

The Politics of Water in the Art and Festivals of Medici Florence

From Neptune Fountain to Naumachia

FELICIA M. ELSE



EUROPEAN FESTIVAL STUDIES

1450–1700

ROUTLEDGE

The Politics of Water in the Art and Festivals of Medici Florence

This book tells the story of one dynasty's struggle with water, to control its flow and manage its representation. The role of water in the art and festivals of Cosimo I and his heirs, Francesco I and Ferdinando I de' Medici, informs this richly-illustrated interdisciplinary study. Else draws on a wealth of visual and documentary material to trace how the Medici sought to harness the power of Neptune, whether in the application of his imagery or in the control over waterways and maritime frontiers, as they negotiated a place in the unstable political arena of Europe and competed with foreign powers more versed in maritime traditions and aquatic imagery.

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European Festival Studies: 1450–1700

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The Politics of Water in the Art and Festivals of Medici Florence

From *Neptune Fountain* to
Naumachia

Felicia M. Else

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- 21 Giorgi Vasari (1511–1574), *The Defeat of the Turks at Piombino*, 1563–1565, detail from the ceiling paintings of the Salone dei Cinquecento, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Source: Alinari/Art Resource, NY
- 22 Giorgi Vasari (1511–1574), *Naval Battle between the Florentines and Pisans*, 1563–1565, detail from the ceiling paintings of the Salone dei Cinquecento, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Source: Alinari/Art Resource, NY
- 23 Stoldo (di Gino) Lorenzi, 1534–1583, *Neptune Fountain*, 1565–1568, Boboli Gardens, Florence. Source: Archive Timothy McCarthy/Art Resource, NY.
- 24 Alessandro Allori (1535–1607), *The Pearl Fishers*, 1572, Studiolo of Francesco I, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Source: Alfredo Dagli Orti/Art Resource, NY
- 25 *Water Festival with Marine Monster* (Valois Tapestry showing the 1565 water festival at Bayonne with a giant whale, Neptune and a large tortoise). With portraits of Catherine de' Medici, Henry IV, Margherite of Valois and Charles Duc de Lorraine. From the tapestries of Catherine de' Medici (Valois Tapestries), Brussels, 1573. Uffizi, Florence. Source: Scala/Art Resource, NY
- 26 Bernardo Buontalenti (1536–1608), Grotta del Buontalenti (or Grotta Grande) in the Boboli Gardens. Interior view of the first room. The decorative cycle is based on the alchemic theme of metamorphosis from chaos into harmony. The grotto, commissioned from Francesco I de' Medici, is by Bernardo Buontalenti. The stucco high relief are by Pietro Mati. The frescos are by Bernardino Poccetti, 1583–1593. Mannerist. Boboli Gardens, Florence. Source: © Vanni Archive/Art Resource, NY
- 27 Jacopo Zucchi (c. 1540–1596), *The Treasures of the Sea* (or *Fishing for Coral* or *The Reign of Amphitrite* or *Allegory of the Americas*), oil on copper, c. 1580, Galleria Borghese, Rome. Source: Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività culturali/Art Resource, NY
- 28 Bernardo Buontalenti (1536–1608), costume design for a sea nymph for the fifth *intermezzo* of Girolamo Bargagli's *La Pellegrina* performed for the 1589 wedding of

- Ferdinand I and Christine of Lorraine, 47.9 × 37.9 cm, pen and brown ink, watercolor, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence (Palatina C.B. 3.53, vol. 2, c. 10r). Source: Scala/Art Resource, NY
- 29 The Boboli Garden seen from the Ammannati courtyard, Palazzo Pitti, Florence. Source: Reproduced with the permission of Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali/Raffaello Bencini/Alinari Archives, Florence. Photo: Bencini, Raffaello. Palazzo Pitti, Florence, Italy. Photo credit: Alinari/Art Resource, NY
- 30 Giusto Utens (d. before 1609), belvedere of Pitti Palace and the Boboli Gardens (showing Giambologna's *Fountain of Oceanus* and Ammannati's *Fountain of Juno*), Florence, Italy, from series of lunettes of Tuscan villas, 1599–1602, Museo Storico Topografico Firenze com'era. Source: Scala/Art Resource, NY
- 31 Bartolomeo Ammannati, view of *Neptune* from the *Neptune Fountain*, Piazza della Signoria, Florence. Source: Felicia M. Else
- 32 View from the north showing the east-west alignment of *Neptune's* chariot, Ammannati, *Neptune Fountain*, Piazza della Signoria. Source: Felicia M. Else



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F.M.E.

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Introduction

A visitor to the Florence of the Medici granddukes would have marveled at the wonders of art, nature and engineering he or she encountered. If the visitor was of sufficient social status to be among the courtly entourage of the Medici, there would be an array of elaborate waterworks and shell-encrusted grottoes to enjoy in private villas. If the visitor came during one of the great ceremonial entries or weddings, he or she would have delighted at the sight of chariots bearing ancient gods adorned with bounties of the sea or observed an astounding sight – a battle of Christians against Turks using full-scale ships on an expanse of water *inside* a palace courtyard. In the heart of the city, the visitor would have seen a magnificent public fountain of fresh spring water commanded by what was surely the largest statue of Neptune that he or she had ever seen, even in maritime strongholds like Venice or Genoa. The visitor might never have known that the Medici had been constantly vexed by problems with water.

This book tells the dynamic story of one dynasty's struggle with water, to control its flow and manage its representation. When Duke Cosimo I de' Medici came to power in 1537, Neptune was virtually unknown to the public spaces of Florence – no surprise given the city's inland location. By the time of Granduke Ferdinando I de' Medici's wedding in 1589, the Olympian god of the waters, as well as a whole host of other aquatic mythological deities, had proliferated among the most important courtly and political arenas, including the city hall, gardens and grottoes in and beyond the city, ephemeral decorations and performances for key festival celebrations and the civic heart of Florence itself, the Piazza della Signoria. Neptune came in many shapes, sizes and attitudes – from colossus to coins, dynamic wielder to calming pacifier, symbol of Imperial maritime rule to mock-heroic leader of serenaders on horseback. The introduction of this new iconography to Florence reflected Cosimo's political ambitions and the family's ongoing multi-faceted quest to control waters, be they real or symbolic, inland fresh water or distant salty seas.

The Politics of Water explores the theme of water in art and festivals created for Cosimo I and his heirs, Francesco I and Ferdinando I de' Medici, spanning from 1537 to 1589. As suggested in its sub-title, *From Neptune*

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Fountain to *Naumachia*, the book pivots on two well-known water-related Medici creations: Bartolomeo Ammannati's *Neptune Fountain* (1560–1574), a public fountain commissioned by Cosimo for the Piazza della Signoria that also featured in the 1565 *entrata* of Johanna of Austria, and the naumachia, or naval battle, staged by Ferdinand in the courtyard of the Palazzo Pitti for his marriage to Christine of Lorraine in 1589 (see Plate 1 and Figure 0.1).

The book further analyzes how the Medici progressed from the first water-related initiatives and imagery pioneered by Cosimo to a glorious culmination marking the start of Ferdinand's reign, exemplified by the unprecedented technical and artistic achievement of an *all'antica* naumachia set within a private courtyard. Such endeavors were particularly remarkable for Florence, which, unlike coastal cities such as Genoa and Venice, had no strong tradition of water-related imagery and maritime prowess. For inland Florence, such ambitions required considerable resources as well as an imaginative leap on the part of Cosimo and the artists, writers and engineers who worked for him. The importance of this development to the success if not survival of Medici Florence and Tuscany in the larger political arena cannot be overstated, and it is this belief that underpins the rationale for

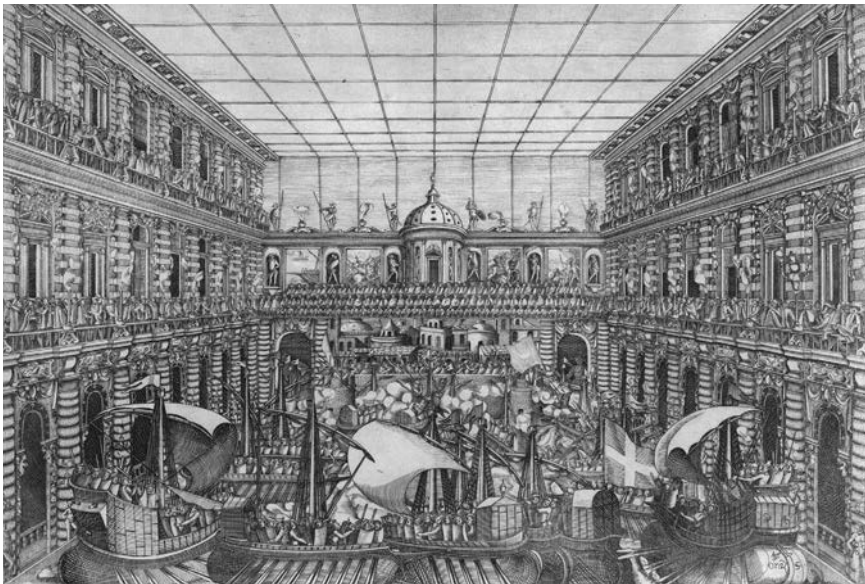


Figure 0.1 Orazio Scarabelli (fl. ca. 1589), *Naumachia in the Courtyard of Palazzo Pitti*, late sixteenth CE, engraving, plate: $9\frac{1}{2} \times 14\frac{1}{2}$ in. (24.5 × 35.8 cm), sheet: $10\frac{1}{4} \times 15\frac{3}{16}$ in. (26.1 × 38.6 cm). Harria Brisbane Dick Fund, 1931 (31.72.5(11)). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Source: Art Resource, NY

this project. As also suggested in the title, water was tied to politics, whether in the form of water-management policies or in the lofty Ancient Imperial vocabulary that proclaimed alliances with powers like the Habsburgs or the Valois. And nowhere was this more vividly showcased than in the realms of art and festivals.

The time is ripe for such a study. Interest in water-related subjects has informed the work of many disciplinary fields, from reconstructing aqueduct systems to the reimagining of a Turkish maritime enemy. Giorgio Spini's foundational *Architettura e politica da Cosimo I a Ferdinando I* (1976) has been particularly influential, not just for the sheer range of valuable historical, urban and archival material but for articulating the specific importance and challenges of *il problema delle acque* for sixteenth-century Tuscany. Spini makes clear the political ramifications behind works of art and architecture, fortification projects, river management schemes, legislation on hunting and fishing, reports on wells and cesspits and the rampant problems of malaria and flooding that plagued Florence and Tuscany in this period.¹ Subsequent studies by Daniela Lamberini, Emanuela Ferretti, Anatole Tchikine and others have furthered our understanding of the complexities of Florence's aqueduct system and of the developments in hydraulics, engineering and river management projects throughout the Tuscan territories during this period.² Ferretti's recent study sees Cosimo's

- 1 The work of Franco Borsi and Leonardo Rombai also discusses the problem of water in the Tuscan region. See Giorgio Spini (ed.), *Architettura e politica da Cosimo I a Ferdinando I* (Florence, 1976); Franco Borsi, *L'architettura del principe* (Florence, 1980); Franco Borsi, *Firenze del Cinquecento* (Rome, 1974) and Leonardo Rombai, 'La "politica delle acque" in Toscana: un profilo storico', in Danilo Barsanti and Leonardo Rombai (eds), *Scienziati idraulici e territorialisti nella Toscana dei Medici e dei Lorena* (Florence, 1994), pp. 1–41.
- 2 Other important publications on the administration and legislation of water management affairs include those by Giovanna Casali, Ester Diana, Luigi Zangheri and Giovanni Pratilli. See Giovanni Casali and Ester Diana, *Bernardo Buontalenti e la burocrazia tecnica nella Toscana Medicea* (Florence, 1983); Giovanni Cascio Pratilli and Luigi Zangheri, *La legislazione Medicea sull'ambiente*, 4 vols (Florence, 1994–1998); Daniela Lamberini, *Il Principe difeso. Vita e opere di Bernardo Puccini* (Florence, 1990); Daniela Lamberini and Maura Tamantini, *Le acque del giardino di Boboli* (Livorno, 2013); Emanuela Ferretti, 'Imminutus crevit'. Il problema della regimazione idraulica dai documenti degli Ufficiali dei Fiumi di Firenze' in Carlo Travaglini (ed.), *La città e il fiume (secoli XIII–XIX)* (Rome, 2008), pp. 105–128; Emanuela Ferretti and Davide Turrini, *Navigare in Arno. Acque, uomini e marmi tra Firenze e il mare in Età Moderna* (Florence, 2010); Emanuela Ferretti, 'Dalle sorgente alle fontane: Cosimo I e 'acquedotto di Firenze', in Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi and Dimitrios Zikos (eds), *L'acqua, la pietra, il fuoco. Bartolomeo Ammannati scultore* (Florence, 2011), pp. 263–275; Emanuela Ferretti, *Acquedotti e fontane del Rinascimento in Toscana: Acqua, architettura e città al tempo di Cosimo I dei Medici* (Florence, 2016) and Anatole Tchikine, 'L'anima del giardino'. Water, Gardens and Hydraulics in Sixteenth-Century Florence and Naples' in Michael G. Lee and Kenneth I. Helphand (eds), *Technology and the Garden (Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture)* (Washington, DC, 2014), pp. 129–153.

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Florence as part of a ‘constellation of interventions’ (‘costellazione d’interventi’) occurring in many centers on the Italian peninsula, in which newly-expanded water-related networks provided the infrastructure for monumental fountains that conveyed messages of political power.³ Two thematic treatments of water and the Medici have also provided useful material and influenced the direction of this research, Suzanne B. Butters’s ‘Princely Waters: An Elemental Look at the Medici Dukes’ (2010) and Cristina Acidini’s *Il mare di Firenze. Arti e collezioni al tempo dei Medici* (2012).⁴

Water has also featured in the abundance of research on individual villas, artworks and fountains commissioned by the Medici – a bibliography too vast to detail here. Garden complexes and collections of art at the Villa Castello, Boboli Gardens at the Pitti Palace and Pratolino have been well documented and continue to be the subject of much ongoing scholarly analysis, restoration and exhibitions.⁵ Art historians have long noted the appearance of Neptunes in various Italian cities in the sixteenth century, and Ammannati’s work has received recent reconsideration by Detlef Heikamp, Henk Th. van Veen and others.⁶ In both art and festivals, mastery

3 Ferretti, *Acquedotti e fontane*, p. 299.

4 Suzanne B. Butters, ‘Princely Waters: An Elemental Look at the Medici Dukes’, in Arturo Calzona and Daniela Lamberini (eds.), *La civiltà delle acque tra medioevo e rinascimento*, (Florence, 2010), vol. 1, pp. 389–411 and Cristina Acidini, *Il mare di Firenze. Arti e collezioni al tempo dei Medici* (Florence, 2012).

5 Only a selection of works will be listed here. See the contributions in Cristina Acidini Luchinat and Elvira Garbero Zorzi (eds), *Boboli 90. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi per salvaguardia e la valorizzazione del giardino* (Florence, 1991), 2 vols; Cristina Acidini Luchinat and Giorgio Galletti, *Le ville e i giardini di Castello e Petraia a Firenze* (Pisa, 1992); Litta Maria Medri (ed.), *Il giardino di Boboli* (Siena, 2003); Luigi Zangheri, *Pratolino, il giardino delle meraviglie*, 2 vols (Florence, 1979); Simonetta Merendoni and Luigi Olivieri (eds), *Pratolino, un mito alle porte di Firenze/Pratolino, a Myth at the Gates of Florence*, trans. Julia Hanna Weiss (Venice, 2008); Bertha Wiles, *The Fountains of Florentine Sculptors* (New York, 1975, reissue of Cambridge, MA, 1933); Claudia Lazzaro, *The Italian Renaissance Garden* (New Haven, CT and London, 1990); Cristina Acidini Luchinat and Maria Sframeli (eds), *Magnificenza alla corte dei Medici. Arte a Firenze alla fine del Cinquecento* (Milan, 1997) and Isabella Lapi Ballerini and Litta Maria Medri (eds), *Artifici d’acque e giardini. La cultura delle grotte e dei ninfei in Italia e in Europa* (Florence, 1999); Cristina Acidini Luchinat et al. (eds), *The Medici, Michelangelo, and the Art of Late Renaissance Florence* (New Haven, CT and London, 2002) and Gabriele Capecchi, Amelio Fara, Detlef Heikamp and Vincenzo Saladino (eds), *Palazzo Pitti. La reggia rivelata* (Florence, 2003).

6 See Sheila Ffolliott, *Civic Sculpture in the Renaissance. Montorsoli’s Fountains at Messina* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1984), pp. 157–161 and 180–183; Luba Freedman, ‘Neptune in Classical and Renaissance Visual Art’, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 2/2 (1995), 219–237; Irving Lavin, ‘Giambologna’s Neptune at the Crossroads’, in Irving Lavin (ed.), *Past-Present. Essays on Historicism in Art from Donatello to Picasso* (Berkeley, CA, 1993), pp. 62–83 and Richard Tuttle, *The Neptune Fountain in Bologna. Bronze, Marble and Water in the Making of a Papal City* (London and Turnhout, Belgium, 2015).

over water took the form of material goods such as shells, pearls, coral and fishes. This period saw remarkable strides in the emerging fields of natural history, including ichthyology (the study of fishes), and this study builds on the research of scholars like Lucia Tongiorgio Tomasi, Francesca Fiorani, Robert LaFrance and Lia Markey on the scientific, medicinal, economic and political aspects behind the Medici interest in collecting wonders of nature.⁷ No study on 'the politics of water' would be complete without a consideration of maritime frontiers and the Medici's place within the Mediterranean. Fernand Braudel's *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1949; revised edn., 1966) remains invaluable for its remarkable geographic and political scope and its study of the great cost and resources involved in galley warfare. Furthermore, like Spini, it provides a crucial reminder of the harsh realities that confronted these societies and, in the case of Medici Florence, a balance to idealized representations widespread in its art and festivals. As we consider the many portrayals of bounties from the land and sea, we should keep in mind Braudel's pointed references to the 'scarcity of fish', widespread floods and malaria, shortages of timber, the ever-present 'fight against the swamps' and 'the traditional wisdom of the old Mediterranean way of life where the meagre resources of the land are added to the meagre resources of the sea'.⁸ More recently,

On Ammannati, see contributions in Niccolò Roselli Del Turco and Federica Salvi (eds), *Bartolomeo Ammannati scultore e architetto, 1511–1592* (Florence, 1995); *L'acqua, la pietra, il fuoco*; Malcolm Campbell, 'Observations on Ammannati's Neptune Fountain: 1565 and 1575', in Andrew Morrogh *et al.* (eds), *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Craig Hugh Smyth*, (Florence, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 113–136 and Henk Th. van Veen, *Cosimo I de' Medici and His Self-Representation in Florentine Art and Culture*, trans. Andrew P. McCormick (Cambridge, U.K., 2006), esp. pp. 103–112.

- 7 Here, too, there is a considerable bibliography and only selected studies are cited below. See E.W. Gudger, 'The Five Great Naturalists of the Sixteenth Century: Belon, Rondelet, Salviani, Gesner and Aldrovandi: a Chapter in the History of Ichthyology', *Isis* 22 (1934), 21–40; Lucia Tongiorgio Tomasi, 'L'immagine naturalistica nelle antiche collezioni degli Uffizi' in Paola Barocchi and Giovanna Ragonieri (eds), *Gli Uffizi: quattro secoli di una galleria. Convegno internazionale di studi, Fonti e documenti* (Florence, 1982), pp. 7–39; Lucia Tongiorgio Tomasi, 'L'Immagine naturalistica a Firenze tra XVI e XVII secolo. Contributo al rapporto "arte-natura" tra manierismo e prima età barocca', in Roberto Paolo Ciardi and Lucia Tongiorgio Tomasi (eds), *Immagini anatomiche e naturalistiche nei disegni degli Uffizi secc. XVI e XVII* (Florence, 1984), pp. 37–67; Robert G. LaFrance, *Bachiacca. Artist of the Medici Court* (Florence, 2008); Francesca Fiorani, *The Marvel of Maps. Art, Cartography and Politics in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven, CT and London, 2005) and Lia Markey, 'The New World in Renaissance Italy: a Vicarious Conquest of Art and Nature at the Medici Court' (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2008).
- 8 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 52–53, 62–68 and 138–145. Similarly influential in the juxtaposition of the harsh realities and idealized art is Suzanne B. Butters, 'Pressed Labor and Pratinolo: Social Imagery and Social Reality at a Medici Garden', in Mirka Beneš and Dianne Harris (eds), *Villas and Gardens in Early Modern Italy and France* (Cambridge, U.K., 2001), pp. 61–87.

engaging narratives by Niccolò Capponi and Roger Crowley have contributed much to our understanding of the details of naval warfare, and studies like those in James G. Harper's edited anthology, *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye, 1450–1750. Visual Imagery before Orientalism* (2011), showcase the multi-faceted and nuanced ways the Ottoman East was perceived by Europeans in this period, offering alternatives to the singular, pejorative view adopted by later 'Orientalist' works.⁹

To this already robust and interdisciplinary matrix, one can add the extraordinary contributions in the field of Festivals research. Descriptions, drawings and archival records relating to the elaborate wedding festivals of Cosimo I, Francesco I and Ferdinando I have been copiously documented by various scholars, including Annamaria Testaverde Matteini, Annamaria Petrioli Tofani, Bonner Mitchell, A.M. Nagler, Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, the European Festival Studies series, the Treasures in Full database of Renaissance Festival Books and many others. The role of festivals in the manifestation of political authority has been explored in great depth and sophistication. Examples range from Roy Strong's treatment of court festivals as 'Renaissance Spectacle and the Theater of Power' to Randolph Starn and Loren Partridge's notion of 'triumphalism' underpinning the rituals of processions like that of the 1565 *entrata* of Johanna of Austria into Florence. Similarly, James Saslow applies the tools of social history to create a 'comprehensive iconology' that shows the political and economic concerns associated with a range of participants involved in Ferdinand's wedding of 1589, treating the 'total celebration as an episode in the creation of material culture'.¹⁰ The links between festivals and political power were

9 See Niccolò Capponi, *Victory of the West. The Great Christian-Muslim Clash at the Battle of Lepanto* (New York, 2007); Roger Crowley, *Empires of the Sea. The Siege of Malta, the Battle of Lepanto, and the Contest for the Center of the World* (New York, 2008), contributions in James G. Harper (ed.), *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye, 1450–1750. Visual Imagery before Orientalism* (Farnham, U.K. and Burlington, VT, 2011) and contributions in Maurizio Arfaio and Marta Carosio (eds), *The Grand Ducal Medici and the Levant. Material Culture, Diplomacy, and Imagery in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Turnhout, 2016).

10 See contributions in Marcello Fagiolo (ed.), *La città effimera e l'universo artificiale del giardino. La Firenze dei Medici e l'Italia del '500* (Rome, 1980); Annamaria Testaverde Matteini, 'La decorazione festiva e l'itinerario di "rifondazione" della città negli ingressi trionfali a Firenze tra XV e XVI secolo (II)', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz* 34 (1990), 165–198; Annamaria Testaverde Matteini, 'L'officina delle nuvole. Il Teatro Mediceo nel 1589 e gli *Intermedi* del Buontalenti nel *Memoriale* di Girolamo Seriacopi', *Musica e Teatro (Quaderni degli amici della Scala)*, 11/12 (1991); Giovanna Gaeta Bertelà and Annamaria Petrioli Tofani (eds), *Feste e apparati medicei da Cosimo I a Cosimo II* (Florence, 1969); Andrew Minor and Bonner Mitchell, *A Renaissance Entertainment. Festivities for the Marriage of Cosimo I, Duke of Florence, in 1539* (Columbia, MO, 1968); Bonner Mitchell, *The Majesty of the State. Triumphal Progresses of Foreign Sovereigns in Renaissance Italy (1494–1600)* (Florence, 1986); A.M. Nagler, *Theatre Festivals of the Medici, 1539–1637* (New Haven, CT and London, 1964);