

Engendering *Pietas Austriaca*

The Villa Poggio Imperiale in Florence under Maria Maddalena of Austria*

Ilaria Hoppe (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

The magnificent decoration of the Villa Poggio Imperiale in Florence long made it one of the city's most important attractions. When it ceased to serve as an aristocratic residence in the nineteenth century, the villa and its history gradually began to sink into oblivion. This is equally true of Archduchess Maria Maddalena of Austria, Grand Duchess of Tuscany, the originator of the commission to redesign the villa at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Researchers have long neglected this historical figure because her pious religiosity did not appear to fit in with the image of the Medici as seemingly enlightened Renaissance rulers. Gaetano Pieraccini, one of the most influential biographers of the family, described her as a religious zealot, egoistical, and lacking in intellect and culture, and this led her to be ignored both as a patron and politician.¹ The shift in the historical assessment of the Catholic Reform and research into women's participation in it, have led to an entirely new perspective upon the biography of Maria Maddalena.² It was precisely her religiousness that proved to be the key to understanding the function and decoration of Poggio Imperiale as an impressive setting for court activity, where, in keeping with a modern understanding, secular and sacred as well as private and public spheres constantly informed one another.³

Between 1621 and 1624 Archduchess Maria Maddalena of Austria commissioned the edifice formerly known as Villa Baroncelli to be largely rebuilt for the first time.⁴ Work began following the death of her husband Grand Duke Cosimo II de' Medici in 1621, when she became regent in the name of her under-age son, Ferdinando II de' Medici—together with her mother-in-law, Grand Duchess Christine of Lorraine, and a four-member Florentine council. Although the young grand duke was immediately formally enthroned, these two women actively managed the affairs of State until he turned eighteen in 1628.⁵ Within this constellation, Grand Duchess Christine remained very influential, even after the death of her son;⁶ however, her daughter-in-law managed to commandingly stage the regency in the interest of herself and Ferdinando II by means of the arts and an ingenious ceremonial.

Location and architecture of Poggio Imperiale

The location of Poggio Imperiale already suggests that the villa was not only a place for relaxation, but also a setting for the regent's political activities. Through the purchase of further estates, the

property came to reach all the way to the Boboli Gardens and thus to the primary residence of the Medici, the Palazzo Pitti (fig. 1).⁷ The acquired properties also permitted the court architect, Giulio Parigi, to install a monumental, steeply inclined avenue, which is still preserved today, and is situated at right angles to the grand *viale* of the Boboli Gardens. A symbolic relationship between the residences was thus established by means of these axes, which both open onto the Piazza di Porta Romana. There must also have been other routes connecting the two estates, because the court chronicle of Cesare Tinghi relates that a guest of the regent made his way incognito from Poggio Imperiale via the Boboli Gardens and the Corridoio Vasariano to his guest quarters in the Palazzo Vecchio, the former seat of the Medici on the other side of the Arno.⁸ This reveals that the seat of the Medici and the regent's power stretched across the city. Although Poggio Imperiale suggests a reclusive *villa suburbana* on the hill of Arcetri, it was nonetheless linked to the official government buildings of the Medici in various ways.



Fig. 1 Location of the Villa Poggio Imperiale in Florence.

The building itself has undergone several campaigns of remodelling that have altered its appearance completely. With the aid of historical *vedute* and previously neglected source material, the reconstruction of the villa under the patronage of the regent has become possible. The imperial double-headed eagle and the combined coat of arms of the Medici-Habsburg alliance, found in a sculptural ensemble at the foot of the hill, already set the stage for entrance into the realm of Maria Maddalena (fig. 2).⁹ The sometimes more and sometimes less subtle play with references to both dynasties is set forth in the design of the facade and in the name of the villa. Alfonso Parigi, the son of the court architect Giulio, created an illustration for the libretto of the 1625 performance of *La liberazione di Ruggiero dall'isola di Alcina* in honour of Wladyslaw of Poland, son of King Sigismund III and nephew of the regent: this image provides the essential source for reconstructing the state of the façade at that point in time (fig. 3).¹⁰ The more or less nondescript fifteenth-century villa had

been transformed into a modern, early Baroque estate with *cour d'honneur* and belvedere. The understated articulation of the façade, with bands along the boundaries and openings of the walls, is consistent with the architectural tradition of Medicean villas and signals their ownership even at a considerable distance. Nonetheless, the monumental coat of arms and inscription over the portal clearly identify the owner of the residence. This is made apparent through the use of the double coat of arms and the inscription, which is still known today and which links the villa topos with a dedication: 'Let the imperial villa, which was given its name by the exalted Austrians, eternally serve the otium and pleasure of the future Grand Duchesses of Etruria.'¹¹ After construction was completed in 1624, the regent rechristened the former Villa Baroncelli as Poggio Imperiale (imperial seat) by means of an irreversible edict—and thus provided a further reference to her lineage.¹² While it is true that Maria Maddalena came from a cadet branch of the Habsburgs which was resident in Graz, it was this line that provided the emperor after 1619, when her brother Ferdinand II was elected. The result was a direct link to the royal house of the emperor: alongside religious motifs, imperial iconography was one of the key elements in the archduchess's self-presentation at Poggio Imperiale.

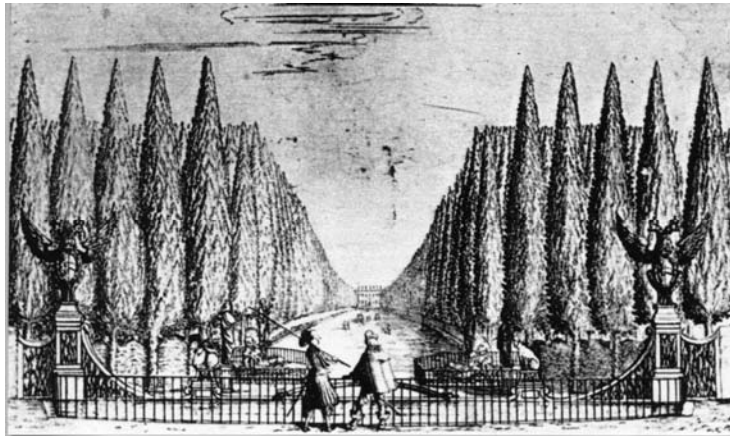


Fig. 2 Marco Credo and Francesco de' Cocchi, Former entrance to Villa Poggio Imperiale, Florence, Biblioteca Marucelliana, 1652.

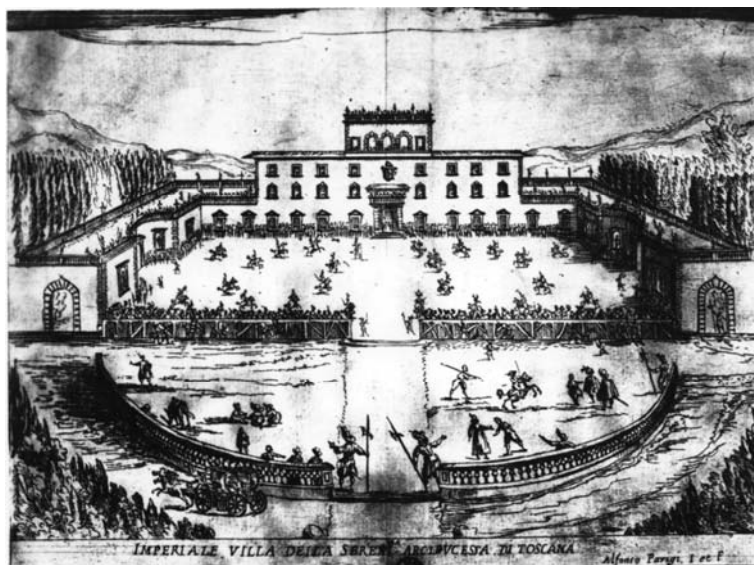
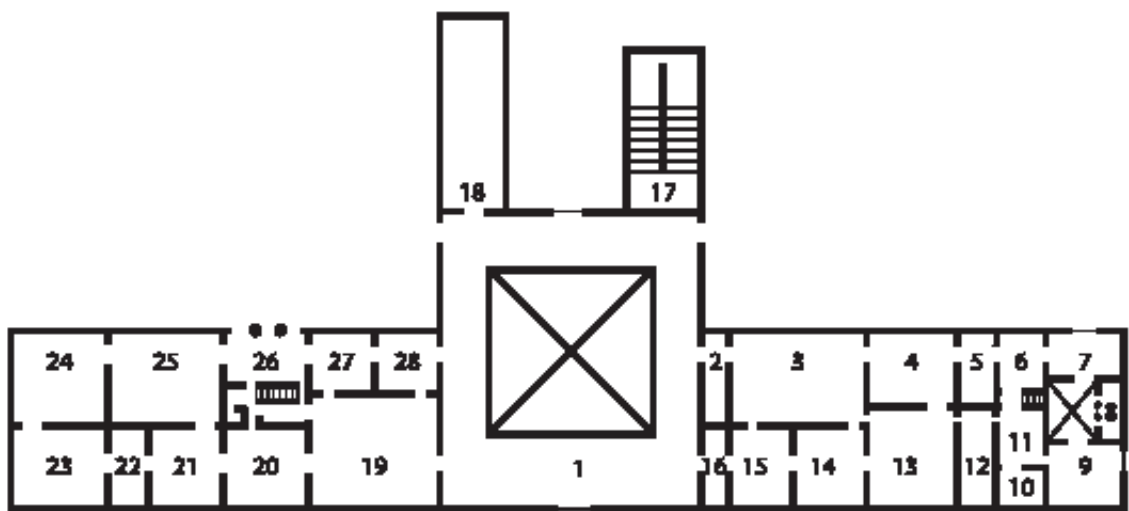


Fig. 3 Alfonso Parigi, Villa Poggio Imperiale, Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e stampe, Uffizi, 1625 (Soprintendenza per i beni ambientali e architettonici, Gabinetto fotografico, Palazzo Pitti).

The rooms and their decoration

My analysis of Cesare Tinghi's court chronicle and the 1625 inventory of the villa made it possible to reconstruct the rooms and their decoration and to re-establish the nature of their original functions.¹³ The inventory lists a large number of paintings on the walls of the interior courtyard surrounded by loggias (fig. 4, no. 1): these consist primarily of still lifes and animal paintings, in keeping with the ideal of the *vita rustica*. There were also sculptures and ancient busts of Roman emperors and empresses, which were set on pedestals bearing the Habsburg coat of arms.¹⁴ Several of these busts have been preserved *in situ*; however, their bases are from a later phase in the palace's decoration (fig. 5). The series originally continued on both into the hall of the ground floor (fig. 4, no. 3) and into the gallery that surrounded the courtyard at the level of the upper storey.¹⁵



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|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1 Inner courtyard | 15 Antechamber of Ferdinando II |
| 2 Vestibule | 16 Vestibule |
| 3 Hall | 17 Main staircase |
| 4 Bedchamber of the archduchess | 18 Sports hall |
| 5 Cabinet | 19 Hall of the guest apartment |
| 6 Cabinet / Oratory after 1631 | 20 First chamber of the guest apartment |
| 7 Volticina | 21 Second chamber of the guest apartment |
| 8 Inner courtyard with grotto | 22 Third chamber of the guest apartment |
| 9 Chapel | 23 Forth chamber of the guest apartment |
| 10 Bath and stufa | 24 First chamber towards the new garden |
| 11 Stanzino dipinto | 25 Second chamber towards the new garden |
| 12 Camerino | 26 Loggia |
| 13 Antechamber of the archduchess | 27 First chamber of Don Lorenzo de'Medici |
| 14 Bedchamber of Ferdinando II | 28 Second chamber of Don Lorenzo de'Medici |

Fig. 4 Villa Poggio Imperiale, Florence, Ground-floor plan, reconstruction of 1625.



Fig. 5 Villa Poggio Imperiale, Florence. Photograph of the present state of the Inner courtyard (Soprintendenza per i beni ambientali e architettonici, Gabinetto fotografico, Palazzo Pitti).

The rooms of Ferdinando II de' Medici

The apartments of Maria Maddalena and her son Ferdinando extended to the right of the courtyard, with the apartment of the latter consisting only of an antechamber and bedchamber (fig. 4, nos. 14 and 15). His rooms were provided with an official character primarily through the frescoes of the lunettes and the ceiling, which were executed by various Florentine painters.¹⁶ They depict the heroic deeds of Habsburg emperors—the male ancestors of his mother. As in all of the other rooms, every scene is linked to a personified virtue and to an inscription, which historically and allegorically convey the significance of the depicted narrative. Chronologically, the genealogical sequence begins in the former bedchamber (fig. 4, no. 14) with the fresco by Matteo Rosselli representing the founding myth of the Habsburg dynasty: the *Legend of Rudolph I and the Priest* (fig. 15). The other images depict the *Barons' Oath of Allegiance to Rudolph I*, who is addressed here as emperor, and the deeds of Emperor Maximilian I (*The Sentencing of Hans Pienzenauer in 1504* and *Maximilian I at Battle*). In the former antechamber of the young grand duke (fig. 4, no. 15), two lunettes are devoted to the victories of Charles V over the Turks (*Siege of Vienna in 1529* and *Conquest of Tunis*) and two further images depict the famous deeds of Emperor Ferdinand II, brother of the regent and namesake of her son Ferdinando II. Each of these frescoes takes a current political event as its theme: the Battle of the White Mountain, fought near Prague in 1620, and the expulsion of the Protestants from Inner Austria during the forcible re-Catholicizing of this territory through Archduke Ferdinand, beginning in 1596 (fig. 6). Featuring themes that are unique in the history of Italian art, the sequence of Habsburg emperors presents the young grand duke and heir to the throne with a

dynastic-genealogical mirror for princes; however, it is unconventionally based not on his agnatic lineage, but on the house of his mother, which was far superior to that of the Medici in terms of dynastic rank. The scenes illustrate essential virtues of male rulers—such as military success—in combination with *Pietas Austriaca*, the typically Habsburg piety that is explicitly thematized here through the *Pietas Eucharistica* of Rudolph I and through the *Fiducem in crucem Christi* of Emperor Ferdinand II.¹⁷



Fig. 6 Matteo Rosselli and Michelangelo Cinganelli, Archduke Ferdinand banishes the Protestants, Florence, Villa Poggio Imperiale, former antechamber of Ferdinand, 1623-24.

The chambers of Maria Maddalena of Austria

All of the other rooms in this wing were for the use of the regent Maria Maddalena. With their fresco programme of ‘famous women’, the hall, antechamber, and bedchamber (fig. 4, nos. 3, 4 and 13) form a pendant to the decoration of her son’s rooms.¹⁸ The long and exemplary tradition of female Christian rulers of the empire is displayed in the hall (fig. 4, no. 3): alongside *Matilda of Tuscany*, conceptual predecessor of Maria Maddalena as regent of Tuscany, we find the first two female regents of the Eastern and Western Roman empires, *Galla Placidia* and *Pulcheria* (fig. 7). With the exception of St Catherine of Alexandria, who serves as a female exemplum for the teachings of the Church (*dottrina*) and apostolic activity, every other heroine depicted in the hall can be traced back to either the real or the fictive genealogy of the Habsburgs. This may easily be recognized in the case of Isabella the Catholic, who presents Christopher Columbus with his commander’s baton, or Isabella of Portugal, whose canonization had received the personal support of the regent and her sister Margaret of Austria, Queen of Spain.¹⁹ Constance of Aragon and the Holy Roman Empress St Cunigunde were two equally renowned female ancestors; they are each flanked by *putti* with armour, which make reference to the legend of the origins of the Habsburg coat of arms during the third crusade and emphasize the dynastic context (fig. 8).²⁰ My research has also revealed that the

collective vita *De Claris mulieribus domus Habsburgicae*, written by Jakob Mennel during the reign of Emperor Maximilian I, begins with Clotilde ‘as a grandmother of the Habsburg rulers’²¹—thus providing an explanation for the presence of the first Christian queen of France in the Poggio Imperiale gallery of heroines. This is also true of St Ursula, another aristocratic saint appropriated by the Habsburgs.²² The genealogical construct was surely the main reason why a theatrical presentation of the life of the saint was performed in the Uffizi during the 1624 visit of Archduke Karl, Maria Maddalena’s brother, and the 1625 visit of Wladyslaw, her Polish nephew.²³ On the stage, as in the fresco, the regent’s female forebear was presented as a model of piety and self-sacrifice, who triumphed over the enemies of Christianity through the power of her faith.



Fig. 7 Matteo Rosselli, Matilda of Tuscany and Galla Placidia, Florence, Hall of Villa Poggio Imperiale, 1624.



Fig. 8 Filippo Tarchiani, Constance of Aragon, Florence, Hall of Villa Poggio Imperiale, 1624.

On the whole, the exemplary figures of the hall indicate both the legitimate succession of female sovereigns in the Holy Roman Empire and the positive effects of their rule upon the well-being of their subjects—through both their legacies and their piety. They are a part of the Habsburg construct of a *stirps regia et beata*: presented as predestined to rule on the basis of divine right.²⁴ Furthermore, the selection of heroines succeeds in adeptly shifting between a dynastic genealogy and one based on salvation history, between militant and pious heroines that illustrate a great

number of rulers' virtues in combination with desirable feminine attributes, such as modesty and beauty.



Fig. 9 Matteo Rosselli, *Semiramis*, Florence, Villa della Petraia, 1623 (Soprintendenza polo museale fiorentino).

This balance between behaviour conforming to and transgressing gender discourse equally applies to the four large-format paintings featuring antique heroines, which were also included in the decoration of the hall. *Semiramis* (fig. 9), *Lucretia*, *Artemisia* and *Sophonisba* form an independent group within the programme of 'famous women', which is otherwise organized according to epochs of salvation history.²⁵ On the one hand, they represent the virtues of marital fidelity and of self-sacrifice for the sake of the interests of the state; on the other, they are exemplary regents who—as in the case of *Semiramis*—could also exhibit militant qualities. Through the alternation in composition and narrative, the images deal with gender discourse and the question of power. The paintings display positive examples of female rulers; however, it is always only in situations of crisis that they intervene for the well-being of their subjects, and they do not fundamentally call the gender order into question.

A depiction of the emperor's and grand duke's crowns are also included in the decoration of the hall, as well as an allegory of government on the central ceiling panel, which, according to my interpretation, represents the virtue of *fortitudo*, accompanied by the attributes of imperial and papal power (fig. 10).²⁶ These images depict an association of secular and sacred power united in the ideals of rule by divine right and universal monarchy, and this proves defining for the entire programme: at Poggio Imperiale, the subject of 'famous women and men' is linked both to the *translatio imperii*, claimed by the Habsburgs, and to the *Pietas Austriaca*, the topical sacralization of the dynasty.



Fig. 10 Filippo Tarchiani, Ceiling fresco with Fortitudo, Florence, Hall of Villa Poggio Imperiale, 1623-24.

The programme is continued in the former antechamber of the regent's apartments (fig. 4, no. 13) with Old Testament heroines who intervened as champions of God on behalf of their people, such as Judith, Jael and Esther, or who ensured a legitimate succession with the help of divine providence, such as Rebecca or the daughter of Pharaoh.²⁷ Advancing to the next level of typological status, the former bedchamber of Maria Maddalena (fig. 4, no. 4) depicts early Christian virgin martyrs.²⁸ The only exception is provided by the image of the finding of the True Cross by St Helena, another canonized female ruler to be appropriated for the House of Habsburg (fig. 11).²⁹ The virgin martyrs provided the widow regent with a desexualized life model for her bedchamber—one that permitted her to compensate for the absence of masculine reproduction and control. The narratives could also provide a stimulus to religious meditation, as suggested by the martyrology that Niccolò Lorini dedicated to Maria Maddalena, which includes detailed discussions of all the saints in the frescoes.³⁰ They also function as typological figurations of Christ: the depicted martyrdoms make them a part of salvation history and thus point to the salvation through the passion of Christ. The St Helena fresco thus establishes a dynastic and theological link that communicates the special significance of the True Cross for the Habsburgs.³¹ Maria Maddalena also linked this significance very concretely to her own person: in 1616, she discovered an ostensible relic of the True Cross in Impruneta and donated a precious reliquary to house it.³² Beyond the elevation of her own status, her identification with this historical figure also involved the rule of St Helena's son: Constantine, the first Christian emperor, also provided an allusion related to the young Ferdinando II de' Medici.

Finally, as a Christian empress and saint, Helena provided the thematic link to the female rulers of the hall, permitting the entire programme to function as a timeless cycle of salvation history.



Fig. 11 Domenico Pugliani, *The Finding of the True Cross by St Helena*, Florence, Villa Poggio Imperiale, former bedchamber of Maria Maddalena of Austria, 1623-24.

Until now, the decoration of the rooms of mother and son have always been considered separately, without taking into account the rooms' functional roles or the relevance of Poggio Imperiale as the residence of the head of state during the regency. It is only by viewing them in combination and by tracing the female figures' association with the genealogy of the female head of the household that we can recognize the link to the male genealogy—which, for its part, also emphatically presents the high birth of Maria Maddalena and claims it for her son. Although the technique of fresco painting and the illustration of heroic deeds in narrative scenes are deeply rooted in Florentine artistic tradition, the cycle's content differs profoundly from the dynastic cycles of the Medici, for example, in the Palazzo Vecchio or the Casino Mediceo, where only the male members of the relatively young dynasty are represented.³³ The programme in Poggio Imperiale emphasizes the ancientness of the lineage, its sacralization through the saints it includes, and its constant dedication to the support of the Catholic faith and a united empire. The Medici's efforts focused more on compensating for their lowly dynastic rank by means of motifs related to their achievement of nobility through virtue and to *arma et litterae*: a programme of this type was also realized in the villa.

The 'Volticina' and other rooms

In memory of her deceased husband, Maria Maddalena commissioned the decoration of a gallery with access to the garden: its vaulted ceiling, the source of the name 'Volticina', depicts the diplomatic and military successes of Grand Duke Cosimo II (fig. 4, no. 7).³⁴ As in an ancient pantheon of great men, the room's decoration included eight statues placed in niches and an abundance of art objects. This classicizing character continues in the adjacent, small interior court, which includes a grotto (fig. 4, no. 8) where additional antique pieces were displayed. A chapel with a secret exit (fig. 4, no. 9) also belonged to the ground-floor apartments of the regent and her son. The presence of

Jacopo Ligozzi's panel painting of the *St Francis receiving the divine enfant from the Madonna* (Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina) in the chapel is documented. The smaller rooms located behind the chapel were reserved for more intimate purposes. The stairs led to the mezzanine and to a so called 'secret room' of the regent, mentioned as such in the inventory and which featured a collection of miniature sculpture, objects of precious materials, sea shells and corals etc.³⁵ The presence of a Bible in an elaborate shelf within this tiny art chamber and cabinet of wonder is again a clear sign of the great piety of the regent.



Fig. 12 Ottavio Vannini and others, Volticina, Ceiling fresco with the deeds of Cosimo II de' Medici, Florence, Villa Poggio Imperiale, 1623/24.

The opposite wing (fig. 4, nos. 19–28) was reserved for guests; its hall was decorated with portraits of the family of Maria Maddalena and with history paintings.³⁶ The disposition of the rooms of the first storey corresponded to that of the level below. An additional gallery, with busts of emperors and portraits of rulers from the houses of Medici and Habsburg, surrounded the interior courtyard. As on the ground floor, this led to a suite for mother and son and an additional chapel; the opposite side housed an apartment for the co-regent, the Grand Duchess Christine of Lorraine.³⁷ Here again, the inventory documents an abundance of paintings. It remains unclear whether or not there were frescoes here, because the first storey was heavily altered at a later point in time. The second storey contained the rooms of the heir to the throne's siblings and of other members of the entourage.³⁸



Fig. 13 Justus Sustermans, Maria Maddalena of Austria as St Mary Magdalene, Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina, before 1625.

The collection

Particularly on the ground floor, but elsewhere as well, the rooms of Poggio Imperiale were decorated with a luxurious and diverse array of artworks.³⁹ To this purpose, the regent had whole series of paintings from the collections of the Medici transferred to Poggio Imperiale, purchased a great number of works through agents, and also commissioned new works herself.⁴⁰ Images of her name saint, Mary Magdalene, were clearly emphasized in the collection and were spread throughout the entire house, marking the sovereign territory of the archduchess like a system of signs. She even had herself painted by Justus Sustermans in the garments of the penitent hermit (fig. 13).⁴¹ The paraphernalia of asceticism and meditation are depicted plainly. The archduchess publicly presented her inner piety in this religious ideal portrait which identified her with her name saint, merging the images of ruler and saint. The description in the inventory makes it possible to situate this painting in the midst of the dynastic portrait gallery of the first storey.⁴² Placement and theme make Maria

Maddalena's self-concept as *holy ruler* clear: this is bluntly displayed and thus becomes capable of fulfilling a political purpose as well.⁴³ Through the sacralization of her body, here given direct visual expression, the regent legitimates her rule—which was far from uncontroversial—by pointing to her piety and divine calling.⁴⁴ The cycle of frescoes has already proved to be a gendered formulation of the *Pietas Austriaca* and its most important characteristics: the *Pietas Eucharistica*, the *Fiducem in crucem Christi*, and the veneration of the saints—particularly those of the fictive genealogy of the Habsburgs. Only the *Pietas Mariana* is absent. Instead, the regent instigated a '*Pietas Maria Magdalena*' and embodied saint and ruler in personal union. This personalized cult was, furthermore, easily associated with the local veneration of Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi, a Florentine mystic whose canonization was strongly supported by the Medici and the archduchess herself.⁴⁵

Poggio Imperiale as residence of the regent

The regent thus spared neither expense nor effort in decorating her *villa suburbana* until it could stand comparison with contemporary Medici building complexes. It was certainly true that Poggio Imperiale also served her, her entourage, and her guests for the enjoyment of rustic pleasures, just as promised by the dedication: local peasant girls were invited to dance, and hunts and outings on horseback were organized.⁴⁶ In addition, smaller parties were entertained by means of chamber music or performances by Maria Maddalena's children. Several accounts of guests being given tours through the house have also been preserved. The opera performance mentioned above was among the larger events, during which the entire luxuriously decorated villa was opened to a courtly public. Religious festivals, for example, the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1625, were also to be counted among such events.⁴⁷ For this occasion, the palace façade was adorned with tapestries, paintings, and festoons. At the entrance to the space before the palace there were two fountains with ice-chilled red wine flowing out of them. An altar with a baldachin—and adorned with golden vessels, candelabra, and flowers—had been set up in the interior courtyard. To conclude the festivities, a solemn procession carried the baldachin to a nearby church, where a mass was attended.

These examples demonstrate that numerous important social events took place at Poggio Imperiale during the years of the regency. While it is true that the Palazzo Pitti officially remained the main residence of Grand Duke Ferdinando II, who had already been formally enthroned, the regent adeptly used diverse activities to attract the attention of the court and its guests to her *villa suburbana*, which thus took on the role of a residence. All persons of rank who visited Florence at that time were received by Maria Maddalena there. Repeated descriptions in the court chronicle make it clear that the reception ceremonies conducted by their highnesses always began in the hall of the ground floor, in the apartment of the regent (fig. 4, no. 3); hosts and guests then withdrew to the adjacent antechamber in order to speak privately (fig. 4, no. 13). In the case of particularly high-ranking guests, the young Grand Duke Ferdinando II de' Medici first waited upon them in the hall, while the women waited in the antechamber. It is also documented that the regent repeatedly received guests in her bedchamber when she was unwell (fig. 4, no. 4).⁴⁸ This means that the ceremonial unfolded primarily in the three impressive, official rooms of the regent on the ground floor, with their frescoes of 'famous women'. The circular route which was followed correlated with the rooms' cycle on salvation history, thus investing it with particular relevance.

Pietas Austriaca and the golden age of female rule

Programmes with groups of figures related to salvation history always culminate in a view of a golden age: at Poggio Imperiale, this role is realized both through the men and women of the House of Habsburg and through a recourse to the fourth eclogue of Vergil, which prophesied the foundation of a *gens aurea* through a boy: in this case, Ferdinando II de' Medici.⁴⁹ Thus, the space of physical activity and the pictorial space complemented, instead of contradicting, one another. The actions of some of the female exemplary figures selected—like those of the militant Semiramis—transgress their gender role; however, the interpretation according to Vergil opens a prospect onto a positive resolution to a situation of crisis, one in which female rule does not call the social order into question.

Nonetheless, the rooms of the heir to the throne were integrated into a woman's apartment, in contradiction to the conventional gendered topography of the courts; they were also thematically linked to the rooms of his mother through the gallery of Habsburg emperors.⁵⁰ Ferdinando's suite clearly seems to have had a more symbolic function: it played no major role in the ceremonial. In spite of this, previous scholars have focused their attention primarily on the male genealogy and its link to *Pietas Austriaca*. It is in fact possible to point out fundamental motifs, such as the *Pietas Eucharistica* in the image of *Rudolph and the Priest* (fig. 15), which underwent a performative intensification through the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi at Poggio Imperiale—something that also occurred at the courts of Prague and Madrid.⁵¹ The deeds of Emperor Charles V celebrate his victories against the Ottomans and those of Ferdinand II his victories against the Protestants. The two rulers are presented as *Defensor Ecclesiae* and *Defensor fidei*, and Ferdinand's personal veneration of the True Cross is depicted (fig. 6).⁵² In my opinion, however, this approach is also valid for the programme of 'famous women', which was realized (among other places) in the hall, that is, in a space typically reserved for male heroes.⁵³ By tracing most of the empresses and queens pictured there back to the Habsburg genealogy, they come to correspond to the—only later codified—concept of *Pietas Austriaca* through their exemplary and often also miraculous rule.

The ambiguity of previous contextualizations of the Poggio Imperiale fresco programme derives, on the one hand, from the lack of attention paid to Maria Maddalena as a patron and, on the other hand, from the programme's unique interweaving of local art and Habsburg iconography. The depiction of *uomini famosi* and *donne famose* had a long local tradition in Florence, shaped by its republican tradition: here, it is filled out with figures from the House of Habsburg.⁵⁴ The Habsburgs already had their own tradition of ancestral portrait galleries consisting of saints and emperors of both sexes drawn from their own lineage. The combination of imperial genealogy with *Pietas* motifs gradually replaced the Habsburg's purely dynastic-genealogical veneration of their ancestors.⁵⁵ The spread of this new constellation is typically dated to the reign of Emperor Ferdinand II, who was heavily influenced by the Jesuits. However, the earliest known visual manifestations of such programmes date from the reign of his son Emperor Ferdinand III.⁵⁶ The cycle at Poggio Imperiale is therefore of special significance: while the iconography of 'famous women and men' continues to point back to an older tradition that was increasingly being supplanted by mythological cycles, the combination with *Pietas Austriaca* motifs is the first of its kind.

This suggests to me that a similarly intensive reception of the Catholic Reform's spirituality and concept of government took place in the case of Maria Maddalena as is documented for her siblings Emperor Ferdinand II and Margaret of Austria, Queen of Spain.⁵⁷ It was their mother, Maria of Bavaria, Archduchess of Inner Austria, who was primarily responsible for their upbringing and for their strongly Catholic formation, because their father, Karl II, died at a relatively young age.⁵⁸ Bavarian influence was of the utmost importance, because Maria's father, Duke Albert V of Bavaria, and her brother, the future Wilhelm V, both exercised a decisive influence over politics in Graz. Bavaria served as a model of success for the Catholic Reform: here, religious unity was initially successfully implemented.⁵⁹ The House of Wittelsbach developed a *Pietas Bavariae* of their own, including a marked veneration of the True Cross and the saints.⁶⁰ To date, however, there is little research into the role of the duchesses at the Bavarian court. Both the mother of Maria Maddalena of Austria—Maria of Bavaria, who was a daughter of Anna, a daughter of Emperor Ferdinand I and thus a Habsburg herself—and Maria Maddalena's grandmother Maria Jakobaea of Baden-Sponheim were known as prominent patrons and stout defenders of the Catholic faith. It is, for example, commonly accepted that the latter embodies St Helena in the depiction of the *Finding of the True Cross* by Barthel Beham of circa 1530 (fig. 14).⁶¹ This painting is always thought of as being a part of the cycle with ancient histories commissioned by Duke Wilhelm IV. As it is the only Christian theme known for the programme, it seems to me that it illustrates one of the earliest examples of Catholic Reform art and may have served as paradigm for the generations that followed. More research into the field of this matrilineal tradition would certainly deepen our understanding of the spread of devotional practices and of iconographical *Pietas* motifs throughout Europe.



Fig. 14 Barthel Beham, *The Finding of the True Cross by St Helena*, Munich, Alte Pinakothek, ca. 1530, Maria Jakobaea of Baden-Sponheim is depicted kneeling on the left side of the cross

It is also remarkable that Rubens and Wildens' painting of *Rudolph and the Priest* was created at roughly the same time as the image at Poggio Imperiale (figs. 15 and 16). Similarities to Roselli's fresco become apparent, particularly in the twisted figure of Rudolph. According to Elizabeth

McGrath's research, the painting was to be found in the bedchamber (as was the case at Poggio Imperiale) of King Philip IV in the Alcazar of Madrid. It was very probably hung together with a dynastic portrait gallery, Titian's *Religion saved by Spain*, and Rubens' *Garden of Love*.⁶² Earlier versions of the motif have been preserved in books and as a background scene in paintings, but not as primary subject matter.⁶³ The decoration of the bedchamber probably coincided with Philip's accession to power in 1621, and both images fulfilled a programmatic function at a location that was central to dynastic progeny. There was a very intensive exchange between the Madrid and Florence courts during the life of Margaret of Austria, Queen of Spain, who was Philip's mother and Maria Maddalena's sister.⁶⁴ The almost simultaneous placement of this subject matter in the chambers of the two rulers could point to a communication between the courts. At any rate, it demonstrates the clear iconographic choice for the *Pietas Austriaca* through the Habsburg monarchy at that moment in time.

The unusual situation of the regency in Tuscany led to the realization of a monumental and gendered articulation of the concept of *Pietas Austriaca*. In her profound study of Maria Maddalena's musical patronage, Kelley Harness was able to demonstrate how intensively the regent participated in the production of the performances that she financed. It is therefore plausible to consider the regent herself to be the primary creator of the programme: only she and her closest advisors could have had such an intimate knowledge of the Habsburg genealogy and the practices associated with it.⁶⁵ It is even possible that the decoration of Poggio Imperiale provided a model for the plans surrounding the apartment of Maria Maddalena's niece Anna of Austria, Queen of France, for her residence in the Parisian abbey Val-de-Grâce, which she had founded and which was meant to feature an equally extensive programme involving sainted female rulers.⁶⁶

While the concept of *Pietas Austriaca* has begun to be criticized for being too static to describe the highly diverse phenomena of the Habsburg courts,⁶⁷ it was extremely productive in the present context, because it helped to clarify the distinction with respect to Medici cycles and their concept of government. However, Maria Maddalena formulated her own engendered version of the *Pietas*. She made use of the prized artistic resources of Florence in order to provide her vulnerable position as regent of Tuscany with an impressive outer form. This unusual situation found expression both in the atypical disposition of the rooms and in the extremely rare pictorial inventions. Still, the full significance of the programme of Poggio Imperiale unfolds only when it is seen within the context of the House of Habsburg as a transnationally organized network of rulers. Further research could clarify how this model of *Pietas Austriaca* was communicated between the different courts—and also in which ways the performative and visual realizations of the theme affected the subsequent theoretical considerations and written formulation of the concept.



Fig. 15 Matteo Rosselli, Rudolph I of Habsburg and the priest, Florence, Villa Poggio Imperiale, former bedchamber of Ferdinando II de' Medici, 1623-24.



Fig. 16 Peter Paul Rubens and Jan Wildens, Rudolph I of Habsburg and the priest, Madrid, Museo del Prado, ca. 1625.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1, 4 Maps author and Henning Grope.

Fig. 2 Fanelli, Giovanni, *Firenze – Architettura e città* (Florence, 1973), fig. 730.

Fig. 3, 5 Soprintendenza per i beni ambientali e architettonici, Gabinetto fotografico, Palazzo Pitti.

Fig. 6 Spinelli 2008, p. 653, fig. 4.

Fig. 7, 8, 10, 12, 15 Acanfora 2005, p. 144, fig. 83; plates LXXXVIII, LXXXV, CII, XCIV.

Fig. 9 Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali. Soprintendenza speciale per il Polo museale fiorentino.

Fig. 11 Photo author.

Fig. 13 *Stanze segrete raccolte per caso. I medici Santi – Gli arredi celati*, ed. Cristina Giannini (Città di Castello, 2004), p. 37, fig. 23.

Fig. 14 Greiselmayer 1996, plate X.

Fig. 16 *El Siglo de Rubens en El Museo del Pardo, Catálogo razonado de Pintura Flamenca del Siglo XVII*, ed. Matías Díaz Pardon, 3 vols. (Barcelona, 1997), vol. II, cat. no. 1645.

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¹ For the biography of Mary Magdalene, see Pieraccini 1924-25, vol. II, pp. 345–64; Galasso Calderara 1986; Wandruzska 1988; Arrighi 2008; Betz 2008.

² Seminal are the studies *Donne e fede* 1994; Reinhard 1995; *'In Christo'* 1999; Schilling 1999, pp. 51–55.

³ For this aspect, see Hoppe forthcoming.

⁴ Hoppe 2004 b; Hoppe 2012.

⁵ Galluzzi 1781, vol. III, p. 394; Diaz 1976, p. 366; Pieraccini 1925, vol. II, p. 345; Galasso Calderara 1985, p. 93; Cusick 2009, p. 193, n. 9; Hoppe 2012, pp. 27–34.

⁶ For Christine of Lorraine, see now Strunck 2011.

⁷ For the history and the architecture of the villa, see Panichi 1989; Bohr 1994, pp. 344–46; Hoppe 2012, pp. 35–55.

⁸ Hoppe 2012, p. 283.

⁹ For the discussion of the complete ensemble of sculptures and fountains see Hoppe 2012, pp. 42–43, 55.

- ¹⁰ The author of the libretto is Ferdinando Saracinelli, the music was composed by Francesca Caccini. See Solerti 1905, pp. 179–83; Harness 2004, vol. II, pp. 264–80; Cusick 2009, pp. 191–246. For the series of illustrations, see Negro Spina 1983, p. 118; Blumenthal 1984, pp. 201–07.
- ¹¹ ‘VILLA IMPERIALIS AB AUSTRIACIS / AUGUSTIS NOMEN CONSECUITA / FUTURAE MAGNAE DUCES ETRURIAE / VESTRO OCIO DELICISQUE / AETERNUM INSERVIAT’, quoted after Prato 1895, p. 41. The blazon is now lost.
- ¹² Hoppe 2012, p. 281.
- ¹³ The inventory is published fully in Hoppe 2012, pp. 290–330; the chronicle partially.
- ¹⁴ Hoppe 2012, p. 57.
- ¹⁵ Hoppe 2012, pp. 58–59.
- ¹⁶ Wandruszka 1962; Klieman 1993, p. 181; Preiss 1997, pp. 382–83; Acanfora 2005, pp. 149–50; Spinelli 2008, pp. 650–56; Hoppe 2012, pp. 65, 169–89.
- ¹⁷ For the concept of the *Pietas Austriaca*, see Coreth 1982; Kovács 1990; Kovács 1992; Bérenger 1993; Winkelbauer 2003; Baumgarten 2004, pp. 164–172; Ducreux 2011.
- ¹⁸ Visconti 1960 (October), pp. 2–36; Couëtoux 1998, pp. 731–39; Rossi 1999, pp. 169–74; Acanfora 2005, vol. I, pp. 143–57; Spinelli 2008, pp. 645–79; Hoppe 2012, pp. 95–168.
- ¹⁹ Spinelli 2008, p. 670; Hoppe 2012, pp. 108–09.
- ²⁰ Preiss 1997, p. 387.
- ²¹ Mennel 1518, fol. 1v, 4r–4v.
- ²² Kovács 1992, p. 94; Reinhardt 2002, pp. 74, 77, 133–34, 166–67; Hoppe 2012, p. 116.
- ²³ *Argomento della regina sant’Orsola: Rappresentazione di Andrea Salvadori* (Florence, 1624), see Solerti 1905, pp. 159, 174–78. *Per un regale evento*, cat. no. 109, 110; see Harness 2006, pp. 79–110.
- ²⁴ Kovács 1992, pp. 94–96.
- ²⁵ Meloni Trkulja 1973; Fumagalli 1990, pp. 71–73; Hoppe 2012, pp. 95–102.
- ²⁶ Hoppe 2012, pp. 118–24. Cf. Pizzorusso 1986; Acanfora 2005, p. 146; Spinelli 2008, p. 667.
- ²⁷ Painted are Jael, Judith, Miriam, Esther, the Mother of the Maccabees, Rebecca, The Finding of Moses, Susanna, and Zipporah.
- ²⁸ Painted are the martyrdoms of Lucia, Dorothea, Christina, Agnes, Caecilia, Agatha, Barbara, Margareta, and Apollonia.
- ²⁹ Mennel 1518, fol. 108v–110r; Reinhardt 2003, pp. 158, 229; Hoppe 2012, pp. 146–48.
- ³⁰ Lorini, Niccolò, *Elogii delle piv principali S. donne del sacro calendario, e martirologio romano, vergini, martiri, et altre. Messi insieme con molte vigilie. Dal M.R.P.M. e Predicatore Generale F. Niccolò Lorini del Monte*, ed. Zanobi Pignoni (Florence, 1617).
- ³¹ Coreth 1982, pp. 38–44; Matsche 1981, pp. 123–42.
- ³² Tarchi 1989; Hoppe 2011, pp. 227–32, 244.
- ³³ For a more detailed comparison, see Hoppe 2012, pp. 198–201.
- ³⁴ Visconti 1960 (May); Faini Guazzelli 1968; Cantelli 1983, p. 131; Spinelli 2001, pp. 24–25, 40–46; Acanfora 2005, p. 149; Sodini 2011, pp. 290–92; Hoppe 2012, pp. 189–205.
- ³⁵ Hoppe 2012, p. 65.
- ³⁶ Spinelli 1997, pp. 5–17; Hoppe 2012, p. 70.
- ³⁷ Hoppe 2012, pp. 68–69.
- ³⁸ Hoppe 2012, pp. 69–70.
- ³⁹ For a summary, see Hoppe 2012, pp. 70–76.
- ⁴⁰ Fumagalli 1990; Fumagalli 1997 b; Fumagalli 2001.
- ⁴¹ *Sustermans* 1983, cat. no. 14. *La maddalena* 1986, cat. no. 99; see Polleroß 1988, vol. I, pp. 13–16, 48–50, cat. no. 434.
- ⁴² Hoppe 2012, pp. 66–67.
- ⁴³ For the model of the ‘holy princess’ in terms of the Catholic Reform, see Tippelskirch 2001. For a survey of the male concept of the ‘Christian prince’ after Adriano Prospero, see Fantoni 1998.
- ⁴⁴ There were rumours that the regency had to be assigned first to Cardinal Carlo de’ Medici, brother of the deceased Grand Duke Cosimo II. See Fumagalli 1997 a, p. 315, n. 14. In the encomium by Cristofano Bronzini, dedicated to Maria Maddalena, the praise of female rulership and the predominance of the female sex was criticized by the Vatican and therefore censored. See Tippelskirch 2004. For female regencies and their problematic legal basis, see the seminal study by Guerra Medici 2005.

⁴⁵ *La maddalena* 1986, pp. 166–67; Hoppe 2012, pp. 25–26, 74–76. See also the records in Archivio di Stato Firenze, Mediceo del Principato, 6081: 16077; 6077: 15741, 15744, 15745, 15746, 15748; 6101: 15547; 6100: 15502 at the Medici Archive Project, www.medici.org (accessed on 19 November 2012).

⁴⁶ For the function of Poggio Imperiale in these years and the inner disposition of rooms, see Hoppe 2012, pp. 77–93.

⁴⁷ Hoppe 2012, p. 84.

⁴⁸ Hoppe 2012, pp. 87–88.

⁴⁹ '*Ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas; / magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo. / iam redit et virgo, redeunt saturnia regna; / iam nupva progenies caelo dimittitur alto. / to modo nascent puero, quo ferrea primum / desinet ac toto surget genas aurea mundo, / caste fave Lucina: tuus iam regnat Apollo*', Vergil, *IV. Eclogue*.

⁵⁰ For the gendered spheres at Italian courts, see Hoppe 2004 a, pp. 104–106; Hoppe 2012, pp. 11–13, 88–93, 227–229. Broader surveys on gender and space in the early modern period are *Das Frauenzimmer* 2000; and *Architecture* 2003.

⁵¹ For the *Pietas Eucharistica* and the *Imitatio Rudolphi*, see Matsche 1981, pp. 80–83, 112, 116–17; Coreth 1982, pp. 20–25; Preiss 1997, pp. 377–78; Bruckmüller 1998, p. 273; Valenta 2006, p. 180.

⁵² For the devotion of Ferdinand II to the Holy Cross, see Vácha 2009, pp. 68–89.

⁵³ Explicitly mentioned in Armenini 1587, vol. III, VIII, p. 262. The famous women iconography was recommended for the bedchambers of wives and daughters.

⁵⁴ For a summary on the different traditions of famous men and women iconography, see Hoppe 2012, pp. 205–25.

⁵⁵ Herbst 1970, pp. 290, 326; Matsche 1997, pp. 330–31; Polleroß 1985, p. 24.

⁵⁶ Matsche 1981, p. 74; Vácha 2009, pp. 10, 68–89.

⁵⁷ For Ferdinand II, see Bireley 1981. For Margaret, see Sánchez 1998.

⁵⁸ See now the seminal study of Keller 2012. For the education of her children, see Betz 2008, pp. 50–61; Keller 2012, pp. 50–56. For the decisive influence of Maria of Bavaria in terms of cultural exchange, see Koldau 2005, pp. 69–79.

⁵⁹ Herzig 2000, p. 17 and *passim*.

⁶⁰ Herzig 2000, p. 13; Richter 2009, pp. 225–304.

⁶¹ Greiselmayer 1996, pp. 131–56.

⁶² McGrath 1997, cat. no 56.

⁶³ Hoppe 2012, p. 184.

⁶⁴ Queen Margaret of Spain ordered an extensive painting cycle in Florence in 1610 and she was herself remembered in Florence with a vast funeral cycle in grisaille after her death in 1611, afterwards shown in the Corridoio Vasariano. See Goldenberg Stoppato 1999; Bietti 2004; Strunck 2011, p. 86.

⁶⁵ For a broader discussion of the authorship see Hoppe 2012, p. 219.

⁶⁶ The *conchetto* was described as: '*toutes les impératrices et les reines qui ont été en reputation de sainteté*.' See Dorival 1976, vol. I, p. 49, vol. II, cat. no. 424; Wenzel 2005, pp. 78–79.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Ducreux 2011.