



PROJECT MUSE®

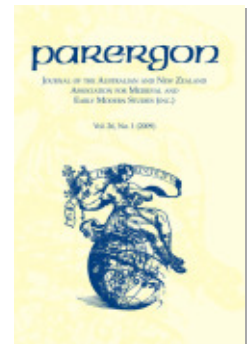
Medici Gardens: From Making to Design (review)

Victoria Bladen

Parergon, Volume 26, Number 1, 2009, pp. 221-223 (Review)

Published by Australian and New Zealand Association of Medieval and
Early Modern Studies (Inc.)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/pgn.0.0143>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/362874>

the part families played in restorative and retributive justice. Karen Cullen looks at the impact of the last national famine on the family. Decreases in baptisms and marriages were such that long-term recovery of the family was severely affected.

Murder in the wake of the 1745 rebellion, outlined in the final essay by Deborah A. Symonds, informs the reader of the effects political disorder, war and the emergence of a new textile economy had on the family. While the evidence points to a breakdown or failure of a family's formation around an illegitimate child, it is also indicative of the breakdown of wider family relationships, and the heavy impact on women, as the community sought to re-establish the order of society and the economy.

By unearthing aspects of the pre-industrial Scottish family that have hitherto been hidden, it is hoped this broad collection of essays has opened the door to further interrogative research on this slowly emerging area.

Michelle Smith
Department of History
University of Auckland

Fabiani Giannetto, Raffaella, *Medici Gardens: From Making to Design* (Penn Studies in Landscape Architecture), Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008; pp. 328; 54 illustrations; R.R.P. US\$55.00; ISBN 9780812240726.

Medici Gardens: From Making to Design is a study of the early Renaissance Medici gardens outside of Florence: Trebbio, Cafaggiolo, Careggi and Fiesole. Raffaella Giannetto begins with the historiography of the Medici garden, especially as it was shaped by the idealising visions of nineteenth-century foreign intellectuals and then by the political motivations of fascism in promoting the idea of a *giardino all'italiana*. This idea identified the Italian garden with geometric principles and a symmetrical layout that reflected the architecture of the house, the design of which was dated to Renaissance Rome. The author seeks to challenge previous critical assumptions that the Medici gardens were prototypes of a *giardino all'italiana* and that there existed an established design practice to which the creation of the early Medici gardens conformed.

The author examines the historical contexts of the Medici gardens, meticulously considering the evidence, which includes letters, books of memoirs, tax returns, notarial deeds and drawings. She identifies the risk of using later

images, such as the painted lunettes by the Flemish artist Giusto Utens (1599), as evidence of the appearance of the properties in the Quattrocento.

Enquiring into the intentions and motivations that produced the gardens, orchards and kitchen gardens within the Medici properties, Giannetto places them within the material culture context of the lives of the Medici. Family members had different attitudes towards the countryside. (Cosimo apparently took a direct, hands-on approach to gardening while Lorenzo was not interested in actually getting his hands dirty.) Giannetto seeks to place these early gardens in the context of Early Modern Italian society rather than presenting the gardens as discrete and isolated art objects.

Giannetto's approach is distinguished from earlier studies by its emphasis on the practice of garden making as preceding its evolution into a theory of design. Her argument is that the gardens developed in a more organic way; a shaping of the landscape that was primarily a physical exercise rather than a theoretical one. The emergence of design principles she identifies as a later development. She seeks to trace the evolution of gardens, and human relationships with such spaces, from kitchen gardens and orchards, providing food for household consumption or sale, to designed spaces that could embody complex allegorical programmes and provide theatrical arenas.

The book takes an interdisciplinary approach. As well as considering the historical evidence of the social fabric surrounding the gardens, the author also considers humanist representations of man's engagement with the natural world in literature and philosophy. The fictional gardens of Petrarch and Boccaccio (together with Petrarch's gardening notes) provide comparisons with, and insights into, the nature of actual gardens. Literary gardens were not conceived as objects but projections of the feelings of the poet and readers. In Boccaccio's literary gardens (which inspired subsequent illuminators and painters) he approaches an idea of design that would not be explored in actual gardens until a few centuries later. In Marsilio Ficino's philosophical writing, the *locus amoenus* is not an object of aesthetic appreciation but rather comprised signs of God. His work is not directly related to the layout of Careggi, the seat of Ficino's Neoplatonic Academy, however, Giannetto relates his interpretation of human creativity, as an instinctual activity not requiring discursive reasoning, to the creation of gardens.

In the final section, Giannetto considers the process by which gardens began to be laid out according to drawings and models previously used in other disciplines, after which a theory of garden making emerged. Leon

Battista Alberti in *De re aedificatoria* (1485) sought to promote architecture as a liberal art and, by including a chapter on gardens, which had previously been included with agriculture as a mechanical art, contributed in part to the elevation of their status. Alberti suggested the plan of a garden should be in the manner of a building, using geometrical shapes for layout and the planting of trees. From the sixteenth century, manuals codified traditions of garden making and horticultural experience. The process of garden making evolved from habit and repetition into what we would term 'design'. The manuals postdate the establishment of garden praxis, while a theory of garden design emerges in text after the significant gardens have been designed. Overall garden making moved away from the practice of agriculture and acquired the image of the Roman *castrum*, the planning of cities.

Giannetto's book is part of the Penn Studies in Landscape Architecture series, edited by John Dixon Hunt which is 'dedicated to the study and promotion of a wide variety of approaches to landscape architecture, with special emphasis on connections between theory and practice'. The series received the Award of Honor in Communications from the American Society of Landscape Architecture in 2006. Luke Morgan's *Nature as Model: Salomon de Caus and Early Seventeenth-Century Landscape Design* (2007) is another work in the same series.

Medici Gardens: From Making to Design engages the reader's interest throughout with its thorough and multifaceted approach. It will be of interest to scholars in areas of garden and landscape history, literature and architecture. With its interdisciplinary approach it will no doubt bring new insights to readers in particular disciplines and those interested in connections between them. It is accompanied by a generous number of illustrations: photographs, maps, plans and paintings.

Victoria Bladen
The University of Queensland

Gascoigne, John, *Captain Cook: Voyager Between Two Worlds*, London & New York, Hambledon Continuum, 2007; hardback; pp. 304; R.R.P. \$49.95; ISBN 9781847250025.

Encounters between cultures have become a fashionable topic and John Gascoigne has adapted his long-term interest in eighteenth-century voyages of scientific discovery to a consideration of the misunderstandings that arose