

I TATTI

Volume 9 **2025**

FROM REDI'S FLIES TO TADPOLES IN THE GARDEN

Exploring Early Modern Ideas of Generation in I Tatti's Archives, Library and Grounds

THE BIBLIOTECA BERENSON IN RETROSPECT

Three Decades of the Library Through the Eyes of Its Recently Retired Director

MUSEUMS IN TRANSITION

Rethinking the Museum for a Changing World

THE POLITICS OF FORCE

Soldiers, Bandits and State Power
in Early Modern Naples

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Nutrition, Community and an
Intern's Experience
Behind the Scenes



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Visiting Professors

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Artists in Residence

Gini Alhadeff Louis I. Kahn, Animist Architect **Silvia Codignola** Florentine Palimpsest **Tacita Dean** Broken Statues **Mathew Hale** Deux Strategie d’Apparition **Margret Köll** The Solo-Repertoire for chromatic harp with a focus on Italy **Brigitte Shim** Investigating the Role of Light and Water in the Italian Garden **Howard Sutcliffe** The Artist’s Relationship to Nature and its Expression Through the Mark of the Hand

Research Associates

Ludovica Galeazzo Mapping the Islands of the Venetian Lagoon

a MESSAGE from the DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Each year, the I Tatti Newsletter offers a portrait of a community in motion: scholars, students, and staff engaged in the daily work of research, reflection, and collaboration. Reading through the pieces in this issue, I am struck by how much they share, despite their range of subjects. Each of them, in different ways, reminds us that the work of the Humanities is sustained by care: for ideas, for history, and for one another.

It has been a challenging time for universities everywhere, and Harvard is no exception. The Humanities, in particular, must often justify their place in an increasingly results-driven world. Yet what I Tatti represents — the study of the past, the exchange of ideas across disciplines and generations, and the belief that understanding history helps us imagine the future — feels more essential than ever. Amid these pressures, I Tatti continues to show that intellectual life, at its best, depends on curiosity and conversation, and that these qualities still have the power to shape institutions and inspire new thinking.

The articles in this issue show how that spirit takes many forms in the work of our Fellows and appointees. **Paola D’Agostino (page 8)**, who spent the spring semester as a Visiting Professor at I Tatti and has since been appointed Director General of the Musei Reali in Turin, reflects on museums as spaces of renewal and public trust. Her article reminds us that the study of the Renaissance remains connected to the responsibilities of cultural institutions today: to preserve, interpret, and share knowledge across boundaries.

Javier Patiño Loira (page 4), 2024/25 Lila Wallace–Reader’s Digest Fellow, examines how early modern thinkers, particularly Francesco Redi, sought to understand the origins of life, linking their questions about transformation to our own ecological and intellectual concerns. His research shows how scientific and literary imagination were once inseparable, and how that interplay can still inform our ways of seeing the world.

Elena Guerra (page 12), our 2025 Mediterranean Cookery and Produce Intern and a Harvard College student, brings readers into I Tatti’s kitchens, and shows that meals, nature, and community nourish scholarship as much as books. Her perspective captures the spirit of collaboration that sustains daily life here and the continuity between intellectual and practical forms of work.

Stephen Cummins (page 15), Deborah Loeb Brice Fellow in 2024/25, explores the social history of warfare from the calm of Florence, revealing how even studies of conflict can teach us about coexistence and resilience. And **Michael Roche (page 18)**, reflecting on his three decades at the Biblioteca Berenson, offers a moving account of growth and stewardship, showing how institutions evolve through care, commitment, and the sharing of expertise.

Taken together, these contributions form a portrait of I Tatti as both place and idea: a space where continuity and renewal coexist, where scholarship and daily life are woven together through care, curiosity, and collaboration. They remind us that the Humanities are not an ornament of culture but one of its foundations — the ground on which our understanding of history, creativity, and human connection continues to stand.

I would like to thank all those whose work makes this possible — our Fellows and staff, whose dedication and imagination sustain I Tatti every day, and our supporters, whose generosity ensures that it continues to thrive as a beacon for Renaissance studies and for the values that unite scholarship and community.

Alina Payne
Paul E. Geier Director, Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies
Alexander P. Misheff Professor of History of Art and Architecture, Harvard University



► The I Tatti community tasting the new olive oil at the Corbignano farm, December 2024

THE QUESTION *of* GENERATION

Early Modern Science *and* New Perspectives

Shaped *by a* Fellowship *at* I Tatti

Javier Patiño Loira was Lila Wallace–Reader’s Digest Fellow at I Tatti in 2024–2025. He is Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese at UCLA, and his book *The Age of Subtlety: Nature and Rhetorical Conceits in Early Modern Europe* was published in 2024. His research explores early modern Spanish and Italian literature, the history of science, and the intersection of poetic and artistic discourse.



At I Tatti, I embarked on a study of “spontaneous generation,” a long-discredited scientific theory that, since at least Aristotle, suggested that species could perpetuate without resorting to sexual reproduction. Lay people and scholars alike believed that bees could emerge from a dead ox as it decomposed, toads from pond slime, and mice from provisions stored in a ship’s hold. Spontaneous generation suggested that heat and humidity alone were sufficient for decaying matter to produce new life forms, and often to generate beings of a different species.

My project’s primary focus is on the seventeenth century, a period marked by rising attention to the theory and eventual rejection. However, rather than merely tracing the demise of spontaneous generation, I wish to prove that, even as the theory faced sustained attack, it fostered innovative approaches to the study of nature that remained at the

forefront of scientific inquiry—approaches that resonate today with concerns about sustainability and interest in the interdependence among species. The book I started writing at I Tatti, *Ecologies of Decay*, is rooted in the conviction that forcing history into a straight line invariably obscures the underlying forces that spark innovation. Increasingly, historians acknowledge that failure is just as crucial as success in understanding our present. The road not taken often contains seeds that later germinate, albeit under different guises: projects that never took off and ideas now deemed obsolete have played crucial roles in shaping our current actions and beliefs.

I Tatti, a research center open to increasingly broad, cross-disciplinary conversations across the humanities, felt like the ideal place for my project. First and foremost, it gave me time and a community. Even though interdisciplinarity

is on everyone’s lips, academic incentives still reward narrow specialization and quick, quantifiable results. Conversely, true interdisciplinarity requires pausing to explore adjacent fields, often led more by intuition than by a clear plan, in a process filled with unsettling and disorienting moments in which novel, cross-field connections emerge that had been invisible within one’s narrow niche, at which point you ask: how did I, or anyone else, not notice this sooner? At I Tatti, I could read and write, stop at crossroads, and follow paths that were promising but merely tentative. I also discovered a diverse community of scholars who—at lunch, at tea—were invariably willing to engage with a project that, while far from their specialties, suggested to them ideas and directions that I had not anticipated.

“I Tatti, a research center open to increasingly broad, cross-disciplinary conversations across the humanities, felt like the ideal place for my project.”

Coming from a background in literary history, I found the opportunity to bridge gaps in my knowledge of early modern scientific disciplines invaluable. On occasion, simply wandering the shelves of the Berenson Library was sufficient, as each book I sought was surrounded by others that were at least as relevant. I studied early modern treatises on plague, which most early modern physicians

viewed as a form of destructive rather than generative putrefaction—unlike in the case of insects emerging from carrion; I explored works on alchemy, a discipline that equipped scholars and artisans with tools to understand matter’s transformation and imagine how rot morphs into new life. And I found that other fellows in the library were reading about plague in early modern Naples, or writing on alchemy and alembics—topics that closely resonated with my research.

Florence, too, felt like the right place to write *Ecologies of Decay*. It was there that Francesco Redi, physician to Grand Duke Ferdinando II, demonstrated in 1668 that worms do not arise from dead flesh, but from eggs laid on it by adult flies. As I pored over Redi’s manuscripts at the Biblioteca Marucelliana and the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, I could sense the scholar’s quiet triumph in disentangling nature’s mysteries and consigning errors to the past. Yet one day, back at I Tatti after reading Redi’s experiment reports, I experienced the same bewilderment that his opponents must have once felt: two ponds at the bottom of the garden, which I had passed countless times, were suddenly thick with hundreds of tadpoles—creatures I could swear were not there the day before. Lizards slipping across the stones heightened the sense that life emerged from nowhere and everywhere. Slipping into the universe of beliefs that Redi’s work had helped dismantle then seemed all too easy.



▲ A Lizard with a Snail and a Snail Shell (detail), Giovanna Garzoni, mid-17th century, Galleria Palatina, Florence
◀ Vase of Flowers (detail), Jan Davidsz. de Heem, c. 1660, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

To dismiss spontaneous generation as merely pre-scientific, pre-modern credulity not only misrepresents the merits of earlier scholars but also risks obscuring how this and similar beliefs shaped concepts that remain central to our understanding of nature and our responsibilities when we study it. The first hypothesis guiding my work was that belief in spontaneous generation crucially informed seventeenth-century conceptions of nature's "economy," a term used by the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher to describe nature's capacity to persist despite the continuous and inevitable destruction inherent in matter. By positing that life could arise from decay, spontaneous generation represented nature as a sustainable, dynamic, and self-regulating web that maintains wholeness by repurposing rot. The second hypothesis was that spontaneous generation gave rise to complex forms of ecological thought. If there are organisms arising from dead matter of other species, then charting the set of horizontal relations at work in the environment appears to be the path to understanding what is born from what. In the study of nature, spontaneous generation implied that contiguity supplanted lineage.

Underlying my project was the conviction that clichés about seventeenth-century "Baroque" culture, including the lure of death embodied by ruins and flesh-eating worms in *vanitas* paintings and meditations on the fragility of existence, made sense when situated within a materialistic ecology of decay

and regeneration that captivated artists with its protean creativity. **I believe that exploring scientific and artistic developments side by side results in a deeper, more nuanced understanding of a society's perspective on reality.** Picture, for instance, the illustrations of caterpillars feeding on leaves published by Maria Sibylla Merian in 1679–83. In the wake of the discovery that worms only emerge from eggs laid by adult butterflies and moths, Merian pioneered attention to insect and plant interaction as parts of the food chain. In contrast, consider the images commissioned three decades earlier by Kircher's friend Francesco Corvini, a proponent of spontaneous generation, depicting leaves from different plants that allegedly "gave birth" to different species of caterpillars as they decayed. For those who believed in spontaneous generation, Corvini's caterpillars could be devouring their own mothers as they fed on leaves. Still lives became portraits of remorseless matricide, darkly reflecting on the interactions that constitute nature.

"Yet one day, back at I Tatti after reading Redi's experiment reports, I experienced the same bewilderment that his opponents must have once felt: two ponds at the bottom of the garden, which I had passed countless times, were suddenly thick with hundreds of tadpoles—creatures I could swear were not there the day before."



Javier Patiño Loira beside the ponds in the I Tatti gardens where he spotted the tadpoles ▲
Detail from an illustration by Maria Sibylla Merian, from *Der Raupen wunderbare Verwandlung und sonderbare Blumennahrung*, vol. 2 (1679–1683). UB Frankfurt

A matter of days before I started my fellowship in July 2024, I published a piece about fireflies in the journal *I Tatti Studies*.

Its topic was the seventeenth-century craze for elaborated metaphors called "conceits" (*conceits*), which split Italian writers and readers into the two opposite camps of followers and critics. I argued that the restless, winged creatures that light up the fields in early summer were unexpected protagonists in a literary dispute that gripped Italian creative circles around 1630. Like the sparkling but logically weak metaphors that were so in vogue, critics maintained, fireflies shine with a light that charms but hardly illuminates the way. Yet, those advocating the use of *conceits* replied that the cold light of fireflies intrigues humans more deeply than the sun itself—just as metaphors touch us more directly than truth does. The analogy between fireflies and conceits was one link in a chain of correspondences between views of nature and cultural and artistic production that had passed unnoticed until then.

One year later, I saw the swarms of fireflies near the walls of I Tatti as I returned home every evening during the last weeks of my fellowship. My stay in Florence was undoubtedly a career-changing opportunity, and I hope to have contributed to I Tatti's community through my interest in bridging the humanities and the sciences.



RETHINKING MUSEUMS TODAY

A Visiting Professor Reflects *on* Museum Policy, Practice *and* Exchange

Paola D'Agostino was Visiting Professor at I Tatti in Spring 2025 and was recently appointed Director General of the Musei Reali in Turin. A specialist in Italian Renaissance sculpture, she previously directed the Bargello Museums in Florence for eight years and has held curatorial positions at the Yale University Art Gallery and The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

My first visit to I Tatti was in 2003, and over the years I returned many times as a scholar to use the library – even when I was working in the United States – and also as a guest for seminars and events, once I moved back to Italy. However, I would never have imagined that being a Visiting Professor for six months on the spellbinding hills of Fiesole would be such a transformative experience.

I was Director of the Bargello Museums in Florence for over eight years (December 2015 – January 2024), a consortium comprising five different institutions – the Medici Chapels, Orsanmichele, Casa Martelli, Palazzo Davanzati and the Bargello itself – which together hold the most important collection of Italian Renaissance sculpture. **After this wonderful professional experience, it became essential for me to reflect on and explore the role and future of museums in contemporary society: a pressing question posed at different levels worldwide.**



▲ Allegory of Sight, Jan Brueghel the Elder and Peter Paul Rubens, c. 1617–1618, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

I Tatti proved the ideal framework for this reflection and to discuss some of the more urgent issues with other Fellows and Visiting Scholars.

Art museums are currently at the center of political, social, economic, and cultural debates. Since the second half of the twentieth century, the number of museums has increased exponentially around the globe, especially in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Long perceived as institutions designed to safeguard priceless objects for the public good, museums were historically seen as embodying shared cultural, educational, and aesthetic values. **More recently, however, museums have also been harshly criticized for being elitist expressions of a colonial mentality.**

In response to these critiques, numerous institutions have significantly redesigned their displays and developed new strategies to make their collections more accessible to diverse audiences. New types of museums are now being conceived to meet diverse cultural demands and encourage stronger public engagement. Despite, and indeed because of, the contemporary critical view of museums, these institutions have become more than ever essential, dynamic spaces that produce innovative research, preserve cultural heritage, and promote trust and historical awareness, including through the restitution of artworks and artefacts. Just as importantly, museums are crucial spaces for social interaction, critical discourse, and intellectual exchange.

“...museums were historically seen as embodying shared cultural, educational, and aesthetic values. More recently, however, museums have been also harshly criticized for being elitist expressions of a colonial mentality.”

During the Spring semester, my research focused on how Renaissance art museums are reshaping their collections, programs, and policies in response to current criticisms. Early modern museums are rethinking their missions and the narratives they present to their visitors, as well as drawing attention to more inclusive forms of public engagement. Thanks to my former professional experiences abroad, I also compared the recent changes in museum policy and display in several North American and European institutions.

My work benefited greatly from the library’s industrious atmosphere and the tranquility of my Granaio office.



All staff members at I Tatti were tremendously competent and helpful, and conversations with them frequently offered new insights. I also profited from the wealth of material that I found both in the photographic and historical archives. By looking at Italian and worldwide museums through Bernard and Mary Berenson's own eyes and words, I began to pursue a new line of research.

It was deeply inspiring to browse through the documents and images of the *Committee to Rescue Italian Art (CRIA)*, which was created to restore cultural heritage damaged by the 1966 Florentine flood*. I continue to be impressed by the collections of documents, papers and photographs that are generously donated or acquired, then carefully catalogued and made available, including online. **To me it is an important legacy to the pivotal role I Tatti holds in wide-ranging research fields in Italy and abroad.**

The daily lunches with the Fellows' international community, the morning coffee breaks, and the afternoon teas have

been invaluable opportunities to exchange ideas with other scholars, current and former Fellows, researchers as well as Artists in Residence, who are such a precious addition to the daily life of the I Tatti community. It was fascinating to learn about their work, as well as receiving many queries and feedbacks on my own topic from different perspectives. The opinions were varied and often challenging, whether they pertained to museum collections histories, provenance, public and education programs, research, museums' design and display, or modern art installations within early modern collections.

Some Fellows were undertaking research in other institutions throughout Florence. We often met in the city's historic center after working in libraries, archives, or museums. Many of these institutions – for instance the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, the Kunsthistorisches Institut and other museums in the city – have forged long-lasting partnerships with I Tatti, which is an essential cultural presence in Florence.

Sometimes we organized group field trips to museums off the beaten track, such as the Museo La Specola or the spectacular Chiostrini and Cenacoli. **During weekends, some Fellows spontaneously explored different museums and cultural sites in the city and beyond.** It was inspiring to hear their feedback on how Italian museums are redesigning, or not, their galleries and reconsidering display strategies to make collections more accessible to diverse audiences without effacing their history.

“By looking at Italian and worldwide museums through Bernard and Mary Berenson's own eyes and words, I started pursuing a new path of research.”

The Thursday seminars were engrossing, and the subsequent discussions over drinks were often riveting. I also considered it a special privilege to take part in Exploratory Seminars, as well as the conferences and the workshops. I attended many

of them, as they offered a rare opportunity to gain insights on a variety of topics and to meet scholars and leading experts from different fields.

The Visiting Professorship at I Tatti brought me an unexpected and stellar professional opportunity. A few weeks after leaving, I was appointed Director of the Musei Reali in Turin, one of the largest and most prestigious state museums in Italy.

I am aware that I especially benefitted from the exchange of ideas with the community of Fellows, Professors, Artists in Residence, and scholars from all over the world, whose diverse perspectives and expertise gave me fresh and unexpected insights into museums' roles and resources. They strengthened my knowledge and expanded my professional network in ways I will always value.

CRIA

* The CRIA materials that Paola D'Agostino refers to can be explored through I Tatti's CRIA online exhibition. The *Committee to Rescue Italian Art* was established in the wake of the catastrophic flood that struck Florence in November 1966, threatening some of the world's most important artistic treasures. Convened by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and directed by international experts in art and conservation, the committee coordinated a massive effort to rescue and restore damaged paintings, sculptures, books, and archives.

The CRIA Archive at I Tatti preserves an extraordinary record of that response. It contains correspondence, reports, and thousands of photographs that document the emergency interventions, conservation work, and international collaboration that followed the disaster. The exhibition makes this material freely accessible online, allowing researchers, conservators, and the wider public to explore one of the most significant moments in the modern history of cultural preservation.

To learn more, visit
cria.itatti.harvard.edu



BETWEEN *the* GARDENS *and the* TABLE

The I Tatti Kitchens *and* Food Culture

Elena Guerra is a member of the Harvard College Class of 2026, studying Romance Studies and History of Art and Architecture. She was the Mediterranean Cookery and Produce Intern at I Tatti in June–July 2025.



Much like Italian cuisine itself, the components that bring the lunches at I Tatti to the table are what make them truly special. Fellows, interns, administrators, and staff alike share lunch during the week, whether it is served outdoors under large umbrellas or in the rooms nearer to the kitchens. This collective meal, which dates back to Bernard and Mary Berenson, deepens the community of this already unique research institute. With all of the varied projects that are happening at the same time, the food is what everyone has in common on a given day; it is a social point of gathering that draws everyone from their alcoves in the libraries or offices to a shared space. What goes on within the kitchens also plays a major role in the ability for study to be carried out. It sustains the daily work that keeps the Villa functioning

and ties the experience directly to the surrounding Italian land. As an undergraduate student who has been welcomed with open arms into this part of the Villa as an intern, I am also lucky enough to contribute, for a short while, to the maintenance of this tradition.

Every morning at 07.00, my walk to the kitchens is the same. The air remains pleasantly cool, not yet heavy from the recently risen sun, and the glowing hills sprawl in all directions. From the Villa Linda, a set of residences adjacent to I Tatti, the road hugs olive oil trees in neat rows that spill eastward down the terrain. At the base of the property, in the same complex as bright ochre buildings that house the artist in residence, sits an almost secret vaulted space where

massive metal tanks wait to be filled with the beginnings of wine in the fall. Andrea, who is in charge of the farms, showed me around the areas that are dedicated to production in one of my first weeks, with just four other people comprising the team that cultivate, harvest, and produce all of the olive oil and wine at the Villa.

Past the entrance at the base of the hill, a thick row of dark green cypress trees funnel the gravel path towards the top

of the incline. A dash of sunlight to my right ushers me up the final set of stairs, illuminating a short archway that opens up to the plant nursery and terraced vegetable gardens. Margrit, the head of the gardens, will sometimes bring us baskets from this treasure trove of greenery of basil for pesto, cucumbers for a side dish, or plums to be eaten whole or made into jam. The time and effort dedicated by each of the gardeners is constant and powerful when you recognize the importance of food to a community like I Tatti.

▲ Clockwise from top left: I Tatti's vineyards; Lemon trees in front of the Villa; Elena in the kitchen with the I Tatti chefs Leonardo, Stefano, and Emiliano. Images by Elena Guerra

The preparation, where much could be gained or lost, lies in the expertise of the three chefs. Emiliano has been working in the kitchen and at the Villa the longest, and along with an unmatched sense of humor, he has a genuine intuition for what food requires to be prepared well. Leo's generosity comes from his passion for cooking, and his kindness sets the tone for a collaborative and adaptive environment that never dulls. Stefano's study of hospitality and calm focus under pressure gives his genuine skill an effortless quality and makes experiments seem like generational recipes. Their planning and execution is a day in day out effort, supported by the gardens and facilities available at I Tatti.

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Our daily routine unfolds with a bit of variation depending on the menu. The chefs open their stations and begin prep. I start by making the *schacciata* dough, so that there is time for it to rest before it is baked and brought to the *Granaio* at 11 o'clock. On Mondays, we receive the majority of produce deliveries for the week. Once we've sorted through baskets of zucchini with the flowers still brightly attached, melons, and heads of various leafy greens, the question before checking the menu is always, *Che si sgrana oggi?* or *What are we eating today?* in Tuscan Italian. At the busiest time of year, the kitchen serves over eighty people daily at four separate times. The menu is written two weeks in advance and takes into account the different seatings, the dietary restrictions of individuals, and the season. In the past year, a nutritionist, Fabiana, has been introduced to look over the menu, with the goal of ensuring that the dishes complement a healthy lifestyle that is conducive to productivity.



“Once we've sorted through baskets of zucchini with the flowers still brightly attached, melons, and heads of various leafy greens, the question before checking the menu is always, *Che si sgrana oggi?* or *What are we eating today?* in Tuscan Italian.”

Every step between the gardens and the table at I Tatti is exceptional, from the people working and serving to the ingredients that cross the threshold of the kitchen. No one process on its own makes this tradition stand out, and the product of this complex undertaking supports I Tatti as it is known and loved by those who have spent time here. Because of the structure of my internship, I have spent more time in the kitchens, on the grounds, and with staff than I have in the archives or roaming the halls of masterpieces of Renaissance art. **A community that supports the arts would be lost without the recognition of an art so fundamental to our survival.** The beauty of the Villa is just as much its quality as an international center of study as it is the lively discussions over meals, the deliveries of fresh produce from local suppliers, and the small slices of sunlight in the mornings over the gardens.

Guests arriving for Thanksgiving Lunch in the Myron and Sheila Gilmore Limonaia ▲
A seasonal fruit platter prepared by Elena and ready to be served ◀

WAR *and* PEACE *in* ITALY

Studying *the* Social History *of* Conflict

from the Tranquility *of* I Tatti

Stephen Cummins was Deborah Loeb Brice Fellow at I Tatti in 2024/25. A historian of the early modern Spanish Empire, his research focuses on violence, civil conflict, and the politics of criminal justice in the Kingdom of Naples. In summer 2025, he joined the Biblioteca Berenson team at I Tatti.



The tranquility of the grounds of I Tatti may not seem like the most apposite setting for the social history of war. But it was in this rare peace that my project, on soldiers and outlaws in southern Italy, developed during my year fellowship. Despite the superficial contrast, this is perhaps not surprising: behind the current serenity of I Tatti also lies an intimate history with war both renaissance and modern.

When foreign visitors arrived in Naples in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many were struck by the fortification – in both soldiers and strongholds – that Spain relied on to maintain rule over southern Italy. In 1621, for instance, the traveler James Howell wrote a letter underscoring

the King of Spain's expenditure on keeping the city full of both infantry and cavalry: with the result that much of the revenue from the kingdom was 'eaten up twixt Governors, Garrisons and Officers'.

The monarch was 'forced to maintain' thousands of soldiers, both infantry and cavalry, in a 'perpetual Garrison'. In Howell's telling, the 'hot' nature of the Neapolitans necessitated the consumption of the realm's incomes in this manner 'to keep this voluptuous people in awe'. While Howell's commentary was shaped by stereotypes of the inconstancy of the Neapolitans, it was an accurate precis of Spanish military policy.

▲ Aniello Falcone, Battle Scene, c. 1630-1640, Museo del Prado, Madrid



My general interest in the social aspects of war was spurred in part by the calamities of warfare and the material demands of our contemporary era. **My project at I Tatti explored how the communities of early modern southern Italy dealt with the presence of soldiers, of all nations, and especially the complex politics of military force as a factor in community life, and the impact that this military experience had on their economy and society.**

In Tommaso Costo's 1596 anthology of humorous tales, *Il Fuggilozio*, he tells a story of the discussion between Emperor Charles V and the philosopher Agostin Nifo da Sessa. The emperor asks him 'what in this world would one be able to call happiness?' Sessa offered a quick response: 'not lodging Spanish soldiers'. This dire opinion of billeting came from personal experience, and Charles, amused by his response, provided him with a privilege to avoid all future forced billeting.

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This revulsion towards hosting soldiers was not pure fiction. In my research at archives in Naples and the royal archive in Simancas, I've read of communities complaining about the burdens and harms of billeting soldiers. Communities wrote extensive itemized receipts of the foodstuffs and fuel consumed by soldiers, especially noting when it went beyond accepted limits. They complained about violent harms and jealously guarded any exemptions granted in the past.

The evidence I've found is also clear that billeting was used as a punishment or a 'bridle' against revolt; it was intentionally used to cause suffering. Contemporaries bitterly complained about the effects of this policy. In 1595 a minister of the Spanish government of Naples, Tapia, argued that billeting was in fact the cause of the economic ruin of the Kingdom of Naples, stifling prosperity. It is intriguing to ask: did such military factors play a role in the economic divergence between southern and northern Italy? Although, as northern Italy suffered more directly from battles of the Thirty Years' War, there can be no simple answer to this question.

When pursuing soldiers in the archives, bandits appear. The border between a bandit and a soldier was always vague and porose. In a strict legal sense it identified those who had persistently ignored a summons to appear before a tribunal. But the concept of banditry also covered a social type: the man who lived as an outlaw, who dressed like a bandit, and socialized with them. Soldiers were dispatched

against bandits and, often spurred by missing salaries, at times joined them. On the other side, bandits could also gain rehabilitation by enlisting in the Spanish army. **At I Tatti, conversation with art historians opened new vistas on the visual culture of banditry, such as the popular genre of the landscape with bandits.**

Not only did early modern Italians live alongside soldiers, many served in militias as well as regular units. Anti-bandit armed forces also grew, placed under the control of the military leaders of the so-called 'governo della campagna', the term for all anti-banditry and public security policy. While these provincial forces may seem somewhat distant from the urban experience of the city of Naples, such expeditions into the provinces had clear effects on urban culture.

One of the most famous Neapolitan dialect works of the seventeenth century, Giulio Cesare Capaccio's *Micco passaro 'nnamorato* (1619) relates the story of a Neapolitan bravo recruited into a rag-tag company of soldiers to pursue bandits in the Abruzzo. Commanders of such forces sent the heads of bandit leaders back to Naples for fearful display.

The demands of war in the garrison cities of Spanish Italy produced many effects. On the one hand, there were direct experiences of recruitment, service and an often poor and disabled veterancy, then, on the other, there were the related experiences of cohabitation, sociability and conflict between foreign soldiers and urban inhabitants. War was not only deleterious when battles raged; the burdens of

provisioning soldiers fell on local communities. Yet both the borders and exchanges between soldiers, outlaws, and local communities while often filled with violence, were often more surprising and complicated.

An example I've found in the archives reveals this confusion. In 1631 the squadron of Corporal Jacinto Pace, an officer of *Regia Audienza* of Calabria Citra, was guarding some outlaws who had sought asylum in the church in Scigliano. In his telling at least, one of his soldiers Cinzio Mele sold his firearm to some relatives of these outlaws. This led to the outlaws escaping from the Church with ease. Pace then physically fought Mele, before his other soldiers convinced them to make up and dine together. A notary of the *Regia Audienza*, criticized Mele for selling his firearm, whereupon Mele insulted the notary, grabbed an arquebus, shot at his colleagues and ran off. He was caught and imprisoned in the castle of Belmonte, and gained a safe-conduct to go serve in the Thirty Years' War, but ran off with other men of *mala vita* rather than appear to enlist. The careers of armed men could take twisting paths between licit and illicit activities, paths that can illuminate the consequences of militarization.

My fellowship year provided unrivalled space, bibliographic resources and unparalleled depth of scholarly exchange that transformed my project. Of greatest value was that this was an interdisciplinary experience. As a historian, learning from art historians and renaissance literature scholars made my social history more cultural and expanded my conception of how war shaped lives in renaissance Italy.

Thousands of Spanish, German, and Walloon (from the Spanish Netherlands) soldiers guarded Naples, many in fortresses such as the Castel Sant'Elmo, which loomed over the city with its angular renaissance geometry or the Castel Nuovo which dominated the seafront of the city. Conflict profoundly shaped the urban composition of Naples; after the Italian Wars, the Spanish commissioned the dense grids of the latterly notorious *quartieri spagnoli* to house soldiers of the Spanish crown. The via Toledo, still a prime choice for the Neapolitan *passaggiata*, was a thoroughfare designed to allow military control of the expanding city in the early sixteenth century.

The city of Naples was a military hub of foremost importance, dispatching and receiving men, firearms, and artillery throughout the Mediterranean theatres and beyond the Alps. Towards the Mediterranean, the littoral of the Kingdom was a major border for the Habsburg Empire against Ottoman fleets and was dotted with, often poorly maintained, fortifications.



A LIBRARY *in* MOTION

The Recently Retired Director *of the* Biblioteca Berenson Looks Back *on* Three Decades *of* Stewardship *and* Change

Michael Roche was Director of the Biblioteca Berenson for nearly thirty years, until his retirement in 2025. During his tenure he oversaw the transformation of the library into a modern research facility while preserving its role as a leading resource for Renaissance studies. A historian of Renaissance Florence, he is also the author of *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (1996).

A running joke during my 28-year tenure as Nicky Mariano Librarian and Director of the Biblioteca Berenson poked gentle fun at the incessant shifting and reorganization of the library. “There he goes again,” colleagues teased, rolling their eyes, as hundreds, thousands, sometimes tens of thousands of books, journals, boxes of photographs, and archival collections migrated from shelf to shelf, room to room, building to building, and from I Tatti to a nearby storage area or far-away deposit, and sometimes back again. Between frequent shifts to fit new accessions, major relocations before or after renovations, and transfers of weeded items or entire sub-collections to off-site storage, the library has seemingly been in *motu perpetuo*. In fact every volume – now numbering 220,000 – may have transited from one place to another as many as ten times on average. To a casual observer, libraries may appear immobile. The Biblioteca Berenson seems to be endlessly dancing.

All this movement and effort are, of course, the happy result of healthy growth. In a mainly open-stacks library spread across multiple small rooms, such shifts are unavoidable. **But as I reflect back on these years, having just retired, this perpetual motion also serves as a metaphor for the transformation of so many other aspects of the Berenson Library over the course of almost three decades.**

When I had my first sustained encounter with the library, as a Fellow in 1990-91, more than thirty-five years after Mr. Berenson’s death, it still had the look and feel of his fabled personal collection rather than the institutional research library it has become. However rewarding in many regards, I can now admit – with respect and affection – it was also deeply frustrating. Since BB left I Tatti to Harvard the collection had grown, but quite slowly; it still had major gaps and inconsistencies especially outside art history, and often lacked even basic texts and studies. Instead of facilitating discovery of the library’s holdings, the arcane cataloging and classification practices often thwarted it. The unreliable card catalog was bound in unwieldy volumes that had to be screwed open to insert a new record, while the arrangement of items on the shelves was often mysterious.



Emblematic of the library's seeming inertia in those days was the system of assigning each book a location pegged to a particular bookshelf, rather than an individual call number. The shelfmark was penciled on the author and subject catalog cards as well as discreetly inside the book's cover. Spine labels were forbidden in order to maintain the aesthetic of a gentleman's library. And while a book's subject matter loosely determined its location, its ultimate position was dictated by its size, on shelves organized in descending height from bottom to top. Even on individual shelves, books formed pyramids, with the tallest in the center, and tapered off on either side. Attractive, perhaps; dysfunctional, absolutely! Apart from the challenge to users, when shelves grew overcrowded and books had to be rearranged, the shelfmark for each item moved was painstakingly erased and its new location re-written in three different places! This cumbersome system resembled a slowly tightening straitjacket.

When I returned to I Tatti as a part-time library employee five years later, in 1996, the library I was familiar with had been completely transformed, thanks to the strategic vision and energy of Walter Kaiser, Director at the time, who prioritized modernizing the library and making it a first-class institution for research on the Renaissance. I Tatti had spearheaded the creation of the local IRIS consortium in 1994, opening the library to cooperation with others. In that context, under my predecessor, Assunta Pisani, the card catalog was converted to electronic format; cataloging was automated in conformity with international standards; all works in print were reclassified following the Library of Congress system, with each book and journal assigned its own call number and labeled on the spine; and every single volume was moved to a new – now flexible – location. This herculean effort finally exploded the straitjacket. Combined with a major influx of the dedicated funds that Walter raised, the Berenson Library entered a new era. I was the grateful beneficiary when, the following year, I was made head of the library.

From then on, the Berenson Library has been on the move as never before, both literally and figuratively. It underwent another critical repositioning when it migrated in 2007 from IRIS to the Harvard Library system, its logical home. Becoming an integral part of Harvard Library helped us streamline workflows, ensure the highest quality of our



records, expand online offerings, provide new research services, and stay at the forefront of technological and professional developments.

The impressive expansion of the library's collections in these decades has turned it into a leading resource for Renaissance scholars in all fields. In a short time, yearly acquisitions of monographs more than doubled, and now average around 3,000, while the library subscribed to 150 new journals (now totaling about 560). The systematic purchase of older but still relevant materials has filled gaps. In these years the main research part of the printed collection nearly tripled in size, and became more comprehensive, balanced, and useful. **The library's scope now extends beyond late medieval and early modern Italy, still its backbone, to encompass all of the Mediterranean and beyond, to Asia, the western hemisphere, and sub-Saharan Africa in the long global Renaissance.**

Sustained focus on all aspects of the library's non-circulating Special Collections of rare and early printed books, historical archives, and photo archives – such rich sources for new research – has also breathed new life into these areas, and they too have grown substantially. The rare books section has increased from around 1,000 volumes to over 7,000, largely through the acquisition of early imprints (15th-18th c.). The photo archive has added around 150,000 photographs, towards a total now of over 350,000. The historical archives have also flourished, as no less than twenty-one new manuscript collections have joined the Berenson Papers and a few other small fonds.

Facilitating researchers' discovery of and access to these expanding collections has always been a driving principle.



Multiple data remediation projects have improved record quality and accuracy, making it easier for scholars to find items of interest. The work of cataloging and describing is no longer limited to monographs, as when I first began; it now includes all media – periodicals, auction catalogs, manuscripts, music recordings, microforms, photographs, archival collections – as well as the previously uncataloged library of the Villa Papiniana. As a result, the records giving access to the library's holdings have increased from 70,000 to 191,000 in these decades.

Digitization of the library's Special Collections is also making rare or unique materials increasingly accessible online. **Dozens of early printed or otherwise very rare books can now be read online, along with tens of thousands of pages from archival collections** – including such exceptional resources as the thirty diaries of Mary Berenson, or over six hundred letters from the celebrated Belle Da Costa Greene to BB, and much more. Adding to thousands of photos already accessible, sometime this autumn a long ongoing project should culminate in the publication online of several hundred thousand digital images and records representing the entirety of the historical Berensonian part of the photo archive.

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Constantly improved library services have also enhanced users' interactions with staff and with the collections. After barcodes were applied to every volume, the circulation

of materials was automated in 2009, making it easier to borrow items internally. This became easier still with the realization of a self-checkout system a few years later. The virtual movement of items between Harvard Library and the Berenson Library ballooned in 2013 when we joined the university's Scan & Deliver service, enabling access to millions of items on either side of the Atlantic. That same year we implemented a system for requesting and tracking new acquisitions, followed later by a procedure to request and retrieve materials stored off-site.

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Numerous partnerships have been fashioned over these years that have expanded the library's cooperative relationships and profile around the world. In 2003 the Library joined what



A detail of the Smyth Wing, dedicated to former Director Craig Hugh Smyth and his wife Barbara, and inaugurated in 2009.

would become the Art Discovery group, a network that affords access to the holdings of over 75 international art libraries. Ten years later we became a founding member of PHAROS, an association of fourteen leading historical photo archives in Europe and America whose pathbreaking discovery platform will be launched this fall. More recently we partnered with the Morgan Library & Museum to develop a website featuring the remarkable correspondence between librarian Belle Greene and Bernard Berenson. We also spearheaded an innovative linked open data project with local Florentine libraries to create Floreat Musica, an online repository of digitized and cataloged Renaissance music manuscripts. **These partnerships have raised the global visibility and impact of the Berenson Library.**

Finally, the growth and reorientation of the library's collections have gone hand in hand with the continuous expansion of its physical facilities. These include the creation in 2000 of a space to contain the new Asian and Islamic collection (since moved to Villa Linda); the renovation of the farm's old wine-making space in 2004 to accommodate 25,000 volumes in compact shelving; the addition in 2007 of compact shelving in the Geier Library to house 30,000

volumes, and the transfer of the Reference Room next door; the opening of the beautiful Smyth Wing in the renovated "Annex" in 2009, which added 1,000 meters of shelf space and nine carrels; the transformation in 2014 of the space previously housing the photo archive into the Ahmanson Reading Room for Special Collections; and the agreement in 2016 with an offsite deposit which now houses 50,000 volumes. Planned for some time, but still unfinished, are two new local spaces: Villa Pieragnoli, which will become the library's main deposit when renovations are complete; and the nearby Villa Tartaro, to which the library staff and all Special Collections will eventually move.

It has been the greatest honor and privilege of my life to serve the Berenson Library throughout this exciting period. My heartfelt thanks go to all who have facilitated this long journey, both my own and the library's: the successive Directors of I Tatti who have supported it, the many friends and benefactors who have generously sustained it, and above all my colleagues in the library who share my pride in our hard work and our accomplishments. **May the Berenson Library long continue to flourish and move forward!**



From right: Alina Payne, Michael Roche, Council Chair Susan Mainwaring Roberts and guests at the 2018 opening of the Walter J. Kaiser Reading Room. Formerly known as the 'Big Library', the space was renovated to serve the needs of a modern academic community and now houses sixteen state-of-the-art workspaces. Its opening marked an important new chapter in the life of the Library.

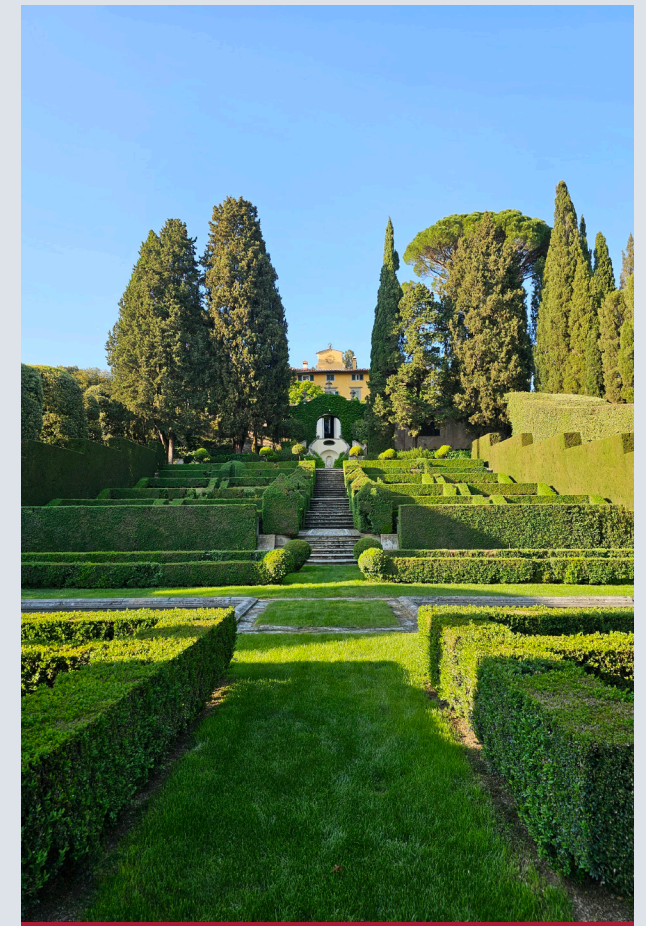
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I Tatti's mission endures because of those who believe in the lasting value of humanistic research.

Gifts of all kinds and sizes allow our Fellows to carry out groundbreaking research that advances knowledge and enriches universities, museums, and institutions around the world. Current projects span a wide range of fields, from studies of early modern science, literature, and art, to digital initiatives such as the census of Italian Renaissance drawings, the cataloguing of photographic archives, and the digitization of rare collections. Each year, our appointees bring new perspectives to Renaissance studies and advance the Humanities generally.

Recently, support for scholarship has become more tenuous. Across Harvard and beyond, the sudden and unanticipated withdrawal of funding has created tremendous challenges. At I Tatti, we have been forced to cut our budget significantly, but have made the deliberate decision not to reduce the number of Fellowships, and not to reduce stipends or resources for our Appointees. **This choice was made because supporting scholars remains at the heart of our mission.**

We are able to remain true to this mission because of the generosity of individual supporters. By giving to I Tatti, you ensure that our Fellows have the facilities, resources, and intellectual community they need to carry out their work uninterrupted. You also help sustain our library, archives, gardens, and the many activities that bring scholars, artists, and students together to exchange ideas.



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▲ Canestra di frutta, Caravaggio (Michelangelo Merisi), c. 1599, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan

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