

Le delizie ritrovate: Poggioreale e la villa del rinascimento nella Napoli aragonese.
Paola Modesti.

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Several of the most famous and architecturally significant villas of the Italian Renaissance live on today only in drawings, paintings, maps, and poetic encomia, their stones and riches dispersed over time and their once lavish gardens erased by later construction. Such is the case of the legendary Neapolitan villa of Poggioreale, built at the end of the Quattrocento for Alfonso of Aragon, Duke of Calabria, and gradually demolished into the late eighteenth century. Paola Modesti's meticulously researched

monograph — based on her recent discovery of five outsized architectural drawings of the villa at the Victoria and Albert Museum — makes a groundbreaking contribution to the already rich bibliography on this celebrated Aragonese estate.

Described and contextualized in the first chapter, these detailed and technically accomplished plans, elevations, and sections (reproduced in color at the end of the book) are the only comprehensive record of the Poggioreale complex in existence. They were part of Lord Bute's vast collection of modern drawings of Italian buildings, commissioned and amassed during his grand tour of the peninsula between 1768 and 1771. Modesti provides a thorough account of the collection, paying particular attention to the illustrations of the four Neapolitan buildings it contained. She attributes the ca. 1770 Poggioreale drawings to Carlo Vanvitelli, whose exhaustive study and reconstruction on paper of that famed Renaissance *delizia* may have inspired his own royal villa projects for the Bourbons.

That the architect depicted the dilapidated villa in a fully restored state leads Modesti to question whether it was indeed possible for him to objectively re-create all of its parts. In the second chapter, she turns to other types of visual and literary evidence to help her assess the drawings and understand Poggioreale's original form and transformations over time. Crucial to her painstaking comparative analysis is Agostino Landulfo's previously overlooked description of the villa and its gardens from 1536 (transcribed in the appendix), as well as various sketches, engravings, painted *vedute*, and maps, which are unfortunately reproduced in small black-and-white illustrations. Unlike previous studies of Poggioreale that had mostly focused on the main palace, the new data provided by the V&A drawings and Landulfo's text allows Modesti to examine the villa complex in its entirety and, in the process, shed new light on several crucial areas, such as the nymphaeum and the kitchen, the latter also illustrated and discussed in Philibert de l'Orme's *L'Architecture*. Twelve color plates of the three-dimensional digital rendering of the villa created by Modesti's collaborators give the reader a visual record of her findings, as well as a compelling spatial sense of Poggioreale's architecture.

With its hunting grounds, animal reserves, orchards, vineyards, and rich aquatic displays, Poggioreale was not only a royal leisure estate par excellence, but also an expression of princely magnificence and a symbol of the supreme authority of the Aragonese, which was challenged at this time by baronial revolts. In the third chapter, Modesti convincingly demonstrates that Alfonso's ambitious building program in Naples and the broader territory served to assert the presence and power of the ruling dynasty. The unusual iconography of the exterior and interior decorations of the Poggioreale palace — likely devised by Giovanni Pontano and Jacopo Sannazaro and consisting exclusively of depictions of military victories of King Ferrante and his son Duke Alfonso — were part of the same strategy. They served as a backdrop to numerous encounters of great political significance that took place at the villa. Modesti also discusses Poggioreale in the broader context of early Renaissance courts and considers it in relation to Islamic gardens in Spain.

The final chapter tackles Poggioreale's complex building history, which initiated in 1487 with the arrival of Giuliano da Maiano from Florence with a gift of two *modelli* from Lorenzo de' Medici, and subsequently involved several other architects, such as Francesco di Giorgio Martini, Giuliano da Sangallo, and Fra' Giocondo. This chapter also considers Poggioreale's remarkable literary and antiquarian dimensions that helped make it one of the greatest monuments of Aragonese culture overall.

Enriched by dense footnotes and a thorough bibliography, Modesti's erudite and multifaceted monograph will be of great interest to scholars of Quattrocento Naples, villa culture, architectural and garden history, and Renaissance literature.

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