



Andrea Mantegna

Camera Picta

1465-74

Palazzo Ducale, Mantua



PRIMARY SOURCE READER

ZEUXIS VR: IMMERSIVE ART HISTORY

Description of the Medici-Rucellai Wedding 1466

The celebration was held outside the house, on a raised platform that was one and a half arm lengths high from the ground. The platform was beautifully decorated with fabrics, tapestries, benches, and backrests. There was also a canopy overhead made of inverted blue fabric to shield the guests from the sun. The canopy was decorated throughout with garlands covered in foliage and roses in the center of each garland. Festoons of foliage surrounded the garlands, and there were shields with the coats of arms of the Medici and Rucellai families on the platform, along with other decorations.

Description of Wedding Ceremony (1475)¹

This document describes the wedding ceremony of the illustrious Lord Meser Constantio Sforza d'Aragona and his wife, the illustrious Lady Camilla d'Aragona which took place in 1475. The document was likely written to record and commemorate the details of the wedding ceremony for posterity.

Around the walls of the hall, near the ceiling, there were two ropes of garlands in the ancient style, thick with greenery, like laurels, pines, boxwoods, and firs, and other things, each about six feet apart. And between these two ropes, there were round garlands in the ancient style, made of greenery, in the middle of which were all the silver and gold-colored coats of arms of the aforementioned lords, in large shields about four and a half feet, held by two little spirits, and between them, semicircles of garlands in the ancient style, in which passed aioli and diamonds made of greenery, which are also divided by the signor: and all the ties binding these garlands were of gold, and the fruits of gold, like quinces, pine cones, pomegranates, and other fruits. From the second rope, here from the garland, beautiful pieces of fabric were attached that covered the entire wall of the hall.

At the head of the hall, there was a five-foot high tribunal, with five steps, as long and wide as the entire hall, covered with tapestries, and ten feet wide, on which sat the Lord and Lady, the Duke of Urbano, and all the ambassadors, and worthy ladies who had a large and wide golden cloth on their shoulders, hanging from the last rope of the garland to the level of the tribunal, which was wide. And above the heads of the newlyweds, there was a very large shield crowned with gold, and fine colors with the arms of Ragona, that is, red and gold stripes.

On the right hand side of the hall, about halfway along the wall, there was a balcony of living stone columns where the pipers stood: and a little further from that, a wooden balcony also covered with garlands, (14v) where a large number of women stood who could not be in the tribunal because of age, rank, or other reasons. At the foot of the hall, there was a tall cupboard, reaching up to the ceiling of the hall, about nine steps high, all loaded with silver. And on this side of the hall, at one corner, there was a well-decorated balcony, on which there was a beautiful organ that played at the feast.

Mantegna complains to Lodovico Gonzaga²

Mantegna was noted for a somewhat prickly personality, and his querulous letter, coming after almost twenty years of service, should be taken with a grain of salt. The marquis' response was polite and measured.

Your Excellency: you remember how you sent Lucca Tagliapietra to me with letters of credence when I was in Padua in 1458; the said Luca declared many things to me by word of mouth on Your Excellency's behalf: principally how much you desired to have certain works by my hand and how well disposed Your Excellency was towards me, suggesting that if I was not satisfied with the terms you offered me that I should say so, and making many other generous offers. Wherefore in spite of the many persuasions of others to the contrary, I decided wholeheartedly to enter the service of Your Excellency, with the intention of so working that you could boast of having what no other Lord of Italy has: thus I did. But because it can be seen from the letters Your Excellency wrote to me containing such generous promises that if I bore myself in the manner of which Your Excellency was confident, you would make sure that the initial terms would be the least of the rewards I should receive from you, I have been in great hope, increasing all the time I have served Your Excellency, which is nearly nineteen years. And seeing the great remuneration of property, houses and other assets which have been lavished on your servants, I meanwhile still wait deservingly and neglected; it is five years since your Lordship promised to pay me with that property, which I do not reckon a good sign. I hoped that in that time your Excellency would have paid me with the said possession, that is the 800 ducats, and would have helped me further to pay the 600 ducats, as Your Excellency promised; and I still had hope that you would help me build the house as was promised. I find my affairs much more burdensome than I did when I came to settle with Your Excellency, with sons and daughters, one of whom I have to provide for in marriage, and seeing myself grow older every day, and thus is the state of my affairs.... Regarding the offers of Your Excellency and in the opinion of many in Italy, it appears that I swim in milk [i.e., am in milk and honey] under the shadow of your Serenity, to whom I humbly recommend myself.

Mantua, 13 May 1478

From your most dedicated servant

ANDREA MANTEGNA

¹From *Ordine delle Nozze dello Illustrissimo Signor Meser Constantio Sfortia de Aragonia: et della Illustrissima Madonna Cammilla de Aragonia sua consorte nell'annon MCCCCLXXVadi infrascripto*. (Vatican Cod. Urb. 899)

²Translation in David S. Chambers, *Patrons and Artists in the Italian Renaissance* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1971), pp. 119–20.