

# THE FLORENTINE AND SIENESE RENAISSANCE: A MONOPSONISTIC EXPLANATION\*

Virginia Lee Owen

## INTRODUCTION

Historians have long been fascinated by the origins of the Renaissance. For art historians this fascination has appeared in investigations of the prominence of Florence in artistic development or comparisons of Florentine, Venetian, and Northern artistic Renaissance movements. Why should the arts have flourished so creatively in Florence rather than elsewhere? Why should Florentine artists have dominated the course of artistic development for 300 years in a straight line from Giotto to Michelangelo? Other cities possessed active artists of local and in some cases international prominence, yet the preeminence of Florence was maintained. Siena is one such city. Located less than 40 miles from Florence, it developed its own painting tradition, the Siena School, which was rather unaffected by the mainstream artistic developments of linear perspective, rational construction, secularization, and humanism with classical references. This isolation has caused one art scholar to observe

...had this Sieneese school not arisen we should have seen no difference in the progress of Western painting....It is simply that Sieneese painting forms, as it were, an island.(1)

Similarly, art critic John Canaday, in discussing the most prolific painter of the 15th century School of Siena, reinforces this observation.

...he is seldom mentioned in general histories of art for the very reasons that distinguish him as an artist. If you are following the story of art in his century, you are involved in an account of the sequence of explorations that began with Masaccio and went straight through Leonardo to culminate in Raphael and Michelangelo. Giovanni di Paolo rejected these explorations in a way that was extreme even for a Sieneese. He was so far to one side of the main current that the historian is obliged to make an interruptive detour, with the result that he

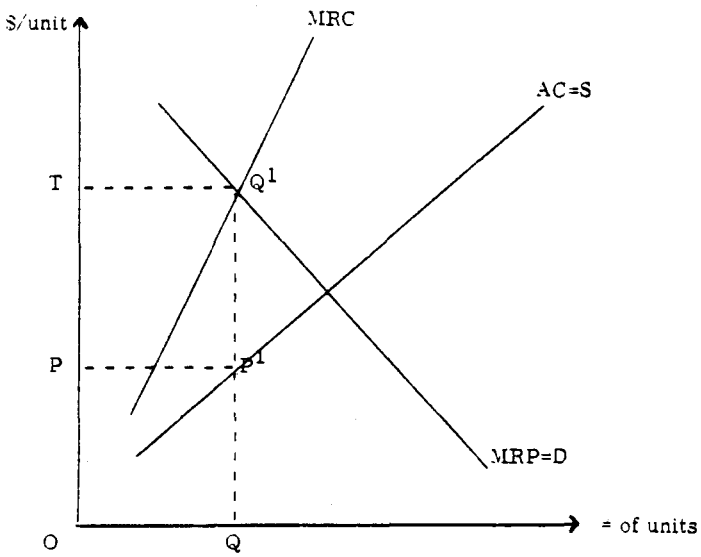
is usually passed up while many minor artists who rode the current are widely known. He was not even the kind of isolated revolutionary, ahead of his time, who requires historical attention from the other direction.(2)

The paradox of the Florentine Renaissance and the Siena School coexisting and developing for 300 years in such proximity is intriguing. On the surface the two cities appear similar. Each was a Tuscan semi-independent city which eventually became a city state. Each possessed a general populace of the same ethnic origin and the same religious heritage. Each included in its populace a wealthy, educated aristocracy which supported the arts among other expenditures. Each expressed bold city pride and experienced violent outbursts from divisions within its society and wars from without. Each depended upon the agricultural produce of subdued lands surrounding it for sustenance. How could two cities of such apparently similar ethnic, religious, political, and social backgrounds provide such divergent artistic traditions of such long duration in such close proximity? It is the purpose of this paper to examine this question with the perspective of economic theory. Section I describes the economic model of monopsony. Sections II and III apply this model to the art markets in Florence and Siena between 1300 and 1500. A final section compares the results and offers some generalizations.

The application of an economic framework for analysis of art history does not arise from some rigid theory of economic determinism. Many noneconomic factors have profound influence over the course of artistic development. However, the emphasis on these to the complete exclusion of economic considerations seems to be the rule in the literature of art history (perhaps because art historians seldom study economics). The economic framework is thus a method of supplementing rather than replacing existing analyses.

## **I. THE THEORY OF MONOPSONY**

A market situation in which there is a single buyer is known as a monopsony. Closely corresponding to it is one in which there are only a few buyers-oligopsony. The traditional textbook treatment of monopsony analyzes the situation in which the monopsonist is the lone buyer of a particular resource(3) although the term may be properly applied to cases in



Resources hired =  $OQ$   
 Resource price paid =  $OP$   
 Monopsony profit from reduced wages =  $PP¹Q¹T$

FIGURE 1: RESOURCE MONOPSONIST\*

\*Adapted from Leftwich 1961, p. 309

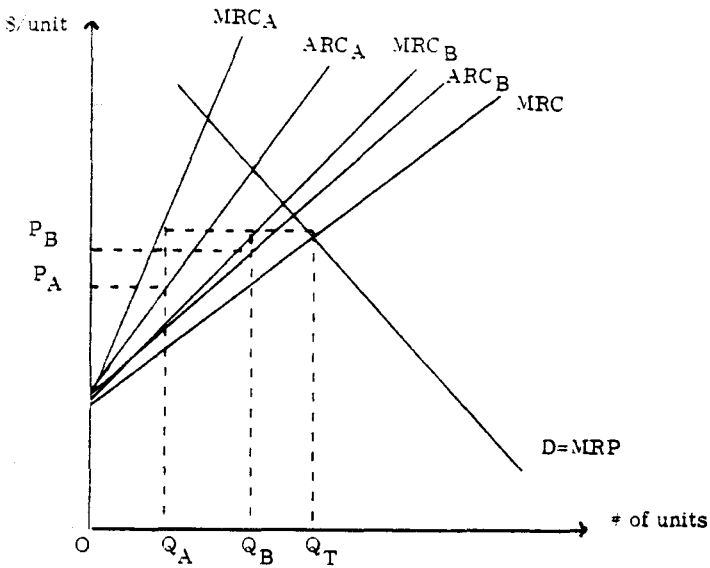


FIGURE 2: DISCRIMINATING MONOPSONY FOR RESOURCE MARKET SEGMENTED INTO FORMS A AND B\*

\*Adapted from Koch and Chizmar 1976, p. 36

which the monopsonist is the lone buyer of a particular product as well. In the analysis of a monopsony in a resource market, the emphasis is on the influence of the monopsonist over resource prices. As the sole employer of a resource, the monopsonist faces the market supply curve of the resource which is upward sloping. Employment of more of the resource results in an upward pressure on the return to that resource. This situation usually is associated with large firms or firms which dominate a local economy. If the company of the old-fashioned "company town" had tried to expand without importing more workers, the wage rates would no doubt have risen. Faced with a rising resource supply curve, the monopsonist tries to maximize profits by choosing that quantity which equates marginal resource cost and marginal revenue product. "To maximize his profits he restricts the quantity of the resource used and pays it a price per unit less than its marginal revenue product."(4) The results are illustrated graphically in Figure 1.

If the resource monopsonist faces a segmented resource market, it is possible for him to take advantage of differences in elasticity of supply by paying differential resource prices. This discriminating monopsonist argument has been used to explain wage differentials by sex or race.(5) In the context of the labor discrimination model, Koch and Chizmar conclude "... the higher wage is paid to the type of labor that possesses the most wage-elastic supply of labor."(6) These results are illustrated in Figure 2. Separate average and marginal resource cost curves are constructed for the two segments of the resource market (e.g., men, women). The two resource categories are assumed identical in production but different in supply elasticity. The discriminating monopsonist is assumed to hire resources on the basis of equating an overall marginal resource cost (a summation of the individual ones) with the marginal revenue product. This total quantity is subdivided in accordance with the individual marginal resource cost curves and the price paid for each resource is given by the individual supply curves. The discriminating monopsonist has maximized profits by taking advantage of special supply conditions through differential (discriminatory) resource payments.

The other aspect of monopsony analysis concerns the product rather than the resource market. This form of monopsony is much less rigorously developed. It seems obvious that if there is only one product buyer then that buyer would have immense influence over the product's characteristics. That

buyer's demand is the market demand and his personal tastes are the only ones visible in the market. Further, it would be an exceptional circumstance if the variations of a product available to a market of many buyers would be produced for a market of one buyer. In addition, since the smooth demand curves of intermediate texts arise from the horizontal summation of individual demands, the monopsony model is more likely to result in a truncated or discontinuous demand than a market with many buyers. Similarly, the demand is likely to be more inelastic under monopsony. The non-price or product characteristic emphasis of monopsony has been applied recently to government procurement policies.(7) It is suggested that government acts as a monopsonist but, because of cost-plus pricing, does not use its market power primarily on prices. Rather, the emphasis comes on product specifications or production methods. The specifications for military purchases represent the first of these. The enforcement of affirmative action guidelines on government contractors is an example of the latter. Carroll and Scott suggest that this government monopsony power could be used to eliminate barriers to entry.(8) Clearly then the product market monopsonist is recognized as having significant non-price market power. The form in which this is manifested, however, depends on the circumstances and personality of the monopsonist.

## **II. ART PATRONAGE AS MONOPSONY**

The relationship between artist and patron has elements, at least potentially, of both types of monopsony. The patron may be viewed as hiring specialized labor services so that the patron/artist relationship is simply an employer/employee relationship. Such an analysis could be applied to long term contracts paying annual salaries to artists who thereby became attached to a particular family's household or court. Leonardo da Vinci's 18 year service in the court of the Duke of Milan is an example. To be a monopsonist in such circumstances requires that there be only one patron - or for oligopsony, only a few patrons - by whom artists may be employed. In such circumstances, the resource market monopsony model would predict a limitation of employment opportunities for artists and reduced wages. On the other hand, any patron who commissions a specific art work could be considered a product market monopsonist in a limited sense. The

commissioning patron can always have extensive control over that one product. However, this limited one-item monopsony power hardly captures the spirit of the product market monopsony model. For that, the number of patrons who grant all commissions must be strictly limited to one for monopsony or a few for oligopsony. In that situation one could hypothesize that the artistic qualities of the art works - subject matter, materials, size and location, perhaps even style - would correspond to the tastes of the dominant buyer or buyers. One could also predict that variety might be rather limited and that the method of creation might be proscribed.

If this monopsony model of patronage art is to be used to explain the Florentine-Sienese divergence, it is first necessary to determine the existence of monopsonist (oligopsonist?) art patrons in the two cities. It is to this task which we now turn. The period under investigation for this inquiry will be from 1300 (Giotto's early prominence) to 1500 (roughly the end of the first artistic phase of the Renaissance with Botticelli the dominant artist in Florence).

The history of Florence from 1300 to 1500 is intertwined with the Medici family. However, the political and commercial dominance of this family was not evident in 1300. Florence had undergone several popular revolutions in the 13th century - in 1250, 1282 - which created an official oligarchy wherein guild representatives dominated. Such popular governments were not democratic, however.

Italian civic republicanism was associated with oligarchy rather than with democracy, though there could be moments of crisis when the basis of government was forcibly broadened, through failures of confidence in the established circle of governors....The great wool-guild of Florence, the *Arte della Lona* was a corporation run by the manufacturers in their own interests, with its own tribunals and prison - so that the bosses became judges in their own cases in industrial disputes. In Florence, as in Bologna and Siena, the workers in the industry - weavers, beaters, combers, carders, and so on - were forbidden to form their own associations. So, for that matter, were the dyers, who were not proletarian and propertyless wage-earners, but small masters....

Hence, really humble artisans seldom took any effective part in the government of their cities, and the triumph of government by guilds did not imply any genuine form of workers' control.(9)

The actual governing officials came primarily from a few families with some districts having 1/4 of seats from two families, over 1/3 from three, and over half from five or six.(10) Throughout the 14th century the Florentine oligarchy struggled with usually unsuccessful popular uprisings aimed at broadening access to the oligarchy. Even so, as late as 1328-42, 71% of seats in the Priorate came from only three of the 21 guilds legally eligible for election.(11) The Medici - successful commercially though by no means elite - gained popular acclaim by supporting the populist movements, especially the one of 1378.(12) On this basis and the growing commercial success of their enterprises, the Medici emerged as the dominant political family after 1434, replacing the three families of the Albizzi, Capponi, and Uzzano who had preceded them from 1382.(13) To maintain this power, the Medici relied on manipulating the selections of their friends to government rather than serving themselves. Government positions circulated among members of families friendly to the Medici.

Of the 159 newly qualified citizens from the Santa Maria Novella quarter whose names were placed in the *borse* [container from which office holders were drawn by lot] in 1453, no less than 145 were sons, grandsons or brothers of men who had been considered eligible for office in 1449.(14)

By such procedures, Cosimo became the acknowledged political leader of Florence so much so that Piccolomini who became Pope Pius II in 1458 could write

Political questions are settled at his house. The man he chooses holds office....He it is who decides peace and war and controls the laws....He is King in everything but name.(15)

This consolidation of political power persisted - though occasionally challenged - until the death of Lorenzo in 1492. Thus the political power of Florence was held by only a few families from 1300 to the early 15th century and until the end of the 15th century was concentrated in Medici hands.



Political supremacy does not of necessity mean supremacy in artistic patronage. Dominance of artistic patronage by a few - indeed the Medici - was achieved simultaneously with political superiority in Florence, however. Early Medici influence arose through joint subscription with other leading families or through governmental commissions. This approach fit especially well with the philosophy of the founder of the Medici bank in 1397, Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici. On his deathbed he urged his sons to "always keep out of the public eye..."(16) Giovanni was probably a judge in the competition for the commission to design doors for the baptistry - the competition won by Ghiberti in 1402. Giovanni and his son Cosimo financed a monument to Pope John XXIII by Donatello and Michelozzo, and were among the group of eight which financed the rebuilding of San Lorenzo and building of Ospedale degli Innocenti both undertaken by Brunelleschi.

This same policy of working in the background was followed by Cosimo when he inherited the family fortune. Gradually, however, he became more obvious in his patronage. Works commissioned through him include the following: Ghiberti's statue of St. Matthew, the novice's dormitory and chapel at Santa Croce, the choir of Santissima Annunziata, library of San Bartolommeo, the monastery of La Bodia at San Domenico di Fiesole and San Girolamo nei Monti di Fiesole, a college for Florentine students in Paris, renovation of Santo Spirito in Jerusalem, additions to the Franciscan Monastery at Assisi, rebuilding the monastery at San Marco. Indeed his total public expenses between 1434 to 1471 amounted to 663,755 florins.(17) These contributions totaled almost double the estate he left his heirs.(18) The list of artists supported by Cosimo reads like a Who's Who in Renaissance art of his lifetime. Donatello, Fra Filippo Lippi, Fra Angelico all received major impetus in the careers from his interest. Donatello not only received work during his creative years but retired at Medici expense, supported until his death by Cosimo and his son Piero. Vespasiano da Bisticci, his contemporary, chronicled Cosimo's artistic supremacy:

Musicians in like manner perceived his mastery of music, wherein he took great pleasure. The same was true about sculpture and painting; both of these arts he understood completely, and showed much favour to all worthy craftsmen. In architecture he was a consummate judge; and without his

opinion and advice no public building of any importance was begun or carried to completion.(19)

Although less well known than his father, Cosimo, or his son Lorenzo the Magnificent, Piero maintained the family tradition of artistic patronage. He commissioned works by Luca della Robbia, Uccello, Antonio di Jacobo Benci (Pallaiuolo), Gozzoli and Sandro Botticelli. In Botticelli's case the patronage took the form of living with the Medici family. When Piero died, his sarcophagus was designed by Verrocchio. His position was assumed by his now famous son Lorenzo. Unfortunately, the Medici family fortune was not so large as it had been and Lorenzo lacked the skill to rebuild it.(20) Nevertheless, he continued the sponsorship of Botticelli and salaried the young Michelangelo while he studied for four years. Michelangelo was only one of many young artists to whom he paid salaries while they attended a school in the San Marco garden which he had established.(21) Lorenzo also set about finding employment for his favorite artists from other more prosperous friends and relatives. He was responsible for Botticelli's call to work in the Sistine Chapel and was

...equally active on behalf of Filippino Lippi whom he also sent to Rome, Antonio Pollaiuolo whom he sent to Milan, and Giuliano da Maiano whom he recommended to the Duke of Calabria. For Ghirlandaio he obtained work in Santa Maria Novella and in Santa Trinita, and afterwards recommended him for employment in the Sistine Chapel. For Verrocchio,..... Lorenzo obtained work all over Tuscany....It is possible that Leonardo.... had lived in Lorenzo's household for a time. It is certain that....Lorenzo ....recommended him to Ludovico [Duke of Milan] by sending the Duke a silver lyre, made in the shape of a horse's head, which Leonardo had made.(22)

Lorenzo was also sought out as a final arbiter in matters of artistic design. He offered advice on the designs for the Strozzi Palace, Forteguerri tomb at San Jacopo in Pistoia, and set the standards for the Santo Spirito altar commissioned of Ghirlandaio.(23) In short, the absence of funds to directly control commissioned art in no way reduced the dominance of the Medici family on the arts. Others may have paid the bill but the standards for

Florentine art were established by the Medici. From 1300 to 1500, Florentine art moved from the dominance of one family. In short, the Florentine art market changed from oligopsony to monopsony.

The political development of Siena is very similar to that of Florence. Unlike Florence of the Medici, however, Siena never became so completely dominated by one family. In the 13th century, Florence and Siena vied with each other for political and commercial dominance of Tuscany. Siena's banking family of Buonsignori were then papal bankers "able at will to apply the sanctions of the Church against their debtors." (24) It seemed in 1260 that the rivalry was to be won by Siena for, in the Battle of Montaperti, the Sieneese defeated a superior Florentine force. The Pope, fearing an emergence of the Holy Roman Emperor, supported the Florentines, however, by "excommunicating the Sieneese bankers - an action that affected more than the latter's souls, for it freed all Christians from obligation to pay debts contracted with the condemned." (25) Economic decline set in with political repercussions. Since 1230, Siena had been governed by the rule of Twenty-Four. Half were to come from the nobles and half from the people, but "there were always nobles, and those from the greatest families, in the popular party." (26) The Council of Twenty-Four was replaced by the Council of Nine in 1287, which ruled for nearly 80 years. During the period political power gradually became concentrated in the hands of a few. The Board of Nine "could influence [their] succession and procure continuity, by compiling lists of persons eligible for office..." Merchants predominated and the same person often held office several times over periods as long as 15 years. (27) Popular unrest dominated the last half of the 14th century and brought Siena to the same exclusive oligarchic structure as Florence.

During the fifteenth century, developments in the smaller Tuscan republic of Siena were broadly similar to those within the Florentine state. The Sieneese regime in the fifteenth century was probably the most broadly based in all Italy, but there were fewer admissions to the franchise in the second half of the fifteenth century; ... From 1403 onwards the *Monti* or parties known as the *Nove*, *Riformatori* and *Popolari* bore the main burden of government, and between 1385 and 1425 there were seventy-six new admissions to their ranks, each new

recruit bringing his descendents with him, down to the farthest generation. But from 1440 to 1480 no more than twenty-one new admissions took place.(28)

By the end of the 15th century Siena succumbed to a despot, Pondolfo Petrucci, but he only lasted fifteen years. "The people of Siena missed indeed the devious, benevolent tyranny the Medici wielded over Florence."(29)

If the political power of Siena was slightly less concentrated than that of Florence, the patronage of the arts was no less cohesive. Even though there was no Medici family, the dominance was taken by the government of Siena. Under the Rule of Nine, the churches of San Domenico, San Francesco, Sant'Agostino, and Maria dei Servi were constructed and the Palazzo Publico built and then enlarged. The Siena School of painting flourished as civic pride sought to adorn these churches and public buildings. Virtually all known representatives of the school were painted for public places rather than the adornment of private palaces.(30) Duccio's *Maes tra* and Simone Martini's *Annunciation* were painted for Siena Cathedral. The Lorenzetti's *Allegories* and *Effects of Good & Bad Government* were commissioned for the Palazzo Publico. Sasseta and Giovanni di Paola concentrated on religious works to decorate churches. More than 50 private palaces were built or rebuilt under the Rule of the Nine, but almost as under a community plan. "...the same window motif, for example, was repeated on dozens of facades with subtle variations in shape and rhythmic spacing."(31) Pullan observes that by the beginning of the 14th century "...there were signs of conscious and deliberate town planning..." citing Siena as the example.(32) Thus even private patronage fell under the influence of public design. Government of the few provided the artistic leadership for Siena which was provided by the Medici in Florence. Officially, this should be classed as oligopsony, but the apparent similarity in tastes of the few in the oligopsony might better be reflected in the term "group" monopsony.

### III. THE DIVERGING PAINTING SCHOOLS OF FLORENCE AND SIENA

Having determined that art patronage in Florence and Siena was in limited hands, two avenues of investigation are open. Did the monopsonists exercise their power over resource markets as the employers of artists or did they emphasize product market power over the art works themselves? It seems

apparent that most influence was felt over the art objects produced rather than the employment conditions of the artists as workers. The evidence on the former is ample; on the latter it is fragmentary. There is some evidence that Leonardo was encouraged to leave Florence because the Medici didn't care for his painting as enthusiastically as the more poetic work of Botticelli.(33) It is also known that Cosimo preferred to patronize the architecture of Michelozzi rather than the more famous Brunelleschi even though he requested a model design for his palace from the latter.(34) It is also clear that the Medici expected the delivery of commissioned works at the appointed time. One anecdote survives of Cosimo's locking Fra Filippo Lippi escaped out the window on a rope made from a torn bedspread.(35) Whatever potential power the Medici might have had over employment conditions, it appears that they chose not to exercise it dramatically. Artists who weren't favored still were accorded respect(36) even if encouraged to leave, and noted artists retained their own studios open to all customers - e.g., Verrochio. Even Giotto in the early 14th century had possessed his own shop.

The evidence of resource market monopsony is even less convincing in Siena. Certainly the potential was there in that after the plague of 1348 virtually no Siennese artists were mobile enough to obtain commissions outside Siena. The major exception to this is Sodoma who was commissioned in Rome regularly returned to Siena to extoll "St Catherine, St. James of Compostella, St. Benedict or St. Sebastian."(37) Apparently employment terms were sufficiently attractive to retain Siennese artists and to cause them to maintain in their own country the local preferences. In short, there is very little evidence to support a thesis of depressed or discriminatory artist wages as a result of monopsony power.

There is considerable evidence of product market monopsony. The divergence of Florentine and Siennese painting can be explained in terms of the tastes and preferences of these monopsonists/oligopsonists. We can identify two distinct periods: (1) an early period in which the patrons of Florence and Siena had similar experiences (really pre-Renaissance) and (2) a later period in which the patrons' lives differed dramatically (early Renaissance). The art of the early period was very similar in both cities. The art movements diverged with the differing experiences of the cities' patrons later on.

The early wealth of both Siena and Florence came from banking and commerce. Such sources of wealth required travel and a worldly sophistication. The Sieneze company of the Bonsignori began to maintain branches in Genoa, Marseilles, Bruges, Paris and London in the mid-13th century. In 1292, both Florentine and Sieneze firms were listed on the tax roles in Paris.(38) Moreover, Siena dominated this world banking business for half a century.(39) In addition, their business was not restricted to banking, but included import/export business particularly in cloth and overseas investment.(40) Both cities were centers for visitors. Siena's annual celebration in connection with the Assumption of the Virgin was cause for a local fair at which the products of "a hundred cities could be bought...and the booth provided for gambling was second in attendance only to Mary's shrine."(41) The Florentine *Florin* first minted in 1252 became a world currency - alongside the Venetian *ducat*.(42) It was also at this time that both Florence and Siena possessed the least concentrated political power of the succeeding 200 years.

Patrons in these similar circumstances could be expected to prefer similar artistic innovation and indeed such innovations were forthcoming. Florence produced Giotto. Siena produced Duccio. Almost coincidentally the artists produced their masterpieces almost simultaneously - Giotto's Arena Chapel completed sometime between 1306 and 1312(43) and Duccio's *Maestra* between 1308 and 1311.(44) Further, both treated some of the same subjects - the lives of Joachim and Anna, the Virgin, and Christ. Each brought a humanity to painting which had been missing in the earlier medieval work.

Giotto's power and Duccio's refinement, Giotto's humanistic clarity and Duccio's mystical tenderness, brought both artists to expressions so complete that if one of them had never existed, it would certainly seem to us that the other, whether Duccio or Giotto, was the natural, the inevitable, the only possible and unapproachable master painter for that particular moment - a thought that could be a bit chastening to the art historian.(45)

However similar these two innovators' contributions may have been, their legacies were considerably different. Just prior to the commissioning of Duccio's *Maestra* in 1298, the Sieneze banking/commercial house Bonsignori

failed. Although other Sieneſe banking wealth existed - the Solimbene, for example - the Sieneſe aristocracy turned its attention to agriculture.

In 1318-1320 many of Siena's merchantile oligarchy or their close relatives were landowners, and usually owned much more property outside than within the city. Many Sieneſe bankers ploughed their capital into farms, vineyards, and orchards. In 1314, in the region surrounding San Gimignano, 639 landed proprietors resident in the city represented 61.8 percent of the property owning population, and owned 84 percent of the taxable rural wealth.(46)

This concentration on agriculture gradually eliminated the commercial links to the rest of the world. By the mid-15th century, most ruling party members were landowners who lived from rents and no longer actively engaged in business enterprise.(47) The introspection encouraged religious revivalism - notably through the local saints Catherine and Gernadino. The steady decline of commercial interests was encouraged by repeated riots by workers in the wool guild. In 1385, mass expulsions of the former rioters drove "4000 good artisans from the city."(48) In short, Siena declined from world supremacy in banking to local agricultural wealth. Its leaders looked back to Siena's history with nostalgia and to its future with self-contained pleasure.

Florence suffered no such introspective conservatism. The Florentine Bardi, Perruzzi and Acciaiuoli became the three largest banking firms in the world. In 1336, the Perruzzi house had offices or branches in 22 cities as far flung as Bruges, Paris, Cyprus, Rhodes and Tunis.(49) Even though the default of Edward III of England on his debt of 1,365,000 florins to the Bardi and Perruzzi ultimately caused their collapse in 1345, and even though plague and famine had reduced its size in 1300, "the trading instincts of the Florentines soon spawned a new set of entrepreneurs, some of whom had turned a tidy profit from the sale of drugs and shrouds."(50) Travel and commerce were held in high repute.

A Florentine who is not a merchant, who has not travelled through the world, seeing foreign nations and peoples and then returned to Florence with some wealth, is a man who enjoys no esteem whatsoever.(51)

The Medici's place was assured when Giovanni di Bicci de Medici succeeded in supporting Baldassare Cossa who became one of three rival popes taking the title Pope John XXIII. By handling the papal finances, over half the total earnings of the Medici organization came from the Rome branches.(52) The Medici enterprise took on other activities besides banking.

...the Medici houses undertook all manner of commissions for their customers, supplying tapestries, sacred relics, horses and slaves, painted panels from the fairs at Antwerp, choir boys from Couci and Cambrai for the choir of St. John in Lateran, and even, on one occasion, a giraffe. They were also importers and exporters of all manner of spices, of silk and wool and cloth. They dealt in pepper and sugar, olive oil, citrus fruits, almonds, furs, brocades, dyes, jewellery, and above all, in alum...(53)

The Medici also owned two woolshops and a silkshop by the mid-15th century.(54) Even so, the Medici tax returns show that they were not the wealthiest of Florentine families but instead ranked third.(55)

The constant ties of Florence's wealthy citizens to other parts of the world generated a lively intellectualism. Cosimo succeeded in transferring the General Council of the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches from Ferrara to Florence in 1439. Greek scholars lectured in Florence during the Council and many returned permanently after the fall of Constantinople. Cosimo, already a humanist, became interested in Plato and founded an academy for Platonic studies.(56) Piero and Lorenzo were both educated in this tradition. Florence of the 14th and 15th centuries, then, was increasingly urbane, cosmopolitan and intellectual, its great patrons accustomed to balancing both account books and philosophic arguments.

The effects of the diverging interests of the monopsonist/oligopsonist patrons of Florence and Siena are clearly reflected in the works of art they sponsored. The monopsony model predicts control of subject matter, materials, and even style in accordance with monopsony tastes. The increasingly introspective and conservative Sienese sought traditional religious subjects.

Almost exclusively they painted holy pictures where the



Virgin holds pride of place and this makes for a rather tedious resemblance between their works, all meant for various sanctuaries.(57)

The worldly Florentines commissioned religious subjects as well but their humanism and interest in the classics resulted in secular portraits, illustrations of myths, and assemblages of people in pictures in accordance with Neo-Platonic philosophy. These tendencies grew with each generation until Botticelli incorporated all the subject matter in his commissions of the late 15th century.

...Botticelli painted the famous *The Birth of Venus* and *Spring* expressing the intellectual and nonworldly ideals of the group around Lorenzo the Magnificent....Done about 1478 they are characteristic of the Medici's love of finely turned and complicated literary references....(58)

Botticelli's religious scenes were populated with Medici family members playing the religious roles.(59)

The rationalism of Florentine aristocracy brought attention to a scientific approach to painting. The technical innovations of linear perspective, modeling of flesh and arrangements of details in perfect geometric shapes such as the triangle or circle and attention to anatomy gave Florentine painting an earthy realism. Even the calamitous plague-ridden mid-14th century with its temporary return to religious subject matter and orthodoxy did not prevent continued technical advances in "...skills in modeling the figure, in giving expressiveness to the face, in rendering perspective..."(60) At the beginning of the 15th century Massaccio could combine the innovations of Giotto with the technical advances of the six intervening decades to become the first Renaissance painter. During the first half of the 15th century, "realists and scientific formalists [flourished] in Florence." "...the Christian story was frequently little more than a peg from which a painter could hang a bit of secular realism; or more admirably, it would supply a series of incidents adaptable to illustration through an intellectualized study of form and space."(61) Botticelli, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci all studied anatomy through dissection of cadavers and Botticelli studied optics.(62) Perhaps this scientific construction is most obvious in the battle scenes of

Uccello commissioned by Piero in which the lances have all neatly fallen “exactly parallel or at right angles to one another or the spectator, in order that they may recede, like railroad tracks, to a common vanishing point. And a fallen knight, seen feet-on, has obligingly lined himself up with them.”(63)

No such scientific experimentation for realism occupied the Siense. To express their mystical religious qualities, realism was purposely avoided.

Do not expect from them an interest in the play of muscles, the weight of ‘consciousness’ of objects: they are decided non-realists.(64)

Nor was this non-reality the result of lack of acquaintance with the Florentine advances. Simone Martini who followed Duccio accepted commissions at the Angevin Court of Naples, traveled to Assisi and Florence, and finally received a call to the papal court at Avignon.

Simone was the only truly international Italian painter of his century, and his influence, spreading from Avignon, was a powerful one on the late-Gothic manner called the International Style. But as for the temper of his art, Simone might never have left home.

...There is little that can be connected with Giotto’s formal revolution here, and nothing at all that can be connected with his humanization of the holy story.(65)

While Massaccio labored to create a cohesive new rational art in Florence, Sassetta purposely avoided it in Siena. His pictures are “doll-like, inhabiting doll-like houses or moving within doll-scaled models of delightfully invented landscapes.”(66) Sassetta had a sound knowledge of anatomy and perspective “but he regarded them as auxiliary advantages...”(67) Such rejection of the artistic mainstream meant that Sassetta traveled little and his successor, Giovanni di Paolo, not at all. The Siense patrons and artists fed on each other, creating an art which was going no place but going there ever more skillfully and elegantly.

## SUMMARY

The stamp of their respective patrons led Florentine and Siense artists into widely divergent paths as the monopsony model would predict. The

Florentine Renaissance was an elite art.

To an extent this preoccupation with the past (classics) made that section of art the private preserve of those who had the education to appreciate the setting. Whatever was painted for private palaces hardly benefited the general public.(68)

The late 15th century art, however, was the expression of Medici taste. An anecdote describes Piero's demand of Gozzoli that he paint out two angels in one of his commissions.(69) The 15th century culmination in Botticelli was not to everyone's taste. "Botticelli was not a popular favorite..."(70)

Only an exclusive and cultured society with a taste for Plato could be the proper soil for 'classical' art; an art of perfected harmony and complete beauty.

...The triumphal march of Platonism went along the same road as led from the Florentine bourgeois republic to the Principate of Lorenzo de Medici....(71)

The early Florentine Renaissance was thus the personal taste of primarily one patron family. It reflected their preferences and desires. The Medici were true product market monopolists.

No one family dominated Sieneese artistic development. The primary patron was the government of Siena.(72) This government was increasingly controlled by a limited number of rural landlords. Their tastes did not run to rationalism or realism. Plato and the classics remained foreign to them. Instead, the traditional religious values and styles, mysticism and a veneration of the Virgin permeated tastes.

In the fifteenth-century rooms of Sieneese painting museums a visitor is only dimly conscious of having left the 1300's behind him; he is still in the stylistic realm staked out by Duccio and Simone, a realm dominated by gold backgrounds and Madonnas with almond eyes.(73)

Further, this art was a public art appreciated by a broad segment of Sieneese society. The completion of Duccio's and Simone's *Maestras* were occasions for public celebrations.(74) The only remotely secular subjects - the Lorenzetti frescoes in the Palazzo Publico - were designed to instruct the

general populace. The frame of Sassetta and Giovanni di Paolo rests on their public religious altarpieces. Giovanni "should be considered primarily as a painter of predellas."<sup>(75)</sup> Although perhaps officially an oligopsony, the Sienese patrons were of such uniform taste that the results were those predictable from a group product market monopsony. Seen in the light of an economic framework, the divergence of Florentine and Sienese art is not nearly so inexplicable.

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\*Prepared for April 1977 meetings of the Eastern Economic Association, Hartford, Conn. Associate Professor of Economics, Illinois State University

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