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Mirka Benes and Dianne Harris, Eds., *Villas and Gardens in Early Modern France and Italy* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. xx + 428 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography and index. \$85.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-521-78225-2.

Review by David Buisseret, University of Texas at Arlington.

This volume is derived from a symposium held at Dumbarton Oaks in 1995, at which four papers on Italian gardens were read. To these were added two more papers on Italian gardens and five on French gardens, making up the eleven papers listed below. This is, then, a commissioned anthology that attempts to give an idea of the most recent work in the two areas rather than to cover the entire scholarly field.

Until the late 1980s, gardens had been regarded by traditional historians primarily as “art-historical objects,” and it is the goal of most of these papers to shift the emphasis away from this preoccupation and toward the notion that gardens should be seen as “integral parts of the larger structure of society” (p. 7). The six papers concerned with Italy approach this problem in different ways. For Claudia Lazzaro, the problem is to decide whether there can be such a thing as an Italian garden, given the great range of influences felt throughout the peninsula, particularly from Spain. Suzanne Butters brings us down to earth by considering the contrast between garden imagery and social reality; she remarks that laborers were often discontent in these earthly paradises. Mirka Benes and Tracy Ehrlich are both concerned to place the gardens in their specific contexts as important parts of the economic landscape. Elizabeth MacDougall and Diane Harris both deal with specific sites, and Harris offers some particularly interesting passages on the use and misuse of pictorial representations.

In the French section, Sheila ffolliott makes the argument, concerning Catherine de Medici, that the garden was “an arena in which women could claim power” (p. 207). This ingenious idea does not seem to take into account the extraordinary range of places in which the queen-mother exercised her redoubtable will. Moreover, this paper seems a little at odds with the succeeding one by Elizabeth Hyde, who carefully shows the important part that gardens and their flowers played in the thought and policy of the Bourbon kings from Henri IV onwards. As the introduction puts it, Hyde analyses “the appropriation of the parterre as a male sphere” (p. 23).

Chandra Mukerji casts her net more widely, showing the importance of gardens to the economic development of France and to the growing policy of the *aménagement du territoire*. She returns to the days of Olivier de Serres to emphasize the importance of the garden in such industrial activities as the production of silk or the design of faience at Lille, pointing out the appeal of de Serres' ideas for Henri IV and his successors. Her arguments interestingly reinforce those of Thierry Mariage's recent work on André Le Nôtre; clearly, the garden in early modern France had a significance that it has lost for most of us. This emerges as well from Hilary Ballon's chapter on Vaux-le-Vicomte, in which she is concerned to get away from the old recital of Fouquet's misfortune and to show instead how he and Le Nôtre were working towards a form of garden that would best express a certain idea of the emergent French state. For Ballon, Fouquet's house and garden were not a “subversive anomaly” but a paradigmatic development in the line of similar ventures undertaken by previous statesmen such as Sully and Richelieu. In her view, all these ventures need to be studied carefully in order to show their relationship

to the emergence of a certain idea of France.

Finally, in “This is not a *jardin anglais*,” David Hays uses the career of Louis de Carmontelle to show that the famous garden at Monceau was not merely another English garden but rather responded to a whole range of desires and interests on the part of his patrons. Some of the influences did indeed come from England, but they derived from many other sources as well. This chapter is remarkably well supported with maps and diagrams in order to make its case. After reading it, one is easily persuaded of the great interest of the area of garden history and of the many studies which remain to be undertaken.

As this book suggests, such studies need to be made on a case-by-case basis, looking at the product as it now is, at the many different circumstances of its construction, and at the parties involved in its creation (including garden laborers as well as designers and patrons). The book is illustrated with some authentically muddy photographs by the various authors and is elegantly produced. Bibliographies are generally not provided for collaborative works of this kind, but such a list of the literature would have helped us to reflect on past and present directions in this fascinating area of study.

LIST OF ESSAYS

1. Claudia Lazzaro, Italy is a garden: the idea of Italy and the Italian garden tradition
2. Suzanne Butters, Pressed labor and Pratolino: social imagery and social reality at a Medici garden
3. Mirka Benes, Pastoralism in the Roman baroque villa and in Claude Lorrain: myths and realities of the Roman campagna
4. Tracy Ehrlich, “... dall’Agricoltura venne la Nobiltà...”: the Roman landscape of the villa Mongragone near Frascati
5. Elizabeth McDougall, Venaria Reale: ambition and imitation in a seventeenth-century villa
6. Dianne Harris, Landscape and representation: the printed view and Marc’Antonio dal Re’s Ville di delizie
7. Sheila ffolliott, Women in the garden of allegory: Catherine de’ Medici and the locus of feminine rule
8. Elizabeth Hyde, Gender, flowers and the baroque nature of kingship
9. Chandra Mukerji, Dress and address: garden design and material identity in seventeenth-century France
10. Hilary Ballon, Vaux-le-Vicomte: Le Vau’s ambition
11. David L. Hays, “This is not a *jardin anglais*”: Carmontelle, the *jardin de Monceau*, and irregular garden design in late eighteenth-century France

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