

Daria Rose Foner, Princeton University
Coluccio Salutati Submission

I walk along Via dei Servi nearly every day that I am in Florence. At the beginning of my Italian sojourn, the street merely provided a way of moving from my home stay on Via Marsilio Ficino to the *centro*, whether for a site visit, my internship at the Uffizi, a shopping expedition, or simply a stroll and an *incontro*. I would walk along, admiring the many jewelry shops, puzzling at the Vampire Museum, and occasionally popping into Robiglio for a midday snack, until arriving at Brunelleschi's *cupola*, always looming large in the distance. But my interaction with Via dei Servi soon developed. I began to look at the street, really look, not just scurry by. I noticed an engraving of a lamb, the symbol of the *Arte della Lana*, observed Medici palle adorning doorways, and became entranced by the attenuated cantos I passed. (Not the type of cantos I read in my literature class, but the kind I studied in art history, those that afforded better vistas while elevating the status of the corner house. My particular favorite, the fabulously ornate Canto di Balla, reigns supreme, with sweet cherubim holding a family crest aloft.) I was intrigued, absorbed by my Italian encounter not with another person, but with a street. Each time I walked along, I noticed more and more details. I had discovered my own treasure trove in the middle of Florence—available for every passerby to observe, yet in some way my own little secret. There was my beloved Italian bookstore and across the street, the *gelateria artigianale* serving my favorite *cannella* in Florence.

In a way Via dei Servi provides an intersection between Florence of old, the Florence I imagine and that I study, and Florence of today, the one in which I actually live. I can recognize the changing architectural typologies in the archways, the loggia-like storefronts evolving into closed-off urban facades, while at the same time I know the old Italian lady who sells her handmade jewelry in a nook of a store.

I have become particularly fond of a terracotta Madonna and Child tucked away behind a no parking sign right before the street ends and the Piazza del Duomo engulfs the space. When I pass the emblem of the Servites over the touristy knickknack store, I cannot help but think of a dollar sign and its ever-decreasing value compared to its European counterpart. And I giggle to myself when I read the graffiti lining the former palaces; one such comic epithet reads, "life of agony."

Just as my eye passes over a volute-like window bay that has faded from many years of weathering by the elements, I am distracted by the honking of a *motorino*. I turn to see normal people riding their *biciclette* with large Zara bags propped in the front baskets and perfectly coiffed Italian women strolling down the street, appearing to dart between the over-size carton-shaped garbage cans.

The history that so defines Florence and my quotidian life here have merged into one, I can relate to both and almost shift between the two worlds in my mind. And at the same time, I feel as though in some small way I am able to make my own imprint on the city, just as so many have done before me. I can experience the ease of slipping between the world of a past Florence and the one I live in and am a part of both.