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Brancato, Dario, Italia Paola, and Tomasi Francesca, eds. *VaSto* (VArchì, STOrìa fiorentina edizione digitale). Edition

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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**Brancato, Dario, Italia Paola, and Tomasi Francesca, eds.**

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[dharc-org.github.io/progetto-vasto](https://dharc-org.github.io/progetto-vasto).

The VaSto (VArchì, STOrìa fiorentina edizione digitale) project is an ambitious one: it aims to provide scholars with a digital edition of an important historical document, the *Storia fiorentina* by Benedetto Varchi. This is indeed a crucial text to understand the relationships between politics and culture in Renaissance Italy, as Varchi was tasked by the second duke of Florence, Cosimo I de' Medici, to continue the *Istorie fiorentine* written by Niccolò Machiavelli. Varchi had to narrate the events that led to the ultimate end of the republic and the beginning of the undisputed Medici rule in Florence. The manuscript remained unpublished until 1721 as it was subjected to political-religious revisions by the duke as well as by Baccio Baldini, the director of the Laurentian Library and court physician of the Medici family.<sup>1</sup>

Benedetto Varchi was born in 1503 in Florence; his father was a notary. After studying in Pisa and gaining a law degree, he dedicated himself to the study of Greek literature and philosophy. In January 1537, the assassination of Alessandro de' Medici, the first duke of Florence, raised Varchi's hopes for the restoration of a republican regime; the election of Cosimo I as the second duke pushed Varchi into exile, as he joined the powerful banker Filippo Strozzi's followers. Varchi became the instructor of Strozzi's children in Venice and Padua, where he remained after a break in relations with the Strozzi family. In Padua, Varchi joined the circles of university intellectuals and founded the Accademia degli Infiammati.

After moving to Bologna in 1541 and gaining more fame as one of the most important intellectuals in Italy, Varchi was pardoned by Duke Cosimo I for his republican ideas and brought back to Florence in 1543. There, he became part of the cultural life of Accademia Fiorentina, created by ducal will, and in 1546 was officially tasked to write the history of Florence during its passage from a republic to a dukedom. However, Varchi was unable to complete his

1. Brancato, "'Narrar'"; Gentile, "Studi sulla"; Lo Re, *Politica*.

task, despite the great quantity of documentation he had gathered before his death in 1565.<sup>2</sup>

The project's website is quite straightforward and includes five links. The first is an introduction to the VaSto project, with information about the author, the manuscript, and the pilot version of the project. The second link opens the EVT view with diplomatic and critical editions, which can be displayed in five different modes (including paratext and indexes, reading text, image and text, text comparison, and more). The third link refers to the tools that integrate the text, which are a map, a timeline, and the VaStoCollection. The fourth and fifth links provide technical details of the functionalities and limitations of the VaSto project, an XML/TEI tag list, and platform customization; in addition, the fifth link refers to the project codes on GitHub, where EVT's software code base is also available.

Florence was not the only Italian city to promote public historiography in the sixteenth century; it also flourished in Venice and in Rome.<sup>3</sup> But the absence of systematic studies on the Tuscan context after the establishment of the Medici duchy is what makes this digital humanities project truly valuable: the VaSto project is bound to attract the attention of historians, as it will make available a very important source, as well as philologists for the innovative methodology. The website has so far offered a digital edition of the Proemio (preface) of *Storia fiorentina* and presented it as a case study of digital philology, whose pilot version was released in 2020.

The project is coordinated by Dario Brancato as part of the 2020–23 research grant The Italian Art of Political Correctness: Patronage, Censorship, and Authorship in Florentine Renaissance Historiography (1548–1574), funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada. The VaSto platform is the result of the collaboration between several institutes (the Digital Humanities Advanced Research Centre, the Department of Classical Philology and Italian Studies at the University of Bologna, Concordia University in Montreal, and the Carisbo Foundation). This digital edition is based on manuscript RC4, i.e. the *Corsiniano 1532* document from the Biblioteca Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana in Rome, and is meant to be exhaustive.

This project aims to overcome the contrasts between critical and diplomatic editions of a text through their integration: the diplomatic edition

2. Brancato, "Varchi, Benedetto"; Sorella, "Varchi, Benedetto."

3. Bauer, *Invention*; Cozzi, "Cultura."

preserves the peculiarities of the original text, including the mise-en-page, the addenda, and the corrections of the text; the critical edition guarantees readability but at the same time allows us to understand the internal diachrony through a differentiation that highlights the types of corrections. As intended by the authors of the project, the critical edition allows the reader not to give up analytical study in favour of an ease of reading.

The VaSto project has so far published a pilot version focused on the Proemio of the *Storia fiorentina* by using EVT2-beta2 (Edition Visualization Technology), an open-source tool specifically designed to create digital editions from XML-encoded text that was developed by a team of college students from the University of Pisa. Besides the text edition, the website includes a dedicated collection of features and digital tools divided into three sections (timeline, map, and VaStoCollection). These integrate the book by focusing on places, facts, and protagonists of Renaissance Florence from 1527 to 1530. The timeline, map, and multimedial collection are the result of the effort made to recreate on several levels the context of the events narrated by Varchi.

The project's website aspires to become a full-fledged knowledge research source, providing comments or references concerning significant people, places, or facts mentioned in the text.<sup>4</sup> This is thanks to a series of informative and interactive functionalities that better contextualize the Proemio through a focus on three categories: time, space, and characters. A timeline of the most significant dates between 1526 and 1533 that includes events related to international and Florentine politics—such as the escape and return of the Medici family and the appointment of Alessandro as the first duke of Florence; the stipulation of the League of Cognac; the sack of Rome; and the Peace of Cambrai—was created using the software Timeline Js24, which is an open-source tool developed by the Knight Lab at Northwestern University.

A map that identifies the places in Florence mentioned in the text was created by Leaflet, the open-source Javascript library for interactive maps. These places are divided into six categories or layers (churches, castles, bridges, gates, squares/locations, and reconstructed locations), which can be activated or deactivated in the legend. The markers are customized to represent the different categories by means of symbols and colours. Finally, the visual tools include the VaStoCollection, a set of items related to the Proemio of *Storia fiorentina* and

4. Tomasi, "Edizioni."

implemented with Omeka.net, a web publishing platform for sharing digital collections and creating online exhibits.

The VaStoCollection is itself divided into three further sections: a focus on manuscript RC4, an introduction to the historical figures mentioned in the *Storia fiorentina*, and a collection of paintings featuring these figures. The first collection includes all the images of the Proemio from document RC4, which has been descriptively catalogued. The other two collections highlight the characters named in the Proemio: one presents the biographical records of the individuals, including dates of birth and death, developed by the Dublin Core Metadata Element Set (DCMES). The painting collection also includes a description of each physical object and provides additional information such as creator, size, and original format.

In conclusion, the VaSto pilot project is definitely useful for research and suggests that the full edition of *Storia fiorentina* will represent a milestone in digital philology. This is especially so if the additional tools (timeline, map, and characters) are extended to the rest of the text. This would make the project more fruitful for historians as well, who can already appreciate the digitization of primary sources on such a delicate moment in the history of one of the most important cities of the Italian Renaissance. The only critical point to note is the absence, for the moment, of an English interface.

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