

LADIES FIRST?  
SOME THOUGHTS ON A TOURNAMENT PRESENTED TO PRINCE  
LADISLAS SIGISMUND (FLORENCE, 10 FEBRUARY 1625)

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**ABSTRACT**

When Prince Ladislas Sigismund of Poland visited Florence in January–February 1625 as part of his Grand Tour, he was presented with a long series of entertainments comprising a *sacra rappresentazione* (Andrea Salvadori's *La regina Sant'Orsola*, with music by various Florentine composers), Ferdinando Saracinelli's *La liberazione di Ruggiero dall'isola di Alcina* (set by Francesca Caccini), and a run of comedies, tournaments, and *balli*. Typically, the Medici involved various leading Florentine patricians in these events. No less typically, these patricians took advantage of the occasion to demonstrate their loyalty to the two Medici women who currently held most power as regents for the young Grand Duke Ferdinando II: his mother, Archduchess Maria Magdalena of Austria (widow of Grand Duke Cosimo II), and grandmother, Grand Duchess Christine of Lorraine (widow of Grand Duke Ferdinando I). One of the entertainments offered to the prince, the tournament *La precedenza delle dame* (text by Andrea Salvadori; music by Jacopo Peri; scenery by Giulio Parigi), might seem to fit the pattern, although it is not quite so straightforward. Moreover, the hitherto unnoticed complexities of handling his visit—the Medici were hosting other distinguished guests as well—prompts careful thought about such entertainments not just as a conventional display of conspicuous consumption, but also as part of an intricate etiquette of diplomatic engagement.

**KEYWORDS**

Prince Ladislas Sigismund; Medici; Florence; festivities; *barriera*; Andrea Salvadori; Jacopo Peri; Giulio Parigi; diplomacy

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Prince Ladislas Sigismund's stay in Tuscany in January–February 1625 has often been discussed as marking a high point in Florentine “court” entertainments in the 1620s.<sup>1</sup> This is especially the case given that the decade has otherwise tended to be viewed (if wrongly) as a rather dismal period by virtue of the fact that the rule of the young Grand Duke Ferdinando II (b. 1610), who was not yet eleven years old when his father died, was under the regency of his mother, Archduchess Maria Magdalena of Austria (widow of Grand Duke Cosimo II), and grandmother, Grand Duchess Christine of Lorraine (see Table 1).<sup>2</sup> The Polish prince was presented with a rich panoply of spectacular performances, including a *sacra rappresentazione*, *La regina Sant’Orsola*, in the Teatro degli Uffizi (28 January), a *balletto rappresentato in musica*, *La liberazione di Ruggiero dall’isola d’Alcina*, plus a *balletto a cavallo* in the Medici Villa del Poggio Imperiale (3 February), and a *barriera* in the Casino di San Marco, the Florentine residence of one of the grand duke’s uncles, Cardinal Carlo de’ Medici (10 February). Given that this was Carnival, Prince Ladislas was also treated to the standard civic entertainments (three *calcio* matches in Piazza Santa Croce), in addition to more private ones in the principal Medici palace in Florence, the Pitti (typically, *commedie all’improvviso*), hunting of various kinds (birds, hares, wild boar, etc.), and evening *festini* in the houses of various Florentine patricians, as well as maritime exercises during his subsequent visit to Pisa and Livorno. Clearly the Medici regents and their advisors were pulling out all the stops, in part to motivate further the prince’s campaigns against the Ottoman Empire, but also because Maria Magdalena was hoping (albeit in vain) to engineer his marriage to her daughter, Margherita, even though she was already promised to Duke Odoardo Farnese of Parma.

These entertainments have attracted significant scholarly attention, not just because they included what has been called the first “opera” by a woman composer (Francesca Caccini’s *La liberazione di Ruggiero*), but also given that they needed to engage with the somewhat unusual circumstance of a state currently in the hands of two powerful women, meaning that their content had to celebrate the manifold abilities of female rulers in matters of good government. Less covered in the literature, however, is the fact that the prince’s visit was an organizational *tour de force* on the part of the court administration as documented by the grand duke’s *aiutante di camera*, Cesare Tinghi. From July 1600 until his death in April 1626, Tinghi produced three manuscript volumes of what he styled (in the third, begun on 11 November 1623) a

<sup>1</sup> See Kelley Harness, *Echoes of Women’s Voices: Music, Art, and Female Patronage in Early Modern Florence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 79–99, 152–62; Suzanne Cusick, *Francesca Caccini at the Medici Court: Music and the Circulation of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 191–246. I rely significantly on both these texts, also for the more general historical circumstances outlined here. In addition, I am grateful to Maddalena Bonechi, Antonella D’Ovidio, Francesca Fantappiè, and Iain Fenlon for their comments on a draft of this text. All dates are given in modern style, not *stile fiorentino* (where the year began on 25 March).

<sup>2</sup> Grand Duke Cosimo II originally designated as regents Maria Magdalena and his eldest surviving brother, Cardinal Carlo de’ Medici, but he replaced the cardinal with his mother in a codicil to his will. The two regents were also advised by a council made up of prominent Florentines; see Assunta Petrosillo, *Maria Maddalena d’Austria: una figlia dell’Impero nella Firenze medicea* (Naples: Guida Editori, 2018), 93.

Table 1: An outline genealogy of the Medici family

**Ferdinando I** (1549–1609; *r.* 1587–), *m.* (1589) Christine of Lorraine (1565–1637)

- **Cosimo II** (1590–1621; *r.* 1609–), *m.* (1608) Archduchess Maria Magdalena of Austria (1587–1631)
  - Maria Cristina (1609–1632)
  - **Ferdinando II** (1610–1670; *r.* 1621–), *m.* (1633) Vittoria Della Rovere (1622–1695)
    - Giovanni Carlo (Giancarlo; 1611–1663), Cardinal (1644)
    - Margherita (1612–1679), *m.* (1628) Odoardo Farnese, Duke of Parma (1612–1646)
    - Mattias (1613–1667)
    - Francesco (1614–1634)
    - Anna (1616–1676), *m.* (1646) Archduke Ferdinand Karl of Austria (1628–62)
    - Leopoldo (1617–1675), Cardinal (1667)
- Eleonora (1591–1617)
- Caterina (1593–1629), *m.* (1617) Ferdinando I Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua (1587–1626)
- Francesco (1594–1614), Prince of Capistrano
- Carlo (1596–1666), Cardinal (1615)
- Filippo (1598–1602)
- Lorenzo (1599–1648)
- Maria Maddalena (1600–1633)
- Claudia (1604–48), *m.* (1621) Federigo Della Rovere, Duke of Urbino (1605–1623); *m.* (1626) Archduke Leopold of Austria (1604–1648)

diary . . . of all the days in which His Most Serene Highness will go to Mass with the Papal Nuncio and with the resident ambassadors to His Most Serene Highness, and when with the Most Serene Archduchess and with the Lord Princes his brothers, and when with foreign princes; and of all the foreign guests which His Most Serene Highness will accommodate and by whom they will be handled and served; and of all the gifts which His Most Serene Highness will give and will have given; and of all the hunts which His Most Serene Highness will undertake and will have undertaken; and of all the public matters in which His Most Serene Highness will engage; and of all those things which happen from day to day which will concern the service of His Most Serene Highness; and of all the campaigns done, and booty gained, by the galleys and vessels of His Most Serene Highness and of the Knights of St. Stephen; and of all those things which I will know.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Angelo Solerti, *Musica, ballo e drammatica alla corte medicea dal 1600 al 1637: notizie tratte da un diario con appendice di testi inediti e rari* (Florence: R. Bemporad & Figlio, 1905; repr. New York: Broude, 1968; repr. Bologna: Forni, 1989), xii–xiii. Tinghi's *diario* is an official chronicle rather than a personal diary. His involvement in its third volume (Florence, Archivio di Stato, Miscellanea Medicea 11) ceased around the end of January 1626, when he fell ill prior to his death; it was continued by his successors in a more sporadic fashion until 1644. The position of



1. Jacopo Ligozzi (?), *Maria Maddalena, Grand-Duchess of Tuscany (1589–1631), with her Eldest Son Grand-Duke Ferdinand II (1610–1670), and Youngest Daughter Anna de' Medici, later Archduchess of the Tyrol (1616–1676)*. The National Trust Collections (Oxburgh Hall). Photo: © National Trust Images.

But despite the apparent singular focus of Tinghi's title on "His Most Serene Highness," the circumstances of the regency forced a more nuanced terminology upon him, with "Sua Altezza Serenissima" (Grand Duke Ferdinando II), "Loro Altezze Serenissime" (normally the grand duke and his mother, Archduchess Maria Magdalena), and "Madama Serenissima" (Grand Duchess Christine). Tinghi tended to keep "Madama Serenissima" separate from the closer "family" unit represented by "Loro Altezze Serenissime" and the grand duke's siblings, including his four

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*aiutante di camera* was somewhat similar to what in the English royal household was called a "yeoman of the privy chamber," i.e., one of a group of non-noble attendants granted (highly prized) access to, and performing a range of personal services for, the ruler. Tinghi had a salary of 8 *scudi* per month, which places him midway between the lower-level servants and the grand duke's noble *camerieri* (in effect, gentlemen of the privy chamber).