation of Castagno, see: John R. Spencer, *Andrea del Castagno and his Patrons* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 1–6.

<sup>10</sup> Roger J. Crum and John T. Paoletti's recently edited volume of essays (*Renaissance Florence: A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) provides a wealth of insights into how space and society were informed by each other in Renaissance Florence. A few essays refer to the role of artworks in the negotiation between the two, but none addresses the complex interrelationships between an artist's personal life and professional work.

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas A. Eckstein, *The District of the Green Dragon: Neighbourhood Life and Social Change in Renaissance Florence* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1995), Chapter II, Part II: Drago's *dipintori*, pp. 41–60; Nicholas A. Eckstein, 'Neighbourhood as Microcosm', in Crum and Paoletti (eds), pp. 219–39.

<sup>12</sup> Spencer (p. 4) noted that many of Castagno's works were executed in the San Giovanni quarter, where he lived, or for patrons residing there.

world of Florentine artists (of the artisan class) and that of their patrician patrons.<sup>13</sup> This article seeks to represent a cross-section of an artist's social world by examining their experience of traversing the gamut of the city's spaces from a peripheral street to the city's most venerable cultural monuments in its centre. The location of artworks may inform the itinerary's significance.

Naturally, artworks could serve purely personal functions for the individuals who commissioned or acquired them, as objects providing sensual pleasure, preserving memories, or serving a devotional purpose. However, art was commissioned above all to be seen in communal spaces in which an audience was available to receive whatever messages a patron might wish to communicate. The distinction between private and public in the Renaissance, as now, was often blurred or changeable. Domestic spaces were regularly made accessible to particular members of the public for social, commercial, or government transactions. Conversely, private influence could be exerted over public spaces in various ways, such as the sponsoring of building works in or near communal spaces on the condition that the improvements bore the patron's familial insignia.

Artworks commissioned to decorate furniture and domestic interiors in the Renaissance often commemorated marriages between families, and so alluded to social relations beyond the home. Such is the case with the numerous surviving cassoni bearing the coats of arms of the bride and groom. Carved and painted coats of arms adorned the façade of the home, frequently placed at the property lines of buildings to mark the extent of the family property, or over the main door to communicate information to visitors about the occupants. The ubiquitous paintings and sculptures of the Virgin and Child in tabernacles on the outside of houses acted as talismans for the family and passers by.<sup>14</sup>

For well-to-do families artistic patronage usually extended to the local church, where patronage rights over a chapel would be obtained to provide a fitting place to bury and commemorate the family's dead, and to demonstrate the family's wealth and power in the neighbourhood. Chapels could be furnished with stone altars covered with expensive fabrics,

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<sup>13</sup> F. W. Kent, "'Be Rather Loved Than Feared': Class Relations in Quattrocento Florence", in *Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence*, W. J. Connell (ed.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 13–50 (p. 47).

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the domestic interior in Renaissance Florence, see: Roger J. Crum and John T. Paoletti, "'...Full of People of Every Sort...': The Domestic Interior", in Crum and Paoletti (eds), pp. 273–91.

painted altarpieces, metal candelabra, wooden crucifixes, carved tombstones, and coats of arms. The rich might obtain patronage rights at the principal church of the quarter, in addition to or in preference to, the local church. The wealthiest citizens supported charitable institutions in their neighbourhood and elsewhere in the city, such as hospitals, which also often required a degree of adornment in the form of architectural finishes, sculptures, mural paintings, and panel paintings. Many wealthy families also owned agricultural land and villas beyond the city walls, extending the geographical scope of private patronage considerably.

The most significant patronage in the city was organised in a corporate fashion through confraternities, and civic institutions such as the guilds, the *Parte Guelfa* (a semi-official institution representing above all the interests of Florence's conservative, oligarchic families), and the government's various bodies. The building of churches, large hospitals, and other major infrastructure projects devoured sums of money that only very large institutions could afford, nevertheless, powerful individuals and families could still hope to influence the decision-making processes of corporate patrons. Thus, a variety of communal spaces within the city, from intimate domestic rooms to public squares, provided contexts for the commissioning of artworks that served to identify their functions to the public, to remind people who owned them or who had provided for them, and to render them dignified and worthy of respect.

A case study of an artist's relationship with the social spaces of their city, challenging because of the limited direct evidence, is nevertheless valuable for Paolo Uccello (c. 1397–1475). While a legendary figure of early Renaissance art history, his biography has remained for the most part mysterious, obscured by Vasari's caricature-like sketch of his personality, summed up in four piquant adjectives: 'solitary, strange, melancholy and poor' (*'solitario, strano, malinconico e povero'*).<sup>15</sup> Granted, the innovative and often fantastic nature of Uccello's imagery makes his artistic personality seem singular, and for that reason intriguing. However, archival evidence provides a quite different picture of his life than Vasari's literary topos of the poor, socially isolated artist.

In one of Uccello's tax returns he indicated that at about the age of thirty-seven he had acquired: 'a house for me to live in, located in the parish of Santa Lucia near Ognissanti in Via della Scala, [surrounded on its sides by] first, the street, second and third, Gabriello the furrier, and fourth Cristofano the cook, bought on 21 April 1434 from Lorenzo di Piero Lenzi [for] 110

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<sup>15</sup> Vasari, III, p. 61: appearing in the 1568 ed.

florins'.<sup>16</sup> A later tax return shows he lived in the same house until the end of his life, that is, over a period of more than four decades.<sup>17</sup> From the detailed information Uccello provided about his neighbours, it can be seen how Carocci was able to work out the overall pattern of the city's occupation from individual tax returns, the information fitting together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.<sup>18</sup> Carocci was helped by the fact that many of the major streets of Florence still follow the Renaissance layout, albeit approximately. The long, straight Via della Scala takes much the same route now from the bottom of Piazza di Santa Maria Novella west to the former boundary of the third city wall (since demolished), as it was depicted in the print of the city made shortly after Uccello's lifetime: the street is visible in the so-called *Chain Map* woodcut of c. 1510 (Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen, Berlin — a copy of an engraving of the 1480s, of which only a fragment survives).<sup>19</sup>

Judging from the depiction of the buildings on the part of the street where Uccello lived, near the church of Santa Lucia (even if they represent only an approximation of the buildings that actually lined the street), the low price of Uccello's house, its distance from the centre of the city, and the blue-collar professions of his neighbours, his domicile would have been a modest one. Nevertheless, Uccello was not poor as Vasari would have it. In addition to his house in the city, he owned agricultural land at Ugnano, a district several kilometres west of the city, from about the age of twenty-eight (if not earlier) until his old age. In 1455, 1458, and 1459 he added to his

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<sup>16</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Catasto, 625, microfilm reel 1527, fol. 224<sup>r</sup>: '*una chasa p[er] mia abitare posta nelpopo[lo] disal/ nta lucia dongnj santi nella via della schala/ dap[r]im]o via s[echon]do 1/3 tofano di ghabriello vaiaio 1/4/ cristofano chuo[c]inaio conpera adj 21 daprile 1434/ dalorenzo djpiro lenzi ffiorin]j 110*'.

<sup>17</sup> Uccello lived at the same address at the time of his last tax return in 1469 (Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Catasto, 926, 2, fols 259<sup>r</sup>–259<sup>v</sup>). In the will written in the year of his death Uccello's place of residence is described as the parish of Santa Lucia, the same parish as his house on Via della Scala (Archivio di Stato di Firenze, ser Pace di Bambello di Pace, 7, 1471–76, fol. 147<sup>r</sup>, in Enio Sindona, *Paolo Uccello* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1957) p. 44).

<sup>18</sup> The same analogy was drawn by F. J. Carmody in his discussion of the methodology of modern map-makers of late-Medieval Florentine property ownership: 'Florence: Project for a Map, 1250–1296', *Speculum*, 19, 1 (1944), 39–49, p. 40.

<sup>19</sup> On this map, see: David Friedman, "'Fiorenza': Geography and Representation in a Fifteenth-Century City View", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 64 (2001), pp. 56–77.

property there with successive purchases of land.<sup>20</sup> He seems only ever to have increased his land holdings, never to have sold off these investments. Uccello certainly had dealings with the poor, as is learnt from a tax return in which he informs the tax officials of a debt owed to him, but not likely to be recovered, by one of his tenant farmers who ‘is poor [and] has nothing’.<sup>21</sup>

Topographically, the northwest quarter of the city comprising the segment of land in the angle between a point just west of the Piazza di San Giovanni in the city centre, the north bank of the Arno river running to the west, and the road to the Fortezza da Basso (corresponding in part to the present-day Via Faenza) covers much of the administrative Santa Maria Novella quarter, the area surrounding the Dominican church and convent renowned for its patrician families, their impressive palaces, and the lavishly decorated churches they patronised.<sup>22</sup> However, wealth was not evenly distributed in the quarter. Samuel Kline Cohn Jr has argued that the redevelopments that resulted in the opening up of the dense urban fabric in the centre of Florence had a disproportionate effect on members of the artisan and labouring classes. From the late fourteenth century to the end of the fifteenth, the lower classes tended to be redistributed towards the periphery of the city.<sup>23</sup> In Uccello’s time this seems to have been true of the northwest part of the city. The rich tended to live and conduct their business closer to the centre of the city, within the boundaries of the second city wall. For example, the shops of wealthy wool merchants in the quarter seem to have clustered around the street running between San Michele Berteldi and Santa

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<sup>20</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze: Catasto, 826, microfilm reel 2063, fol. 56<sup>v</sup> (7 October 1455); Notarile Antecosimiano, F 304, fol. 225<sup>v</sup>, in Richard Fremantle, ‘Ricerche, Documenti di archivio’, *Antichità Viva*, 16, 3 (1977), 69–70, p. 70 (28 October 1458); Catasto, 926, 2, fol. 259<sup>r</sup>, in Mather, p. 63 (17 September 1459).

<sup>21</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Catasto, 826, microfilm reel 2063, fol 56<sup>v</sup>: [15 February 1458] ‘*O avere dabaldese digiovannj delpopolo disantto istefano/ anngnjano ffiorin]j 24 equali sono di fitto dj mjaterer tenel insjno nel 1452 chome nerogato s[er] crjstofano danjtulino/ et povero nona nulla.*’ (Owing from Baldese di Giovanni of the parish of Santo Stefano at Ugnano, 24 florins, which are rent for my land taken since 1452, as notarised by ser Cristofano d’Anitolino, [but he] is poor [and] has nothing.)

<sup>22</sup> For an account of the principal palaces in the Santa Maria Novella quarter, see: Leonardo Ginori Lisci, *The Palazzi of Florence: Their History and Art*, 2 vols, trans. J. Grillo (Florence, \: Giunti Barbèra, 1985; orig. Italian ed., Florence: 1972), II, pp. 115–322.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Kline Cohn Jr, *The Laboring Classes in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), pp. 123–24.

Trinita (now the Via de' Tornabuoni), as well as along the Via della Vigna Nuova,<sup>24</sup> while further away from the centre, along the edge of the river the workshops of wool processors were located in a less densely built-up area, where water was used in the dirty and fetid processes of washing and dyeing fleece. The area was also popular with tanners, and the son of one of these, Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni, is better known as Sandro Botticelli (c. 1444–1510). He lived in the same parish as Uccello after 1470.<sup>25</sup>

Even though Uccello's career intersected for some time with that of Brunelleschi in the Cathedral (Uccello executed two mural paintings and designed three stained glass windows there between 1436 and 1444),<sup>26</sup> the distance he travelled between work and home was further, and traversed a greater part of the social spectrum, as it were. So what did it mean socially to be a painter like Uccello living on the outer fringes of the Santa Maria Novella quarter in the mid-fifteenth century?

Since the research of the great archivist Gaetano Milanesi, published as annotations to his 1878 edition of Vasari's *Vite*, it has always been accepted that Uccello's father was Dono di Paolo, a barber-surgeon from Pratovecchio, a small town east of Florence. Dono (short for Donato) gained his Florentine citizenship in 1373, and married one Antonia di Giovanni Castello del Beccuto in 1387.<sup>27</sup> While Milanesi was able to show that Uccello's father had a coat of arms

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<sup>24</sup> Adrienne Atwell described the route taken by Wool Guild members escorting visiting wool traders to the city's *botteghe* (by which is meant the points of sale rather than manufacture) as taking in these streets ('Ritual Trading: Florentine Wool-Cloth *Botteghe*', Crum and Paoletti (eds), pp. 182–215 (pp. 199–201).

<sup>25</sup> For Botticelli's biographical details, see: Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli, Complete Catalogue*, 2 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), I (throughout).

<sup>26</sup> Uccello's documented works made for the Cathedral are: the *Equestrian Monument for Sir John Hawkwood* (detached mural painting, 1436); the *Clockface with Four Male Heads (Evangelists?)* (mural painting, 1444); the *Nativity* (design for a stained glass window, 1443); the *Resurrection* (design for a stained glass window, 1443); and the *Annunciation* (design for a stained glass window, 1444, subsequently destroyed).

<sup>27</sup> Gaetano Milanesi (ed.), in Giorgio Vasari, *Le opere di Giorgio Vasari* (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1981; reprint of 1906 ed.; orig. ed. Florence: 1878), II, note [cross] on p. 204, note 3 on p. 217, and p. 219. Anna Padoa Rizzo (*Paolo Uccello: Catalogo completo dei dipinti* (Florence: Cantini, 1991), p. 6) cited Herbert Horne's reference (Fondazione Horne, Florence, Spogli, G.VI.I) to the source for Dono di Paolo's citizenship as: Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Consigli Maggiori, Provvisioni, Registri 1373, fol. 109<sup>r</sup>. Although Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Archivi della Repubblica, Provvisioni, Registri, 61, microfilm reel 84, fol. 109<sup>r</sup> is for the year 1373, it does not appear to include the name of Dono di Paolo, nor do the

(a chevron between three lion heads), confirmed by a seventeenth-century record of the family's tombstone (now lost, but previously in the cloister of Santo Spirito, south of the Arno),<sup>28</sup> being the son of a migrant to Florence in the early fifteenth century could well have been a social disadvantage for Uccello. Since the fourteenth century, the conservative, oligarchic government of Florence generally discriminated against migrants, and made it difficult for them to hold public offices, the chief means of gaining high social status.<sup>29</sup> Uccello's mother's family also had a coat of arms (a red field with a white band), but had a very long and respectable, even somewhat distinguished, history in Florence, putting Uccello in the awkward position of being both wellborn and slightly suspect, socially speaking. Compounding Uccello's difficulty was the fact that his father had died by the time he was about twenty-eight, and it appears he had also been separated from what remained of his nuclear family, since Uccello did not leave anything to family members in the will he wrote at this time.<sup>30</sup>

There is further evidence to suggest that Uccello was orphaned. When Uccello was away in Venice working on mosaics for the façade of San Marco in 1427, it fell to a distant relative from his mother's family, Deo di Deo del Beccuto, to submit his tax return. Deo described himself as Paolo's attorney (*p[er]ochuratore*), and stated that he submitted the return for a notary by the name of ser Bartolo di ser Donato Giannini.<sup>31</sup> The death of a young person's father in Renaissance Florence could call for the involvement of the *Magistrato dei Pupilli*, a communal institution providing judges and notaries to administer family property for orphans, who in turn

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adjacent pages. The archive has presumably been re-ordered since Horne's research. The origin of Milanese's information concerning Dono di Paolo's marriage to Antonia del Beccuto is unknown.

<sup>28</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Manoscritti, 624, *Sepoltuario fiorentino ovvero descrizione delle chiese cappelle e sepolture loro armi et inscrizione della Città di Firenze e suoi contorni fatta da Stefano Rosselli*, 2 vols, 1657, I, fol. 32<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Gene A. Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society 1343–1378* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 87.

<sup>30</sup> Giovanni Gaye, *Carteggio inedito d'artisti dei secoli XIV.XV. XVI.*, 3 vols (Florence: Presso Giuseppe Molini, 1839), I, pp. 147–48. Uccello's will is dated 5 August 1425, and records his wish to be buried with his father.

<sup>31</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Catasto, 55, fols 707<sup>r</sup>–707<sup>v</sup>, dated 12 July 1427: [fol. 707<sup>r</sup>] *'Istritta p[er] me dio dj dio/ bechutj. p[er]ochuratore dell detto pagholo...p[er] s[er] bartolo di s[er] donato gianinj.'* Padoa Rizzo (*Paolo Uccello*, p. 6) was the first to describe Uccello as an orphan and to identify Deo Beccuti as a protective influence in the young artist's life.

dealt with orphans' legal representatives, called in Latin *procuratores*, *curatores*, and *tutores*.<sup>32</sup> Uccello's name has not been found in the *Pupilli* records, however, the facts that he left nothing to relatives in his will, and that his tax return was submitted by a distant relative while he was in Venice, suggest that he was without close family relatives at this time. Ser Bartolo Giannini is known to have been Notary of the *Signoria* on a number of occasions from 1416 to 1438.<sup>33</sup> Although, it is not clear whether he helped administer Uccello's affairs following the death of his father, or merely requested that Deo Beccuti submit Uccello's tax return while Uccello was away from Florence.

Deo was the most prominent member of Uccello's mothers' family at the time, and this may explain why he accepted the responsibility. Carocci identified Deo's properties on his map, clustered around the Piazza di Santa Maria Maggiore, valuable real-estate near the centre of the city. It may have been because of the location of his mother's ancestral home in this area that Uccello moved to the northwest part of the city by the age of about twenty-eight,<sup>34</sup> and apart from professional trips out of the city, remained there for the rest of his life.

An unpublished, eighteenth-century genealogy of the del Beccuto family, compiled by a descendent, Anton Ranieri Orlandini, provides a diagram of the male lineage of the most prominent branch of the family. It includes Deo, but does not make any reference to Uccello's mother Antonia, or any woman born of the family for that matter. However, from her patronymic, 'di Giovanni di Castello', her grandfather's name is known to be Castello, which was not a particularly common name in Florence. There is, however, one person with that name in the genealogy — Deo's grandfather's brother. Thus, Deo and Antonia may have been related through their grandfathers. This is supported by the age difference between Uccello and Deo. In 1427 Deo was fifty, while Uccello was about thirty, making Uccello approximately one generation younger than Deo.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> For a fascinating case study of the laws concerning orphans at this time, see: T. Kuehn, 'Inheritance and Identity in Early Renaissance Florence: The Estate of Paliano di Falco', in *Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence*, W. J. Connell (ed.) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 137–54.

<sup>33</sup> D. Herlihy, R. B. Litchfield, A. Molho, and R. Barducci, *Florentine Renaissance Resources, Online Tratte of Office Holders, 1282–1532, Machine Readable Data File* (Florentine Renaissance resources/STG, Brown University, Providence, R.I., 2002), search by 'Giannini' [accessed 14 April 2005]. Ser Bartolo was elected Notary of the *Signoria* in 1416, 1430, and 1438.

<sup>34</sup> Gaye, I, pp. 147–48. Uccello lived in the parish of Santa Maria Novella in 1425.

<sup>35</sup> Deo Beccuti's age in 1427 is recorded in: Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Catasto, 53, fol. 718<sup>v</sup>.

Castello di Lippo del Beccuto, identifiable in this way as Uccello's great-grandfather, lived in the parish of Santa Maria Maggiore, as is indicated in a notarial record that also supports the nature of Uccello's relationship to Deo suggested here. It seems that when Castello died the tutelage of his sons Vanni and Antonio was assumed by his nephew Deo di Vanni (Deo di Deo's father), keeping the two lineages of the family closely bound, an arrangement sanctioned by the *Pupilli*.<sup>36</sup> The name of one of Castello's sons, Vanni (short for Giovanni), corresponds with Uccello's grandfather's name, as it is known from his mother's patronymic. This incidence of family solidarity provides a precedent for Deo di Deo del Beccuto's later tutelage of Uccello.

Castello was a man of some social standing, whom the genealogy notes held the government office of prior in 1348, 1351, and 1355. Other archival evidence shows he helped the *Signoria* fortify the *castello* at Calenzano against Visconti attack in 1352.<sup>37</sup> In turn, Castello's great-grandfather was Geremia del Beccuto, who had been employed by the *Signoria* on works on the road outside the Baptistery in 1289.<sup>38</sup> Thus, Uccello's mother's family had established a notable social status in Florence over many generations by the time of Uccello's birth.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Manoscritto 537, fol. 66<sup>r</sup>: '1360 D.na Bancha filia ol. S. Silvestri Alamanni et uxor di S. Castelli Lippi del Beccuto pop. S. Maria Maioris et Silvester di S. D. Alamanni de Medicis et Thomasus di Giuntini Alamanni et Deus di S. Vannis del Beccuto tutores Vannis et Antoniis dil. d. Castelli'; [fol. 67v] '1363 D.na Bancha uxor di S. Castelli Lippi del Beccuto pop. S. maria Maioris, et filia di S. Silvestri Benincasa et eor. filii Pupilli et Tutoris.' These transcriptions are by Dr Paolo Piccardi, published by Mr Pierluigi Carnesecchi (<http://digilander.libero.it/gasparo/manoscritti.htm> [accessed 18 January 2007]).

<sup>37</sup> Gaye, I, p. 504: an entry of 3 February 1353 from the Archivio delle Riformagioni di Firenze records that Amerigo da Sommaia, Castello di Lippo del Beccuto, and Benedetto di Giovanni Strozzi fortified the *castello* at Calenzano, on the western edge of Mount Morello.

<sup>38</sup> Gaye, I, p. 419. The year of the document was transcribed by Gaye as MCCCLXXXIX — erroneously for MCCLXXXIX, judging by the chronological order followed for the other transcriptions Gaye provided.

<sup>39</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Deputazione sopra la nobiltà e cittadinanza, 15, section 21, part 1, unfoliated. The genealogy also shows how the men of the family maintained its social standing over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by marrying women from important Florentine families, including the Carnesecchi, the Pitti, and the Machiavelli. All of these families were prominent in the *Parte Guelfa*, a semi-official association predominantly representing the interests of Florence's aristocratic, oligarchic families, and a Felice di Deo Beccuti, most probably Deo Beccuti's son, was an officer of the *Parte Guelfa* in 1459 (Diane Finiello Zervas, *The Parte Guelfa, Brunelleschi and Donatello* (Locust Valley: J.J. Augustin, 1987), pp. 54 and 309).

Fortunately, a number of artefacts supplement the archival evidence for the family discussed above. A large, carved *pietra serena* lintel, described by Carocci as a modern reproduction of a fifteenth-century original, was removed from the del Beccuto palace on the street of their name (Via del Beccuto), presumably at the time the building was demolished in the nineteenth century. The lintel is now housed in the Museo di San Marco in Florence, with hundreds of architectural fragments salvaged from the historic centre of Florence. The lintel shows the family's coat of arms in the centre, inside a wreath with two undulating ribbons flowing to each side. At each end of the lintel is the head of a fantastic, bird-like creature with plumes splayed out at the back and a giant beak, a witty allusion to their family name (*becco* means beak).<sup>40</sup>

Also housed in the Museo di San Marco is a small, detached mural painting of the Virgin and Child with an unusual expensive gold ground and lapis lazuli drapery. The credit for identifying this rather damaged painting as a work of Uccello goes to the art historian Alessandro Parronchi, who realised that the inscription on the reverse of the work, 'formerly in a house of the Del Beccuto [family]' ('*già in una casa dei Del Beccuto*'), and its elegant, Gothic-inflected, Renaissance style indubitably linked the work to Uccello.<sup>41</sup> Judging by the painting's pointed-arch shape, it was originally located over a doorway, perhaps the same one the lintel came from. Together, the artefacts would have expressed symbolically the family's piety, wealth, taste, and wit.

The del Beccuto had two, or possibly three, chapels in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore, opposite their houses. According to Vasari, the family had the chapel to the left of the main altar painted with scenes from the life of Saint John the Evangelist in 1383 by an obscure artist called Lippo, whose chapter in *Le Vite* actually includes works by a number of artists,<sup>42</sup> and nothing remains of the paintings that might help identify the individual responsible. A tomb of a member of the Beccuti family bearing the family's coat of arms is still in the chapel, sometimes identified as belonging to Bruno Beccuti,<sup>43</sup> presumably the Bruno del Beccuto who was a prior of

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<sup>40</sup> Chiara Cecchi, '43. Architrave di porta', in *Il centro di Firenze restituito: Affreschi e frammenti lapidei nel Museo di San Marco*, Maria Sframeli (ed.) (Florence: Alberto Bruschi, 1989), p. 110.

<sup>41</sup> Alessandro Parronchi, 'Probabili aggiunte a Dello Delli scultore', *Cronache di Archeologia e di Storia dell'Arte*, 8 (1969), 103–10, p. 104

<sup>42</sup> Vasari, II (1967), p. 298: appearing in the 1568 ed.

<sup>43</sup> Walter Paatz and Elisabeth Paatz, *Die Kirchen von Florenz: Ein Kunstgeschichtliches Handbuch*, 6 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1952–55), III (1952), p. 628.

the church.<sup>44</sup> Other evidence shows Carnesecchi family patronage of the chapel. A tabernacle for the sacraments on the left wall of the chapel bears the date 1449 and the arms of the Carnesecchi, and Bernardo Carnesecchi's tombstone, dated 1449, was recorded in the chapel in the eighteenth century.<sup>45</sup> It is possible the del Beccuto and Carnesecchi families shared patronage rights to the chapel, or that patronage passed from one family to the other.

Deo Beccuti recorded that his father, Deo di Vanni, established a chapel dedicated to Saint Blaise in his testament, notarised in 1386, without specifying its location within the church.<sup>46</sup> However, the eighteenth-century antiquary, Giuseppe Richa, referred to a chapel founded in that year that was third on the right from the entrance to the church. It had a panel painting by the seventeenth-century artist Ottavio Vannini and his student Antonio Giusti, showing the martyrdom of Saint Blaise, with Saints Michael and John the Evangelist.<sup>47</sup> An altarpiece that apparently stood in the chapel by 1423 is now lost.<sup>48</sup> The chapel remained in the del Beccuto family until at least the seventeenth century.<sup>49</sup> Further, Richa wrote that Deo di Vanni also had the patronage rights to the chapel to the right of the main altar, where he recorded an inscription (now lost) declaring his foundation of the chapel in 1383, in language that left no doubt as to his own view of his social standing: '*SEP. NOBILIS VIRI DEI VANNIS DE BECCVDIS SPECTABILIS/ HONORABILIS QVI PRIMA DIE IVNII DOTAVIT AN. D. MCCCLXXXIII.*'<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Giuseppe Richa, *Notizie istoriche delle chiese Fiorentine divise ne'fuoi quartieri*, 10 vols (Rome: Pietro Gaetano Viviani, 1972; orig. ed. Florence: 1754–62), III, p. 265.

<sup>45</sup> Paatz and Paatz, III, pp. 627–28 and 632.

<sup>46</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Catasto, 53, fol. 718<sup>v</sup>: '*Una chappella insanta maria maggiore di sanbiaggio debo dotare per lastro fatto per lo testameto dimio padre roghato per ser nicholo mazzetti nel 1386*'. Padoa Rizzo (*Paolo Uccello*, p. 6) noted that the del Beccuto family had three chapels in Santa Maria Maggiore, including the one dedicated to Saint Blaise referred to in Deo Beccuti's tax return, without specifying their locations.

<sup>47</sup> Richa, III, p. 279.

<sup>48</sup> Paatz and Paatz, III, p. 626.

<sup>49</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Libri di commercio e di famiglia, 1693, Entrata e uscita, fol. 52<sup>v</sup>. Camilla Buini del Beccuto's account book, beginning in 1620, includes a reference to '*ma cappella d' san biagio d' s. maria mag<sup>te</sup>*'.

<sup>50</sup> Richa, III, p. 283. The complete inscription read: '*SEP. NOBILIS VIRI DEI VANNIS DE BECCVDIS SPECTABILIS/ HONORABILIS QVI PRIMA DIE IVNII DOTAVIT AN. D. MCCCLXXXIII. ALTARE PRESENTIS CAPPELLE PRO ANIMA SVA ET SVOREM DESCENDENTIUM.*'

From sifting the fragmentary archival, artistic, and archaeological evidence, art historians such as Anna Padoa Rizzo and the present author have pieced together a picture of a long association between Uccello and Deo di Deo del Beccuto, in which the patriarch of the artist's mother's family seems to have fostered the young man's career in the absence of a father. Evidence of connections between Deo Beccuti and Uccello exists from the period Uccello was about sixteen to about the age of about thirty-six. Most importantly, Deo Beccuti had connections with Uccello's earliest presumed patrons: the Confraternity of Saint Peter Martyr (it seems likely that Uccello worked in *c.* 1413 at their hospital at Castello just outside Florence, to which Beccuti had donated money for its renovation), the Bartoli family (in 1416 Uccello may have helped paint the street tabernacle near Castello belonging to this family with which Beccuti had financial dealings), and the Carnesecchi family (early sources state that Uccello helped paint the altarpiece, datable on current evidence to *c.* 1423, for a member of the family in Santa Maria Maggiore in Florence, the same family from which Beccuti's wife came), and as Padoa Rizzo suggested, Deo Beccuti most likely commissioned the *Virgin and Child* now in the Museo di San Marco, in the early 1430s.<sup>51</sup>

Uccello's 1458 tax return provides the first information about his wife and children. He named his wife, Tomasa di Benedetto Malifici, aged twenty-five (compared with his sixty-two years!), his six-year-old son Donato, and his daughter Antonia, who was just over a year old.<sup>52</sup> Nothing is known about the social status of Uccello's wife. At 200 florins, her dowry was neither particularly small nor large for a Florentine artist's wife.<sup>53</sup> The fact that she possessed a family name might suggest she came from a distinguished family, or one with pretensions. A little investigation of the tax records of the Florentine State Archive reveals that there were at least two

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<sup>51</sup> Anna Padoa Rizzo, 'L'Età di Masaccio, Firenze, Palazzo Vecchio, Giugno 1990', *Antichità Viva*, 29, 2–3 (1990), pp. 57–58; Padoa Rizzo, *Paolo Uccello*, pp. 6 and 8–9; Hudson, 'Paolo Uccello', pp. 70–83 and 99–100.

<sup>52</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Catasto, 826, microfilm no. 2063, fols 56<sup>r</sup>–57<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Notarile antecosimiano, ser Pace di Bambello di Pace, 7, 1471–76, fol. 147<sup>r</sup>, in Sindona, p. 44: '*Item reliquit et legavit domini Thomaxie eius uxori et filie olim benedicti malifici dotes suas quas dixit et asseruit esse florenos ducentos auri de sigillo.*' In Rab Hatfield's list of dowries of Florentine artists' wives (*The Wealth of Michelangelo* (Rome: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2003, p. LXI) Uccello's wife's dowry is larger than the one for Giusto d'Andrea's wife (50 gold florins *largi*) and Cosimo Roselli's wife (100 gold florins *largi*), but less than the one for Neri di Bicci's wife (340 florins *di suggello*) and Domenico Ghirlandaio's wife (590 gold florins *largi*).

Benedetto Malefici in Florence in 1427, one of who was potentially Uccello's father-in-law. By coincidence, both of them were named Benedetto di Piero, while neither of them claimed to be particularly wealthy. One of them lived on Via della Scala, so Uccello might have met the family of his wife on the street where he lived.<sup>54</sup> In the fifteenth century it was much more likely for an artisan or labourer to marry within their own *gonfalone* than for a member of the patriciate.<sup>55</sup>

Uccello's wife appears in the most famous of Vasari's anecdotes concerning the artist, when one night she called him to bed he reportedly responded: 'Oh what a sweet thing this perspective is!' ('*Oh che dolce cosa è questa prospettiva!*'). It is usually understood from this exchange that Uccello preferred to work on his perspective studies than sleep with his wife. Another interpretation, however, may be inferred from the words Vasari chose, no doubt carefully: that for Uccello the prospect of going to bed with his wife was a sweet thing (*prospettiva* meaning perspective *and* prospect). Both interpretations would have been intended more for the amusement of Vasari's readers than their edification. Another of Vasari's anecdotes concerning Uccello's home relates that it was filled with the artist's drawings of animals, which he kept there because he was too poor to afford real animals. It is, though, far from unusual for an artist to have drawings of animals at their disposal for the design of artworks. Ironically, Vasari admitted that he admired Uccello's skill as a draughtsman, and that he was a collector of Uccello's drawings, including a study of a beautifully foreshortened bull made for a painting then in the Medici Palace.<sup>56</sup> Why, then, make Uccello (and Castagno, and other early Renaissance artists) the subject of disreputable anecdotes? Perhaps for no other reason than Vasari's long series of artists' lives would have made rather heavy-going reading if every artist was accorded the same reverential tone that he gave his favoured contemporaries, such as Michelangelo.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Catasto, 77, microfilm reel 142, fol. 213<sup>v</sup>, for the Benedetto di Piero Malefici living on Via della Scala; and Catasto, 65, microfilm reel 123, fol. 298<sup>r</sup>, for the Benedetto di Piero Malefici living in the Santo Spirito quarter.

<sup>55</sup> Cohn Jr, p. 81.

<sup>56</sup> Vasari, III, pp. 65 and 72: appearing in the 1550 and 1568 eds.

<sup>57</sup> Vasari (III, pp. 70–71: appearing in the 1550 and 1568 eds) criticised Uccello, claiming that he had compromised his talent with his obsession with perspective, ending his life at home, isolated, unsuccessful, and poor. Of course, Vasari did not really know anything about Uccello's finances, as discussed in the text of this article. Similarly, while praising Botticelli's pictures, Vasari chastised him for failing to manage his career to provide for a dignified old age, describing the elderly artist as a miserable figure reduced to hobbling around on crutches (Vasari, III, pp. 511 and 119: appearing in the 1550 ed.). Piero di Cosimo, too,

If the acquaintances Uccello made on his street might have led to marriage, it seems they might also have led to a commission for work. A mural painting by Uccello, datable on stylistic criteria after the late 1430s, was once found in the Spedale di Santa Maria della Scala (subsequently renamed San Martino alla Scala) on the same part of the street where Uccello lived.<sup>58</sup> The hospital was founded in the early fourteenth century by a local benefactor, Cione di Lapo Pollini, and it took on the role of caring for abandoned children; by the fifteenth century its administration was taken over by the Silk Guild.<sup>59</sup> The smallish *Nativity* mural painting (140 by 215 cm) was originally in the arch above the door leading from the cloister of the hospital into the foyer in front of its chapel. The painting has been detached from the wall, and is now stored with its *sinopia* (the underdrawing on the preparatory layer of plaster) in the reserve collection of the Uffizi, due to the painting's poor state of preservation.

While no document concerning the work's commission has been found, Annamaria Bernacchioni has suggested the commission might relate to the presence of the children's

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is characterised as an eccentric who died alone, his body found at the bottom of the stairs in his house (G. Vasari, IV, pp. 70–71: appearing in the 1550 and 1568 eds).

Vasari seems to have had an ulterior motive in his criticisms. A fitting end for an artist was evidently very important to Vasari, presumably because it set the tone for how the artist would be regarded in posterity. Most of Vasari's lives of artists end with a flattering epigram or epitaph written for the artist at the time of their death by admirers, diligently collected by Vasari. Laura Ricco has argued that *Le vite* are structured to illustrate the gradual perfection of the arts under the Medici, describing Vasari's attacks on Uccello, Botticelli, and Piero di Cosimo as a negative counterpoint to his adulation of the great artists of the High Renaissance (L. Ricco, *Vasari scrittore: La prima edizione del libro delle "Vite"* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1979), pp. 105–22). Within this conceptual framework, any behaviour reflecting poorly on artists in general, or failure to rise above the mundane level of life in the early Renaissance, was liable to lead to criticism of some sort from Vasari. Perhaps Uccello, Botticelli, and Piero di Cosimo, in particular, were targeted for Vasari's barbs because, even though they worked for the richest and most powerful patrons of their day and were among the most famous artists in Italy, they seemed to have maintained an everyday presence in their neighbourhood in the Santa Maria Novella quarter until the end of their lives, rather than dying young, like Masaccio, or dying in the arms of a king, like Leonardo. Vasari, with his agenda to raise the status of artists, apparently interpreted their behaviour as perverse and unbecoming, while by present-day standards it might seem natural.

<sup>58</sup> It was first published by Walter Paatz: 'Una Natività di Paolo Uccello e alcune considerazioni sull'arte del maestro', *Rivista d'Arte*, 16, 2 (1934), pp. 111–48.

<sup>59</sup> Paatz and Paatz, IV, pp. 133–34.

Confraternity of the Archangel Raphael in the hospital.<sup>60</sup> The confraternity moved into the chapel and rooms between the present-day Via degli Orti Oricellari and the courtyard by 1427, which they renovated at their own expense. It had prominent supporters, including Pope Eugenius IV, who approved an alternative name for it, in recognition of the impressive nativity play it performed in 1430: the Confraternity of the Nativity of Our Lord (perhaps helping to account for the subject of Uccello's painting). He also issued bulls to obtain accommodation for the confraternity at the hospital, not far from the entrance to his apartment at Santa Maria Novella on Via della Scala. The confraternity might well have known the paintings Uccello executed in 1437 for the Confraternity of the Purification at the Spedale di San Matteo in the north of the city, since that confraternity was a splinter group that had separated from them in 1427. The groups maintained good relations after the split, visiting each other every year on the feast days of their patron saints.<sup>61</sup> Thus, Uccello was a local artist whose work would have been familiar to those at the hospital.

The *Nativity* has been discussed by art historians as much for its *sinopia*, showing a regular perspectival grid, as for the composition of the final painting itself. Indeed, the *sinopia* is unique in the Renaissance in establishing only the perspective for the final composition, not the figures, architecture, or natural landscape features. The grid informs the finished painting's unusual use of perspective, showing two sharply contrasting views: one of a Nativity scene taking place in front of a wooden shelter whose perspective is aligned to a point at the far right, and another view of the landscape with a pavement whose perspective is aligned to a point at the far left. Art historians have interpreted this treatment of perspective as an instance of Uccello's legendary experimentation with this key technical feature in the development of the visual arts in Florence in the fifteenth century.

Alessandro Parronchi interpreted the separate vanishing points as a critique of Brunelleschian and Albertian orthodox single-point perspective. He related this approach specifically to Vitellione's observation in Book III of his *Perspectiva* that an object is only seen distinctly when it falls on the central axis between the viewer's eyes.<sup>62</sup> If this theoretical

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<sup>60</sup> Annamaria Bernacchioni, 'Paolo Uccello e le confraternite', *Arte Cristiana*, 91, 819 (2003), 415–20, pp. 419–20.

<sup>61</sup> Konrad Eisenbichler, *The Boys of the Archangel: A Youth Confraternity in Florence, 1411–1785* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp. 26, 30, and 35–37.

<sup>62</sup> Alessandro Parronchi, 'Le fonti di Paolo Uccello, I 'Perspettivi passati'', *Paragone*, 8, 89 (1957), 3–32, pp. 14–15.

interpretation of Uccello's imagery seems rather erudite for a hospital for abandoned children housing a confraternity for children, it may be relevant that Brunelleschi (the reputed discoverer of single point perspective) had been one of the *Operai* (on the board of works) of the Silk Guild that administered the hospital, although his duties related to the construction of the Spedale degli Innocenti in the 1420s, well before Uccello's work was painted at the Spedale di Santa Maria della Scala.<sup>63</sup> Even so, there seems to be no definite imagery within the composition, such as blurred images at the lateral edges, to support Parronchi's interpretation. Alternatively, Franco and Stefano Borsi interpreted the bi-focal perspective of the *Nativity* as an allusion to the duality of Christ's incarnation, divine and human.<sup>64</sup>

Perhaps, though, the divergence of the perspectival views towards the right and the left in Uccello's *Nativity*, with the view to the right dominating, may have a different kind of religious significance. The prominence of the sheep in the left foreground, near the point where the two perspective views separate, recalls the passage in the Bible in Matthew 25: 32–46 from Christ's discourse on the Mount of Olives, describing the separation of the sheep from the goats:

And before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats:

And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed *thee?* or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink?

When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee?*

Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.

Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

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<sup>63</sup> Howard Saalman, *Filippo Brunelleschi: The Buildings* (London: Zwemmer, 1993), pp. 38–39.

<sup>64</sup> Franco Borsi and Stefano Borsi, *Paolo Uccello*, trans. Elfreda Powell (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994; orig. Italian ed. Milan: 1992), p. 313.

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:  
I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison,  
and ye visited me not.

Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a  
stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of  
the least of these, ye did *it* not to me.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.<sup>65</sup>

Part of the same text (the latter part of Matthew 25: 34) provides a central inscription in the  
fourteenth-century mural painting *Allegory of Mercy* in the Sala dell'Udienza of the Misericordia  
in the Piazza di San Giovanni in Florence, one of the most important charitable institutions in  
Florence in the late Medieval and early Renaissance period. Like the Spedale di Santa Maria della  
Scala, it cared for foundlings, among its other charitable activities. The *Allegory of Mercy* has  
been described as the earliest instance of the representation of the works of mercy in an Italian  
philanthropic institution, and as such the model for a number of mural painting cycles of similar  
subject matter in Tuscany, some of them in hospitals.<sup>66</sup> The most celebrated Tuscan depiction of  
the seven acts of mercy (the six acts referred to in Matthew plus the burying of the dead added by  
the Catholic Church) is the glazed terracotta relief frieze, mostly by Santi Buglioni, on the façade  
of the Ceppo Hospital at Pistoia, dating from the 1520s.<sup>67</sup>

The separation of the sheep and goats seems rarely to have been depicted in art literally. A  
relief of the subject is found on a fourth-century Italian marble sarcophagus lid in the  
Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. A more important example is found among the sixth-  
century mosaics in the church of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna. If the iconography of  
Uccello's *Nativity* does relate to the parable of the sheep and the goats, it could be interpreted as

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<sup>65</sup> Bible, Authorised King James Version (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 37–38. I am  
indebted to Astrid Krautschneider for suggesting the iconography of the *Nativity* might relate to the parable  
of the sheep and the goats, following a paper given by me: 'When Good Neighbours Become  
Good...Patrons: Paolo Uccello's Neighbours and Patrons in the 1430s and 1440s', *AHCCA Postgraduate  
Symposium*, The University of Melbourne, 10 June 2004.

<sup>66</sup> William R. Levin, *The Allegory of Mercy at the Misericordia in Florence: Historiography, Context,  
Iconography, and the Documentation of Confraternal Charity in the Trecento*, (Dallas: University Press of  
America Inc., 2004), pp. 41–50.

<sup>67</sup> Alan Marquand, 'Unpublished Documents Relating to the Ceppo Hospital at Pistoia', *American Journal  
of Archaeology*, 22, 4 (1918), pp. 361–77.

an allusion to the charitable work undertaken at the hospital, especially for children. While the children might be reassured that they will be cared for at the hospital by the image of the Virgin adoring the Christ Child, or (metaphorically) by the image of the shepherds watching over their flocks, the administrators of the hospital could be reassured (allegorically) that ultimately their charitable work would be recognised by Christ.

The *Nativity* may also hint at the punishment Christ alluded to for those who did not act mercifully. While the dominant view of the Christian story of the Nativity leads to the vanishing point on the right (traditionally the virtuous side and in the painting it is also on Christ's right), the subsidiary one leads to a tiny gallows in the distant landscape at the left (traditionally the 'sinister' side). That the motif of the gallows might not just be an insignificant landscape feature, but a symbol, is suggested by the figure of *Securitas* in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Effects of Good and Bad Government* in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, whose attribute is a man hanging from a gallows. Furthermore, the hanged man calls to mind Judas Iscariot, himself a foundling according to medieval legend.<sup>68</sup> The iconography of the *Nativity* apparently represents two paths: the Christian path leading to eternal life on the right, and another leading to ignominy on the left, a moral message on the rewards of charity and the danger of straying from the Christian path.

The *Nativity* is not an isolated instance of neighbourhood patronage. Some of Uccello's most famous mural paintings are to be found in the Chiostrò Verde ('Green Cloister') of the ex-convent of Santa Maria Novella, around the corner from where he lived. Elsewhere, the present author has argued that the commission for the *Stories of Genesis* mural painting cycle on three walls of the cloister probably relates to the presence of the Confraternity of Saint Peter Martyr at the convent, and that Uccello's involvement with the project may have come about partly through his and his relative Deo Beccuti's dealings with the confraternity.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Thanks to Tim Ould, the first of several colleagues who have suggested to me the potential allusion to Judas in the figure of the hanged man, following my paper of 10 June 2004 (see note 65). Interestingly, in his book *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* John Boswell (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1988, p. 154) interpreted the Christ Child as a quasi-foundling figure, given his apparent separation from God the Father and the modesty of the circumstances he was born into. This could potentially make the dualism of Uccello's *Nativity* even more pronounced (right and left, Christ and Judas, the 'good foundling' and the 'bad foundling'). Also, see Boswell (p. 367) for the medieval legend of Judas' abandonment as a child.

<sup>69</sup> As discussed in this author's conference paper: 'Paolo Uccello and the Confraternity of Saint Peter Martyr: Themes of Reciprocal Obligation in Life and Art', *Sociability and its Discontents: Civil Society, Social Capital and their Alternatives in European and Australian Society*, School of Philosophical and

If Uccello's route is traced in a hypothetical journey made in the late 1450s from his home to the Cathedral, much as was done for Brunelleschi, the topographical landmarks that would have stood out in spaces of particular significance for him can be identified. Walking down Via della Scala he would have passed the hospital from which the street took its name, where he painted the *Nativity*. He might have heard the voices of the orphaned children his painting overlooked in the cloister, and given thought to the difficulties he had faced as a young man in Florence without a father. His own family history demonstrates how Florentine families and the city's government were concerned with protecting the young in a time of high mortality, and perhaps Uccello's *Nativity* itself alludes to this.

At the end of the street he would have entered the Piazza di Santa Maria Novella where the magnificent church and convent rise, near which he had lived in his twenties, and for which he later painted scenes from Genesis in its cloister. Seeing work commencing on Alberti's spectacular white marble façade of the church he might well have recalled that the patron, Giovanni Rucellai, who lived only a few blocks away on the south side of the piazza, was also an owner of his work.<sup>70</sup> Crossing into the present-day Via dei Banchi on the other side of the piazza he would have come to the intersection known as the Canto dei Carnesecci where Domenico Veneziano painted the tabernacle that allegedly inspired Castagno's envy, probably for a patron from the Carnesecci family. As modern commentators have done, Uccello might have noted how its robust use of perspective and pure geometric forms was influenced by his own works in that vein.<sup>71</sup>

Following the Via de' Cerretani, Uccello would have passed on his right the houses of his wealthy relative Deo Beccuti, surrounding the small Piazza di Santa Maria Maggiore, even perhaps glimpsing above their door the *Virgin and Child* he painted for his mother's family. Inside the church, sixteenth-century sources inform us he painted an *Annunciation* impressive for its pioneering use of perspective.<sup>72</sup> The altarpiece to which it belonged was commissioned by

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Historical Inquiry, University of Sydney, Nicholas Eckstein (convenor), 20 August 2005, publication forthcoming.

<sup>70</sup> Giovanni Rucellai, "Il zibaldone quaresimale", in *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo zibaldone, I "Il zibaldone quaresimale"*, A. Perosa (ed.) (London: The Warburg Institute, 1960), pp. 23–24. What work of Uccello's Rucellai owned is not known.

<sup>71</sup> Dillian Gordon, *The Fifteenth Century Italian Paintings, I, National Gallery Catalogues* (London: National Gallery Company, 2003), pp. 64–65.

<sup>72</sup> Francesco Albertini, *Memoriale di molte statue et picture di Firenze*, with an introduction by P. Murray (Westmead: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1972; orig. ed. Florence: 1510) [p. 6]; Vasari, III, pp.

Paolo di Berto Carnesecchi,<sup>73</sup> from the family into which Deo Beccuti had married, making Uccello a very distant relation of his patron.<sup>74</sup> To square the circle, as it were (constituting Uccello, Deo Beccuti, Paolo Carnesecchi, and Filippo Brunelleschi) Paolo di Berto Carnesecchi would have known Brunelleschi from their time together as representatives of the Gonfalone Dragon on the government *Consiglio del Popolo* in 1400.<sup>75</sup> Brunelleschi's house was located a stone's throw away, in the block to the south of Deo Beccuti's properties, and Uccello would have given some thought to the technical innovations of this most famous artist and architect, as even a fifteenth-century source suggests.<sup>76</sup> From this social context it is not very far to the upper echelons of Florentine society. Deo Beccuti also owned property in the parish of San Lorenzo,<sup>77</sup> the heartland of the Medici, located a little further up Via de' Cerretani and a small block to the north. Moreover, he was a neighbouring landlord of Cosimo de' Medici in Calenzano,<sup>78</sup> and had financial dealings with Averardo de' Medici.<sup>79</sup>

Coming to the Baptistry in a matter of minutes, Uccello might have recalled how one of his distant ancestors had worked there, how he himself had been commissioned to paint a tabernacle for it in the early 1450s (which if it was completed is lost),<sup>80</sup> and how his son and

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63–64: appearing in the 1550 and 1568 eds; Raffaello Borghini, *Il riposo*, Mario Rosci (ed.) (Milan: Edizioni Labor, Riproduzioni e Documentazioni, 1967; orig. ed. Florence: 1584), p. 309.

<sup>73</sup> For a recent review of the evidence for the altarpiece, see: Roberto Bellucci and Cecilia Frosinini, 'The Carnesecchi Altarpiece', in *The Panel Paintings of Masolino and Masaccio: The Role of Technique*, Carl Brandon Strehlke and Cecilia Frosinini (eds), (Milan: 5 Continents, 2002), pp. 81–86; and Roberto Bellucci, Cecilia Frosinini, and Mauro Parri, 'Technical Catalogue', in Strehlke and Frosinini (eds) pp. 131–257 (pp. 149–55).

<sup>74</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Deputazione sopra la nobiltà e cittadinanza, 15, section 21, part 1, unfoliated) The genealogy of the del Beccuto family shows that Deo Beccuti was married to one Andreola di Zanobi Carnesecchi.

<sup>75</sup> Zervas, 'Filippo Brunelleschi', Fig. 45.

<sup>76</sup> Antonio Manetti, *The Life of Brunelleschi by Antonio di Tuccio Manetti*, introduction, notes, and critical text by Howard Saalman, trans. C. Enggass (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), pp. 44–45.

<sup>77</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Catasto, 380, fol. 547<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>78</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Catasto, 380, fol. 547<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>79</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Catasto, 498, microfilm reel 1234, fol. 188<sup>r</sup>. Deo Beccuti owed Averardo de' Medici 25 florins in 1433 for an unspecified reason.

<sup>80</sup> Wilhelm Boeck, *Paolo Uccello: Der Florentiner Meister und Sein Werk* (Berlin: G. Grote'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1939), pp. 102–03. Between 1450 and 1453 Uccello was commissioned to paint a

daughter were baptised there.<sup>81</sup> Uccello might then have stepped into his workshop situated on the piazza<sup>82</sup> to examine the small paintings of the Virgin and Child that were probably being produced by an assistant to his designs in this period.<sup>83</sup> Then entering the soaring space of the Cathedral he could not have failed to see his enormous mural painting of the *Equestrian Monument for Sir John Hawkwood* on the wall of the left aisle, and on the inner façade, the equally large *Clockface with Four Male Heads (Evangelists?)*. At this point Uccello might have recalled his dealings over many years with his patron there, the Opera, drawn from the rich and powerful members of the Wool Guild.<sup>84</sup> Finally, approaching Brunelleschi's cupola, he would have seen far above his head the three spectacular stained glass windows he designed for its drum: the *Annunciation*, *Nativity*, and *Resurrection* — evidence of his long-standing favour with one of the most important patrons in the city.

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tabernacle for the Baptistery showing Saint John with Christ or the Virgin (the wording of the document is ambiguous concerning its subject matter).

<sup>81</sup> *Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore di Firenze, Risorse Elettroniche, Registri Battesimali*, [www.operaduomo.firenze.it](http://www.operaduomo.firenze.it), 2001–2005, on-line source: Registro, 1, fg 52, Masche e Femmine, 1451 Ottobre 26–1451 Novembre 2; and Registro: 1, fg 311, Maschi e Femmine, 1456 Ottobre 10–1456 Ottobre 17 [accessed 14 April 2005]. Donato was baptised on 1 November 1451 and Antonia was baptised on 13 October 1456.

<sup>82</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Catasto, 826, microfilm no. 2063, fol. 57<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>83</sup> For the hypothesis that Uccello had a workshop assistant who painted small panels of the Virgin and Child after Uccello's designs in the 1450s, see: Hudson, 'Paolo Uccello', pp. 154–59.

<sup>84</sup> For Uccello's commissions in the Cathedral see: Hugh Hudson, 'The Politics of War: Paolo Uccello's *Equestrian Monument for Sir John Hawkwood* in the Cathedral of Florence', *Parergon*, 23, 2 (2006), pp. 1–34.