



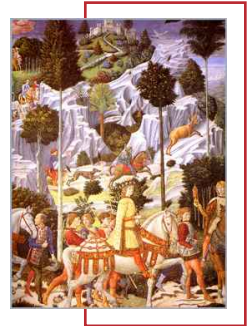
Florence and the Medici

The Medici had a very close relationship with Florence for more than three centuries. They influenced the city and were influenced by her. Cosimo the Elder, called Pater Patriae, held both public and private power in town. So did his grandson Lorenzo, called the Magnificent. As active merchants and bankers the Medici handled important financial affairs with the Church and the most important European courts. They reached the Papacy with Leo X and Clement VII, the throne of France with Henry II's bride Catherine and Maria who married Henry IV. The Medici patronized art, favoured the rebirth of antiquity, developed learning and promoted science. They made Florence the capital of a rich and powerful well respected Principate.

An itinerary in search of the Medici cannot but start from the Medici Palace, built in 1444 by Michelozzo for Cosimo the Elder. In the renaissance courtyard one can see the Medici coat of arms and at the first floor visit the small, but richly decorated Chapel where Lorenzo's resemblance with the younger of the three kings emphasizes the political and civil weight of the Medici. When the Palace was sold to the Riccardi family an Allegory of the Medici was painted in a seventeenth century Gallery. Almost opposite the palace the church of Saint Laurence holds the tombs of the Medici (died out in 1737), who were also buried in the Old and New Sacristies as well as in the Chapel of the Princes. Going through the cloister one can visit the Laurentian Library with precious books and manuscripts collected by Cosimo and his son Piero. They had both generously commissioned works of art in the convents of San Marco, Santissima Annunziata and San Miniato al Monte.



In the nearby piazza Signoria and Palazzo Vecchio the achievement of monarchical power by the Medici is clearly visible. Sculptures in the square as well as those under the Loggia, called in XVIth Century of 'the Lanzi', emphasize the might of Medici Grandukes: Bandinelli's Hercules and Cacus, Cellini's Perseus, Ammannati's Neptune, Giambologna's Rape of the Sabine and the Equestrian Monument of Cosimo I. Furthermore, in the courtyard and inside Palazzo Vecchio the visitor notice the various changes wanted by Cosimo I and his wife Eleonora of Toledo. Giorgio Vasari and his several assistants transformed the Palace of old Republican regime into a great Ducal Palace, lavishly decorated with paintings and sculptures.



Cosimo I's climax was reached when the Uffizi were built in 1560 and later Vasari was charged to link Palazzo Vecchio with the newly acquired Pitti Palace, thanks to the Corridor built in 1565 over the old shops at Ponte Vecchio. Although the Uffizi were used for the administration of the Granduchy, the top floor was turned into one of the most prestigious art collections. Buontalenti designed the Tribune as a magic jewel box containing precious items, painting and sculptures of amazing value. At Pitti Palace and in the magnificent Boboli gardens, designed by Tribolo in 1550, the Medici lived as successful sovereigns surrounding themselves with high quality works of art and really fascinating pomp. At least one of the several country Medici villas should be visited to end the Medici tour properly, either at Careggi, Castello, Petraia or Poggio Imperiale in the outskirt of Florence and, in the surroundings of the city, at Poggio a Caiano, Cerreto Guidi, Pratolino or Cafaggiolo.



Medici monuments in Florence:

Medici Palace, 1, via Cavour

Church and Cloister of San Lorenzo, piazza San Lorenzo

Medici Chapels, piazza Madonna Aldobrandini

Loggia of the New Market, known as the “Straw Market”, via Porta Rossa

Palazzo Vecchio and Loggia dei Lanzi, piazza della Signoria

The Uffizi, piazzale degli Uffizi

Pitti Palace and Boboli Gardens, piazza Pitti

Medici Villa at Careggi, 17, viale Pieraccini

Medici Villa “La Petraia”, 40, via della Petraia

Medici Villa at Castello, 47, via di Castello

Medici Villa of Poggio Imperiale, 1, viale di Poggio Imperiale

Medici Villa at Poggio a Caiano, Poggio a Caiano (Prato)