

## **Kids in the Palace!**





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# Kids in the Palace!

CHILDREN'S LIVES THROUGH THREE DYNASTIES IN THE PITTI PALACE

MEDICI



HABSBURG-LORRAINE,  
 BOURBON AND BONAPARTE



SAVOIA



**s i l l a b e**

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# MEDICI

## 8 IN THE PITTI PALACE COURTYARD



“Welcome to the Pitti Palace! Let me introduce myself: I am **Cosimo II de' Medici** (fig. 1) and this is my splendid home (fig. 2).

When my grandfather, Cosimo I became Duke of Florence, he and his wife, my grandmother, Princess Eleanora of Toledo and their children were living in the old Palazzo della Signoria. One day my grandmother learned that the Pitti family had put their palace, located on the other side of the river Arno, up for sale. The palace got its name from Luca Pitti who had built it a century earlier. Grandmother Eleanora bought the property in 1549, for a price of 9,000 florins (around 1,390,000 dollars in today's money)!

She was very pleased with her purchase, she had to spend a large part of her dowry on it, but she was tired of living in the small, dark and damp rooms of the Palazzo della Signoria. Now, she would be able to raise her children (my father among them) in a beautiful home which was large, luminous and very near the countryside. She wanted to make this palace worthy of a ruling family and for this reason she commissioned the architect, Niccolò Pericoli nicknamed “Il Tribolo” to transform the Boboli hill behind the palace into a splendid garden.



Fig. 1 - Anonymous, *Portrait of Cosimo II de' Medici with his Governess Costanza della Gherardesca*, 1590 (Gallery of the Statues and Paintings, storage)

Then she decided to enlarge the building starting at the rear. My grandparents chose the architect Bartolommeo Ammannati to build a large courtyard (that is still called the Ammannati Courtyard) and the two wings flanking it on the garden side (fig. 3).

They needed a great deal of space because, besides the Medici family itself, officials, councillors, and courtiers all lived here as did the footmen, maids and housekeepers who ran the household and took care of the family's daily needs. This large group



Fig. 2 - Pitti Palace, the façade



### *The She-Mule*

Enlarging a palace like this one required a huge amount of hard physical work on the part of both men and animals. One little mule the builders used to pull the carts containing the stones used in construction worked so hard that she died of fatigue. To commemorate her dedication and sacrifice the Medici ordered a bas-relief – that you can see in the courtyard – to be carved in her honour.



Fig. 3 - Pitti Palace, the “Ammannati Courtyard” with the Artichoke Fountain

# HABSBURG-LORRAINE, BOURBON AND BONAPARTE

## 24 IN THE MODERN ART GALLERY

“How exciting... it was 13 September 1765 when my parents Peter Leopold of Lorraine, son of Francis Stephen and Maria Luisa of Bourbon-Spain arrived at Pitti, the old palace where the Medicis had lived.

All of us, my brothers, sisters, and I were born here. You can see us in this painting (fig. 25) – well, not really everyone, 6 of us had not been born yet. You could say that we were a large family, 16 boys and girls born over 25 years! The one at the harpsichord (an ancestor of the piano) is my eldest sister, the firstborn Maria Teresa. She was named for our grandmother on our father’s side, the empress Maria Teresa. The boy in red, pointing to the globe, is my oldest brother, Francesco, destined to become the Emperor Francis II. I am the casual and elegant one, by his side!



Fig. 25 - Wilhelm Berczy, *The Family of Peter Leopold*, 1781-82 (Pitti Palace, Modern Art Gallery)



Let me introduce myself, I am Ferdinand, the future Grand Duke of Tuscany with the name **Ferdinando III**.

I was born in this grand palace in 1769. My father, in anticipation of our births, had the entire building renovated but decided to live in the left wing of the palace instead of in the apartments where the Medicis had lived. He had the Palatine Gallery, with an extraordinary collection of paintings, sculptures and precious objects, set up in the right wing.

Yes. You have understood correctly, it was my father, Peter Leopold, who put together this wonderful collection of masterpieces. Cosimo II de’ Medici told you the truth: his family started the collection but the credit for having set up the Gallery goes to my father, and it would be my son, Leopold II who opened it to the public in 1828.

But going back to us: our mother lived on the first floor, the noble floor, in eight lovely rooms overlooking the square and our father lived on the same floor, but his rooms overlooked the Boboli Gardens.

My parents really did not spend much time in the Pitti Palace, they preferred the Poggio Imperiale villa or even Pisa, a city my father loved.

So here I am, about two years old, together with my little sister **Maria Anna** (fig. 26).

We are all dressed up and posing for the official portrait. In that year, 1770, they took us to Vienna to meet our grandmother Maria Teresa and in the same year the Spanish court painter Anton Raphael Mengs, painted her portrait and also came to stay in our city.

We little princes lived on the second floor of the palace, in the bright rooms overlooking the square. Our section of the palace was very big, a little world inside the Pitti Palace, with its independent areas that included the kitchens, and our father watched over everything.

At first, our wet nurse Giovanna degli Albizi, a noble Florentine



Fig. 26 - Anton Raphael Mengs, *Double Portrait of the Archduke Ferdinand and Archduchess Maria Anna of Habsburg Lorraine*, 1770-71 (Pitti Palace, Palatine Gallery)



# SAVOIA

36 “Some hateful gossip about me was going around Florence... in 1822, when I was still very little, my nurse came too close to my crib with a candle and it caught fire! Someone said that I died in the flames and the same gossip-monger said that my mother hurried to find another child to take my place before anyone found out: you can imagine how terrible it would have been if she suddenly lost her first born!



But here I am, strong and healthy: I am **Vittorio Emanuele II of Savoia** and in this portrait you can see me with my mother, Maria Theresa of Habsburg-Lorraine and my little brother Ferdinand (fig. 42).

But what were we Savoias doing in Florence in those years?



Fig. 42 - Ferdinando Cavalleri, *Maria Theresa of Habsburg Lorraine and her Children*, 1832 (Cuneo, Castello di Racconigi)

My mother was the daughter of the Grand Duke Ferdinand III of Habsburg-Lorraine: do you remember? He was sent into exile by Napoleon! He could only return to the Pitti Palace with his father and siblings after the end of the Napoleonic domain, when kings were able to reclaim to their thrones: it was the Restoration Era!

By marrying Carlo Alberto of Sardinia in Florence, in the cathedral of Santa Maria dei Fiori, my mother united her family, the Habsburg Lorraine, with the Savoia family: a new family was about to be linked to the history of this splendid palace and I, in a certain sense, represented the symbol of this union: I am sure that I will accomplish great things when I grow up!

For the time being, I am practising – together with my

brother – to become a great commander (note how the uniform suits me!) and I am taking advantage of the opportunity to enjoy the Pitti Palace when I come to visit my uncle Leopold II of Habsburg, the Grand Duke of Tuscany. At the moment he is busy supervising the construction of a big avenue for carriages in the Boboli Gardens. I am very sorry that he had decided to destroy the old mazes where I used to play every so often, to make way for this wide road but what can I do if adults are always in a hurry and need to move around faster and faster?”

? HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN A MAZE?

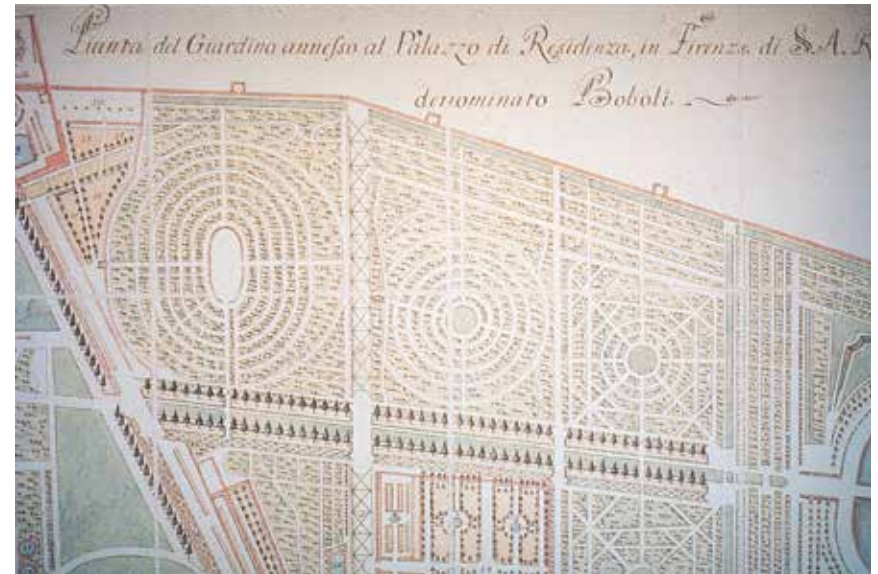


Fig. 43 - Michele Gori, *Map of the Boboli Gardens of H.R.H. The Grand Duke of Tuscany*, detail (Firenze, B.N.C.F.)



Fig. 44 - Boboli Gardens, The Avenue (period photo)

**Mazes**

There were four mazes (fig. 43) in the Boboli Gardens made at the beginning of the seventeenth century along the path that leads to the Island Pond (Vasca dell'Isola). They were completely destroyed in 1834 in order to build the carriage path (fig. 44) that still links the area of the Island with the area of the Cavaliere. We know what they looked like from old maps and descriptions.