

## The “Grotta degli Animali” in the Villa Medicea di Castello

The **Grotta degli Animali** (also called “**Grotta del Diluvio**” [“The Cave of the Flood”]) – with its water features reactivated after a long cycle of restoration – is located in the **Villa Medicea di Castello** on the outskirts of Florence.

The Villa di Castello is one of the oldest residences of the powerful Medici family, outside the city of Florence. It has belonged to the family since 1477 and was Cosimo I’s favorite home.

Its spectacular garden was designed in 1538, just one year after the duke took power.

Every detail of the park is a celebration of the duke’s power through the use of precise symbols, sculptures, caves and fountains.

The villa – a **UNESCO heritage** site since 2013 – is now also the seat of the **Accademia della Crusca**.

The Grotta degli Animali was designed in 1540 by **Niccolò Tribolo** and completed by **Giorgio Vasari** between 1554 and 1574. But there were also Davide Fortini and the sculptor Antonio Lorenzini at work in that cave.

Inside the cave there are three niches in which animals sculpted in polychrome marble and bronze crowd together.

In addition to fantastic animals such as the unicorn, there are wild boars, horses, deer, a roe deer, a wolf, a giraffe (“camelopard”), a leopard, a monkey, a dromedary, an elephant, and a **two-horned gray rhinoceros**.

The cave – like all the others built in that period – is decorated with stuccos, river pebbles, sponges, calcareous concretions and shells.





*(English adaptation of basic text in Italian by Antonietta Bandelloni)*