Fashion and Court-Building in the Sixteenth-Century Florentine Ducal Court: Politics, Agency, and Paleopathology in the Wardrobes of Eleonora di Toledo and Giovanna d’Austria

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Abstract
Fashion in the Renaissance became intensely political, highly gendered, and anatomized (i.e. emphasizing human anatomy rather than masking it). Court culture placed a particular emphasis on the body of the courtier, as skills such as dancing and dressing fashionably became crucial to political success in states throughout Europe. In sixteenth-century Florence, the Medici attempted to install a duchy in what was at the time a republican city (with strong republican heritage). Florentine fears of foreign domination and resentment towards non-republican forms of government made the Medici’s task nearly impossible. Fashion became a primary pillar of the Medicean political agenda, as the first members of the Medici family to hold official power in the Florentine Grand Duchy (and their wives) dressed quite modestly in comparison to other sixteenth-century heads of state, so as not to appear to have imperial or monarchical pretensions and thus arouse dangerous levels of antipathy from their Florentine subjects. The first Grand Duchess, Eleonora di Toledo, and the second, Giovanna d’Austria, faced an additional challenge as foreign brides marrying into the Medici duchy, as they were themselves representatives of the influence of imperial power in Florentine politics. They both were faced with countless factors to consider as they made choices about how to dress, and each choice had political, social, and economic implications and consequences.

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In the 14th century, as the monarchies north and west of the Alps began a process of political consolidation that gradually ended feudalism, the city-states of Italy began to develop systematic theories of popular sovereignty and celebrations of active citizenship. The optimism of humanist political thought suffered a major setback during the French invasion of Italy and ensuing Italian wars, a traumatic context that gave rise to the pessimistic realism of Machiavelli and Guicciardini. In the 16th century, humanism’s political assumptions spread north...
and were further developed by Christian Hu