Belonging to the Individual or the Collective? The Urban Residence as a Public/Private Building in Renaissance Italy (1300–1500)

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Abstract

This article explores the public/private character of the urban residences of the social and political elite in Renaissance Italy. The public-private dichotomy is not understood here in terms of accessibility or openness, but in terms of ownership and belonging. Although the residence was owned by the private family, it also belonged to the urban and civic community as well as to the municipal authorities. Four main developments can be distinguished as having contributed to this phenomenon. Three of them—the praise for urban residences as fundamental contributions to the city's splendour and beauty contained in urban panegyrics and histories, the prominent position assumed by such buildings along public streets over the course of time, and direct or indirect funding of the construction of private residences by public authorities—have already been developed in existing scholarship. This article suggests that a fourth development sheds additional light on the increasingly ambiguous status of urban residences as public/private buildings. This was the gradual abolition of house-destruction as a legal punishment by municipal authorities. In doing so, these authorities recognized urban residences as a form of public good. By discussing these four developments together with a discussion of the possible meanings and connotations of the words 'public' and 'private' in scholarly discourse, this article hopes to contribute to the many studies that focus on the public and the private both in architectural history in general and in the study of urban residential architecture in Renaissance Italy in particular.

Keywords

Urban residences; Renaissance Italy; civic and urban community; municipal authorities; ownership; public good

Over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Italy, urban residences of the social and political elite assumed an ambiguous character as public/private buildings.[1] The public-private dichotomy is not understood here in terms of accessibility or openness, but in terms of ownership and belonging.[2] The residence was the private property of the *pater familias* and his family. Yet, on a more symbolic level, it also belonged to the urban and civic community as well as to the municipal authorities. Praise for urban residences in written sources are both an expression of, and an active contribution to, this phenomenon. Such praise presented urban residences as buildings that made a fundamental contribution to the city's splendour and beauty. Urban residences also assumed an increasingly prominent position in the urban fabric, especially along those roads which the political authorities developed into the representational face of the city. Finally, financing mechanisms led to a more ambiguous status of the urban residence as a public/private building. Urban authorities financed, in part or in full, the construction of these buildings.

These three mechanisms (although already discussed separately in existing scholarship, albeit never—to the best of my knowledge—together), should be seen against a final evolution that took place from the beginning of the thirteenth century onwards. At this time, judicial authorities at the urban level began to progressively abandon the penalty of house-destruction as a legal punishment. The arguments cited in the sources were, among others, to protect the honour of the city and to preserve its physical integrity. Through these changing legislative measures, municipal authorities recognized houses as a form of public good. However, this article argues that this evolution also contributed to the increasingly ambiguous status of urban residences of the social and political elite as public/private buildings in Renaissance Italy.

The public/private dichotomy: Open versus hidden, or individual versus collective?

Before discussing the ambiguous status of urban residences as public/private buildings in Renaissance Italy, it is important to clarify what is understood here by the words 'public' and 'private'. Jeff Weintraub's work helps to clarify how these words are used throughout the article.[3] Although dating back to the 1990s, Weintraub's work still provides a

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1   This article uses the word 'residence' and not '*palazzo*'. This is a conscious choice. Within architectural historical research focusing on the Italian Renaissance, the word '*palazzo*' is often used to refer to a specific typology of city-residences. This article uses the word 'residence' because it takes into account social and political status of the owners—rather than the typology of the building—as a selection criterion.

2   For other examples of scholarly contributions on the public/private nature of urban residential architecture in Renaissance Italy, see, for example, Fabrizio Nevola, *Street Life in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 227–64; Max Grossman, "A Case of Double Identity: The Public and Private Faces of the Palazzo Tolomei in Siena," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 71, no. 1 (2013): 48–77; Roger J. Crum and John T. Paoletti, "'... Full of People of Every Sort': The Domestic Interior," in *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, ed. Roger J. Crum and John T. Paoletti (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 273–91; Yvonne Elet, "Seats of Power: The Outdoor Benches of Early Modern Florence," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 61, no. 4 (2002): 444–69.

3   Jeff Weintraub, "The Theory and Practice of the Public/Private Distinction," in *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy*, ed. Jeff Weintraub and Krishan Kumar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1–42.

clear overview of the various connotations and meanings that these words have acquired within different disciplinary and scholarly contexts.

According to Weintraub, there are two fundamental and analytically very different ways in which the 'private' is differentiated from the 'public' in scholarly discourse.[4] The first considers the private as that which is hidden or withdrawn, as opposed to the public which is open, revealed, or accessible (visually, audibly, and/or physically). The second regards the private as that which is individual or belongs to the individual, as opposed to the public which is collective or belongs to a collective of people. The two may over-lap and be combined, but do not necessarily do so. For example, when one speaks of the 'public good' (in terms of something which benefits the collective), criteria of openness and accessibility do not come into play.

In addition to these two categories of distinction, Weintraub identifies four fields of social and political analysis within which the public-private contradiction acquires specific con-notations.[5] He first distinguishes the liberal-economic field which considers the public-pri-vate antithesis in terms of state administration versus market economy.[6] In this approach, the opposition between public and private can be best summarized by the terms 'public sector' versus 'private sector'. The public sector represents the state and its administra-tion whereas the private sector constitutes the one ruled by the laws of the market. As a second field, Weintraub considers the republican-virtue approach which understands the public in terms of a political community based on citizenship.[7] In this model, the 'public' is thus distinct from both the administrative state and the market (which were regarded as the two poles of the public/private distinction in the first one). In the republican-virtue approach, the focus is on the 'public sphere'—a sphere in which a collective of citizens actively participates in discussion, debate, deliberation, and decision-making.

As a third approach, Weintraub identifies that analytical field in social history and anthropology which understands 'public life' in terms of sociability (without it necessa-rily having a political connotation as in the first two models).[8] This tradition studies the conditions and physical spaces in which people can meet and enjoy social encounters. As a fourth and final category, he mentions the feminist approach which situates the distinction between private and public within the opposition between the family and the larger economic and political order.[9] In contrast to the previous approaches, the feminist approach analytically starts from the private, specifically linking it to the domestic. In this approach, the 'public' is often considered to be a rather residual category.[10]

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4   Weintraub, "Theory and Practice," 5.
5   Weintraub, "Theory and Practice," 7–42.
6   Weintraub, "Theory and Practice," 7–10.
7   Weintraub, "Theory and Practice," 7 and 10–16.
8   Weintraub, "Theory and Practice," 7 and 16–25.
9   Weintraub, "Theory and Practice," 7 and 27–34.
10   These fields are variably present in the aforementioned publications that discuss urban residential architecture in relation to the public and the private. Grossman's article on the Palazzo Tolomei, for example, discusses how the building was used both by a family and as a representative building for the communal authorities. Nevola, for instance, discusses how multiple people negotiated matters of publicity and privacy in and around the palace, especially as it was situated on the physical zone that separated outdoor from indoor space. Both matters of

Weintraub's analysis not only allows to carefully set up what can be meant by the words 'public' and 'private' but also enables a nuanced discussion of the term 'public' itself. In this article, the public/private distinction recognizes Weintraub's first observation and considers that distinction in terms of ownership and belonging (and not in terms of what is hidden or withdrawn either physically, visually, and/or audibly). It also considers the multiple connotations of the 'public' in relation to the different fields identified by Weintraub, wherein the 'public' refers both to a community of inhabitants and citizens involved in a public sphere, as well as to a state administration or, in this case, the formal authorities in charge of governing a city.

One of the arguments made in this article is that this specific distinction of the public as urban community, community of citizens, and state administration is blurred in the 'public' nature of the urban residence in Renaissance Italy. Urban communities at the time did not necessarily coincide with political communities. The political community consisted of citizens who had obtained the legal status of citizenship of a particular city.[11] Often, this was a select group of people who lived in (or outside) the city. The city itself was governed by municipal authorities composed of one or more city councils. Their constitution and composition varied from city to city and from time to time.[12] Urban residences should be considered in part as 'public' buildings because all three levels of the public apply to them—they belonged not only to the individuals and their families but also to the urban community as a whole, to the community of citizens, and to the municipal authorities.

The abolition of house-destruction as a legal punishment by municipal authorities

The development of urban residences into public/private buildings took place within the overall context of the development of late medieval cities into more independent political and legal entities from the end of the eleventh century onwards.[13] At this time, cities in northern and central Italy (as well as elsewhere in Europe) assumed a more independent status by appropriating political and judicial rights. Institutional structures developed that made allowances for the urban community to govern itself. Among the judicial rights that were appropriated was the right for house-destruction as a legal punishment.[14] This

sociability and political decision-making are present in his discussions. See Nevola, *Street Life in Renaissance Italy*, 227–64; Grossman, "A Case of Double Identity," 48–77.

11   On citizenship in the early modern period, see Maarten Prak, *Citizens without Nations: Urban Citizenship in Europe and the World, c.1000–1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Christopher R. Friedrichs, *Urban Politics in Early Modern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Pietro Costa, *Civitas: Storia della cittadinanza in Europa* (Rome: Laterza, 1999). On Italy in particular, see François Menant, *L'Italie des communes 1100–1350* (Paris: Belin, 2005); Giuliano Milani, *I comuni Italiani: secoli xii–xiv* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 2005).

12   See, for example, Friedrichs, *Urban Politics*; Menant, *L'Italie des communes*; Milani, *I comuni italiani.*

13   On the communes, see, for example, Menant, *L'Italie des communes*; Milani, *I comuni Italiani.* Edward Coleman, "The Italian Communes: Recent Work and Current Trend," *Journal of Medieval History* 25, no. 4 (1999): 373–97, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-4181(99)00010-X; Philip Jones, *The Italian City-State: From Commune to Signoria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

14   Antonio Pertile, *Storia del diritto Italiano dalla caduta dell'Impero Romano alla codificazione*, Vol. 5 (Bologna: Forni, 1965), 348–53; Ernst Fischer, *Die Hauszerstörung als strafrechtliche Massnahme im deutschen Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1957); André Delcourt, *La vengeance de la commune. L'arsin et l'abattis de*

punishment became frequently applied for crimes against the urban community and for disrespecting its political and legal privileges. It provided that the criminal's house would be destroyed as a consequence of his crime. The destruction marked the moment at which the criminal was expelled from the urban community—his material presence, symbolized through the house, was razed to the ground.[15]

Yet, even if municipal authorities appropriated the right to impose house-destruction as a legal penalty, variations on the punishment were introduced rather quickly in several city statutes, allowing (complete) demolition to be avoided.[16] This process seems to have started north of the Alps, but continued on the Italian Peninsula at least from 1236 onwards.[17] In his overview of the history of Italian law, Antonio Pertile cites the statutes of Padua as a first example in which the punishment was abandoned. He then enumerates multiple additional urban statutes that included clauses to forbid or replace the punishment with alternatives over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.[18]

Arguments cited in the statutes for the changes in the legislation referred often to the disfigurement and shame that such destruction brought on the *civitas*. The 1303 statutes of Mantua, for example, mentioned specifically that no house of a convicted criminal would be destroyed "for the honour and utility of the commune".[19] Galvano Fiamma (1283–1344) mentions that during Visconti rule, it had been decided that the houses of banished people should no longer be destroyed but should be used instead for communal benefit. Destruction would only "disfigure the city and inflict manifest shame upon it".[20] The Roman statutes of 1363 included similar motivations in the documents as a reason to abolish the punishment.[21]

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maison en Flandre et en Hainaut (Lille: Raoust, 1930). For more recent scholarship, see Nele De Raedt, "Papal and municipal authority in the city: house-destruction as a legal punishment in Renaissance Rome," *Urban History* (2022): 1–17, http://doi.org/10.1017/S0963926822000748; Christopher R. Friedrichs, "House-Destruction as a Ritual of Punishment in Early Modern Europe," *European History Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (2020): 599-624, https://doi.org/10.1177/0265691420960917; Daniel Jutte, "Living Stones: The House as Actor in Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Urban History* 42, no. 4 (2016): 659–87.

15   See also Giuliano Milani, "The Ban and the Bag: How Defamatory Paintings Worked in Medieval Italy," in *Images of Shame: Infamy, Defamation and the Ethics of Oeconomia*, ed. Carolin Behrmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 119–40; Giuliano Milani, "Giuristi, giudici e fuoriusciti nelle città Italiane del duecento: Note sul reato politico comunale," in *Pratiques sociales et politiques judiciaires dans les villes de l'occident à la fin du Moyen Âge*, ed. Jacques Chiffoleau, Claude Gauvard, and Andrea Zorzi (Rome: Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2007), 595–642; Desiderio Cavalca, *Il bando nella prassi e nella dottrina giuridica medievale* (Milan: Giuffrè editore, 1978).

16   De Raedt, "Papal and municipal authority," 7–10; Pertile, *Storia del diritto italiano*, 348–53; Fischer, *Die Hauszerstörung*, 144; Delcourt, *La vengeance de la commune*, 154.

17   Pertile, *Storia del diritto italiano*, 352; Delcourt, *La vengeance de la commune*, 154.

18   Pertile, *Storia del diritto italiano*, 352, footnote 54.

19   "[P]ro honore et utilitate Comunis." Cited from Pertile, *Storia del diritto italiano*, 352, footnote 54.

20   "[Q]uod civitatem deturpabat et manifestam infamiam inducebat." Galvano Fiamma, *Gualvanei de la Flamma. Opusculum de rebus gestis ab Azone, Luchino et Johanne, vicecomitibus, ab anno MCCCXXVIII usque ad annum MCCCXLII*, ed. Carlo Castiglioni (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1938), 44. Also cited in Pertile, *Storia del diritto italiano*, 352, footnote 54.

21   "Pro honore urbis" and "ut romana civitas non deformetur". N. Del Re, ed., *Statuti della città di Roma del secolo XIV* (Rome, 1883), 94 (Book 2, Article 16: *De domibus homicidarum non diruendis*) and 141 n. 7 (Book 2, Article 200: *Quod non diruatur aliqua domus*). See also De Raedt, "Papal and municipal authority".

It might be regarded as no coincidence that mainly legal authorities at the judicial level of the city abandoned the punishment over time. Such authorities had every interest in preserving the material stock of the city, not only for fiscal and economic reasons but also—as the sources state—because that material stock contributed greatly to the city's pride and reputation. It can be assumed that such concerns certainly and especially applied to the urban residences built by the social and political elite. Within the urbanization process of many late medieval cities, such houses, often built in stone, became monumental structures, defining the cityscape.[22] Through the changing legislation, local authorities recognized houses in general and—as suggested here—the urban residences of the social and political elite in particular, as a form of public good. This evolution preceded, and partially ran parallel with, other mechanisms that contributed to the development of urban residences of the social and political elite as buildings with an ambiguous public/private character over time.

The urban residence as a contribution to the splendour of the city

The development of late medieval cities into more independent legal and political entities was accompanied by the emergence of numerous writings in which the built environment was celebrated as a sign of urban greatness.[23] This occurred specifically in the genre of urban histories and panegyric. In such celebrations, the residences of the social and political elite figured prominently. Already at the start of the fourteenth century, Dino Compagni (ca. 1260–1324) mentioned the houses of Florence in his chronicle as being the most beautiful.[24] In his *l'istoria di Firenze* (1380–1405), Gregorio Dati (1362–1435) equally celebrated how the residences of the Florentine citizens were certainly not inferior to those built by princes. The whole city, he claimed, "is full of such beautiful and ornate dwellings."[25] In his *Invectiva in antonium luschum vicentinum*, Coluccio Salutati (1332–1406) too celebrated the superb palaces of Florence, together with other buildings such as temples and porticos.[26]

A more explicit and elaborate celebration of urban residences as contributing to the splendour and beauty of the city is found in the *Laudatio florentinae Urbis,* written by Leonardo Bruni (ca. 1370–1444) around 1403–4. In this work, Bruni celebrates the beauty of Florence as a sign of the quality of the Florentine people, specifically its citizens.[27] The inti-

22   Paul Oldfield, *Urban Panegyric & the Transformation of the Medieval City, 1100–1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 15–16.

23   Oldfield, *Urban Panegyric*, 1–22.

24   Dino Compagni, *Cronica Fiorentina della cose occorrenti ne' tempi suoi* (Milan: Paolo Carrara, s.a. [1867]), 7. Also cited in James R. Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace in Florence: Magnificence and Splendour in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 15–16.

25   "[T]utta la città è piena di belle e ornate abitazioni." Gregorio Dati, *L'istoria di Firenze*, ed. L. Pratesi (Norcia: Tonti Cesare, 1902), 119. Also cited in Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace in Florence*, 16–17.

26   Coluccio Salutati, "Invectiva in antonium luschum vicentinum," in *Prosatori Latini del Quattrocento*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Milan and Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi editore, 1952), 34–35. Also cited in Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace in Florence*, 17.

27   Leonardo Bruni, *Laudatio Florentine Urbis*, ed. Stefano U. Baldassarri (Florence: Sismel, 2000). Bruni's text fits within a broader collection of works produced in the circle of Manuel Chrysoloras (ca. 1355–1415) in which the visible is considered to be evidence of the invisible. According to Christine Smith, this use of the built envi-

mate connection between the quality of the built environment and the greatness of the urban and political community applied to the city as a whole. The two were so closely connected that their relationship resembled that between father and son.[28] Yet, the connection also specifically applied to the urban residences of Florence's social and political elite. These residences were built with such "magnificence, ornament, wealth, delight, and splendour" that Bruni claims he lacks the right words to describe them.[29] In contrast to other cities, these residences, he claims, were not simply present along the main roads and their artistic development was not merely limited to the façade. Even in the furthest corners of the city, as in the most secluded rooms inside the building, visitors could enjoy beauty and splendour. "As blood runs evenly through the whole body," Bruni observes, "so are delight and decorum spread throughout the city."[30]

In using the word "magnificence" to describe the urban residences, Bruni also referred to the growing discourse on the virtue of *magnificentia* in Renaissance Florence. In the middle of the thirteenth century, Robert Grosseteste (ca. 1168–1253) and William of Moerbeke (ca. 1215–86) made new Latin translations of Aristotle's *Ethica nicomacheia* and *De politica*.[31] These translations brought the virtue of *magnificentia* back into the focus of ethical and political discourse. The discourse on *magnificentia* stated that it was a virtue for a prosperous man to incur large and appropriate expenditures (i.e. in relation to the patron, the object and the circumstances) in the creation of great works. According to Aristotle, it also behoved the magnificent man to construct a residence proportionate to his wealth.

Although Aristotle's works had already been translated in the thirteenth century and discussions on magnificence (and magnificent architecture) had taken place in relation to the construction of cities and residences, large-scale attention towards magnificence-as-virtue was paid only in the fifteenth century.[32] This attention was particularly strong in Florence. Leonardo Bruni made a new translation of the *Ethica nicomacheia* in 1416/17.[33] Preachers expounded upon the virtue in the streets of Florence at least from the 1420s

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ronment as evidence of national character was an innovation that first appeared in these Florentine intellectual circles at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Christine Smith, *Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Eloquence 1400–1470* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 180.

28　Bruni, *Laudatio Florentine Urbis*, 4.

29　"[M]agnificentiam, ornatum, gazam, delitias, nitorem." Bruni, *Laudatio Florentine Urbis,* 7.

30　"Nam velut sanguis per universum corpus, sic ornamenta delitieque per universam urbem diffuse sunt." Bruni, *Laudatio Florentine Urbis*, 7.

31　William of Moerbeke, *Aristotelis Politicorum libri octo; cum vetusta translatione Guilelmi de Moerbeka*, ed. F. Susemihl (Leipzig: Teubner, 1872); Aristotle, Robert Grosseteste, and René Antoine Gauthier, *Ethica Nicomachea, translatio Roberti Grosseteste Lincolniensis sive 'Liber Ethicorum': B. Recensio recognita edidit Renatus Antonius Gauthier*, vol. 26, 1–3, fasc. 4, Aristoteles Latinus (Leiden: Brill, 1973). Aristotle's discussion of magnificence can be found in the *Nicomacheian Ethics* at 1122a–1123a.

32　See, for example, Peter Howard, *Creating Magnificence in Renaissance Florence* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012); Alessandro Polcri, "Teoria e prassi della magnificenza tra Marsilio Ficino, Timoteo Maffei e Cosimo de'Medici," *Italian History & Culture* 13 (2008): 111–34; Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace in Florence*; A.D. Fraser Jenkins, "Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage of Architecture and the Theory of Magnificence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 162–70.

33　See, for example, David A. Lines, *Aristotle's Ethics in the Italian Renaissance (1300–1650): The Universities and the Problem of Moral Education*, Vol. 13 (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: Brill, 2002).

onwards.[34] Several authors, such as Giannozzo Manetti and Timoteo Maffei, discussed the virtue in their works.[35]

Rupert Shepherd has argued that authors writing on magnificence in fifteenth-century Florence made a distinction between works that benefited the common good (such as churches, hospitals, loggias, or city walls) and works that were intended for the individual and the family (such as tombs, houses, and villas). The buildings of the first category would especially have been considered as appropriate objects for large-scale expenditure in a republican context. Huge expenditure on works for the individual and family would have been regarded with more suspicion. If such works were mentioned, authors would place especial emphasis on the communal benefit that could be received from them.[36] As such, in discussions on magnificence too, a growing discourse emerged that presented the construction of a magnificent residence as an act of good citizenship, one in which the individual contributed to the splendour and beauty of the city.[37] This can be seen, for example, in Timoteo Maffei's discussion of the architectural patronage of Cosimo de'Medici (1389–1464). In his *In Magnificentiae Cosmi Medicei Detractores* of 1454/56, he wrote that in building his urban residence, Cosimo had not his own greatness in mind, but the greatness of Florence. Cosimo built his residence as a sign of gratitude towards Florence for the many benefits he had received from the city.[38]

Attention to the virtue of magnificence and the celebration of the urban residence as a fundamental contribution to the beauty and splendour of the city were, however, not confined to Florence. In other Italian cities such as Bologna, Naples, and Rome, similar considerations can be found.[39]

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34   Howard, *Creating Magnificence.*

35   For example, Howard, *Creating Magnificence*; Polcri, "Teoria e prassi della Magnificenza"; Christine Smith and Joseph F. O'Connor, *Building the Kingdom: Giannozzo Manetti on the Material and Spiritual Edifice* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in collaboration with Brepols, 2006), 247–54; Jenkins, "Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage of Architecture". Manetti also made his own translation of the *Nicomacheian Ethics*. See, for example, David A. Lines, "The Commentary Literature on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics in Early Renaissance Italy: Preliminary Considerations," *Traditio* 54 (1999): 245–82.

36   Rupert Shepherd, "Republican Anxiety and Courtly Confidence: The Politics of Magnificence and Fifteenth-Century Italian Architecture," in *The Material Renaissance: Costs and Consumption in Italy, c.1400–1650*, ed. Michell O'Malley and Evelyn Welch (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 49–50.

37   On the concept of ornament in relation to the city, see also Yan Thomas, "Les ornements, la cité, le patrimoine," in *Images romaines: Actes de la table ronde organisée à l'Ecole normale supérieure (24–26 octobre 1996)*, ed. Clara Auvray-Assayas (Paris: Presses de l'école normale supérieure, 1998).

38   Howard, *Creating Magnificence*, 128–29, 142–43.

39   Shepherd, "Republican Anxiety," 47–70; Georgia Clarke, *Roman House—Renaissance Palaces: Inventing Antiquity in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 54–65; Evelyn Welch, "Public Magnificence and Private Display: Giovanni Pontano's 'De Splendore' (1498) and the Domestic Arts," *Arts Journal of Design History* 15, no. 4 (2002): 211–21; Georgia Clarke, "Magnificence and the City: Giovanni II Bentivoglio and Architecture in Fifteenth-Century Bologna," *Renaissance Studies* 13 (1999): 397–411. On the reception of Aristotle's *Nicomacheian Ethics* more generally, see Lines, *Aristotle's Ethics in the Italian Renaissance (1300-1650).*

Architectural and urban developments in building urban residences

Figure 1: Palazzo Medici Riccardi. ©Wojciech Strózyk / Alamy Stock Photo

Bruni's celebration of the Florentine urban residences as buildings that were spread across the city and not restricted to only being present on the most important roads should be read against contemporary architectural and urban developments in which a more intimate relationship developed between public streets and private residences in many Italian cities. The 'public' street should be understood here as a specific category of streets in late medieval cities. Within the administration of the rising communes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, distinctions were made between so-called public streets, neighbourhood streets, and private streets.[40] Public streets (*via publica*) were those over which communal authorities exercised most direct control, both in their use and physical form. Communal authorities could direct individual owners to build the façades that fronted such a street according to an ideal physical form. The ideal 'public street'—so Friedman reconstructed from Italian statutes—was rectilinear, paved, and surrounded by a continuous wall.[41]

David Friedman argued that tensions were initially present between the ambitions of communal authorities to develop public streets into the representational face of the city and private families who owned properties along such streets. [42] The latter would have initially resisted the building conditions imposed by the authorities for the façades of their houses looking out into public streets. However, over time, patrons would have understood the benefits offered by public streets which permitted the creation of privileged views of their properties from the streets where inhabitants and

Figure 2: Palazzo a Punta di Diamante on a fragment of Antonio Tempesta, Plan of the city of Rome (Rome: Giovanni Domenico de Rossi, 1645). ©The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accession Number: 1983.1027(1-12). Edward Pearce Casey Fund, 1983.

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40   David Friedman, "Palaces and the Street in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy," in *Urban Landscapes*, ed. J.W.R. Whitehand and P.J. Larkham (London: Routledge, 1992), 69–113.

41   Friedman, "Palaces and the Street," 72. See also Marvin Trachtenberg, *Dominion of the Eye: Urbanism, Art, and Power in Early Modern Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
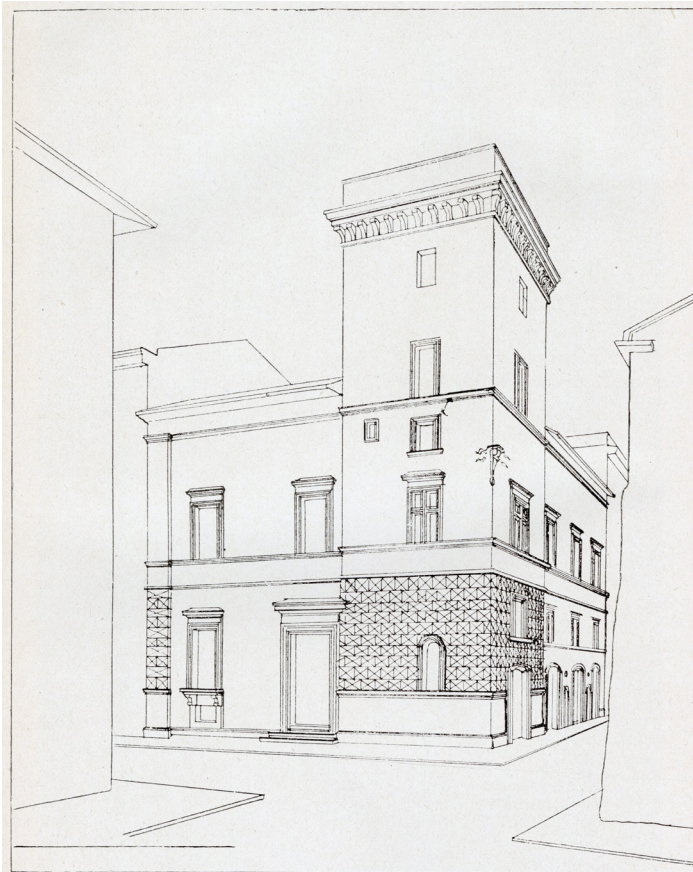
42   Friedman, "Palaces and the Street," 69–113.

Figure 3: Reconstruction of Palazzo a Punta di Diamante. From Piero Tomei, L'architettura a Roma nel Quattrocento (Rome: Fratelli Palombi, 1942), pl. 168.

visitors circulated on a daily basis. Over time, and especially during the fifteenth century, a more "symbiotic relationship" would have emerged between the construction of the ideal public street and the monumentalization of the private residence.[43]

Friedman illustrates this more "symbiotic relationship" by means of examples.[44] Cosimo de'Medici, for example, bought multiple plots on the corner of the present-day Via de'Gori and Via Camillo Cavour in order to build Palazzo Medici.[45] This prominent location towards the urban centre permitted a privileged view on the corner of the building where the coat of arms of the family was prominently displayed (Figure 1). Friedman also suggested that the building was tilted over a corner so that visitors, coming from the north and approaching the cathedral, would immediately see the building at the end of the street.[46] In Rome, the Santacroce family, owning numerous properties in the narrow Via in Publicolis, acquired additional plots located along the more frequented Via Mercatoria over the years (Figures 2 and 3).[47] By the end of the fifteenth century, the family was able to build an urban residence along the street whose prominent corner tower attracted the attention of pilgrims and merchants on this busy commercial route. In other cities too, many urban residences are located along the city's main roads, leading from the gates to the centre.[48]

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43   Friedman, "Palaces and the Street," 69.
44   Friedman, "Palaces and the Street," 100-04.
45   The example is discussed by Friedman in "Palaces and the Street," 97–99. See also Howard Saalman and Philip Mattox, "The First Medici Palace," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 44 (1985): 329–45.
46   Friedman, "Palaces and the Street," 102–4.
47   Nele De Raedt, "The Santacroce Houses Along the Via in Publicolis in Rome: Law, Place and Residential Architecture in the Early Modern Period," in *Creating Place in Early Modern European Architecture*, ed. Elizabeth Merrill (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 73–97; Carla Benocci, "Palazzo Santacroce tra Via in Publicolis e Via del Pianto: Contributi e ricerche," *L'urbe* 47 (1984): 225–33.
48   Friedman, "Palaces and the Street". See also Nevola, *Street Life in Renaissance Italy*, 227–64.

Although commercial motivations may certainly have played a role in these developments (as many urban residences integrated ground-floor retail spaces for rent),[49] the representative value of the façade along a public street cannot be underestimated. Public streets were often busy streets along which visitors discovered the city. On these streets, private owners and political authorities could present themselves together to urban dwellers and visitors. Both the virtuousness of citizens as well as communal political power could be displayed here side-by-side.

Public and private money in financing the urban residence

Finally, financing mechanisms also played a role in the increasingly ambiguous character that urban residences acquired as public/private buildings over time. In several cities, municipal authorities contributed financially to the construction of urban residences by the social and political elite, either directly through (co-)financing the construction or indirectly through tax reductions.

Ian Robertson, for example, has studied such financing mechanisms for Bologna in the second half of the fifteenth century.[50] He has shown how the municipal authorities contributed indirectly to the construction of private residences through tax exemptions. For example, in November 1460, Sante Bentivoglio (1424–63) was exempted from all taxes on the building materials he needed for the construction of Palazzo Bentivoglio.[51] In 1464, a similar exemption was granted to the Bianchi brothers for building an urban residence in Piazza San Stefano.[52] The reasons given in the documents for these financial contributions echo the expressions found in legal documents or urban histories—the exemption was granted "bearing in mind that beautiful and adorned domestic buildings redound to the adornment and profit of the city."[53]

The financial contribution could also take a more direct form by, for example, granting the income of the municipal authorities to private persons. In 1452, for instance, Sante Bentivoglio was granted entitlements to revenues from the *Dazio delle carteselle*.[54] Sante had been brought to Bologna from Florence some years earlier to take over the leadership of the Bentivoglio faction. Sante came from a modest background in Florence and his income did not allow him "to live honourably in accordance with his status and condition."[55] For this reason, the municipal authorities granted him the income of the

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49   Fabrizio Nevola, "Home Shopping: Urbanism, Commerce, and Palace Design in Renaissance Italy," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 70, no. 2 (2011): 153–73.

50   Ian Robertson, *Tyranny under the Mantle of St Peter* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 79–98.

51   Robertson, *Tyranny under the Mantle of St Peter*, 79.

52   Robertson, *Tyranny under the Mantle of St Peter*, 81.

53   "Attendentes pulchra et ornata domorum edificia cedere ad ornatum et utilitatem Ciuitatis." Archivio di Stato di Bologna (hereafter ASB), Riformatori dello stato di libertà, Lib. Mand., 15, fol. 45v. Cited from Robertson, *Tyranny under the Mantle of St Peter*, 81.

54   The *Dazio delle carteselle* was a kind of tax, imposed on purchase and sale contracts as well as on marriage dowries. Robertson, *Tyranny under the Mantle of St Peter*, 84–85.

55   "Ut uiuere possit honorabiliter secundum statum, et condictionem suam." ASB, Riformatori dello stato di libertà, Libri partitorum, 1, fol. 64v (4 August 1452). Cited from Roberston, *Tyranny under the Mantle of St Peter*, 85.

Dazio delle carteselle. One of the conditions stipulated in the documents was that Sante had to invest 2,400 lire every year in real estate in the city or in the immediate surroundings of Bologna. In this way, part of the public money returned to the development of the physical structure of the city, even if it was through private commissioning. In Bologna, all these mechanisms blurred the boundaries between public and private capital and thus also between the status of the urban residence as public or private good.

These same funding mechanisms can be found in other Italian cities (and even in cities across the Alps).[56] In his *Nuova Opera*, Giovanni Cavalcanti (1381–ca. 1451) alluded to similar practices in Florence, specifically in relation to Cosimo de'Medici's architectural patronage.[57] Cavalcanti recalls how by the 1440s, both rich citizens and ordinary people in Florence complained about Cosimo de'Medici's spending on architectural patronage, specifically alluding to the inappropriate use of public money for private spending. "Who would not build magnificently," Cosimo's critics claimed, "having to spend money which is not his own?"[58] Public coffers would be emptied at the door of Cosimo's house. Private self-enrichment at the community's expense and the subsequent usage of such money to build seemed to have been part of the criticism. With reference to the Palazzo Medici, its immoderate size was another thorn in the side. Cosimo had started to build a palace, his critics claimed, next to which the Colosseum would seem useless.[59]

In a certain way, it may not have been so surprising that private residences of the urban elite were (partly) funded from the municipal coffers. It was in the interest of these authorities to make the city the pride of the urban community. Moreover, the patrons of these residences were often the same people who sat on the councils and committees of the urban authorities. Some form of self-enrichment seems not to have been unknown to this elite.

However, not all of these practices were without controversy. In Bologna, Pope Paul II (r. 1464–71), himself in conflict with the municipal authorities, noted that he received several complaints from citizens that the urban elite, occupying seats in the *Sedici* (the central governing body of Bologna), were spending public money for private purposes (such as, for example, on weddings in addition to architectural commissioning).[60] Who really expressed this criticism—whether it was Pope Paul II himself, local families who did not support the regime, or a broader segment of the population—is not clear. But the criticism does show—as it did in Florence—that in the eyes of contemporaries, there were mechanisms of self-enrichment operative in the city by those in political power.

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56   Merlijn Hurx, *Architecture as Profession: The Origins of Architectural Practice in the Low Countries in the Fifteenth Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 102–14.

57   Giovanni Cavalcanti, *Nuova opera: Chronique Florentine inédite du xve siècle*, ed. Antoine Monti (Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1989), 120–21.

58   "Chi non murerebbe magnificamente avendo a spendere di que' danari che non sono suoi?" Cavalcanti, *Nuova opera*, 120.

59   The relevant passage reads: "[À] cominciato un palagio al quale sarebbe allato el Culiseo di Roma disutile." Cavalcanti, *Nuova opera*, 120.

60   Robertson, *Tyranny under the Mantle of St. Peter's*, 65.

Conclusion

This article has analysed four overlapping developments—the abolition of house-destruction as a legal punishment, the celebration of urban residences as contributing to the splendour and beauty of the city, the more prominent position of urban residential architecture along public roads, and financing mechanisms operative in many cities—by means of parallel discussions in order to show how they all attest and contribute to the increasingly ambiguous position of urban residences as public/private buildings in Renaissance Italy. All these developments were closely linked to the rise of the communes and the evolution of cities into more independent political and legal entities. In the public nature of urban residential architecture, the boundaries between the building as belonging to the urban community, to the civic community, and to the municipal authorities seemed to blur.

Urban residences of the social and political elite thus enjoyed an ambiguous status as public/private buildings as they were privately owned by the individual and the family but also belonged, on a more symbolic level, to the urban community, the community of citizens, and the municipal authorities. By examining urban residential architecture in Renaissance Italy from this vantage point, this article has attempted to contribute more generally to studies in architectural history that study the public/private dichotomy. As Weintraub's contribution demonstrates, the words 'public' and 'private' carry many different connotations. These different meanings and connotations help to discuss the public/private nature of historical buildings generally and of urban residential architecture in Renaissance Italy specifically.

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