



THE XIMÈNES - PANCIATICHI PALACE  
IN FLORENCE

**THE DIAGNOSIS, MANAGEMENT AND  
TREATMENT OF HYPOPARATHYROIDISM**

**FLORENCE, MAY 7<sup>TH</sup> – 9<sup>TH</sup>, 2015**





## A BRIEF HISTORY

The 1st International Conference of Fondazione Internazionale Menarini on "*The Diagnosis, Management and Treatment of Hypoparathyroidism*" will be held in Florence, from 7th to 9th May 2015, in a meeting venue of great historical importance: the Ximènes - Panciatichi Palace.

It is a private historic house, national heritage site, located in via Borgo Pinti 68, in one of the most attractive street of the medieval Florence and a few steps away from the most artistic sites: Piazza della Signoria, the Duomo, the Baptistery and the Giotto's Bell Tower. Borgo Pinti is tall, narrow, and highly picturesque. It runs all the way from the northern ring-road boulevards of 1870, which replace the ancient 14<sup>th</sup> century walls, to the inner part of the city: the Santa Croce quarter. This is one of the four Florentine historical ancient sectors still challenging today during the calcio storico fiorentino, the Florentine Soccer match.



The term *pinti* probably comes from the Gesuati Friars living in the convent of San Giusto alle Mura near Porta Pinti, one of the ancient massive access Gate of the 14<sup>th</sup> century city walls, destroyed in 1865. The friars were well known for manufacturing and tinting the artistic stained glass windows, called *pinti*. At that time, Porta Pinti was called Fiesolana as through it passed all goods traffic and trades to and from Fiesole.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, many artists lived and had their workshops in Borgo Pinti area as they regularly met in the near cloister of San Luca by the Basilica of Santissima Annunziata, seat of the *Academy and Company of the Arts of Drawing* founded by Cosimo de' Medici on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1563. The houses of Perugino and Giambologna were in via Borgo Pinti, those of Pontormo and Tribolo in via della Colonna, those of Andrea del Sarto and Federico Zuccari in via Giusti while Cellini used to live in via della Pergola, etc.



Folklore also tells that in the house opposite Ximènes - Panciatichi Palace was born in May 1478 Giulio Zanobi, the illegitimate son of Giuliano de' Medici. On April 26 of that year, Giuliano was assassinated during the Pazzi conspiracy, a plot by members of the Pazzi family to displace the de' Medici family as rulers of Renaissance Florence. The child was adopted and raised by Lorenzo de' Medici il Magnifico, brother of Giuliano, and became pope Clemente VII from 1523 to his death in 1534.

The Palace is known with several names as it passed many properties in about three centuries: Palazzo da Sangallo, Palazzo Ximènes da Sangallo, Palazzo Ximènes - Panciatichi, Palazzo Ruffo di Calabria.

It was first built between 1490-98 by two brothers, Giuliano and Antonio Giamberti, as a house for themselves on an area





bought from the Cistercian monks. In the city they were artistically known as the Sangallo family, the Florentine Renaissance architects specialized in the design of fortifications. Especially Giuliano was the favourite architect of Lorenzo de' Medici. The historian Giorgio Vasari reported that they richly adorned the palace with many Roman antiquities and paintings by illustrious Florentine artists as Botticelli, Paolo Uccello and Antonio del Pollaiuolo.

The most ancient nucleus of the palace by the Sangallo is still easy detectable today. It is characterized by a perfectly symmetric U structure, which develops around a wide cross double-height room. On the back of the palace, on the sides of the loggia facing the garden, there are two equal rooms, covered by barrel vaults with stucco decorations. The kind of decoration and the technique used are typical of the Sangallo, and in fact, these vaults have always been considered as the few original elements that survived transformations.

In 1603, the palace was sold to Sebastiano di Tommaso Ximènes d'Aragona (1568-1633) the wealthy Jewish Portuguese trader who used to ran in Spain a powerful trading empire with branches throughout all Europe. He arrived in Florence in the second half of 1500 because of the Spanish Inquisition and the edicts of expulsion of Jews from the Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon by the Catholic Monarchs of Spain, Isabella I and Ferdinand II.



The Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici welcomed him to Tuscany and conferred him the hereditary title of Marquis and the honour of Christian Knight of the Order of Saint Stephen and gifted him the fief of Saturnia as a reconnaissance to the investments he made all over Tuscany.

The Marquise restored the Sangallo Palace and started its enlargement to transform it in a sumptuous wide stately residence, enriched with a big garden and built up on four main floors.

He commissioned the works to the famous Florentine architect and sculptor Gherardo Silvani in the Tuscan mannerism style, which he kept simple and sober without the extravagances of the Roman Baroque. He built the actual façade with the main portal flanked by two Tuscan pairs of *kneeling* windows at the side and a central balcony on the first floor with four lateral trabeated windows.

In 1753 the grandson Anton Francesco, the last male descendant of the Ximènes d'Aragona family, inherited the palace and enlarged the property thanks to the acquisition of part of the adjacent Jesuit novitiate of San Salvatore. He decided for further modifications that underwent significant changes: the entrance hall was added with two splendid symmetrical stairways with downward curving fasciae.



His nephew Ferdinando added to the ground floor, facing the garden, a large entrance hall and the courtyard with a fine large loggia crowned by the actual serliana structure. The garden was reduced and divided in many flowerbeds in rectangular shape to follow the symmetrical traditional urban Renaissance gardens and was enriched with a statue of the mythical Hercules destroying



the Nemean Lion (symbol of animal instinct) by the sculptor Giovanni Baratta and two marble statues representing Apollo and Diana, the huntress.

Historical documents of that period indicate that in 1796 the Marquis Ferdinando rented his palace to the French Embassy in Florence and, in the same year, the general Napoleone Bonaparte spent here one night before visiting the Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinando III d'Asburgo-Lorena at Pitti Palace. In April 1799, Charles de Reinhard, the French Ambassador in Florence and Civil Governor of Tuscany settled in the Palace until the 7<sup>th</sup> of July when he fled Florence from the popular revolutionary risings against the French domination. Furthermore, when Lord John Fane Burghersh 11<sup>th</sup> Count of Westmorland lived here as British Minister to Tuscany from 1814 to 1830, he turned the large courtyard of the palace into a theatre by covering it with a tent. He was a diplomat and a famous musical composer and offered weekly to his guests music performances and theatre in English.



In 1816, Francesco Ximènes d'Aragona died and his noble title as the entire property passed to his two nephews, sons of her sister Vittoria. She married Niccolò Panciatichi member of a rich family of bankers from Pistoia.

The two brothers, Bandino and Pietro Leopoldo Panciatichi - Ximènes, enlarged the palace with the intervention of the Florentine Jewish architect Niccolò Matas. He designed

the Franciscan church's 19<sup>th</sup> century neo-Gothic façade.

They organized the garden behind the building with a great central flowerbed and gravelled paths, adorned with fine sculptural works and a sundial. This is a copy of the medieval one placed on the roof of a shop on Ponte Vecchio, next to the monument of Cellini, and also copy of one in the garden of Villa I Tatti by Fiesole. The sundial is formed of a white marble cup divided by slender columns indicating the canonical hours. The gnomon projects its shadow onto the cup, thus marking the hour of the day.



Nice to notice is that Ferdinando Panciatichi - Ximènes, eclectic, intellectual and famous for the magical Moorish-Oriental style family Castle of Sammezzano in Reggello, introduced in the garden many exotics plants such as palm trees, loquats, and introduced in Italy the first redwood.

In 1832, in order to prolong the Via del Mandorlo, now via Giusti, towards the new Mattonaia district, the palace was cut in two but it still remained one of the largest in Florence.

The last member of the Panciatichi Ximènes family was Marianna who married the Marquis Alessandro Anafesto Paolucci delle Roncole. She was a biologist and well known for her activity in natural sciences and for a rare malacological collection of shells donated to the Florence Museum of Natural History, for the ornithological collection now in San Gimignano and for the botanical collection now at the technical Institute Galileo Galilei of Scandicci.

She turned the Italian garden into a Romantic English garden decorating it with sculptures



and fruit trees such as lemons and medlars and a fountain, now removed to make the garden appear more spacious.

The Panciatichi Ximènes family line ended with her death for lack of male heirs.

The palace then passed for inheritance in the female line to the Counts of the Rabitti-San Giorgio family, then to the family Arrigoni degli Oddi, originally from Padova, the last of which, Oddina, married Francesco Ruffo di Calabria, Prince of Scilla.

From Oddina the palace finally passed to her daughter Princess Isabella Fabrizia Ruffo di Calabria married Becherucci and related to the Royal Family of Belgium. She is the current owner and still lives in the palace.

In the first years of this decade, the Princess restored the palace and brought it to all its ancient glory. The large central ballroom is decorated with frescos. Tapestries with coat-of-arms adorn the other rooms furnished with antiques, original crystal chandeliers. They all preserve paintings and ancient busts as the one of Emperor Napoleone Bonaparte by the great neo-classic sculptor Antonio Canova (1757 - 1822), his official portraitist.

The palace hosts today events, conventions, weddings and parties.



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