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Lorenzo de' Medici and Classical Study (1070 words)

Lorenzo de' Medici was born in 1 January 1449 in the family owning the most influential bank in Europe and ruling Florence at that time. In 1469, he became the statesman of Florence and the leader of his family, succeeding his late father, Piero 'the Gouty' de' Medici. He was known as Lorenzo the Magnificent or Lorenzo il Magnifico due to his ability in ruling the state despite the inability in doing the business of his family.¹ In spite of the purpose to earn the favor among Florentine population through the works of art, it was his own interest that made many types of art prevalent and turned Florence to a festive city.² Hence, it seems that his evident contribution to humanities is the patronage of art as well as the patron of many famous world artists including Leonardo da Vinci, Sandro Botticelli and Michelangelo Buonarroti.³ However, apart from the art, there is another contribution which is important but not quite obvious. That one was pioneering the classical study in Florence paving the way for further development in Italy.

Cosimo de' Medici, Lorenzo's grandfather, had started collecting a number of books for the family's private library known as Medici Library or Laurentian Library. When Lorenzo became the first citizen, he tried to keep on his grandfather's work which was the starting point for his contribution to classical study.² His interest in classical study made him eager for more classical knowledge. After the fall of the Byzantine Empire, he brought one of Greek scholars, Janus Lascaris, to his family.

¹ Wikipedia contributors. "House of Medici" *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 4 Feb. 2012. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Medici>

² Ady, Cecilia M. *Lorenzo dei Medici and Renaissance Italy*. 1960. p.43-44, 154

³ Wikipedia contributors. "Lorenzo de' Medici" *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 4 Feb. 2012. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorenzo_de'_Medici>

Yet, Lascaris accepted Lorenzo's offer due to the death of his former patron. Lorenzo assigned the position of librarian to him and also assigned the tasks to retrieve the classical work from the East for his library.⁴ Because of this factor, Lorenzo filled his private library with various types of classical works and made classical knowledge flow to Florence.

After turning his family library to the source of classical knowledge, Lorenzo began his second step for the contribution to classical study. To make Florentine people interested in the classical study, he started from the closest people which were his children. He used every method to encourage his children to study in classical knowledge. The obvious evidence was that he gave his son, Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici, the prize due to Piero's conformity in his instruction to behave well and pay attention to classical study.⁵ Moreover, he employed the skilled tutors for his children's classical study. Angelo Poliziano, whose ability in translating the Homer's work attracted Lorenzo, was one of the tutors employed for Medici family.⁶

In addition to his children, Lorenzo had to make classical study prevalent and accessible so that people had more opportunities to study it. To do so, he decided to keep on his grandfather's policy in allowing the scholars to borrow any book from Medici Library by just leaving their names in visiting book. Although this policy had been launched since his grandfather's period, it was him that provided more classical study and attracted many scholars to visit the library. During the time he ruled Florence, he employed many scholars to work for him such as Janus Lascaris and Angelo Poliziano which were mentioned above and these scholars did not let this chance to reap this benefit pass by.³ In addition, apart from the scholars, some parts

⁴ "John Lascaris" *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 4 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/330864/John-Lascaris>>

⁵ Ady, Cecilia M. *Lorenzo dei Medici and Renaissance Italy*. 1960. p.106

⁶ Wikipedia contributors. "Poliziano" *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 4 Feb. 2012. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poliziano>>

of Medici Library were accessible to ordinary people. This enabled Florentine population interested in classical study to learn more about it.⁷ Moreover, his generosity was not restricted in Florence since he also distributed the copies of many classical books across European states.² Therefore, Lorenzo played a crucial role to bring about the classical study in Florence and provide more material about classical knowledge for the citizen to access.

Apart from improving the library, another step Lorenzo contributed to classical study was the development in some academies to be another source for classical knowledge. As mentioned previously, he recruited talented scholars to his family to discuss and work on some branches of classical study. These scholars were formed in a warm circle of Lorenzo's friends known as Medici circle.⁸ The clear example was the Platonic Academy in Florence or Florentine Academy. Like the Medici Library, the academy had been supported since his grandfather's time, with the purpose to provide the knowledge about Platonism. Lorenzo was also taught by Marsilio Ficino, the director of this academy and was inspired to study classical knowledge. However, Lorenzo was credited in bringing more talented scholars to the academy including Poliziano and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. In fact, Lorenzo's academy not only provided the classical knowledge but also made it improved. The reason was that, when his scholarly friends shared the same basic knowledge, they came to discuss about it. Then, they tried to integrate it with modern knowledge that was not available in ancient time. For example, in the branches of classical philosophy, there was the integration between the Platonic philosophies with Christian idea by these scholars.² Also, thanks to this group of scholars, the revival

⁷ "Medicean-Laurentine Library" *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 4 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/372293/Medicean-Laurentian-Library>>

⁸ Ady, Cecilia M. *Lorenzo dei Medici and Renaissance Italy*. 1960. p.114 - 115

of Neo-Platonism occurred in Lornzo's period.⁹ Accordingly, he made the academy not only the source of classical knowledge, but also the place for developing it. Addition to classical philosophy, he established an academy for another branch of classical study, namely the classical art. The academy was situated in the Medici garden at San Marco. Nevertheless, he did not restrict the idea of the artists he supported to classical art. He just provided some example of ancient visual art for the students attending the academy in order to learn about it.⁸ His sponsored academies were the apparent works constituting to the classical study in Florence.

To conclude, Lorenzo de' Medici worked in many ways in order to bring classical study to Florence and made it prevalent as much as possible. He first collected a lot of classical works from the East and kept it in Laurentian Library so that it became the formal source of classical knowledge. Then, he encouraged his children to pay attention to classical knowledge. At the same time, he carried on the policy of his grandfather to facilitate talented scholars to learn more about it. Additionally, he also paved the way for classical study to develop through his academy. Owing to all of these factors, it can be said that Lorenzo de' Medici is one of the pioneers of classical study in Florence.

⁹ "Platonic Academy" *New World Encyclopedia*. 5 Feb. 2012. <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Platonic_Academy#Academy_of_Florence>