On November 20, 1490, the wealthy Florentine banker Piero de’ Medici acquired a thirteenth-century panel that he believed to have been painted by the Florentine artist Cimabue (c. 1240–c. 1302). The panel might be identified with a painting now in the Fogg Art Museum [Fig. 1]; it is no longer attributed to the master.\(^1\) The acquisition was remarkable, at least according to modern concepts of the Renaissance – a period, after all, of investments in antique rather than medieval art. For Creighton Gilbert, Piero’s interest represented a unique instance in the history of early modern collecting: the first, and for a long while, isolated appreciation of an Italian primitive.\(^2\) Yet the text that documents Piero’s acquisition makes clear that his interest was not awakened by the work’s ‘medievalism’, but by its authorship, by its being ‘di mano di Cimabue’.\(^3\) By 1490, Cimabue was chiefly known as the founding father of the Florentine Renaissance. His art was believed to mark a first instance of rebirth rather than a late representative of a pictorial language of the Middle Ages that the fifteenth century had superseded. ‘Cimabue’, wrote Cristoforo Landino in 1481 in his *Commento* on Dante’s *Divina Commedia*, ‘rediscovered the natural forms [*lineamenti naturali*] and true proportion, which the Greeks called

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1 For the identification of the panel in Cambridge with the one Piero acquired, see Belosi L., “Un Cimabue per Piero de’ Medici e il ‘Maestro della Pietà di Pistoia’”, *Prospettiva* 67 (July 1992) 49–52. I thank Todd Richardson for reading an earlier draft of this essay. Unless otherwise attributed, translations are my own.


Fig. 1. Maestro della Pietà di Pistoia (?), Lamentation. Tempera on panel, 49.7 × 34.8 cm. Cambridge (MA), Fogg Art Museum.