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VILLA D'ESTE (TIVOLI)

"Let's leave holy things in the Vatican, this is the place of delights only."

Ippolito d'Este

At a certain point in his life, for Cardinal Ippolito d'Este – son of Lucretia Borgia and nephew of the cardinal of the same name to whom Ludovico Ariosto had dedicated *Orlando furioso* – the ascent to the papal throne and the pride of giving a pope to his family had become his life's only reason; but at each conclave, his hopes were shattered and this happened no fewer than six times. More attentive to power plots and profane delights than to religious vocation, Ippolito had love affairs, fathered a daughter, Renata, later the wife of Lodovico Pico della Mirandola, and gave vent to his frustrations in the project to build Villa d'Este, in Tivoli, a town in the valley of the Aniene loved by the Roman élite since the days of the empire. He only just had time to enjoy the inauguration of the villa, which was attended by Pope Gregory XIII, as he died a few months later, on 2 December 1572. The villa and the magnificent garden were left untended and the antique collections were dispersed, until, in the middle of the 19th century, the residence was restored by Cardinal Gustav Adolf von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst; in those years, a small apartment of Villa d'Este became the holiday home of the composer Franz Liszt who, inspired by the villa, wrote three pieces of the piano solo suite *Années de pèlerinage*. A UNESCO site since 2001, Villa d'Este expresses all its magnificence in its gardens: the hundreds of fountains, the nymphaea, the grottoes, the ornamental water features and the hydraulic systems not only make it a masterpiece of the Italian garden model, but instill in visitors an absolute sense of peace and harmony; perhaps the same peace that Ippolito d'Este sought in the coolness and in the babbling waters of his work of art, far from the hustle and bustle of the palaces of power.



CULTURAL HERITAGE

UNESCO DOSSIER: 1025

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CRITERIA FOR SELECTION: Villa d'Este in Tivoli, with its palace and garden, is one of the most significant and complete examples of Renaissance culture at its most refined expression. Considered one of the first "gardens of wonders", from the very beginning it was a model for the development of gardens all over Europe.



*“As for me not even stubborn Sparta/
or the fields of lush Larisa are quite as
striking, as Albunea’s echoing cavern,
her headlong Anio, and the groves
of Tiburnis, and Tibur’s orchards, white
with flowing streams.”*

The beauty of the Tivoli landscape, sung by Horace in these verses of his *Odes* (I, 7), has captured the attention of poets, painters, emperors and popes over the millennia.

“[...] We passed through [...] adorably scattered and animated and even crowded Tivoli, from the universal happy spray of the drumming Anio waterfalls, all set in their permanent rainbows and Sibylline temples and classic allusions and Byronic quotations.” To contain the overflows of the “drumming Anio” described by Henry James in *Italian Hours*, in 1832 Pope Gregory XVI had a tunnel dug out in Mount Catillo and channelled the waters into a **1 waterfall** with a drop of 120 m, the second highest in Italy after that of the Marmore, in Umbria. Today the **Park of Villa Gregoriana** stretches around the waterfall, of great naturalist value, with woods, paths, remains of large Roman villas and natural grottoes. Goethe loved this scene and in his *Italian Journey*, he writes: “I was in Tivoli at that time,

where I admired one of the greatest visions nature could offer. Those waterfalls, together with the ruins and the landscape as a whole, are amongst the things that if we know them make us profoundly richer inside [...]. The waterfall that flows in the vicinity, following an intricate route, produces the most admirable effects”. Not to be missed on an excursion to Tivoli is **2 Villa Adriana**, the magnificent residence of the emperor whose story is told in the successful novel by Marguerite Yourcenar: “That evening, on returning to my house in Tibur, it was with a weary but tranquil heart that I received from Diotimus’ hands the incense and wine of my daily sacrifice to my Genius [...]. While still a private citizen, I had begun to buy up and unite these lands, spread below the Sabine Hills along clear streams, with the

patient tenacity of a peasant who parcel by parcel rounds out his vineyard; later on, between two imperial tours, I had camped in these groves in prey of architects and masons where a youth imbued with all the superstitions of Asia used often to urge devoutly that the trees be spared”. Then there is the third villa in Tivoli, **3 Villa d’Este**, with the cypresses and fountains portrayed by Corot (in the painting *The gardens of Villa d’Este*) and loved by Gabriele d’Annunzio, who in his poem *Notturmo* dreams: “To be the tallest and thickest cypress of the Villa d’Este, / after dusk, / when the fountains removes the veil of maidenhair fern / from its dripping ear / to spy on the remote noise / of the Tivoli cascade; / and caress the grace of the evening/ with the sensitive pale green that borders the funerary foliage”.



MAP



THE “COMMENDATORE”

“Countless distractions have prevented me, until today, from starting with the Cantata by Beethoven. Now at last peace and silence have come: I will spend the whole winter at Villa d’Este [...] and I want to try and not waste my time.”

Letter from Franz Liszt to Dr Ludwig Nohol, Villa d’Este, 17 November 1869

The composer Franz Liszt went to Villa d’Este for the first time in July 1864, invited by Cardinal von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, who wanted to completely renovate the villa, which had passed into the hands of the Hapsburg-Este family after years of neglect. The Cardinal gave Liszt a small three-roomed apartment. The musician’s favourite room was decorated with wallpaper with trellises of roses and bluebells. His piano took up almost all the space and the room was always very warm thanks to the stove which was constantly lit and impregnated with the smoke of his beloved cigars. Liszt visited Villa d’Este for 20 years and loved its gardens and fountains, which inspired three of his compositions: *To the cypresses of Villa d’Este* and *Fountains of Villa d’Este I and II*; and he also became very fond of the inhabitants of Tivoli, who called him the “commendatore” and considered him polite, helpful, patient and generous: the musician organised charity concerts, often played on pianos that were out of tune and with inept musicians. All these circumstances did not embarrass him but, on the contrary, greatly amused him.



"GREAT SILENCE, PEACEFUL WELL-BEING, MILD AIR, SPLENDID LANDSCAPES, PLEASANT WALKS, HEALTHY AND NOURISHING FOOD, EXCELLENT WINE, BOOKS, MUSIC, PIANOS TO USE *AD LIBITUM* AND TEMPERATURES SUITABLE BOTH FROM THE PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL POINT OF VIEW."

The composer Franz Liszt, who was spending a holiday in a small apartment of three rooms in Villa

d'Este, used these words to persuade his friend Franz Haberl to join him in Tivoli. The musician spent long periods at the villa, the guest of Cardinal von Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, who in those years was restoring the rooms and the gardens. Liszt loved the marvellous Italian gardens of Villa d'Este, with their countless fountains and hydraulic systems, which were a source of great inspiration for him. Today the gardens are a perfect destination for children who can run around freely and make very surprising discoveries. The sober and elegant **1 Fountain of the Great Glass** was designed almost a century after the inauguration

of the villa, in 1661, by the famous architect Gian Lorenzo Bernini, but who later had to recalibrate the jet of water, because it was so high that it blocked the view from the fine loggia above. The **2 Fountain of Pegasus** nestles in the greenery; a prancing Pegasus, the winged horse born from the beheading of Medusa, triumphs on it. The **3 Rometta** opens on to the belvedere which looks on to the Roman plain and appears as a series of hedges, fountains and gushing water with at its centre the statue of Rome on the throne (hence the name). You can reach it by crossing a small bridge over a canal which represents the Tiber, fed by a stream which represents the Anio, Tivoli's river. The ship in the centre of the fountain symbolises Tiber Island, in the heart of Rome. The **4 Fountain of the Dragons**, built in 1572 in honour of Pope Gregory XIII's visit to inaugurate Villa d'Este, stands in the centre of the park; it once had a complicated series of mechanisms which recreated shots, blasts, the rumble of cannons and explosions inspired by the *Girandola* of Castel Sant'Angelo, the fireworks display that is still held every year on 29 June. The **5 Hundred Fountains**, perhaps the most beautiful in the villa, are made up of 100 sprays of water in three superimposed rows and at night they are lit up very evocatively. The **6 Fountain of the Organ** is monumental, almost Baroque, and bears this name because the internal mechanisms made the falling water cause a jet of air that was channelled producing organ melodies, to the amused amazement of guests. The fountain still plays today, once a day, at the established time. **7 Neptune's Fountain** is one of the most spectacular, with large columns of water projected skywards and enveloped by a rainbow when the light hits them.



VILLA D'ESTE in books

Reading suggestions to get to know Tivoli, the villa and its garden inside-out.

• **Odes**, Quintus Oratius Flaccus (23-13 BC). In Ode VII of Book I, Horace presents the city of Tivoli as peaceful and welcoming: the perfect place where to seek relief from fatigue in wine.

• **Italian Journey**, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1816-17). The fascinating reportage of the Grand Tour that Goethe made between 1786 and 1788 is a journey through the art, culture and beauties of Italy.

• **Viaggio a Tivoli**, Filippo Alessandro Sebastiani (1828). The story of a very personal journey to Tivoli in the middle of the 19th century. Reading it lets you understand the Tivoli of the past and its immortal beauty.

• **Elegie romane**, Gabriele d'Annunzio (1892). In the poems that are inspired by Goethe's *Roman Elegies* (1790), the poet also celebrates the Hundred Fountains of Villa d'Este: "The hundred fountains speak, between the touches of green;/ they speak softly and slowly, like women's mouths, / while eagles and fleur de lys shine, o glory of Este, now finials, that the sun clads in crimson".

• **Letters of Franz Liszt**, La Mara (1894). Liszt's letters are an invaluable source to trace the composer's relationship

with Villa d'Este and Tivoli in general.

In the town he loved, Liszt was considered an honoured guest, and he exchanged this affection by generously offering his music, especially for charitable evenings.

• **Italian Hours**, Henry James (1909). The American-British author who was in love with Italy collected the impressions of his travels, written between 1872 and 1909, in this book.

• **Sentimento del tempo**, Giuseppe Ungaretti (1933). The collection also includes the poem *Isola*, dedicated to Tivoli: "The landscape is that of Tivoli. Why the island? Because it is the point where I can be on my own: it is a point separated from the rest of the world, not because it is in reality, but because in my state of mind I can separate myself from it".

• **Memoirs of Hadrian**, Marguerite Yourcenar (1951). Nothing can help the reader get to know the figure of the emperor who built Villa Adriana in Tivoli better than the novel by the French-Belgian writer Yourcenar. The successful novel is divided into six parts and written like a long letter that Hadrian, now tired and ill, writes to his young friend Marcus Aurelius, who will become his adoptive nephew and then emperor in his turn.

• **Viaggio in Italia**, Guido Piovene (1957). Piovene travelled in Italy for three years to write this unique and

meticulously detailed reportage, considered a classic of Italian travel literature. From the Alps to Sicily, stopping at Tivoli, the author's gaze is an invitation to discover our wonders.

• **Il viaggiatore immaginario. L'Italia degli itinerari perduti**, Attilio Brilli (1997). Brilli was full professor of Anglo-American literature at the University of Arezzo and worked on travel literature in English, in particular, the myth of the Grand Tour. Inspired by those who did the Grand Tour, in 1997 he drew out the evocative itineraries of this book, concentrated in central Italy.

• **Franz Liszt nelle fotografie d'epoca della collezione Ernst Burger**. The catalogue of the exhibition held at Villa d'Este from 13 April to 5 June 2011 tells of the long love story between Tivoli and the composer Franz Liszt, who spent long holidays there as a guest of Cardinal Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, engaged in a major restoration of Villa d'Este

• **Ippolito d'Este. Cardinale, principe mecenate**, Papers from the conference edited by Marina Cogotto and Francesco Paolo Fiore (2013). The cardinal was one of the key players on the social and political scene of the time, but his pride was dented by not having achieved his life's goal: being elected Pope. He commissioned many architectonic and artistic works and his story is told in the papers of this conference.