

Españoles en la corte de los Medici: Arquitectura y política en tiempos de Cosimo I.
Carlos Plaza.

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Thanks to Carlos Plaza's imposing volume dedicated to the complex political and cultural relations between Florence and Spain which developed during the governance of Cosimo I de' Medici (1519–74), the subject has now been enriched with a new and important contribution.

Plaza's clearly written and very readable study runs along two lines which correspond to the two parts of the volume. In the first, divided into three chapters, the author gives a general, but not generic, view of a series of subjects making use particularly of the massive available bibliography. From the increasing friendship and reciprocal support between the Medici and the Spanish royal family, Plaza goes on to describe the political alliance established by Cosimo I starting with his strategic marriage to Eleonora de Toledo (1539). As in Florence, so too in the Kingdom of Naples, then governed by the duchesses's father, Don Pedro de Toledo, the arts and especially architecture flourished as a result of a lively program of work intimately connected with current political strategies. As the author makes clear, the question of the suburban villa, whether in Naples or Florence, provided fertile ground for the creation of exemplars with gardens matching those built in the same years in Castile.

The analysis proceeds with an accurate description of the Spanish presence in a series of contexts—commercial, military, cultural, religious, and social—which aims at bringing out the importance of this community in the construction of Medicean Florence. In the final chapter of the first part of the book, Plaza explores the rich relationship between politics and architecture set up by Cosimo I and modeled, as the author argues, on that of Pope Leo X. With a series of economic incentives, the Duke created a network of allies which included numerous Spaniards who, in turn, became patrons of architecture reflecting the political stance of Cosimo himself.

The usefulness of Plaza's great work of synthesis in this first section is clear, but one point should be made. The subjects discussed, though treated with acuity and clarity, are already pretty well known. A more concise treatment of this material would have accentuated the original and unpublished material in the second half to greater advantage.

In the following chapters, in fact, Plaza gets closer to the heart of the matter and analyzes in detail three personalities, chosen from the *gens nova* who enlivened Florence in the second half of the sixteenth century. Antonio Ramirez de Montalvo, the Duke's *primo cameriere*, Fabio Arrazola de Mondragón, Francesco I's favorite, and the merchant Baltasar Suárez de la Concha, the Duke's brother-in-law. Thanks to a minute study of the documents (some of which are fully transcribed in appendix 2), the author reconstructs in exhaustive detail the biographies of the three protagonists, their progressive

entrenchment in Florentine society, and their role as architectural patrons, supported directly by Cosimo I. In fact, the houses of Ramirez de Montalvo in Borgo degli Albizi, and that of Arrazola de Mondragón near Piazza Santa Maria Novella, were designed by Bartolomeo Ammannati, the Duke's favorite architect. But the author of the palace "del Baliato" of Suárez de la Concha on Via Maggio remains unknown. Plaza carefully reconstructs their building histories and goes into the details of their architecture and urban setting; his examination is accompanied by useful ground plans (collected in appendix 3): an operation which lays open the way to new chronological and interpretive research in the future.

In the closing pages, the author returns to the subject of the villa, concentrating on those of Ramirez de Montalvo—the little-known villa at Gavena, that of le Masse at Fiesole, and that at Campi Bisenzio—and on his reform of the castle-palace at Sassetta. Here too, the documents allow Plaza to provide us with a precise, and in part previously unpublished, picture of current research in the Cinquecento relative to the typology of the villa, a theme of prime importance in the Tuscan context.

The volume includes a bibliography of more than 700 items, another indication of the width and depth of research which underpins this excellent book.

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