Based on her doctoral dissertation, Sara Galletti’s book is one of few recent studies of the Luxembourg Palace and by far one of the most thorough analyses. An established scholar of French architecture and urbanism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Galletti makes extensive use of iconographic sources and unedited manuscripts to present a history of the palace, from its origins to its different construction phases and transformations. By reinterpreting certain primary documents based on new theoretical approaches, Galletti is able to discuss the Luxembourg Palace within the political life of Maria de' Medici as well as the urban transformation of Paris during the same time period. The palace can be seen as a reflection of the glory of Henry IV and his widow. Well-planned with sumptuous decorations, the palace reads like an architectural history of seventeenth-century French architecture. Maria de' Medici’s residence played an important role in the urban development of the Left Bank as well as helping to define modern Paris.

Beginning with an overview of the program for the palace, which Maria de' Medici wished to base on her own childhood residence, the Pitti Palace, Galletti goes on to describe the work of each of the architects and their contributions. Maria de' Medici ultimately approved a plan evoking the French chateau to help cement her political power. Like Anthony Blunt, Galletti believes that the palace is distinctly French despite its Italian precedent. Another chapter investigates the gardens, perhaps the best-known part of the complex today. Created by Tommaso Francini in 1625, the Luxembourg gardens remain less documented due to a serious lack of sources.

This book is part of the De Architectura collection, well known for important studies and transcriptions from colloquia on French architectural history. It was translated into French from the Italian by Julien Noblet, who has rendered other works on French architecture. The translation is clear and, while a good reading knowledge of the language is necessary, the presentation is straightforward and does not require any special familiarity with architectural terminology. Section headings as well as an index enable the reader to easily navigate the text.

Thoroughly documented, Le palais de Luxembourg de Marie de Medicis, 1611-1631 is also well-illustrated. While some of the color photographs are not especially vibrant, every detail of the building is documented with photographs as well as sharp line drawings and/or plans and details taken from early treatises, such as those of Androuet du Cerceau. The labels are clear and the descriptions precise. The appendices are taken from archival sources and augment the information contained in the body of the work.

This book is highly recommended for academic libraries at college and universities where upper level French art, architecture and history courses are taught.

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