

Preface

Florence, Italy, is known throughout the world as a center, and in fact, *the* center, of Western Renaissance art in every sense of the word. It was the birthplace, the cradle, the school, and now the custodian of about one-quarter of the world's great art. It is looked upon from afar as one of the poles of C.P. Snow's famous dichotomy of the two cultures.

Florence has never been thought of as a city with a rich scientific tradition, yet that tradition exists, with its roots in the former Grand Duchy of Tuscany down to our present day with three great centers of scientific research at the cutting edge of such pioneering fields as metabolomics and molecular magnetism.

We wrote this book to set the record straight—to lay out this scientific tradition as found in the lives and works of the first natural scientists to the most outstanding members of the chemistry department of what is now the University of Florence. Perhaps science has never been that romantic abode whose name is associated with the greatest opportunities and the highest ideals. Moreover, if one grants that the great discoveries have always nourished humanity's desire for power and immortality, it is also true that failure drives a great number of researchers to conceal or to disavow their own errors. Even in this case, and within the limited scope of research supporting this book, we have found exceptions: here we see scientists who, associated with a university lacking a long tradition and positioned at the periphery of the scientific center, rework their successes or failures, academic, political, personal or scientific, in a personal form with a view for either growth or emotional release.

The book's organization is chronological, and chapter headings reflect the evolution of the University of Florence from a museum of natural science through the various structural changes that brought it into the modern world as a full-fledged institution of higher learning.

Chemistry and Chemists in Florence

From the Last of the Medici Family to the European
Magnetic Resonance Center

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2016, XI, 123 p. 30 illus., 11 illus. in color., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-30854-8