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Travelling Objects

Transfers between France, Florence and Lorraine (1589–1627)

Princely weddings have always been highly elaborate affairs that required months of painstaking preparations. Endless guest lists were drawn up, accommodations were refurbished, the ceremonial was carefully worked out so as not to offend any of the participants, lavish entertainments had to be rehearsed, the stores were filled with the choicest delicacies the realm could offer, famous cooks and the best musicians were hired. The bride chose her dresses, and innumerable chests were filled with all the small and big objects she would take to her new home. Bridal journeys were stressful emotional rites of passage, but they also involved the transfer of numerous art objects.

The dowry constituted an essential part of the wedding arrangements. Thus Antoine Caron dedicated one of the miniatures of his »Histoire françoise de nostre temps« to the sumptuous dowry which Caterina de' Medici brought with her when she married the future French king Henry II in 1533. In Caron's drawing numerous men are busily occupied with transporting, safeguarding, displaying and admiring the precious objects.¹

The role of women in the processes of cultural transfer between the courts of Europe is often overlooked and underestimated. These transfers involved much more than just the dowry. The foreign brides brought their own cultural traditions with them and gave a fresh stimulus to the cultural productions of their new home country. Usually the women maintained close contacts with their family of origin, and thus there was a continuous exchange of objects, artists and artisans between the two courts.²

The three case studies I will discuss in this article are part of a larger research project that centers on the Florentine grand duchess Christine of Lorraine.³ After the early death of her mother, Christine was raised by her grandmother, the French queen Caterina de' Medici. Caterina arranged Christine's marriage with Ferdinando de' Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany. Christine soon became a very powerful figure at the Florentine court. My case studies are drawn from three different phases of her life and will serve to address the following four questions: In what ways did women contribute to the processes of cultural transfer? What motivated the exchange of art objects? How were these objects integrated into their new context? And to what extent did the new setting alter the original meaning of the objects?

Christine's dowry (1589)

When Christine of Lorraine arrived in Florence in 1589, she was granted a sumptuous triumphal entry. The city had been decorated with numerous triumphal arches that glorified both the bride and the bridegroom. Illustrated booklets were sent abroad so that the propagandistic messages of the event reached a wide audience at the other European courts.

A key painting of the triumphal entry indicated that the wedding of Ferdinando and Christine gave a new direction to Florentine foreign politics.⁴ The painting was dominated by the French queen Caterina de' Medici, Christine's grandmother. The right half of the canvas was given over to Caterina's family of origin, the Florentine Medici dynasty. The two Medici popes Leo X and Clement VII hovered above Caterina. It was Clement who arranged her marriage with the future French king Henry II. Accordingly on the left side of the canvas

the royal family of France was depicted, among them Caterina's daughter Claude de France, the mother of Christine of Lorraine. Thus the painting traces a genealogy that explains why it was logical to unite Christine of Lorraine with Ferdinando de' Medici: Their wedding strengthened the already extant ties between the Medici and the royal house of France. This message was important to Ferdinando as his foreign politics differed significantly from that of his predecessors. While the previous Grand dukes had been heavily dependent on Spain, Ferdinando wished to create a new alliance with France.⁵ As we shall see, the presentation of Christine's dowry underlined this goal.

Christine's dowry was assembled by her grandmother Caterina de' Medici. Since she was short of money, Caterina decided to give an impressive array of valuable objects to her granddaughter.⁶ In this way, objects returned to Florence that had been part of Caterina's own dowry more than 50 years before – for instance the famous Cassetta Medici.⁷ The extremely precious casket made of engraved rock crystal bears the coat of arms of Clement VII, the Medici pope who had arranged Caterina's wedding. The object had travelled with her to France in 1533 and now returned to Florence in 1589. Through this double journey it acquired an additional meaning: It visualized the magnificence of Medici art patronage – and at the same time it symbolized the renewed union between the two dynasties.

Caterina included in Christine's dowry also objects that had been commissioned by herself. A particularly splendid example is the series of tapestries that immortalizes the lavish court festivals organized by her.⁸ By dispatching the tapestries to Florence Caterina ensured that her memory was perpetuated, and her Florentine relatives could take pride in the magnificent acts of the Medici queen.

Soon after Christine's arrival in Florence, many objects from her dowry were exhibited on the top floor of the Uffizi in the so-called Tribuna, the domed octagon that held the most precious art objects of the Medici.⁹ Over the following years, a special room was created only for Christine's dowry, the »Stanza di Madama«.¹⁰ A detailed inventory informs us about its holdings.¹¹ There were 137 objects in total, mostly precious vessels, but also portraits of French royals.

The corridor that led to the Tribuna and the Stanza di Madama contained the so-called »Serie aulica«, a series of Medici state portraits.¹² This indicated the official character of the display. The Uffizi were shown to important guests and served as a venue for court festivals. Therefore Christine's dowry was presented in an environment that lay at the core of Medici cultural politics. Her dowry was not regarded as a private affair, but was made to convey a political meaning. By displaying this collection in a separate room, Christine's noble descent and the Medici alliance with the royal house of France were stressed.

Some years later, in 1600, the Medici loyalty was rewarded when Henry IV of France married Ferdinando's niece Maria de' Medici. Maria's portrait was included in the »Serie aulica« and placed opposite Caterina de' Medici, next to the entrance to the »Stanza di Madama«.¹³ This arrangement underlined the Florentine alliance with France still further.

However, some objects from Christine's dowry were integrated into other contexts. For instance, frames of a mirror and of a painting

were transformed into reliquaries.¹⁴ By reworking the creations of the French goldsmiths, the Florentine craftsmen were able to study these foreign objects carefully and to draw inspiration from them.

Florentine paintings for the Cabinet doré (1623–1627)

Travelling objects were often part of a business deal. This is evident in the case of Christine's dowry, but it also holds true for my second case study that concerns a series of 10 paintings sent from Florence to Paris. In the 1620s Maria de' Medici was busy decorating the Palais du Luxembourg which she had built for herself in Paris. She commissioned Rubens to paint the famous Medici gallery, but she also wanted paintings from Florence. At that time Tuscany was governed by Christine of Lorraine and her daughter-in-law Maria Magdalena of Austria who acted as regents during the minority of Ferdinando II. The three women were engaged in a lively controversy about a large sum of money that Maria demanded as her due. In November 1623 the Florentine regents gave in and paid 200.000 scudi to Maria.¹⁵ Maria waived her claim to interests, but in return for this favour she eventually asked for 10 paintings for her audience chamber. This so-called Cabinet doré is no longer extant in its original form, but its contents can be reconstructed through documents published by Blunt and Marrow.¹⁶

Understandably, the Florentine regents were not keen to spend much money on this forced gift, and thus many of the paintings were copies. For instance, the Coronation of Cosimo de' Medici copied part of a painting that decorated the Salone dei Cinquecento in the Florentine Palazzo Vecchio.¹⁷ In the same Salone dei Cinquecento Maria's wedding banquet had been held in 1600. On that occasion two canvases were displayed that showed Maria's own wedding and that of Caterina de' Medici, thus visualizing the two unions between the Medici and the royal house of France.¹⁸ Between 1624 and 1627

these paintings were copied in a slightly smaller format so as to fit the panelling in the Cabinet doré.¹⁹ The painters created a richer effect by giving more space to costly clothes and textiles, especially the backdrop with the French lilies embroidered in Gold. Obviously this was meant to impress the French audience with the magnificence of the Florentine court.

A further painting sent from Florence showed the river Bidassoa, the border between France and Spain, where the double wedding of Louis XIII and his sister with two children of the Spanish king took place in 1615.²⁰ This event was regarded as a triumph of Tuscan diplomacy and had already been depicted in a gallery at the Medici villa Poggio Imperiale.²¹

Some paintings produced for the Cabinet doré are lost, but their titles are documented. Thus we know that two canvases portrayed victories of the Tuscan galleys that had been immortalized before on the ceiling of the church Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri in Pisa.²²

Only three of the ten paintings for the Cabinet doré were invented from scratch: firstly, the first encounter of Maria's parents Francesco de' Medici and Joan of Austria. Secondly, Maria requested a canvas featuring the splendid galley that took her from Tuscany to France. Thirdly, the Florentine regents chose a scene that underlined the good relationship between the two states: The painting depicts how queen Caterina de' Medici and her son Charles IX received auxiliary troops sent from Florence.²³

All in all the decoration of the Cabinet doré can be compared to a »best of« sampler of favourite Medici tunes. Most of the paintings had originally been produced for very different functions and settings – for a church, for a villa, for a hall of state, for a wedding. In a way, the canvases constituted a museum of previous Medici commissions and united in one room the numerous sites where the Medici had distinguished themselves, creating a sort of political cosmos.

In Paris these travelling objects were reassembled in a new context, integrated with some new additions and thus acquired a new meaning. The heterogeneous components now formed an entirely new series that had a double message: It celebrated Maria de' Medici, but at the same time it glorified her family of origin and thus the donors of the gift.²⁴ On the one hand there were the wedding scenes visualizing the prestigious dynastic connections of the Medici, on the other hand there were historical episodes that retold Medici success stories. Many of the canvases referred to the relationship between France and Tuscany and could thus serve as a reminder to remain on good terms. In this way the Florentine regents used their forced gift in order to convey a diplomatic message.

The Equestrian Monument to Charles III of Lorraine (1618–1621)

The objects presented in this paper have continued to travel and were recontextualised in gallery displays. Christine's dowry is now partly on display in the Museo degli Argenti, while the paintings she sent for the Cabinet doré are kept in various private collections. The bronze statuette I would like to discuss in my final case study is currently on show in the Musée historique lorrain in Nancy (fig. 1). It is about a meter high and traditionally regarded as a model for the equestrian monument to duke Charles III of Lorraine. We know from some historical sources that such a monument was begun in Nancy in 1621, but abandoned due to the war between France and Lorraine. When France conquered Lorraine in 1633, only the horse was finished, but not its rider. In 1670 the horse was transported to Paris in memory of the French victory and seems to have been destroyed subsequently.²⁵

Due to these events it is not surprising that the statuette in the Musée historique lorrain acquired a special meaning. Charles III,



Fig. 1 Anonymous artist (workshop of Pietro Tacca?), Equestrian statuette, here identified as Henry II of Lorraine, 1618/19. Nancy, Musée historique lorrain

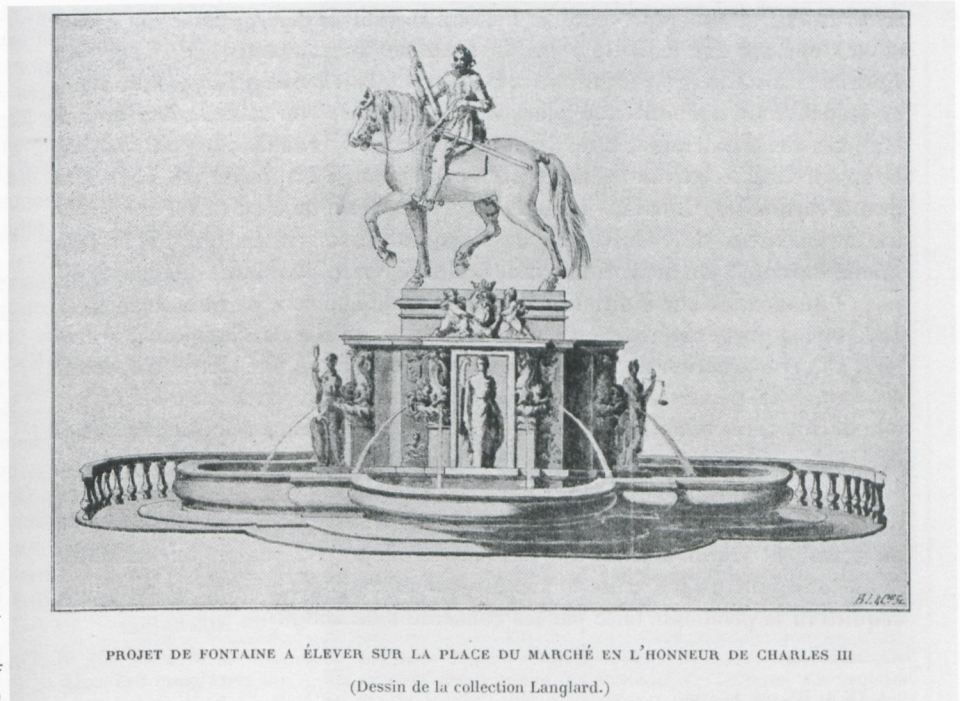


Fig. 2
Anonymous artist, Drawing
recording the intended setting of the
equestrian monument in honour of
Charles III in Nancy, around 1620

the father of Christine of Lorraine, had been a ruler who introduced many reforms and brought about a period of prosperity.²⁶ By identifying the statuette as a model for his lost equestrian statue, it could be considered a record of a particularly glorious phase in the history of Lorraine when this state was still independent from France. Thus the statuette addressed the national pride of the Lorrainers. But was that its original meaning?

As some documents published by Pierre Marot prove, Christine of Lorraine was keen to promote the erection of an equestrian statue honouring her deceased father.²⁷ Her wish was certainly motivated by the two impressive equestrian monuments to Cosimo and Ferdinando de' Medici that counted among the marvels of Florence. From 1614 to 1615 the bronze founder David de Chaligny from Lorraine spent a year in Florence and was able to study these masterworks.²⁸ A letter of 1618 mentions explicitly that both statues were to serve as models for the monument to Charles III.²⁹ Some documents I recently discovered shed more light on this matter.

In October 1618 David de Chaligny requested for his inspiration »un cavallino di bronzo« which was duly dispatched in the beginning of 1619. It was a copy of the monument to Ferdinando I and much smaller than the bronze now kept in Nancy. Considering the size of the statuette sent from Florence in 1619, it can probably be identified with a horse belonging to the Victoria & Albert Museum which featured originally a rider who has been removed.³⁰

A drawing visualizes the intended setting of the equestrian monument in Nancy (fig. 2).³¹ The horse is very similar to the one mounted by Ferdinando de' Medici. However, it differs significantly from the equestrian statuette kept in the Musée historique lorrain (fig. 1). While the horse on the drawing raises its left foreleg, in the statuette the contrapposto of the horse's legs is reversed: The bronze horse in Nancy raises its right foreleg. Therefore it is questionable whether the statuette really served as a model for the planned equestrian monument.

Christine's brother, duke Henry II of Lorraine, hesitated to undertake the costly business of erecting an equestrian statue to his father. Thus Christine's agent in Lorraine suggested to curry favour by sending an equestrian statuette of Henry for his own collection. Christine agreed to the idea and wrote back that she expected a painted portrait of Henry as a model for the statuette. A newly discovered letter informs us that his portrait arrived in Florence by November 1618. It must be the portrait now kept in the Uffizi which is dated by its inscription precisely to 1618 (fig. 3).³²

Both the head and the armour correspond closely to the equestrian statuette in Nancy. Therefore I would like to suggest that the statuette was actually a diplomatic gift sent from Florence to Lorraine and representing Henry II rather than Charles III. Subsequently, due to the exile of the ducal family, the original meaning and function of the statuette was forgotten. In the context of revived nationalist feeling in Lorraine, the statuette was later reinterpreted as a record of the never completed monument to Charles III in order to glorify his reign.

Conclusion

In the end of this paper I would like to return to the four questions raised in the beginning. Firstly: In what ways did women contribute to the processes of cultural transfer? As we have seen, a marriage network forged close contacts between Caterina de' Medici, Christine of Lorraine and Maria de' Medici. The exchange of art objects served to reinforce this politically important network. Christine of Lorraine maintained contacts both with the court of Lorraine (where she was born) and with the court of France (where she grew up). The presents she sent to these courts were meant to further her own political and cultural aims.

This leads us to the second question: What motivated the exchange of art objects? Both Christine's dowry and the paintings for the Cabinet doré were part of a business deal; they served to



Fig. 3 Claude Chaveneau, *Portrait of Henry II of Lorraine*, 1618. Florence, Uffizi

compensate financial obligations. Moreover, they were meant to impress the other court and to leave a lasting memory of the donors and their actions. The objects assembled for Christine's dowry represented the splendour of the French court, while the paintings for the Cabinet doré carried a diplomatic message: Not only did they glorify the Medici dynasty, but they also exhorted the French court to maintain good relations with Florence.

Notes

- 1 Jean Ehrmann: Antoine Caron. Peintre des fêtes et des massacres. Paris 1986, pp. 84–104, fig. 98.
- 2 On the role of women in the processes of cultural transfer see Höfe – Salons – Akademien. Kulturtransfer und Gender im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit. Ed. by Gesa Stedmann/Margarete Zimmermann. Hildesheim 2007. – Grenzüberschreitende Familienbeziehungen. Akteure und Medien des Kulturtransfers in der Frühen Neuzeit. Ed. by Dorothea Nolde/Claudia Opitz. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 2008.
- 3 The art patronage of Christine of Lorraine has never been studied in any detail. Some aspects of the book which I am preparing on this topic are anticipated in Christina Strunck: Christiane von Lothringen, Großherzogin der Toskana (1565–1636). Ein »weiblicher Herkules«. In: Die Frauen des Hauses Medici. Politik, Mäzenatentum, Rollenbilder (1512–1743). Ed. by Christina Strunck. Petersberg 2011, pp. 74–93.
- 4 Christina Strunck: Bilderdiplomatie zwischen Palazzo Vecchio und Palais du Luxembourg. Die Frankreichkontakte Leos X. in Darstellungen des Cinque- und Seicento. In: Der Medici-Papst Leo X. und Frankreich: Politik, Kultur und Familiengeschäfte in der europäischen Renaissance. Ed. by Michael Rohlmann/Götz Tewes. Tübingen 2002, pp. 547–589, esp. 563–565.

In my third case study I have discussed a bilateral exchange. On the one hand a portrait was sent from Lorraine to Florence in order to provide a model for an equestrian statuette; on the other hand two equestrian statuettes were sent from Florence to Lorraine. One of the statuettes was intended as a model for the equestrian monument to Charles III, while the other statuette served as a kind of bribe for Henry II: a gift that should motivate him to finance the large equestrian monument. In this way Christine of Lorraine hoped to stimulate her brother to realize the monument in honour of their father.

The last two questions are best discussed together: How were the travelling objects integrated into their new contexts? And to what extent did the new setting alter their original meaning? Although some objects from Christine's dowry were transformed (for instance, a mirror and a picture frame were turned into reliquaries), most of them remained unchanged. They were not distributed among the various Medici residences, but kept together as a distinct collection. By recontextualising the dowry in a special museum-like setting, the Stanza di Madama, Christine's noble descent from the royal house of France was publicly stressed. Thus her husband Ferdinando de' Medici celebrated his political alliance with France. The portraits of the French queens Caterina and Maria de' Medici displayed next to the entrance of the Stanza di Madama heightened this message still further.

In the case of the Cabinet doré, the new setting altered the original meaning of the paintings significantly. Most of them had been created for other places and did not refer to Maria de' Medici. However, by uniting them in the new context of Maria's audience chamber and by introducing some scenes referring specifically to her, the whole series now became a coherent celebration of the French Medici queen and created a new political Medici cosmos.

My final case study was concerned with the posthumous reinterpretation of a travelling object. In the context of patriotic feeling in Lorraine, the statuette of duke Henry II acquired a new meaning. From the 18th century it was regarded as a model for the monument to Charles III³³ and was thus presented in the Musée historique lorrain as a memorial to a period of particular glory in the history of Lorraine.

Although I have discussed only a few examples for the processes of cultural transfer initiated by Christine of Lorraine, I hope to have shown that the female network had an important share in the exchange of objects between the European courts. By focussing only on male protagonists, there is a danger of overlooking a central part of cultural history.

- 5 Furio Diaz: Il Granducato di Toscana. I Medici. Turin 1987, pp. 285–290.
- 6 Kerrie-rue Michahelles: Apprentissage du mécénat et transmission matrilinéaire du pouvoir. Les enseignements de Catherine de Médicis à sa petite-fille Christine de Lorraine. In: Patronnes et mécènes en France à la Renaissance. Ed. by Kathleen Wilson-Chevalier/Eugénie Pascal. Saint-Étienne 2007, pp. 557–576, esp. 564–566.
- 7 Caterina e Maria de' Medici: donne al potere. Firenze celebra il mito di due regine di Francia. Exhb.cat. Palazzo Strozzi, Florence. Ed. by Clarice Innocenti. Florence 2008, p. 62.
- 8 Pascal-François Bertrand: A New Method of Interpreting the Valois Tapestries, through a History of Catherine de Médicis. In: Studies in the Decorative Arts, 14, 2006/2007, n.1, pp. 27–52. – Caterina e Maria de' Medici 2008 (note 7), p. 59.
- 9 Ferdinando I de' Medici, 1549–1609. Maiestate tantum. Exhb.cat. Museo delle Cappelle Medicee, Florence. Ed. by Monica Bietti/Annunziata Giusti. Livorno 2009, pp. 120–123.
- 10 Collezionismo mediceo e storia artistica, vol. 1: Da Cosimo I a Cosimo II, 1540–1621. Ed. by Paola Barocchi/Giovanna Gaeta Bertelà. Florence 2002, pp. 73, 123–124, 377–382. – Paola Venturilli: Il Tesoro dei Medici al Museo degli Argenti.

- Oggetti preziosi in cristallo e pietre dure nelle collezioni di Palazzo Pitti. Florence 2009, pp. 107–135.
- 11 Giovanna Gaeta Bertelà: La Tribuna di Ferdinando I de' Medici. Inventari 1589–1631. Modena 1997, pp. 77–85.
- 12 Gli Uffizi. Catalogo Generale. Florence 1979, pp. 700–705.
- 13 Detlef Heikamp: Firenze, anno 1600, vista da Filippo Pigafetta. In: Magnificenza alla Corte dei Medici. Arte a Firenze alla fine del Cinquecento. Exhb.cat. Palazzo Pitti, Florence. Milan 1997, pp. 430–437, esp. 436.
- 14 Magnificenza alla Corte 1997 (note 13), pp. 68–69.
- 15 Deborah Marrow: Maria de' Medici and the Decoration of the Luxembourg Palace. In: The Burlington Magazine, 121, 1979, pp. 783–791, esp. 784.
- 16 Anthony Blunt: A series of Paintings illustrating the History of the Medici Family executed for Marie de Médicis. In: The Burlington Magazine, 109, 1967, pp. 492–498, 562–566. – Marrow 1979 (note 15).
- 17 The Coronation is reproduced in Blunt 1967 (note 16), p. 496, fig. 9. Its pictorial model can be found in Ugo Muccini: Pittura, scultura e architettura nel Palazzo Vecchio di Firenze. Florence 1997, illustration on p. 126.
- 18 Caterina e Maria de' Medici 2008 (note 7), pp. 52–55. The paintings measure 234 x 230 cm and 228,5 x 235,5 cm respectively.
- 19 Marie de Médicis, un gouvernement par les arts. Ed. by Paola Bassani Pacht et al. Paris 2003, pp. 183–184, 189. The paintings measure 182 x 233 cm and 182 x 247 cm respectively.
- 20 Un gouvernement par les arts 2003 (note 19), pp. 190–191.
- 21 Fasto di Corte. La decorazione murale nelle residenze dei Medici e dei Lorena, vol. 1: Da Ferdinando I alle Reggenti (1587–1628). Ed. by Mina Gregori. Florence 2005, p. 329, pl. CII.
- 22 Blunt 1967 (note 16), pp. 493–494 («impresa di Bona», «la battaglia delli 8 galeoni del Ser.mo G. D. F(erdinando) con la Carovana di Alissandria»), to be compared with: Pisa dei Cavalieri. Ed. by Clara Baracchini. Milan 1997, pp. 48, 50–51, 54, 57.
- 23 Un gouvernement par les arts 2003 (note 19), pp. 184–188. On the evolution of the pictorial programme see Marrow 1979 (note 15), pp. 787–788.
- 24 The painting of Maria's wedding contains a portrait of its donor, Christine of Lorraine: cfr. Un gouvernement par les arts 2003 (note 19), p. 189.
- 25 Bronzes français de la Renaissance au Siècle des lumières. Exhb.cat. Louvre, Paris. Ed. by Geneviève Bresc-Bautier/Guilhelm Scherf. Paris 2008, pp. 180–181.
- 26 René Taveneaux: Histoire de Nancy. Toulouse 1978. pp. 127–161. – Georges Poull: La Maison ducale de Lorraine devenue la Maison impériale et royale d'Autriche, de Hongrie et de Bohême. Nancy 1991, pp. 210–217. – Edward William Monter: A Bewitched Duchy. Lorraine and its Dukes 1477–1736. Geneva 2007, pp. 59–83.
- 27 Pierre Marot: La statue équestre du Duc Charles III conçue pour la Ville-Neuve de Nancy et son «modèle». In: Le pays lorrain, 54, 1973, pp. 13–32.
- 28 Christina Strunck: How Chrestienne Became Cristina. Political and Cultural Encounters between Tuscany and Lorraine. In: Medici Women as Cultural Mediators (1533–1743). Le donne di casa Medici e il loro ruolo di mediatrici culturali fra le corti d'Europa. Ed. by Christina Strunck. Milan 2011, pp. 149–181, esp. 157.
- 29 Marot (note 27), p. 15.
- 30 Strunck 2011 (note 28), pp. 157–162 (with the relevant illustrations).
- 31 The drawing was first published by Christian Pfister: Histoire de Nancy, vol. 2. Paris/Nancy 1902–1909, Reprint Paris 1974, p. 521. – Marot 1973 (note 27), pp. 22, 23 and note 49.
- 32 Strunck 2011 (note 28), pp. 162–164.
- 33 Marot 1973 (note 27), p. 28.

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