

La Villa Médicis, vol. 4, Le collezioni del cardinale Ferdinando: I dipinti e le sculture.

Alessandro Cecchi and Carlo Gasparri. Rome: École française de Rome, 2009. 543 pp. €90.00. ISBN 978-2-7283-0795-1.

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Almost everybody who has ever climbed the Spanish Steps in Rome will have paused to admire the characteristic two-towered silhouette of the Villa Medici that dominates the Pincio hill in splendid isolation. Quite appropriately, an exhibition dedicated to the villa and its impressive collections bore the title *Il sogno di un cardinale* [A cardinal's dream], edited by Michel Hochmann (Rome: De Luca, 1999). The dignitary in question was Ferdinando de' Medici, who had been raised to the cardinalate in 1563 at the tender age of thirteen. In 1576, he acquired a villa built by Nanni di Baccio Bigio for Cardinal Giovanni Ricci and had it remodeled by Bartolomeo Ammannati and Jacopo Zucchi. For more than two centuries the villa remained in the possession of the Medici and their successors as rulers of Tuscany, the Lorena (house of Lorraine). In 1803, Tuscany and France exchanged their Roman palaces, the Villa Medici and the Palazzo Mancini on the Corso. Since then the villa has been the seat of the Académie de France à Rome.

In the 1980s the academy started an ambitious in-depth study of the structure, which is now finally completed. The publication series "La Villa Médicis," initially directed by André Chastel, consists of five volumes. Volume 1 (1989) offers a precise description and photographic documentation of the building and its surroundings. Volume 2 (1991) contains twenty-seven essays on the history of the site, the construction of the villa, its patrons, the gardens, the interior decoration, and the successive changes that occurred during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In volume 3 (1991) Philippe Morel analyzed the pictorial program of the painted ceilings and friezes created for Cardinal Ferdinando. Volume 5 (2010) consists of 1,154 documents relating to the essays by Suzanne Butters, Elena

Fumagalli, and Sylvie Deswarte-Rosa presented in volume 2.

Volume 4 (2009) is based on the first known inventory of the villa drawn up before 28 February 1588. In October 1587 Ferdinando's brother, Grand Duke Francesco I, had died under mysterious circumstances and the cardinal had taken over the government of Tuscany. Thus the inventory records the state of the villa at the time when Ferdinando left Rome for Florence. It lists the contents of the building room by room and then describes the statues and reliefs on the façades and in the gardens. Alessandro Cecchi has transcribed the document in its entirety, including all items of furniture. This makes the inventory an extremely valuable source not only for archaeologists and art historians, but also for historians of architecture as the objects kept in the villa provide important clues regarding the function of the rooms. The highly detailed index in volume 5 conceived by Suzy Butters adds much to the usefulness of volume 4 as it refers students of material culture to the relevant entries of the document, indexed as no. 798 (*corame, cristallo, damasco, orologi, profumi*, and so on).

"Le collezioni del cardinale Ferdinando" follows the sequence in which the objects are listed in the inventory. Ground plans and sections help the reader to understand the layout of the various apartments. Each room is described on the basis of the inventory with cross-references pointing to the photographs in volume 1. In succinct catalogue entries providing an up-to-date bibliography the antiquities are commented on by Carlo Gasparri, the paintings and modern sculptures by Alessandro Cecchi. Although the collections have long been dispersed, the authors were able to identify many of the more than six hundred items and to trace their transfers within the villa over the centuries. Ferdinando's country retreat is brought back to life by many illustrations of its former holdings. While in volume 2 of the series Cecchi and Gasparri focused on the history of the cardinal's collections, volume 4 offers interesting insights into his criteria of display. For instance, rather strikingly the famous Medici Venus (nowadays the centerpiece of the Uffizi "tribuna") was placed in 1588 in a private chamber that contained not only a bed but also a urinal and a close stool!

During his stays at the villa the cardinal seems to have resided at first in the southern apartment of the *piano nobile*; later on he moved into an apartment above the loggia, which offered a splendid view of the garden. Both apartments contained beds in three successive rooms. This comes unexpectedly, because the documents studied by Patricia Waddy indicate that a typical cardinal's apartment had only one bedroom preceded by several antechambers. According to Waddy, the *zampnaro* (that is, a second, purely representational bed) makes its appearance in Rome only in the mid-seventeenth century (Patricia Waddy, "The Roman Apartment from the Sixteenth to the Seventeenth Century," in *Architecture et vie sociale: L'organisation intérieure des grandes demeures à la fin du moyen âge et à la Renaissance*, ed. Jean Guillaume [Paris: Picard, 1994]: 155–66, esp. 163; eadem, *Seventeenth-Century Roman Palaces: Use and the Art of the Plan* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990]: 3–13). However, in Florence, Ferdinando's father, Duke Cosimo I, had already in 1553 disposed of an apartment with two partly gilt beds presented in successive rooms (Cosimo Conti, *La prima reggia di Cosimo I de' Medici nel palazzo già della Signoria di Firenze, descritta ed illustrata coll'appoggio d'un Inventario inedito del 1553* [1893], 34–35). Therefore, it is likely that Ferdinando introduced and developed a particularly Florentine apartment layout in the eternal city. To a certain degree his rooms behind the center of the garden façade even foreshadowed the layout of Versailles where the owner's bedroom, too, came to occupy the center of the whole building. Another unusual characteristic of the cardinal's dwelling was that neither of his apartments was linked to a chapel. Instead,

as Morel pointed out in volume 3, the ceilings of Ferdinando's rooms were decorated with erotically charged scenes—quite fittingly for “a cardinal's dream.”

