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YALE UNIVERSITY PURCHASES RENAISSANCE ARCHIVE

Yale University has recently purchased from a Swiss book dealer a large trove of Italian Renaissance manuscripts forming the archive of the Spinelli banking family of Florence. The price was not announced. Until 1920, the documents had been housed in the 500-year old palace of the Spinelli's in Florence. Included in the 150,000 documents in the archive are business records and extensive correspondence between the Spinellis and many of the major figures of Renaissance Italy, including Lorenzo and Cosimo De' Medici, several Popes, and many leading merchant families. The sheer size of the archive makes it the largest collection at Yale, and the largest Renaissance archive in the United States.

Although the materials consist largely of accounting records, more than just accounting historians will be interested in researching the archive since the Spinelli bank was the treasurer for the Vatican. Thus, many historians believe that the accounting records will provide new information on daily life during the Renaissance and on the workings of the Roman Catholic Church. A Yale professor of history stated that account books such as those in the archive are necessary to truly understand the deal-making that went on between the Church and those who provided loans to the Church. It is believed that these documents will yield new light on the Vatican's financial activities. It is almost unbelievable that a collection of such importance and covering such a long period of time has survived the ravages of rodents, floods, war, and time.

Since the account books cover a period of five hundred years, it will be possible to trace changes in the environment of Europe, including such things as the progression from a barter economy to a

money economy and the growth of capitalism. In addition to the banking records, the archive includes records from many of the Spinelli family businesses. In addition, cliometricians should find the archive interesting in that 500 years of numbers can be fed into a computer and analyzed in limitless ways.

The Spinelli palace in Florence was next to the home of Giorgio Vasari, the noted painter, architect and historian of Italian art. Vasari studied with Michaelangelo and appears in a famous painting with Leonardo da Vinci and Fra Luca Pacioli (see the Spring, 1988, issue of *The Accounting Historians Notebook* for a picture of the painting). Vasari is best known for his book entitled *Lives of the Artists*. It seems that the Spinellis were the executors of the Vasari estate and owned thousands of Vasari's personal records. In fact, Vasari's last will has already been uncovered in the collection. The will lists all of the paintings in Vasari's collection including works by Botticelli, Leonardo, Raphael and Durer. It should be recalled that Vasari was one of the more influential authors who spread the allegation that Luca Pacioli had plagiarized much of his material from Piero della Francesca. Thus, it is possible that materials in the archive could turn up new information on Pacioli himself. For instance, documents in the collection may explain Vasari's reasoning as to how Pacioli plagiarized della Francesca.

Given the possibilities, all accounting history scholars with a working knowledge of Latin and early Italian should plan to examine the papers at Yale. The collection is in the process of being catalogued. The first portion of the archive was made available in January, 1989.