

Reprinted from *Urban Landscapes: International Perspectives*, edited by J W R Whitehand and P J Larkham. Routledge: London, 1992.

# PALACES AND THE STREET IN LATE-MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE ITALY<sup>1</sup>

*David Friedman*

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the private house and the environment of public space in the Italian city underwent a fundamental reordering in the late Middle Ages. The catalysts were, simultaneously, the new prominence given to the street as an instrument of spatial organization by the merchant–artisan regimes that gained control of the state in this period and the monumentalization of the private residence by builders from the class of men that formed the government. Despite the fact that the officials who commissioned the new streets and the men who raised palaces were sometimes the same people, the two urban types did not, at first, enjoy an untroubled relationship. The new ruling class discovered the ideal form of the street well before they were willing, as individuals, to give up some traditional privileges associated with property ownership that contradicted it. It is not until the Renaissance that street and palace – and this statement is also true for modest domestic architecture – were set into the more or less symbiotic relationship in which they continued until the twentieth century.

## STREETS AND URBAN GROWTH

The late Middle Ages was a period of spectacular urban growth throughout Italy. The city of Florence, for example, began a circuit of walls in 1284 that expanded the area of the city five-fold. The newly enclosed land was developed co-operatively by its owners and by the government. In all cases development was based on streets. The new streets were public streets, and as such only one of a variety of passages through the city. Distinctions were both physical and legal. A *via*

*vicinale*, or neighbourhood street, was narrower than a public one. The 1342 statutes of Perugia set a minimum width of 8 feet (about 2.4 metres) for neighbourhood streets and 10 feet (about 3 metres) for public ones. A public street, the priors wrote, is one where 'anyone may pass and which leads to a gate in the walls (*uscita*)' while a *via vicinale* goes only to 'certain places, and has no exit' (Degli Azzi 1913–16: book IV, rubric 18; Grohmann 1981: 51). The commune exercised authority here only with the approval of the neighbours.<sup>2</sup> A third kind of street, *via privatorum*, enters the public record only when its owners made use of the city's surveyors to place *termini* marking boundaries.<sup>3</sup>

The 'public street' was the real theatre of government activity. Among the first acts of new communes was an assessment of their physical estate. The 1210–22 statutes of Volterra require men who had usurped public land or diminished the '*viam publicam in civitate Vulterre vel plateas comunis*' to acknowledge it to the consuls and *podesta* (Fiumi 1951a: 45, from Statute G.3 [1210–22] book I, rubric 90). Later in their histories, communes maintained a systematic vigil against encroachment and even appointed special officers for this task. In Viterbo the *balivi viarum* decided questions between neighbours, set *termini*, cleared streets of obstructions, and commanded abutters to repair the street (Ciampi 1872: 465, 468–9, 478, from the statutes of 1251–2, book I, rubrics 47, 64 and 97).<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of his six-month term of office, the Florentine *Capitano del Popolo* was required to send messengers through the city and territory demanding that anyone occupying any part of a public thoroughfare restore it to the public domain and destroy any offending construction. The *Capitano* employed a building master, a surveyor and an assistant to carry out surveillance on the site and two messengers to announce the survey. After a month's period of grace, local officials in both the city's parishes and the townships of the countryside became responsible for reporting offenders to the *Capitano* (Caggese 1910: 177–8, book IV, rubric 8).

The picture of the city painted in legislation like this suggests a fundamental tension between the government and men of property. This was not the case. In the Italian commune, where legislators and homeowners were the same people, the act of house building was explicitly seen as a virtue, the sign of full participation in civic life. Property ownership was even a requirement of citizenship. The barons from whom the communes won their territory in the countryside were 'pacified' by forcing them to live in the city for a certain part of each year and to own a residence there. When they returned at intervals to their country estates, the house remained as a hostage to the city. Even

willing immigrants, at least until the mid-thirteenth century in Viterbo, were required to buy a house or large lot within one month of swearing citizenship (Ciampi 1872: 520, from the statutes of 1251–2, book III, rubric 102). Newcomers at San Gimignano in the same period received a building lot measuring 24 by 12 *braccia* (about 15 by 7 metres) from the commune and five years of tax freedom with the obligation to build a house within six months (Pecori 1853: 722–3, from the statutes of 1255, book IV, rubric 18).<sup>5</sup> Additional legislation, which allowed any house builder to acquire unoccupied lots at a fixed price, identified construction as the commune's priority (Pecori 1853: 734, from the statutes of 1255, book IV, rubric 74).<sup>6</sup> The commune recognized a responsibility towards those who invested in property in the city by underwriting public fire insurance for these buildings. At San Gimignano, Siena and Florence, houses on the tax rolls that were damaged by fire were repaired at public expense, and the crime of arson was punished by execution (Pecori 1853: 683, from the statutes of San Gimignano, 1255, book I, rubric 46; Lisini 1903: 302, (book I, rubric 465); Caggese 1921: 74, (book I, rubric 28)).

Homeowners who were identified with their residences also had obligations to the area surrounding it. The people who in some places in Italy still sweep the streets in front of their house continue a practice that was first recorded in law in the mid-thirteenth century. The San Gimignano regulation required that house occupants sweep the paving in front of their property every Friday evening or face a fine of 12 *denari* (Pecori 1853: 676, from the statutes of 1255, book I, rubric 35). In Siena 'the people who use the street,' that is, the neighbours, paid to pave it, and a representative of the *contrada*, serving as district *provisores lastrichi*, supervised repair (Lisini 1903: II, 40–1 (book III, rubric 71)). In Viterbo the *balivi viarum* divided the expenses for paving a street in the unbuilt area inside the town wall between the owners of all the gardens, whether they abutted it or not, to which the street gave access (Ciampi 1872, from the statutes of 1251, book IV, rubric 120). Even relatively large projects were handled in the neighbourhoods. In 1297, for example, when the Siennese commune wanted to improve an area of town considered 'dark and narrow', it was the people who owned property in the parish who paid for the houses that were destroyed to create a piazza. Individual contributions were assessed by a committee of six assembled by the commune from men of the parish, and the work was overseen by the communal street officers (Lisini 1903: II, 123 (book III, rubric 272, dated May 1297)). Local financing was based on the principle of 'those who benefit most, pay most'.<sup>7</sup> In return

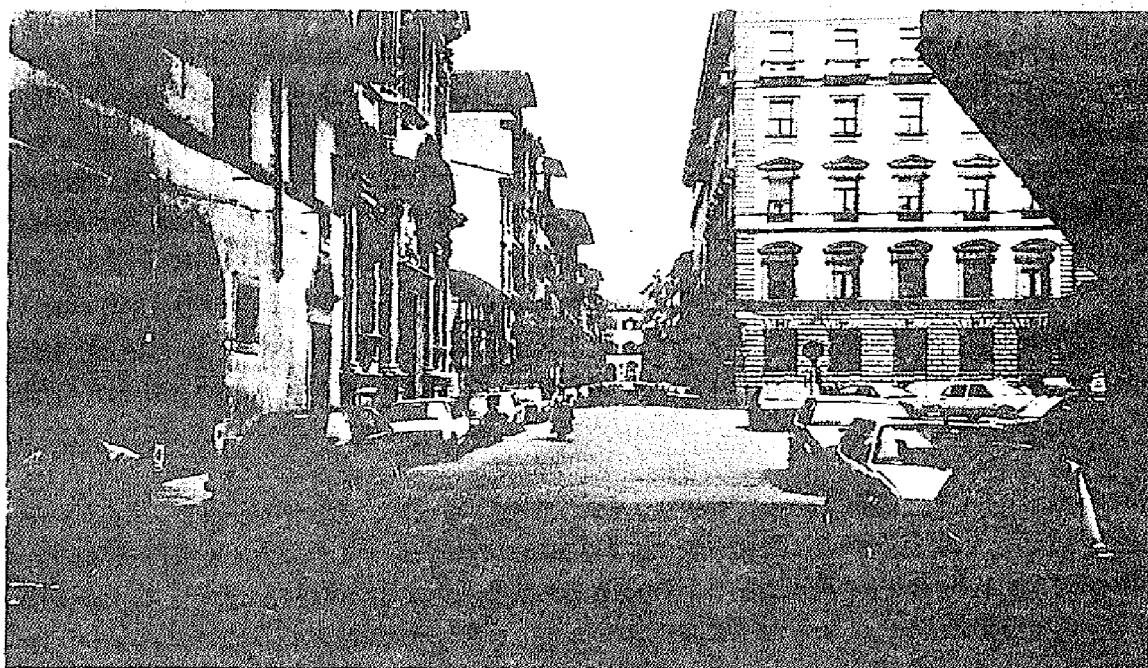


Figure 4.1 Borgo Ognisanti, Florence: street surveyed in 1279 (photograph by the author, 1991).

for shouldering the lion's share of the responsibilities of communal life, householders received privileges that significantly modified the character of the street and influenced the form of domestic architecture throughout the late Middle Ages.

In its ideal form, the public street of the late Middle Ages was physically regular in every way conceivable to its builders (figure 4.1). It was straight, laid out *dritta corda* and *recta linea* over as long a distance as the terrain and previous building allowed (Pampaloni 1973: 114–15, document 66, dated 7 and 24 January 1298). It was paved and graded, and was meant to be enclosed by continuous rows of buildings. In Florence, garden walls 8 feet (about 2.4 metres) tall were required on the street front of vacant lots (Caggese 1921: 353 (book IV, rubric 69)). According to the legislation for their construction, streets disciplined in this way were considered 'useful and proper and beautiful' – they 'honoured' the city.

Except in areas developed on the urban periphery, the streets of cities, at least until the later fourteenth century, fell far short of this ideal. The old streets in the centres of towns, where the best buildings were sited and activity was most intense, were not regular enough, in part because of the privileges conceded to property owners and house-builders by the government.

STREETS AND PRIVILEGE:  
THE RIGHT TO ENCROACH

## Encroachments at street level

What the government gave was the use of a certain amount of public space immediately adjacent to every piece of private property. Legislation names the elements of buildings that might borrow public space and defines the terms of use. Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Good Government* fresco in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena of 1338–9 illustrates the street furniture used for work and display by artisans' shops (figure 4.2). Window counters (*finestre*), tables (*deschi*), benches (*banchi* or *panche*), stools (*predelle*), as well as storage vessels, tools and merchandise all occupy a part of the street. The fixtures were of wooden construction, which meant that they were movable (in fact many of them were taken in each night) and distinct from the masonry structure of the building. The legislation was usually written in the form of a prohibition, which asserted the commune's authority over the space, and a concession: for example, in a Florentine law of 1325, 'no one shall place tables or benches outside his shop in the Via Calimala from the old market to the Ponte Vecchio, unless they are no wider than one *braccia* [about 60cm]' (Caggese 1921: 356–7 (book IV, rubric 69)).<sup>8</sup> In Siena, the government conceded a zone twice as wide and allowed property owners to erect an unspecified range of wooden structures, including poles to support straw mats that served as awnings (Lisini 1903: II, 47–8 (book III, rubric 88)).<sup>9</sup> In this case, the privileges are expressly tied to property ownership. Only on the Campo, the market square, could anyone raise a free-standing awning over temporary tables (Lisini 1903: II, 29–30 (book III, rubric 38)).<sup>10</sup> Everywhere else in the town, awnings and tables had to be attached to a house or shop. Movable tables or carts, potentially so disruptive to the social and commercial order fixed in property, were explicitly banned (Lisini 1903: II, 29–30 (book III, rubric 39)).<sup>11</sup>

There was one appendage to the house with which communal regimes were less lenient. The Sienese statutes not only prohibit the construction of stairs occupying the public street, but also demand their removal. According to the legislation some of these were made of wood, like the *finestra*, but that seems to have mattered less than the fact that, perhaps because of their permanence, they posed a greater obstacle to viability (ASS, *Statuti* 26 [1337], c. 254r., rubric 353).<sup>12</sup> The 1251 statutes of Viterbo, written on the eve of the papacy's relocation to that city and at the height of its power in northern Lazio, prohibit stairs built

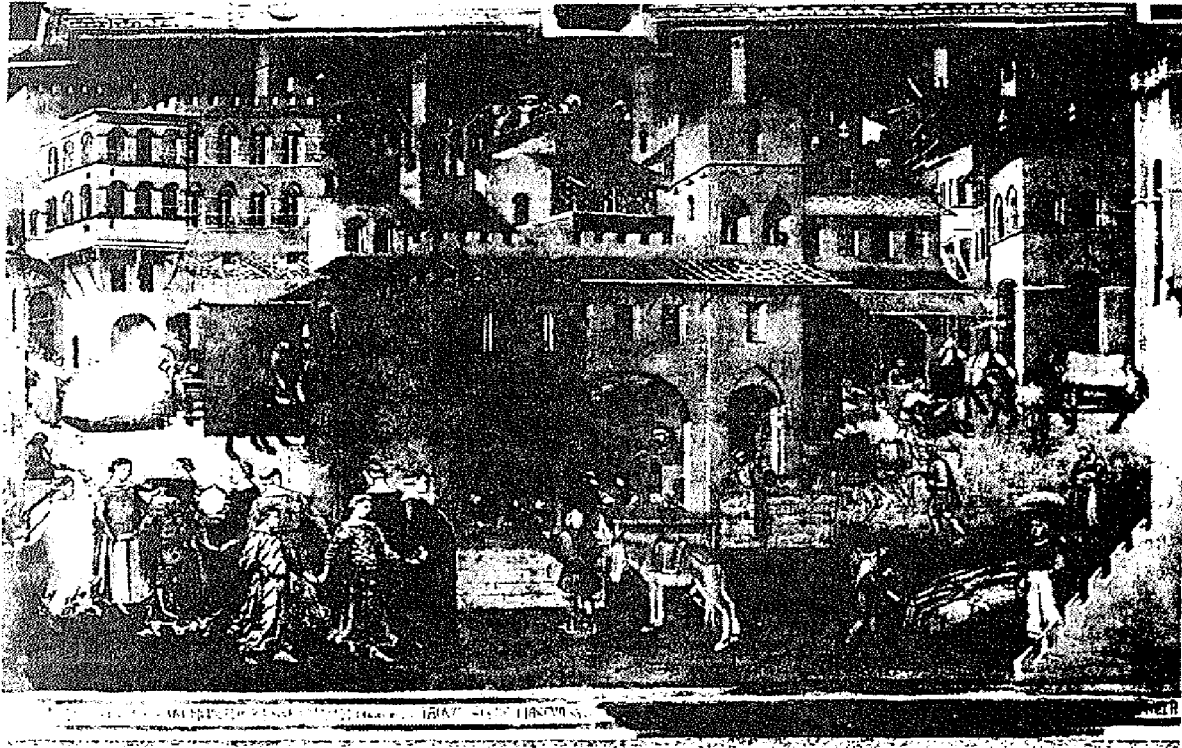


Figure 4.2 *Good Government in the City*. Detail of a picture by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 1338–9, in the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena (photograph by the Soprintendenza BAS–Siena: negative 38827).

in the street for this reason, but also because they ‘damage the status and appearance of the street’ (Ciampi 1872: 507, from the statutes of 1251, book I, rubric 39). Despite the unequivocal tone of the law, property holders did not lose this privilege. The most picturesque ornaments of the very well-preserved historic centre of modern Viterbo are the *proferli*, external stairs, that survive there in great numbers.

### Jetties and balconies

The upper levels of houses and palaces enjoyed even more licence than the shops at street level. The requirements of traffic constrained communal officers, no matter how well disposed they were to the space needs of their peers, but above the height of the tallest load on the largest pack animal, a height usually set at 10 feet (about 3 metres) or 12 feet (about 3.7 metres), houses were almost completely free to expand into the area above the street. Even when jettied upper storeys began to receive the attention of the government, the standards were very different from those that were applied at ground level. The 1224

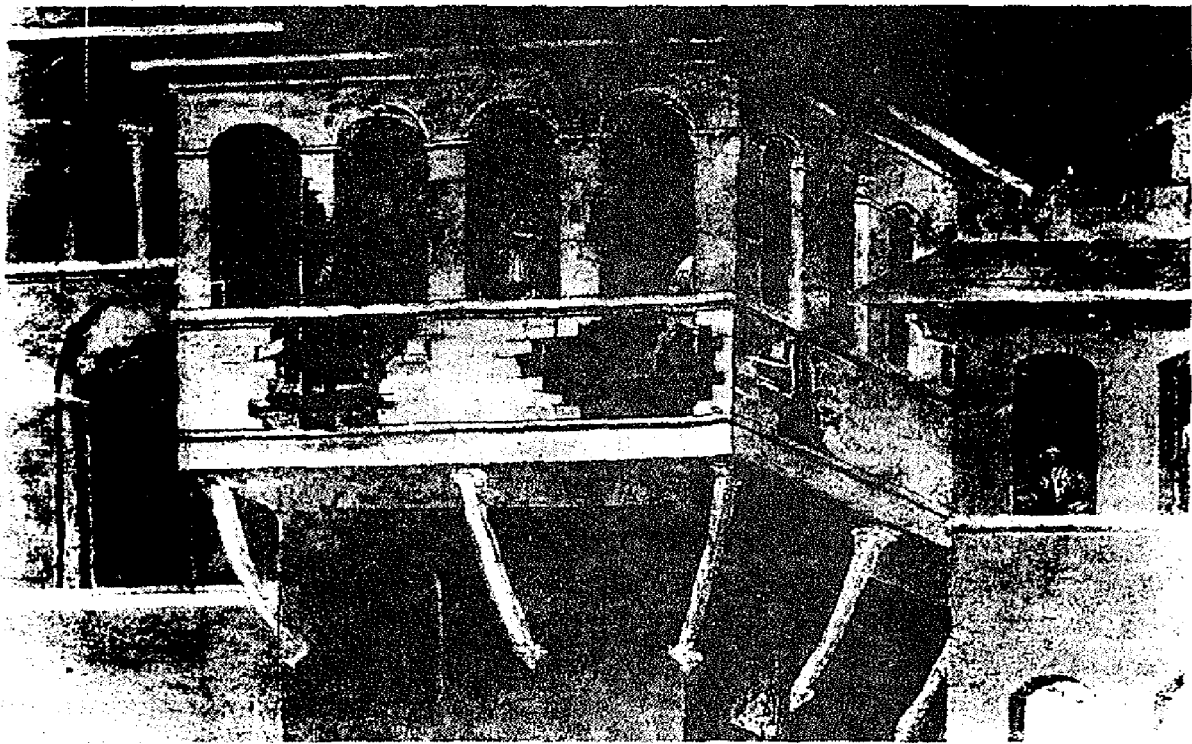


Figure 4.3 *Bad Government in the City*. Detail of a picture by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 1338–9, in the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena (photograph by the Soprintendenza BAS–Siena: negative 32755).

statutes of Volterra set a 6-*braccia* or 12-foot (about 3.7 metres) minimum height for the bottom of a *ballatoio*, or jettied upper level, facing on to a public street and a limit of 2½ *braccia*, 5 feet (about 1.5 metres), for its projection. The same documents limited the width of benches and tables at street level to three-quarters of a *braccia* (about 45 centimetres) (Fiumi 1951a: I, 180–1, Statute G.1 (1224) rubric 143).

The *Good Government* fresco records a broad spectrum of jettied structures. They range from simple balconies to completely enclosed wooden pavilions outside the main bearing wall. There also appear to be buildings in which the external wall itself is projected out over the street. The supports for the cantilevered walls are heavy timber beams that penetrate the main structural wall, braced from below by diagonal struts or curved branches like those shown by Ambrogio. The wall of the jetty is relatively light. When they are not made of wooden planks, they are of the lightest possible masonry, as thin as 6 inches (about 15 centimetres) (Sanpaolesi 1939: 260). An image in Ambrogio's *Bad Government* pendant to the *Good Government* scene in the Palazzo Pubblico shows wreckers destroying a jettied structure which is revealed

to have been built of a light masonry reinforced with timber (figure 4.3).

The medieval documents do not tell what the space created by the jetties was used for. It is only with their destruction that contemporary testimony speaks about this part of the house. The records of the office of the Sienese government that protected the physical environment of the city, the *Ufficiali sopra l'ornato*, preserved for the period between 1444 and 1478, contain the petitions of householders who had been ordered to destroy jetties. Many ask for an appointment to government office to defray the cost of the work which they inevitably claim will be 'a great ornament to the city'. The government's willingness to subsidize these improvements is another sign, not only of its commitment to the urban renewal effort, but also of its support for the property-owning class. In pressing their claims, homeowners give a vivid account of their loss. From these remarks it is clear that the Sienese jetties that survived to the fifteenth century are mostly the kind in which the whole front wall of the building was moved out over the street, as it is in the jetties of timber-framed structures. The space gained by the jetty was integrated into the upper-level rooms where it could represent a significant percentage of the floorspace of the house. One house lost jetties that projected almost 2.5 metres over the street, extending 12 metres on one storey and 6 metres on the other (ASS, *Concistoro* 2125, petition number 15, granted 20 July 1463). The property decreased in value by 200 florins when the jettied section was taken. The owner, Armaleo di conti degli Armalei, claimed that this was a great loss. He shared the house with his mother, and said that without a subsidy he would be driven into poverty and have to leave the city. Another petitioner claimed that the removal of jetties 'diminished the size of the house to such an extent that it ruined the main hall and we are left as if in a hole' (ASS, *Concistoro* 2125, petition number 116, granted 5 September 1472). Another claimed that he had to rebuild because 'without the jetties the house has become uninhabitable' (ASS, *Concistoro* 2125, petition number 24, no date).

When the projections are in the form of galleries, with the main stone load-bearing wall intact from cellar to roof, the space of the jetties is separate from the main rooms and its shape is long and narrow. The niches built into the outer face of the stone wall (figures 4.4 and 4.5) are a physical sign of the integration of the galleries into domestic life from the moment of the construction of the house. Florentine houses still include a number of such spaces. We can gain an idea of how they were used from the petitions of property owners affected by the regulations prohibiting the reconstruction of jetties written by the Medici dukes in



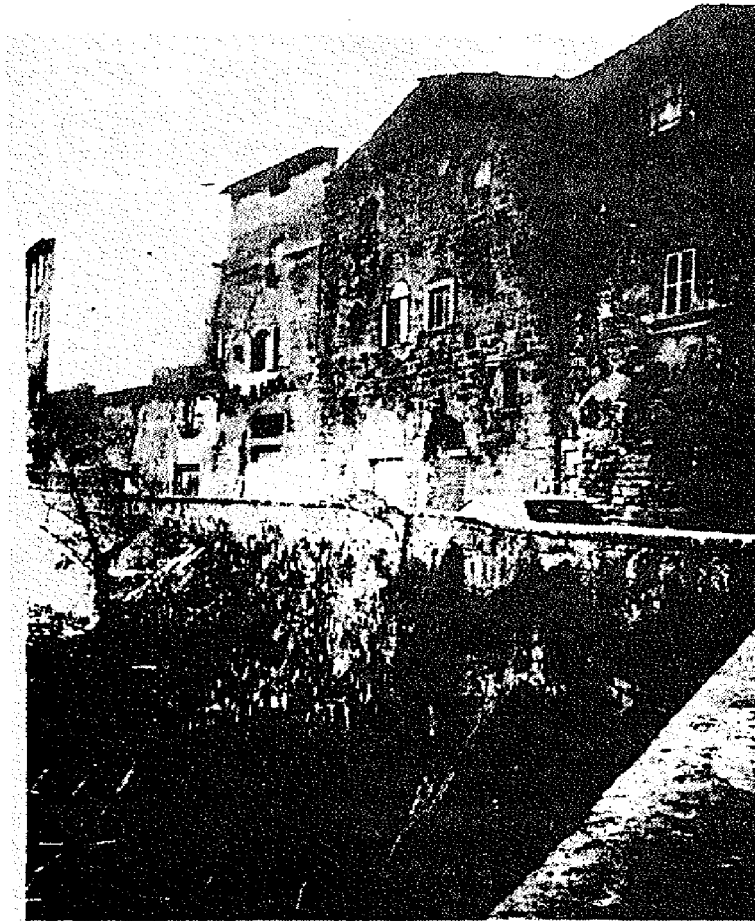


Figure 4.4 House at Via Caprarecce 41–3, Viterbo (photograph by the author, 1991).

the sixteenth century (Salvagimini 1976). A petitioner living on Via della Stufa near S. Lorenzo described a jettied area about 60 by 210 centimetres that had a little study (*un poco di scrittoio*) and a toilet (ASF, *Capitani di Parte Guelfa*, numeri neri 727, petition number 287, 19 February 1572). Another on the Via Larga contained stone stairs, halls and bathrooms (ASF, *Capitani di Parte Guelfa*, numeri neri 727, petition number 75, 27 August 1572). Another, on a cross street of Via Ghibellina, a main entrance route to the centre of town from the east, contained a toilet and a corridor which connected the main part of the house with the owner's bedroom. The petitioner laments that 'without it [the jetty] I will be able to inhabit this house only with great difficulty' (ASF, *Capitani di Parte Guelfa*, numeri neri 711, petition 211, October 1561). A neighbour suffering from the effects of the same renewal project in the Via Ghibellina area reports that a jettied area over an

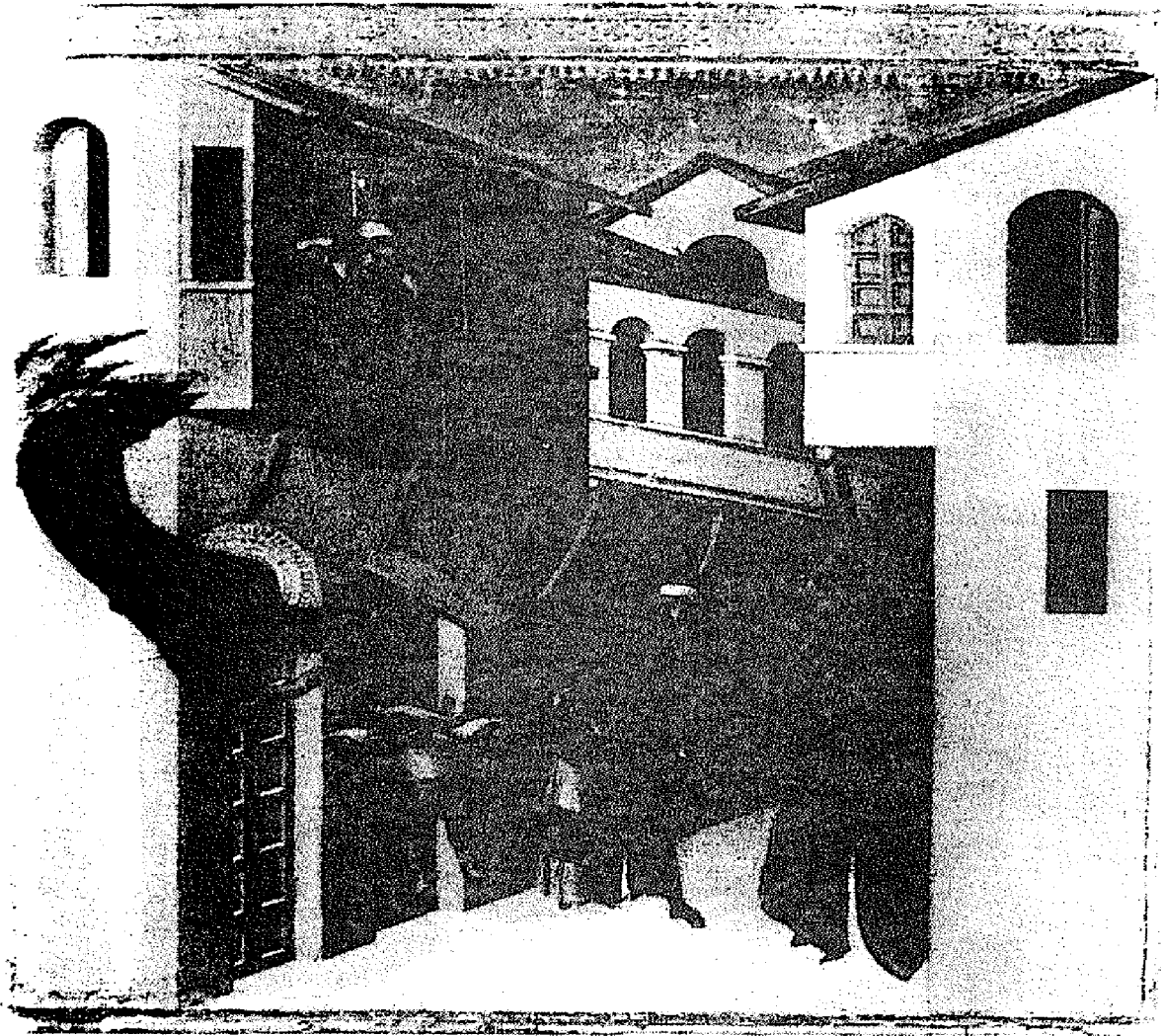


Figure 4.5 Detail of house at Via Caprarecce 41-3, Viterbo (photograph by the author, 1991).

adjacent alley (he, like his neighbour, had already lost the jetty on the main street) contained a toilet and a chimney (ASF, *Capitani di Parte Guelfa*, numeri neri 711, petition number 197, 7 October 1561).

The cities of Ambrogio's *Good and Bad Government*, while full of the most accurate visual description that has survived, are still idealized. The large number of jetties and balconies that he paints may still misrepresent reality. The Sienese statutes of 1309 describe a less orderly situation. In the very heart of the city, the old forms ruled. The Campo itself, the town hall square, was surrounded by palaces covered with balconies and galleries which a law of 1297 hoped, as palaces were rebuilt, to have replaced by multiple-light windows with marble columns, like those on the Palazzo Pubblico and those in Ambrogio's fresco (Lisini 1903: II, 29 (book III, rubric 37)). On the main streets of the city, those leading to the largest churches and to the gates, jetties

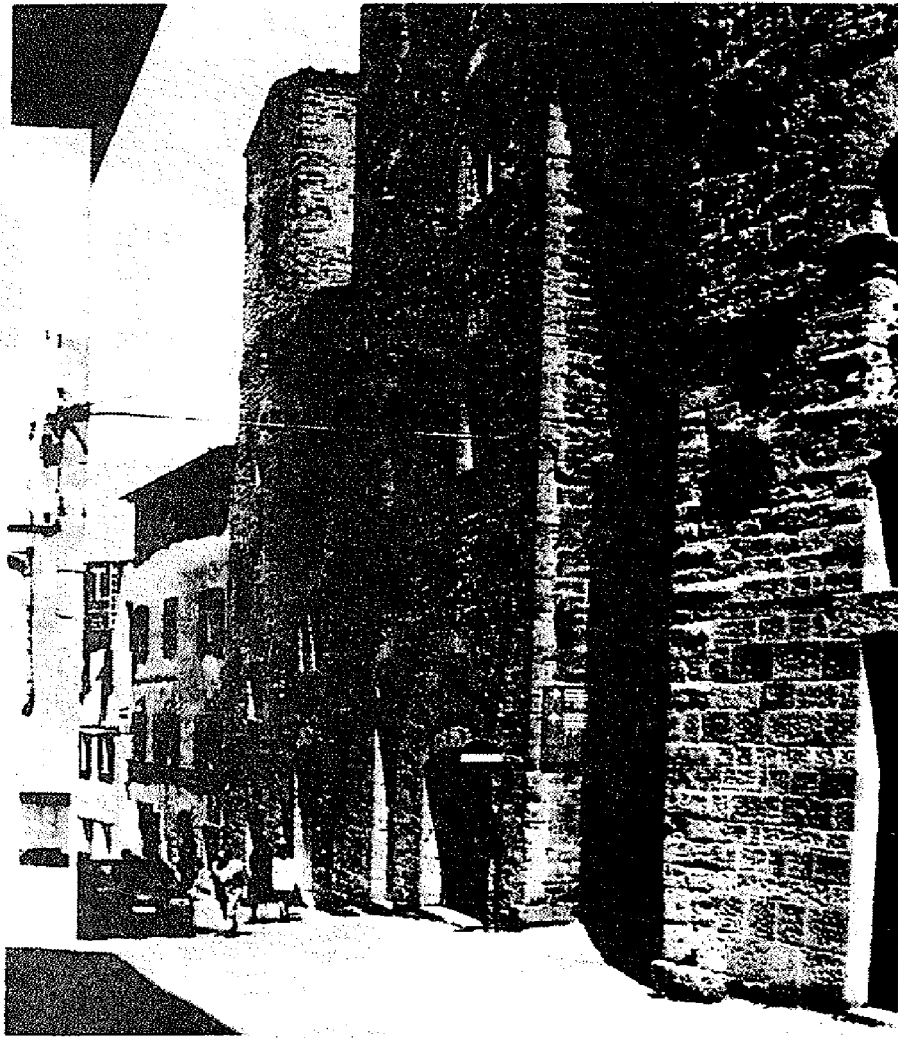
## PALACES AND THE STREET IN ITALY



*Figure 4.6* The Blessed Agostino Novello saves a boy who has fallen from the upper storey of a house (picture by Simone Martini, 1309, in the Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena: photograph by the Soprintendenza BAS–Siena: negative 30967).

also proliferated. A law to improve the situation demanded only that the streets be 'open to the sky' for one-third of their width (Lisini 1903: II, 17–18 (book III, rubric 5)).<sup>13</sup> The 1309 image by Simone Martini of the Blessed Agostino Novello saving a boy who has fallen from an upper floor gives a good idea of how the jettied galleries could dominate the streetscape (figure 4.6).

In those cities of Italy less strongly marked by post-medieval urban renewal, the surviving thirteenth-century housing stock still preserves traces of the wooden structures that crowded the streetscape and hid the



*Figure 4.7* Casatorre Buomparenti, Volterra (photograph by the author, 1991).

load-bearing masonry. The late-twelfth-century double house at 41–3 Via Caprarecce in the Pian Scarano section of Viterbo is a three-storeyed structure with a gable facing the street (figures 4.4 and 4.5). Rows of beam-holes indicate that the building had wooden galleries extending across the entire width of the street wall on two storeys. At the first jettied level, each side of the house had an arched doorway leading to the gallery and a gable-topped niche (like similar niches common on the inside of these houses) for storage. At the base of the roof gable is a row of lightly projecting stones which were probably the coping of a pent roof that protected the wooden structures. Except for the gable and the wall at ground level with its decorated windows, the street front of this building consisted primarily of a wooden screen (Andrews 1982).<sup>14</sup>

## PALACES AND THE STREET IN ITALY

Wooden superstructures also dominated the residential architecture of medieval Volterra, and here examples survive that were built for merchants and noblemen as well as artisans. The robust tower house of the head of the powerful Buomparenti clan (figure 4.7), mentioned in documents of the 1210s and 1220s, and probably built in the second half of the preceding century (Fiumi 1951b: 102–3), has beam-holes and stone corbels that mark three levels of galleries. Hook-shaped stone brackets also survive that once held the ridge beam of wooden pent roofs to protect the galleries and the openings into rooms at ground level. Doors lead out to where the galleries once hung, and windows with elaborately carved tracery also survive. Because they would barely have been visible behind the wooden superstructure, the windows must have as their primary function the decoration of the interior rather than the wall on the street. The top of this tower house was covered by a raised roof whose wooden supports were fixed to vertical stone collars on the exterior walls.<sup>15</sup>

More modest buildings, closer to street life, are no less thickly cloaked in wooden screens. A house at 21 Via Matteotti (figure 4.8), the main merchandising street of medieval Volterra and the *via pubblica* named in the 1210–22 statutes, has beam-holes and brackets for galleries at two levels, and doors to the galleries that have now been partially bricked-up to the size of windows. Above the shops at ground level and at the top of the wall, above the galleries, are the fixtures for pent roofs. A building in a more peripheral location, on the street to the town's east gate (Via Don Minzoni 44) has a tall ground storey that may have served as a merchant's *fondaco*, or warehouse, and a gallery on the upper level, to which a doorway gave access and which screens a very handsome double-light window (figure 4.9).

Even later medieval buildings were well-wooded externally. In Volterra, the best example is the palace that, according to a rare inscription at the entrance to the house, the master mason Giroldo di Jacopo da Lugano built for the nobleman Giovanni Toscano in 1250 (figure 4.10). The residence was built around an existing tower sited at an important intersection. The new construction included an entrance hall at the ground level which contains the lower flights of the stairs that continue inside the tower. In the two storeys above ground the addition consists of L-shaped halls wrapped around the tower. The upper hall, as is common in tower and tower house construction, is vaulted. The thirteenth-century structure continues the gallery lines of the tower—as marked by holes and brackets for supporting beams—and there are a number of doorways at the upper levels that gave access to the external

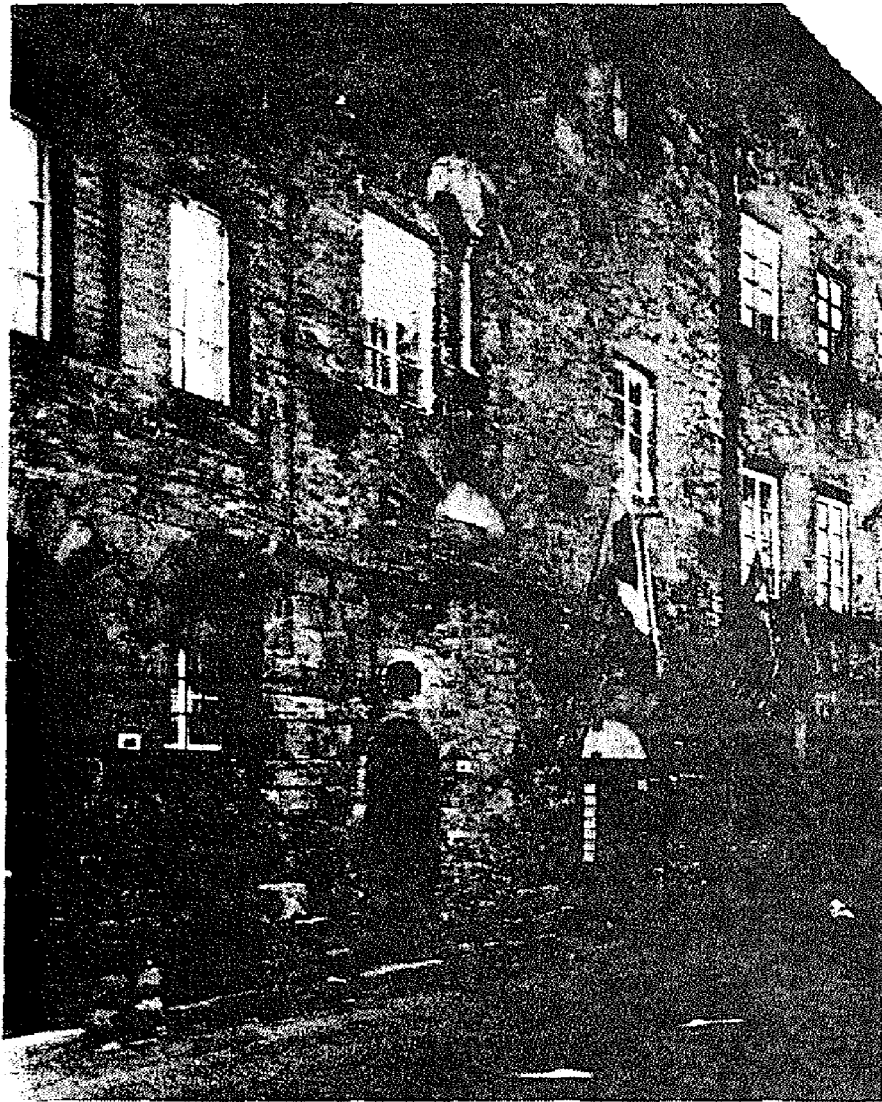


*Figure 4.8* House at Via Matteotti 21, Volterra (photograph by the author, 1991).

spaces. At the very top of the building, channels that drew smoke from the open fires lit in the hall penetrate the wall in narrow slits well above the level of the galleries and of the pent roofs that sheltered them (Consortini 1942).

In many central Italian towns, the stone skeletons of residential buildings preserve the marks of the galleries, jetties and pent roofs that dominated the medieval streetscape. In no domestic architecture, however, was the balance between stone structure and the secondary elements hung from it weighted so heavily in favour of the jetties as in Pisa. A building type appeared in this early entrepôt between Europe

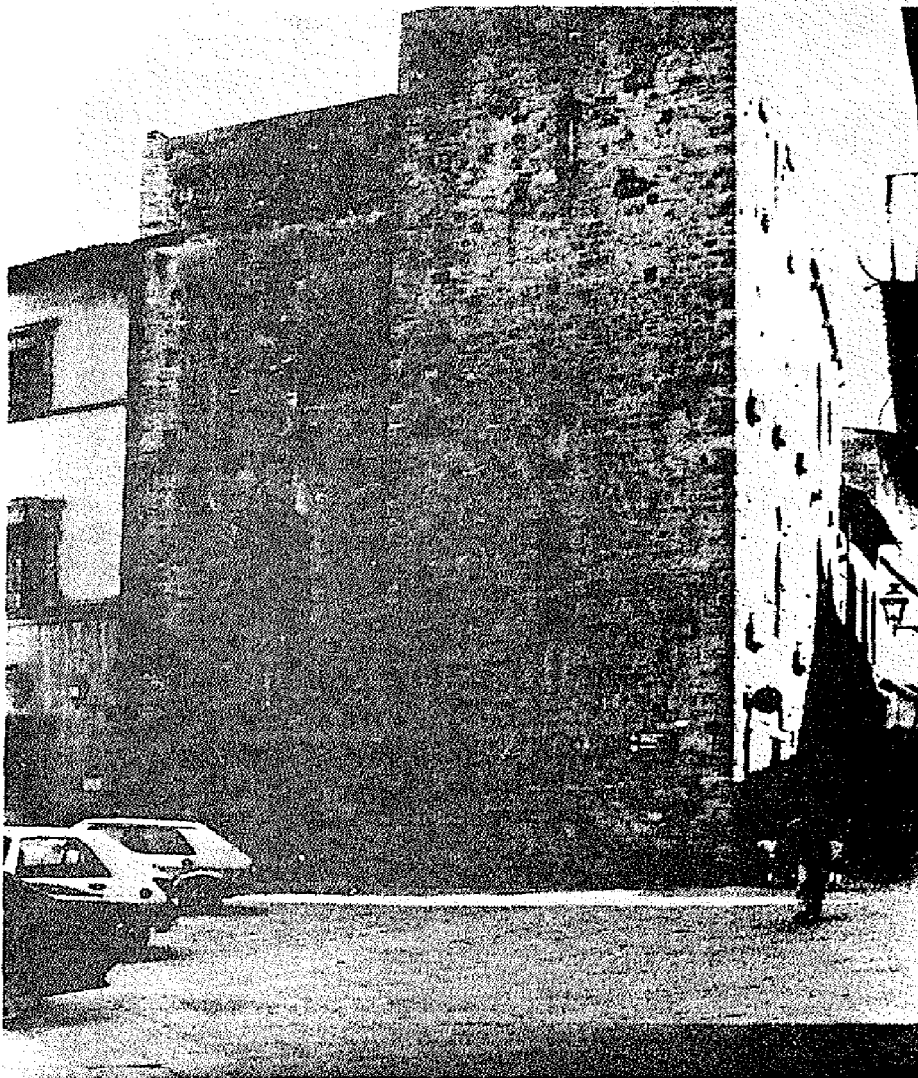
## PALACES AND THE STREET IN ITALY



*Figure 4.9* House at Via Don Minzoni 44, Volterra (photograph by the author, 1991).

and the east in the twelfth century to accommodate the houses and storage facilities of traders and bonded warehousemen which crowded the streets near the river, reaching to five or six storeys and projecting aggressively out over the street (figure 4.11). Masonry construction was confined to party walls and, on the street side of the building, to a frame of thin piers joined at their summit by arches. At the intervals of the intermediate storeys, the space between the piers was spanned by beams of stone or wood. Beam-holes on the forward faces of the piers show that the floor structures continued without interruption into a jettied area. The enclosing wall was light, sometimes made of wood and straw,



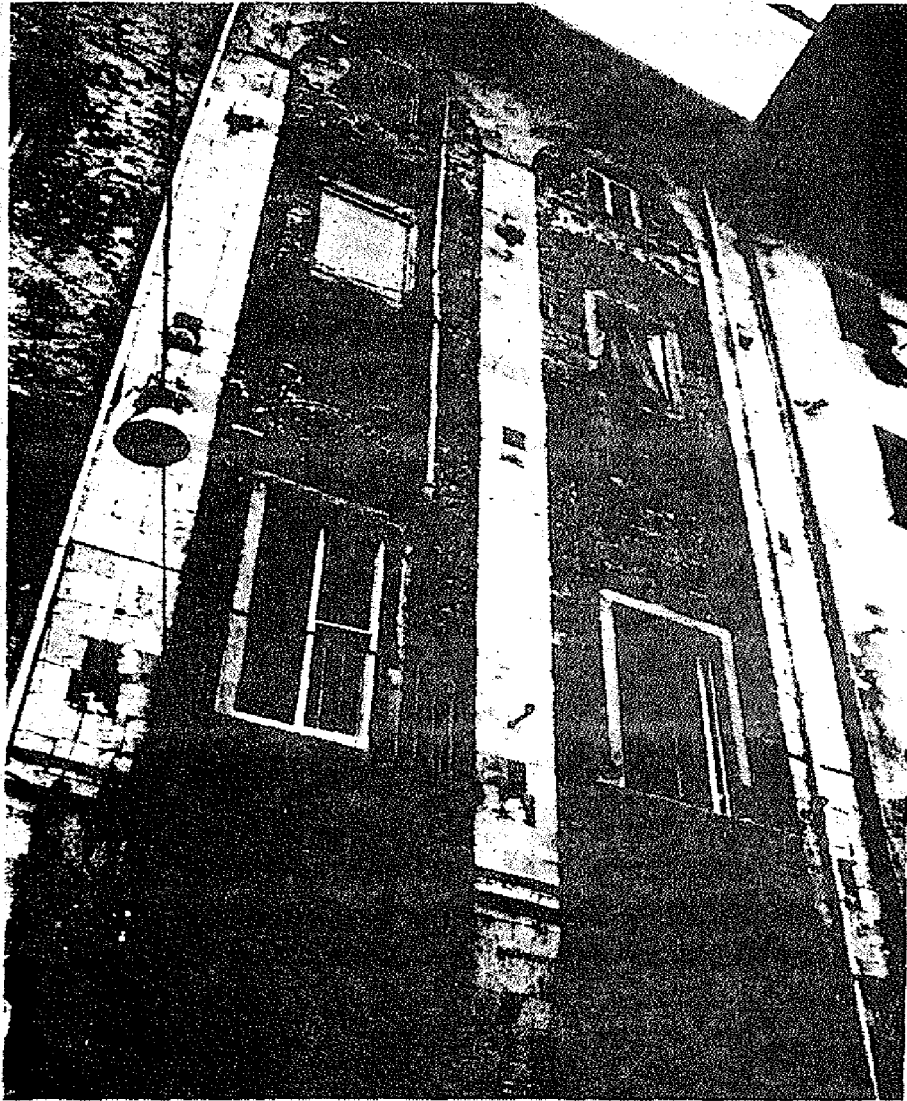


*Figure 4.10* Casatorre of Giovanni Toscano, Volterra (photograph by the author, 1991).

and probably surfaced with plaster. Except for the piers of the ground-level loggia and the masonry wall above the terminal arches at the top of the building, it was this surface alone that the building presented to the street. House-warehouses on the Via delle Belle Torri, stripped of their projecting walls and closed with conventional more recent masonry, present only the bones of the original buildings. Other structures, perhaps more specifically for residential use, showed more of their hard masonry core. But even these, like the house the Emperor Henry VI gave permission for property owners on the south side of the river to build in 1197, place many facilities, including bathrooms, stairs, as well as



## PALACES AND THE STREET IN ITALY



*Figure 4.11* House/warehouse on Via delle Belle Torri, Pisa (photograph by the author, 1991).

galleries, roof eaves and gutters, outside the load-bearing wall (Redi 1983: 274–6; 1989). Later residences, like the house that Mosca da San Gimignano commissioned in 1302, accommodated stairs and bathrooms inside the structural wall, but occasional storeys – in this case the third of five – continued to be jettied forward, sandwiched between storeys that conformed to the property and foundation line (Bonaini 1857: III, 185–9; Redi 1983, figure 3).

Buildings constructed with stone frames and enclosing walls of lighter materials can be found in all the cities of Tuscany. They are

especially prominent in Lucca, where residential architecture followed the Pisan evolution through pier and arcade façades in the first half of the fourteenth century to a more continuous wall fabric pierced by multiple-light windows in the second half (Pierotti 1960, 1965), but masonry-frame buildings from the thirteenth century also survive in Florence (Mercato Nuovo), Siena (32–4 Via dei Rossi), San Gimignano (Via San Giovanni 57–9), and Volterra (Via Matteotti 21, figure 4.8). In these cities, frame buildings were outnumbered by continuous wall structures at an earlier date than in Pisa. The Volterra examples demonstrate this and also the fact that the habit of jettied additions was not tied to a particular structural system. They were everywhere.

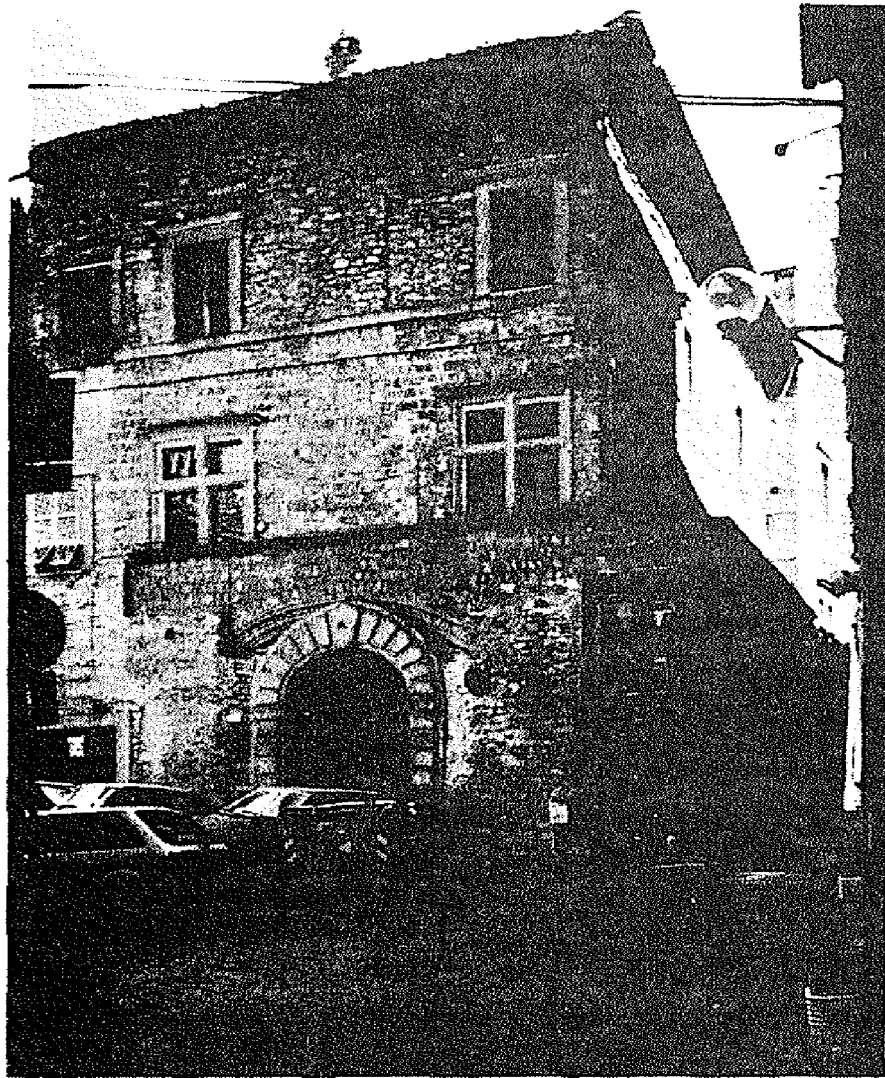
Under such conditions, the modern viewer rightly questions whether these buildings really faced the city in an architectural sense. Was the new public street, which was potentially such a wonderful theatre for architectural display, wasted on its own inventors? The answer is no; but the ways in which Italian residences presented themselves to the street in the Middle Ages were very different from the way they have done it since the Renaissance.

### LATE-MEDIEVAL PALACES AND THE STREET

What the early residences had were a few elements that received special ornamental treatment. In Viterbo the *proferlo*, an external stone stair and its landing, was one of the principal ornaments of domestic architecture. The late-thirteenth-century Palazzo Sacchi preserves an especially monumental example (figure 4.12). It projects 5 feet (1.5 metres) over the street and is supported by columns, arches and substantial stone corbels all decorated, as is the great arch that opens into the ground floor loggia, with finely cut mouldings. Whether or not the upper levels of this building, remodelled in the sixteenth century, were originally screened by wooden structures, the architecture at ground level already distinguished it (Andrews 1982: 48–50 and figure 1.9).<sup>16</sup>

A similar condition holds for contemporary Florentine residences, where the basic form of architectural representation was a prominent display of high-quality construction. Florentine civil architecture is as heavily screened and jettied as any in late-medieval Italy – the projections are called *sporti* here. Twelfth- and thirteenth-century towers, the wing of the Bargello built in 1255 (Paatz 1931: 287ff.), the late-thirteenth-century house of Gherardino de' Cerchi on the Via della Condotta (Preyer 1985) and the slightly later Gianfigliuzzi house (figure 4.13) at Santa Trinita, to choose from many possible examples, preserve

## PALACES AND THE STREET IN ITALY



*Figure 4.12* Palazzo Sacchi, Viterbo (photograph by the author, 1991).

on their forward walls the holes, brackets and metal fixtures for a network of galleries and pent roofs that would have hidden most of the masonry from the street. At ground level, however, behind the workbenches and display tables of the shops, the finely coursed and often rusticated ashlar could be seen.

Not surprisingly, the fancy stonework does not continue up the entire wall. Above the sills of the first full windows the coursing is less consistent and a less expensive surface replaces the finely carved blocks of the rustication. The change is typical. Whatever the surface treatment of the lowest level of a tower in the twelfth or thirteenth century, or a grand house in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the wall above

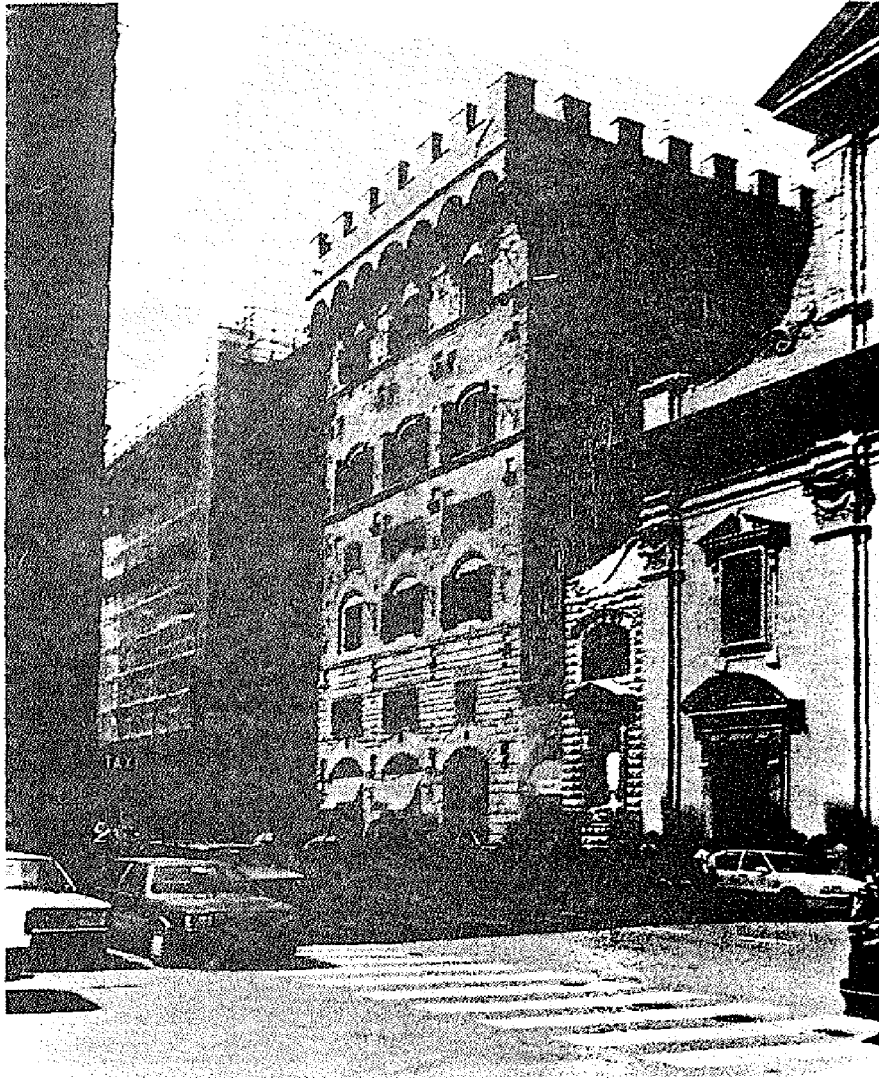


Figure 4.13 Palazzo Gianfigliuzzi, Florence (photograph by the author, 1991).

the first window-sill, and sometimes (at the Cerchi house, for example) above the springing-point of the ground-floor arches, is more modestly finished. The fabric may be as rough as simple quarry stone and the surface was most often created with a coat of humble plaster. Plaster was particularly versatile because it could also provide the surface for the thin walls of jetties, as the view of Florence from the 1342 *Misericordia* fresco in the Bigallo (figure 4.14) and the scenes from the life of St Peter in Masaccio's Brancacci chapel show.

The separation by materials of the lower from the upper levels of domestic building was a subject of legislation when the city rebuilt streets and squares at its centre in the late fourteenth century. The

## PALACES AND THE STREET IN ITALY

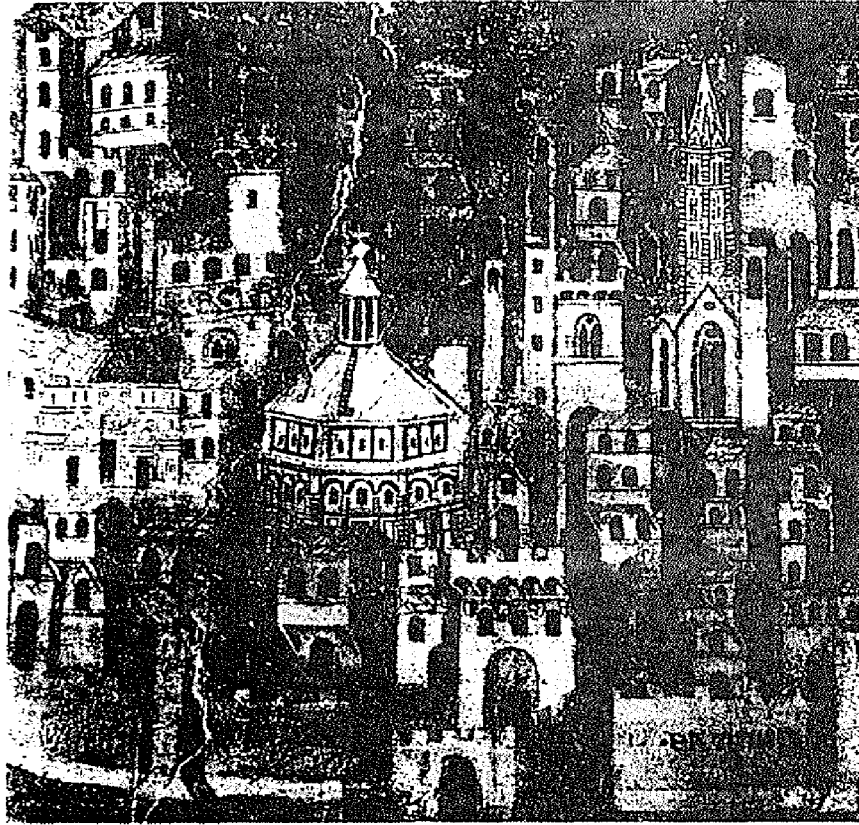


Figure 4.14 View of Florence (part of the *Misericordia* fresco, Bigallo, Florence, 1342).

residences that abutted the enlarged and regularized public spaces had to be reconstructed by their owners in conformity with guidelines established by the city's planners. The regulations concerned only the interface between private property and public space. Repeating legislation first written in 1295 (Moschella 1942: 167–73), the commune took a major step against the zone of privilege it had traditionally accorded property owners by prohibiting all jetties on the renewed public streets. Though enforcement of regulations against jetties was notoriously lax elsewhere in the city, and indeed the tax on *sporti*, far from discouraging them, brought in a revenue of 7,000 florins a year in 1336–7 (Villani 1844–5: III, 321 (book XI, chapter 92)), the commune made the rules stick in these special places. A palace on the Via della Condotta is characteristic in respecting the main street but not the secondary one (figure 4.15). The same is true of a house on the Piazza S. Elisabetta, where a beam-supported jetty survives on the alley but only the scars of a lost counterpart can still be seen on the front of the

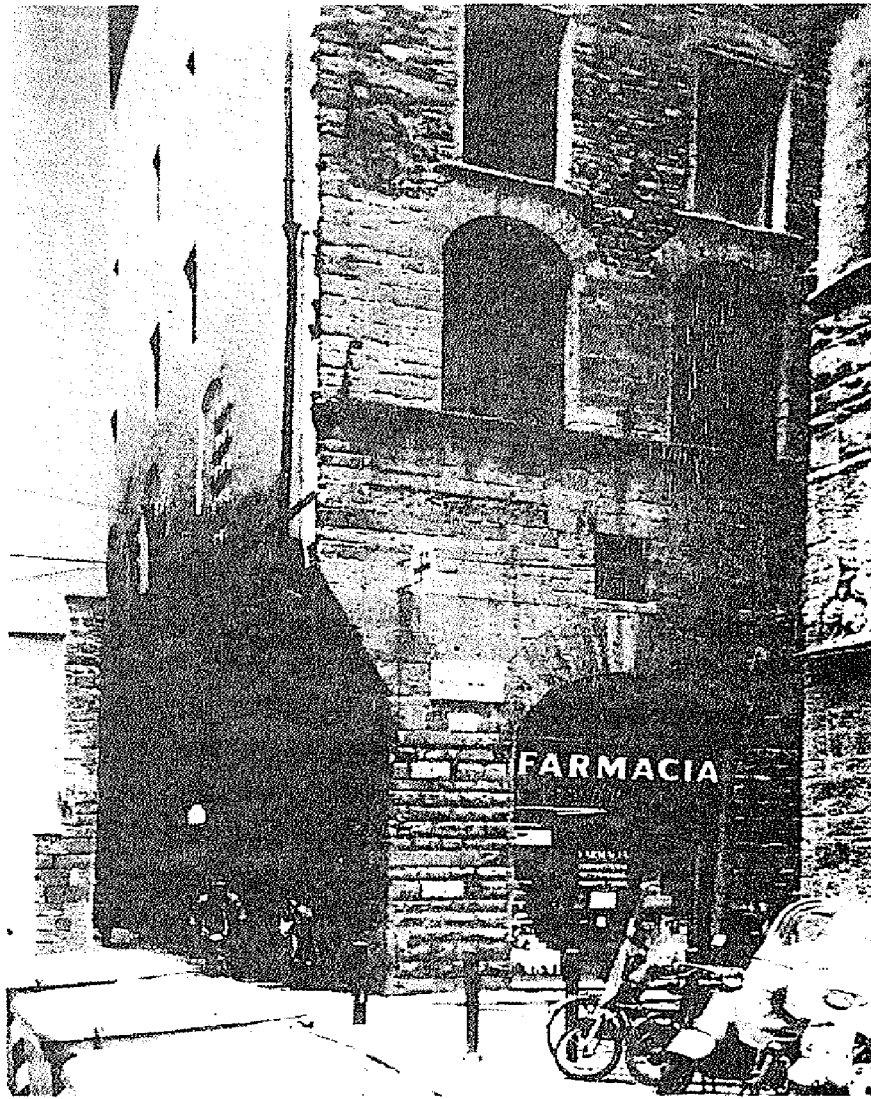


Figure 4.15 House at the intersection of Via della Condotta and Via dei Cerchi, Florence (photograph by the author, 1991).

building toward the square (figure 4.16).

The legislation about rebuilding also included specific instructions about walls to be built facing public spaces. In 1363 the owners of *domunculae* on the street around the baptistry of the city ‘which degraded the appearance and beauty of the whole square’ were forced to remove *sporti* and to build a *muro pulcro* at least 16 *braccia* (9.8 metres) tall on the street side of their property (Gaye 1839: I, 72; Spilner 1987: 387–467). When houses were torn down to expand the Piazza della Signoria toward the north in 1362, owners were required to build ‘the wall next to the square beautifully and properly to a height of at least 12



## PALACES AND THE STREET IN ITALY



Figure 4.16 House in Piazza S. Elisabetta, Florence (photograph by the author, 1991).

*braccia*' (7.3 metres) (Frey 1885: 216–17, document 119 from ASF, *Provvisione* 51, c. 81 r., 23 May 1362). Similar regulations were written for the houses bordering the Via Calzaiuoli between the Piazza della Signoria and the Cathedral when it was widened in 1389 (Frey 1885: 240–1, document 140 from ASF, *Provvisione* 79, c. 248 v., 20 October 1389).

The most astonishing thing about these regulations is the modesty of the government's demands. The *faccia dinanzi*, the face or side toward the front, of houses on the most prestigious public spaces in the city were defined only as beautifully built walls. Even first-class construction



Figure 4.17 House at the intersection of Via Calzaiuoli and Via della Condotta, Florence (photograph by the author, 1991).

did not have to extend as high as the whole building, just 12 or 16 *braccia* (7.3 or 9.8 metres). Looking at two buildings that fell under the 12-*braccia* ruling we can see just what that meant. On the Via Calzaiuoli, but not on the side-street fronts of the same buildings, the wall was constructed as elegantly as it ever was in Florence (figure 4.17). Faced with large ashlar blocks, arched at ground level and rusticated up to the level of the string course that marks the sill of the first windows, it exactly fulfils the terms of the legislation. Above that level, as in the case of the Gianfigliuzzi house, rustication was abandoned in favour of less expensive masonry. The residences on the north side of the Piazza Signoria still display the original fabric of the upper wall and reveal, in addition to the rustication ending at window-sill level, a transition from cut stone to stone broken in the quarry at the level of the springing of the window arches (figure 4.18). Like the *proferlo* of Viterbo, the decorated structure of the great Florentine houses was concentrated at ground level. Even though the light-walled *sporti* and the screens of wooden galleries have been banished from these special buildings, the habit of treating the upper wall as aesthetically neutral survives.



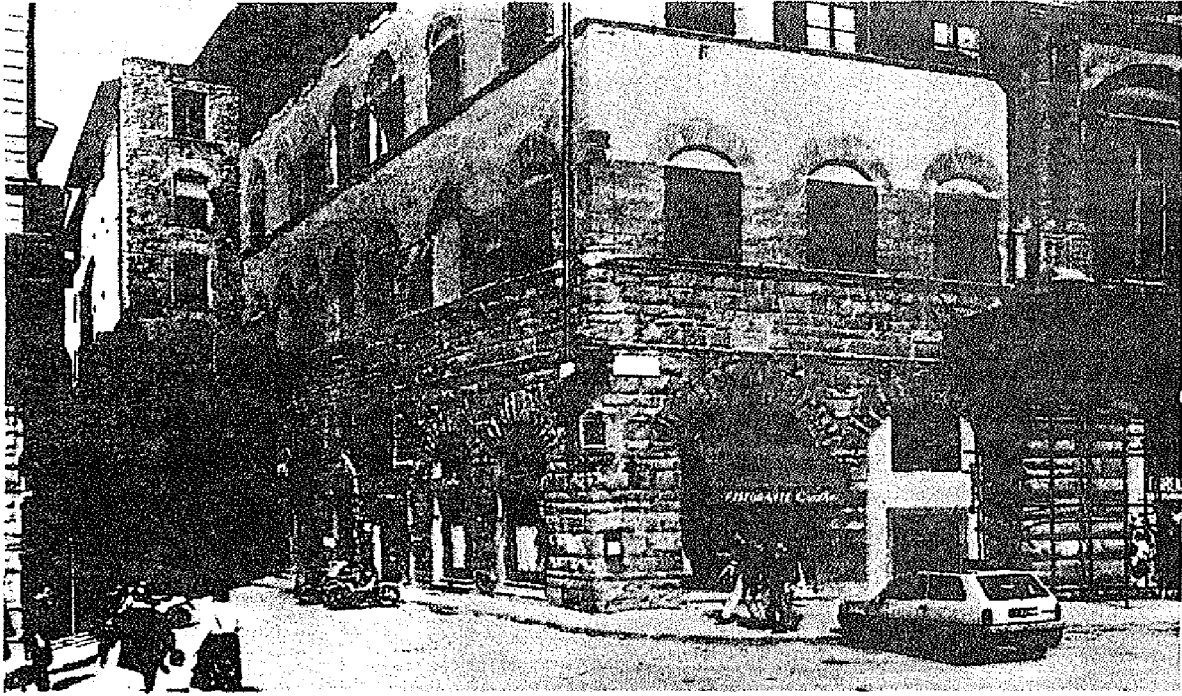


Figure 4.18 Palazzo Antella where Via Farina enters the north side of the Piazza della Signoria, Florence (photograph by the author, 1991).

## THE IDEA OF THE FAÇADE

The modern attitude about the street fronts of urban buildings is very different. Since the Renaissance, the street wall has been understood as a façade. No longer merely part of the structure or even just the front of the building, the façade, as defined by Filippo Baldinucci in the *Vocabulario Toscano* (Baldinucci 1681), had become the element of the building 'which serves the purpose that the face serves in the human body'. It was not only the focus of ornament but also the seat of expression.

The Italian word *facciata*, from which the French and English cognates derive, appears for the first time in the period we have been discussing. It comes from the Latin *facies*, meaning both appearance and countenance or face; yet it is not until the fifteenth century, after *facciata* had come into common use, that *facies* is applied to architecture with the broad meaning of façade.<sup>17</sup> *Facciata* may come more directly from the Italian *faccia* which, in the fourteenth century, had both a geometric meaning, as the face of a polyhedron, and an architectural one (*Dizionario Etimologico Italiano* 1951, s.v.). In 1360, the

contract for the construction of the international merchants' tribunal in Florence, the Mercanzia, speaks of the *faccia dinanzi*, the front surface of the building, which was to be finished with carefully worked flat ashlar and decorated with the coats of arms of the city's guilds (Milanesi 1893: 56–7). Arnolfo di Cambio's reverment at the west end of the cathedral, the element we would refer to as the church's façade, is named in 1357 with the same phrase, *faccia dinanzi* (Guasti 1887: 114, document 70, 4 January 1357–8),<sup>18</sup> or simply *faccia* (Guasti 1887: 95, document 70, 21 June 1357).

*Facciata* enters the language in connection with domestic, not ecclesiastical, architecture. At least, that is the surprising testimony of the evidence I have seen thus far. The first case is Sienese. In February of 1340 the merchant Gontiero Sansedoni signed a contract with three building masters for the construction of a *palazzo* on one of the city's main streets (Toker 1985: 67–95). The document has attracted a great deal of attention because of a unique drawing that accompanies it (figure 4.19). Together, text and image establish the specifications for the commission. The drawing, surprisingly, is not a plan but an elevation and what it represents is the street front of the house, which the text christens *facciata*.<sup>19</sup> The full expression is *facciata dinanzi a strada*, meaning, literally, the façade in front of the street; and despite its cumbersome length, the phrase is repeated *in toto* fully sixteen times. The additional terms are not included to distinguish the street façade from others; the remaining walls abut neighbours or face the internal court and are called, simply, *muri*. It is the newness of the idea, I believe, that explains the fullness of the phrase. Gradually, six times in this document, the short form prevails but for the most part it seems necessary to be complete.

There are other ways in which the concept is still imprecise, or at least different from the one with which we are familiar. For the authors of the Sansedoni contract, the term *facciata* referred to the wall towards the street, in all its aspects. At various points in the text the *facciata* includes structures that are below ground level or out of sight on the inner side of the structure (Toker 1985: 90). Ultimately, of course, visibility, display and design will be central to the idea of façade and certainly they play a role here, but the real focus of the idea in this case is the orientation of the building to the street. There is no more compelling argument for the dependence of the palace façade on the site provided by the new public streets than the phrase *facciata dinanzi a strada*.

The Sansedoni façade design conforms to the same principles of

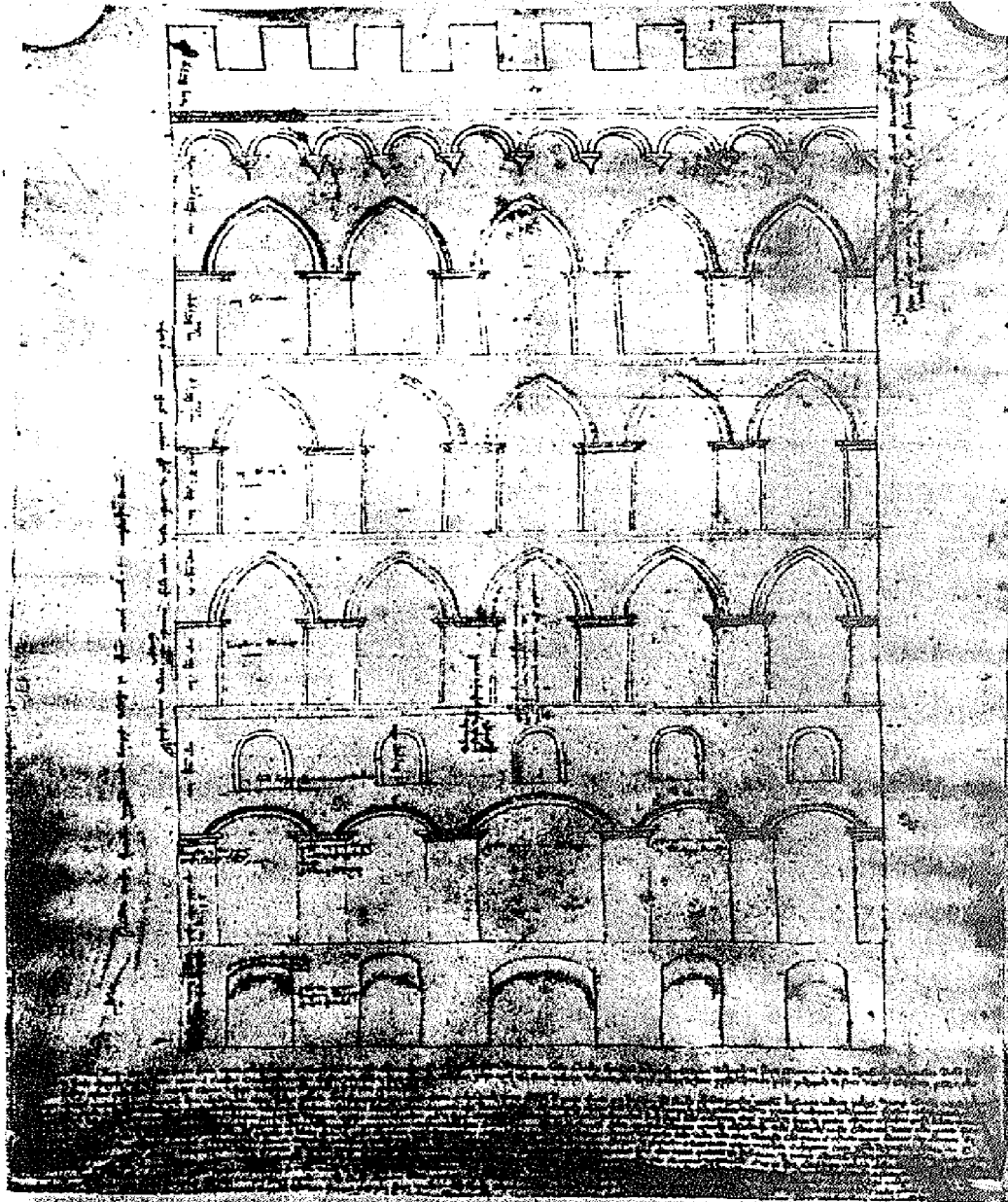


Figure 4.19 Detail of the contract for the Sansedoni Palace (document at Monte dei Paschi di Siena).

ornament that condition the Florentine palaces on the new streets and squares at the centre of the town. The materials in this case are limestone and brick, but the sill of the first full window is still the dividing line and it is the lower level that is built of dressed stone. Gargoyles, the owner's arms, and a corbel table frieze at cornice level ornament the upper surfaces. All of this was on direct display to the street because

there were no galleries or jetties to block the view. The campaign to replace galleries with decorative, multiple-light windows, begun at the Campo in the late thirteenth century, has been extended here to the city's main street.

The transformation of the streets of Siena, or of any of the cities that have provided examples in this discussion, into the relatively clear thoroughfares that we experience today was a process that proceeded in fits and starts over many centuries. By the fifteenth century, however, a new direction had been taken. By then, at least for some, it was no longer adequate merely to remove galleries, as the legislation demanded, to adapt a palace to the requirements of 'façade'. At least one Sienese palace owner, petitioning the government for an appointment to public office to support the project, promises not only to remove the galleries but 'to build the façade from the ground up, honourably, like an obedient citizen who desires the honour of the city'.<sup>20</sup> For the more imaginative observer, the change in the streetscape must have been striking. The Emperor Augustus's boast that he had found a Rome built of sun-dried brick and left it in marble (Suetonius 1928: I, 166–7) was echoed by Leone Battista Alberti (1401–72), in the first treatise on architecture and the city since antiquity, the *De Re Aedificatoria*, which was presented to Pope Nicholas V in 1450: 'how many cities, which as children we saw all built of wood [literally, 'crowded with beams'], are now translated into marble' (Alberti 1966: 699 (book VII, chapter 5)). Since, in the early fifteenth century, few central Italian cities preserved substantial numbers of wood houses (Andrews 1982: 2–5),<sup>21</sup> it can only be to galleries and jetties that Alberti refers.

Because he wrote in Latin, the term 'façade' was not available to Alberti, but for Italian-language authors of architectural theory of the same period, *facciata* is fully established. Filarete, writing about the Palazzo Medici in 1462, refers, like the author of the Sansedoni contract before him, to 'la facciata dinanzi verso la Via Larga, la quale sta in questa forma che di sopra si vede disegnata'. Filarete does not have much to say about the Florentine palace, which he must recall from memory as he writes in Milan, nor does he include the promised drawing in his text, but he makes up for it by a more complete account of the Banco Mediceo in Milan, also designed by Michelozzo, the architect of the Medici palace, and executed with great fantasy by Milanese masons. The extended description of this *facciata* (Filarete 1972: II, 698–9 (book 25)), which, in this case, is accompanied by a drawing (figure 4.20), begins by giving the full height and width of the building. In doing this it defines the entire elevation – from street to roof

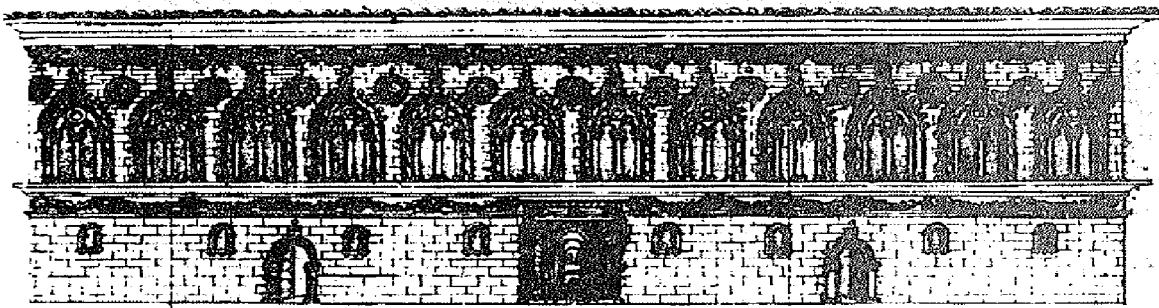


Figure 4.20 Elevation of the Banco Mediceo, Milan (from Filarete, *Trattato* vol. 192 r.).

– as a unified compositional field and goes from there to consider the proportions, architectural vocabulary and ornament by which it is articulated.

The formal rules of façade that lie behind Filarete's description are spelled out in the *De Re Aedificatoria*. It is here that we find the first explicit statement of the primacy of the front of the house. The parts of the building most on display to the public, Alberti writes, deserve the most handsome treatment and anyone who spends so much on the rest of the building (specifically, on its size) that he cannot afford this ornament, makes a fundamental error (Alberti 1966: 783 (book IX, chapter 1)). Contrary to late-medieval usage, Alberti demands that the entire building front be integrated into the design. While there may be more and less intensely ornamented areas of a composition, there are no parts which can be ignored. Decoration should not be 'piled up in single heap', nor should there be any part 'that is neglected and wanting in craftsmanship'. A balance and harmony (*concinuitas*) among all parts represents the ideal (Alberti 1966: 849–51 (book IX, chapter 9)). Even balconies can play a role, as long as they are 'not too large, or ungainly, or too many in number' (Alberti 1966: 811 (book IX, chapter 4)), that is, as long as they are part of the composition.

The residence that Cosimo de' Medici began in 1444 (figure 4.21) has long been recognized as the first great palace of the Renaissance. It is also the first monumental statement of the new attitude toward the façade. The starting-point for the design is the same set of conventions that defined the street fronts of late-medieval palaces. Like the earlier buildings, the ground storey of the Palazzo Medici displays the most

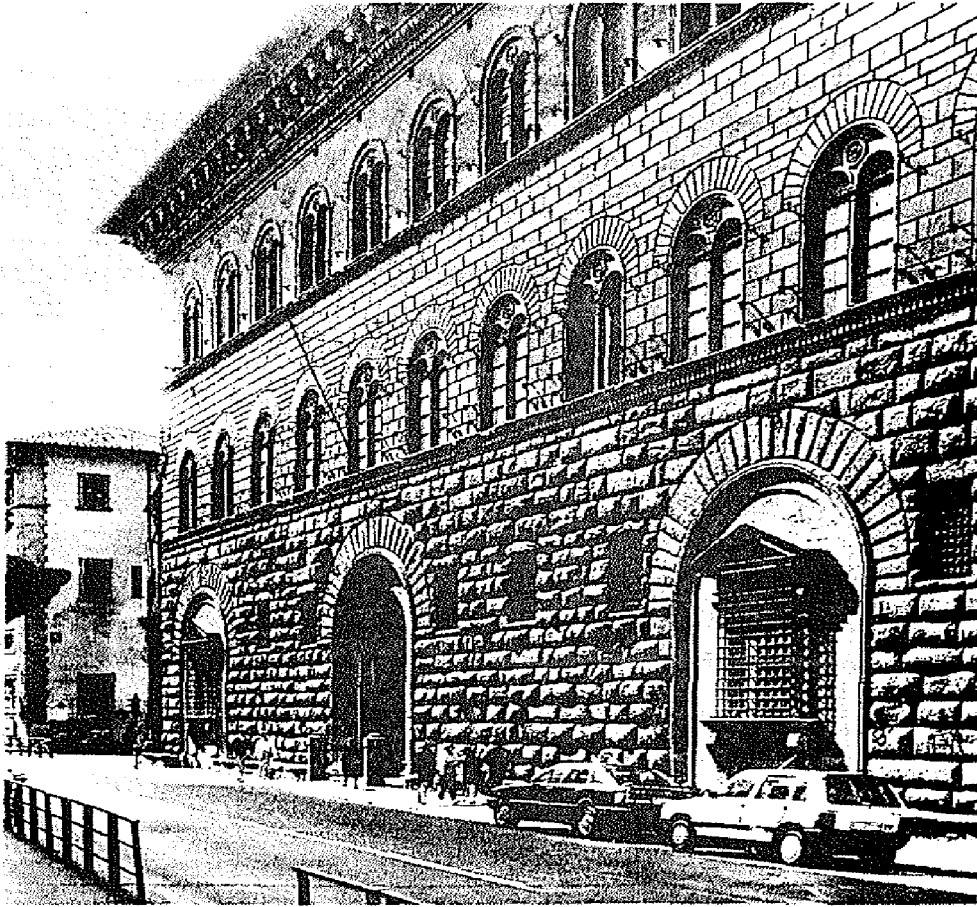


Figure 4.21 Palazzo Medici, Florence (photograph by the author, 1991).

luxurious construction. The difference is that this is rustication at a new scale, so aggressive in its projection and gigantic in the size of the stones that it would appear visually incongruous next to the smooth, thin surface of 'aesthetically neutral' plaster. In the same spirit, its great mass is physically incompatible with the fragile brick or timber-framed wall of a *sporto*. The ground-floor rustication of the Medici Palace demands an upper wall of visual texture and physical substance. As it is, the channelled masonry of the *piano nobile* is only barely strong enough to hold its own against the rustication below. It succeeds because the third level is smoother and 'lighter' still, setting up a progression, more successful between the second and third levels than between the second and the first, that explains the difference. The windows of the Medici Palace, which are the first to introduce decorative tracery to private domestic architecture in Florence, have received a great deal of attention. A pan-Italian perspective<sup>22</sup> makes them seem far less

exceptional, but there is no doubt that their detailed carving and the compelling rhythm adds to the visual weight of the upper zones of the façade.

The traditional 'zone of privilege' of the medieval palaces is preserved at the Medici Palace, even if the borrowed space in the street is occupied by very different fixtures. At ground level tables and awnings ceased to have meaning for a palace that conspicuously disavowed craft work and rental income (Goldthwaite 1972; Kent 1987; Cherubini and Fanelli 1990). The arched openings here are for entrances to the palace and a patrician loggia for ceremony and reception. In place of the work surfaces, stone benches occupy the space. The benches had practical and representational functions but, in the context of the history of the façade, what is most important is that, unlike the tables, they were part of the formal composition that extended across the entire street front of the building. At the top of the wall the powerful stone concluding element, the classicizing cornice, differed from the eaves of earlier buildings in a similar way.

The façade that extended the full height of the palace demanded a larger stage on which to project its effects than did the ground-storey ornaments of medieval houses. Public buildings had, for a long time, received visually prominent settings on the city's streets. A street in Parma was enlarged in 1262 'so that the baptistry can be seen' (Braunfels 1953: 127). At the end of the century an approach street to the church of the Umiliati in Siena was widened and the adjacent houses cleared of projecting jetties so that 'the church of those monks and the open door of that church can be seen from the (main public) street'.<sup>23</sup> It is Alberti, again, who theorizes a broader conception of the view. A varied series of prospects, he writes, 'now of the sea, now of mountains, now of lakes, rivers, or springs, now of parched rock or plain, and now of groves and valleys' (Alberti 1966: 665 (book VIII, chapter 1)) is the greatest amenity of the country highway. Art intervenes to regularize the roadbed, to tend the surrounding fields, and, finally, to articulate the traveller's experience. Suitably placed watchtowers are an 'imposing sight' (Alberti 1966: 699 (book VIII, chapter 5)), and tomb monuments in the Roman manner catch the attention and instruct the passer-by. In towns, a curving street offers a similar series of visual experiences. 'At every step the visitor is gradually confronted with the face (*facies*, which also means form or appearance, is the word, not the usual *frons*, meaning front) of new buildings and the breadth of the entrance and *prospectus* (view) of every house is arranged in the middle of the street' (Alberti 1966: 307 (book IV, chapter 5)).

## RENAISSANCE PALACES AND STREETS

Great cities, however, were supposed to have straight streets (Alberti 1966: 307 (book IV, chapter 5)). Unfortunately, in the cities that the Renaissance inherited from the Middle Ages, only rarely were they also adequately wide. The solution was to reverse the process of the preceding century when the palace as a building type came to terms with its site along the public street, by adapting, instead, the street to the palaces' new presence. Builders were at pains to establish a setting that allowed the viewer to read the entire façade composition, but they had to do it without abusing the public ownership of the streets. The result was a process of purchase and exchange of land that functioned according to terms established by the public authority.<sup>24</sup>

Filarete tells us that the owners of the Banco Mediceo, having completed the palace, were in the process of widening the street on which it faced. 'And I don't doubt that once the adjacent houses are down the façade will appear more magnificent and much more beautiful' (Filarete 1972: 703 (book 25)). In a similar spirit, the Florentine merchant Giovanni Rucellai took it upon himself to open up the site in front of the palace that he created from a group of family houses by some rebuilding and the construction of Alberti's famous façade in the period c. 1455–8. In the process of building a loggia for family ceremony, he demolished a shop opposite the palace and opened up the intersection of the Via della Vigna Nuova with the narrow Via del Purgatorio. The triangular piazza (1456–63) created a handsome setting for the new façade and opened a view of the building and, especially, its entrance for visitors approaching from the important area around the church of Santa Trinita (Preyer 1977; Kent 1972; Taddei 1973) (figures 4.22 and 4.23). At the end of the century, the Palazzo Strozzi (begun 1489) which is both the biggest of the Florentine Renaissance palaces and the one built in the most crowded and central site in the city, was saved from a setting in which the design of its façades would have remained largely unreadable by the clearing of a square (figure 4.24). The 17.6-metre wide strip of space in front of the palace widened an existing street and lengthened the family *curia* (an open space at the centre of the residential compound of the extended family). Filippo Strozzi, who began the palace, initiated the purchase of property in the area of the new square but it was only his heirs, in the 1530s, who cleared the site. The intimate tie between the square and the palace is reflected in its status as private property. The Strozzi fought into the nineteenth century to maintain their rights to this space (Elam 1985).



## PALACES AND THE STREET IN ITALY

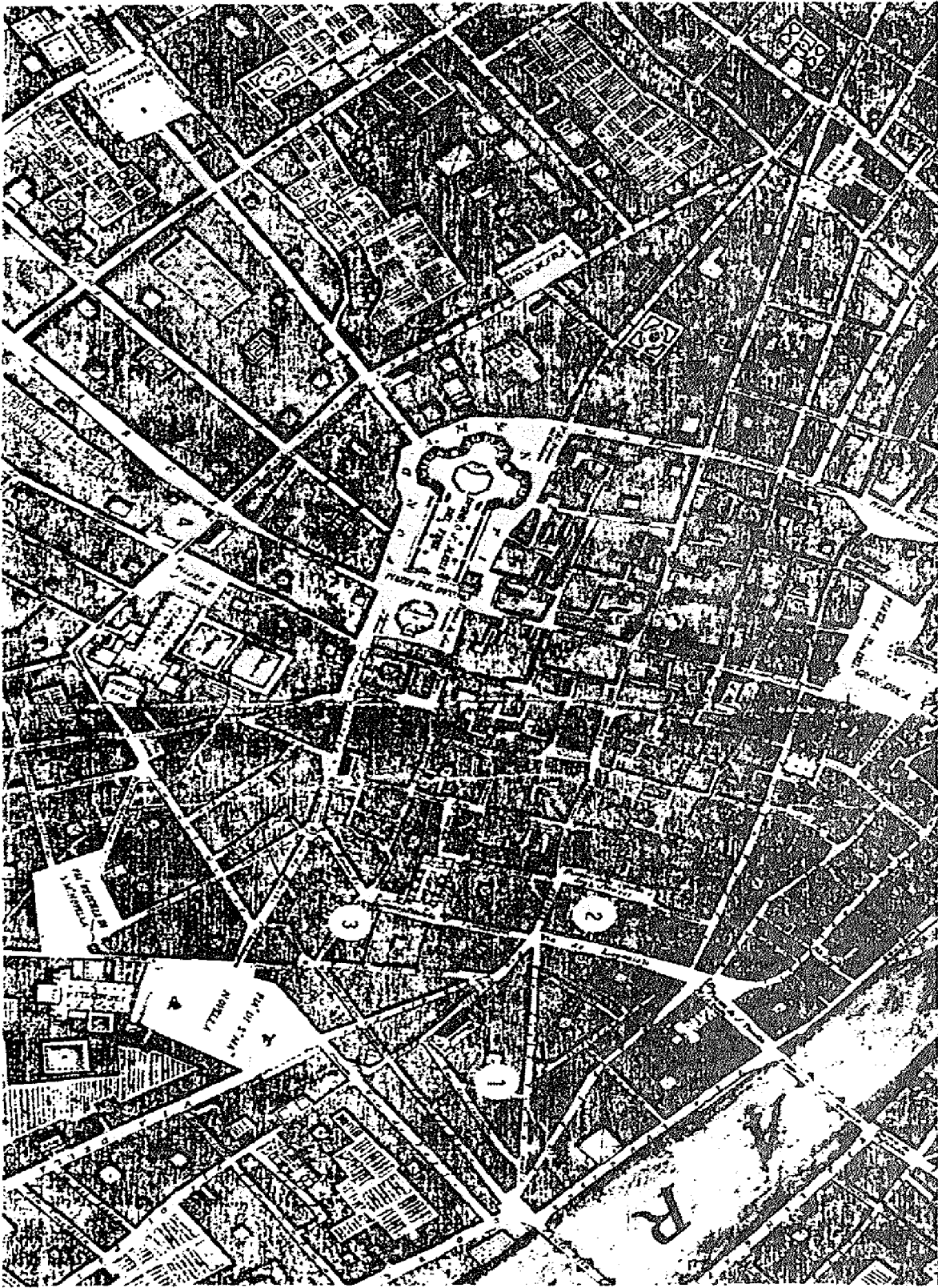


Figure 4.22 Part of a plan of Florence by Cosimo Zocchi, 1783, showing location of palaces discussed in text. 1: Palazzo Rucellai. 2: Palazzo Strozzi. 3: Palazzo Boni (formerly Palazzo Antinori). 4: Palazzo Medici.

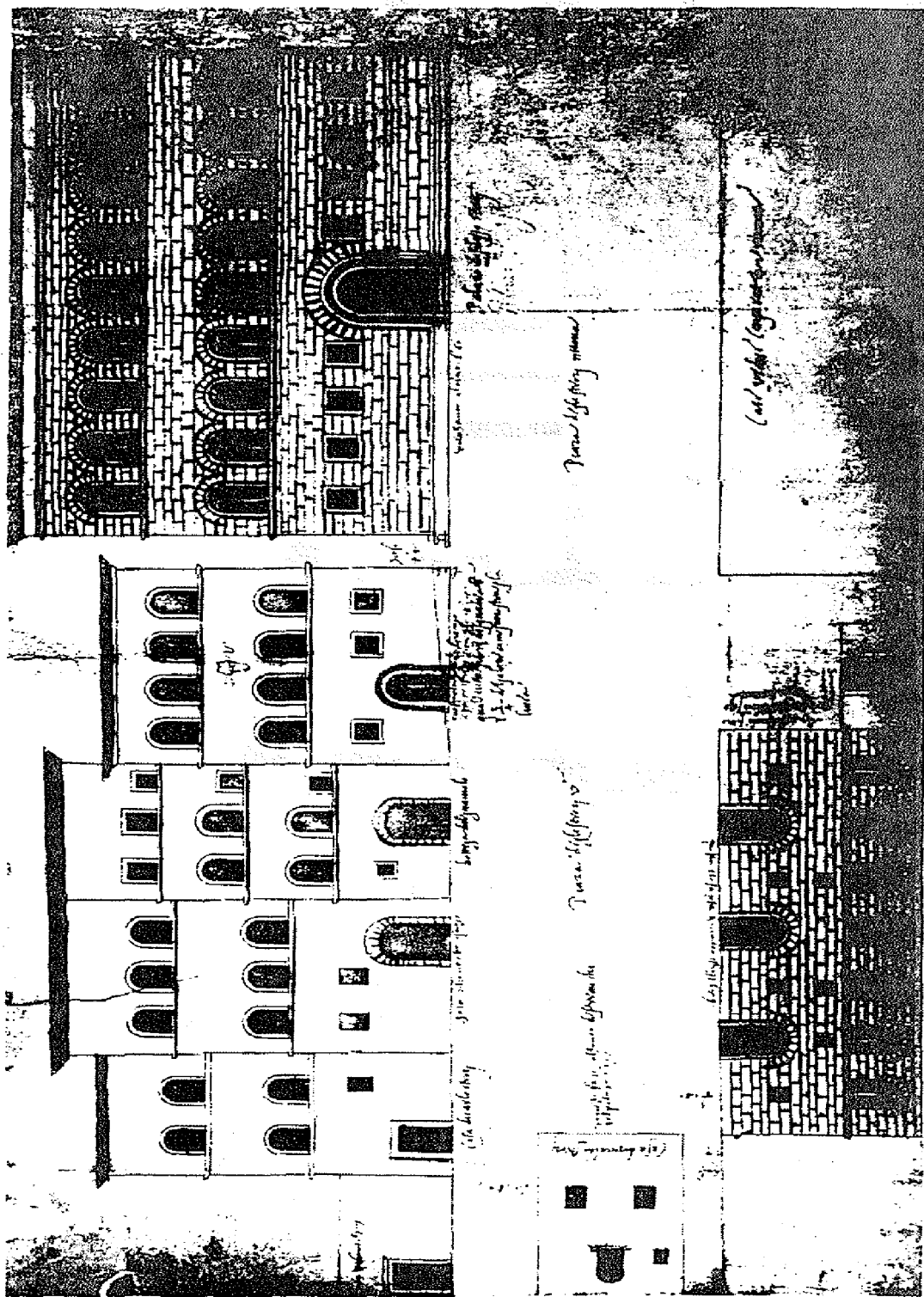
## URBAN LANDSCAPES



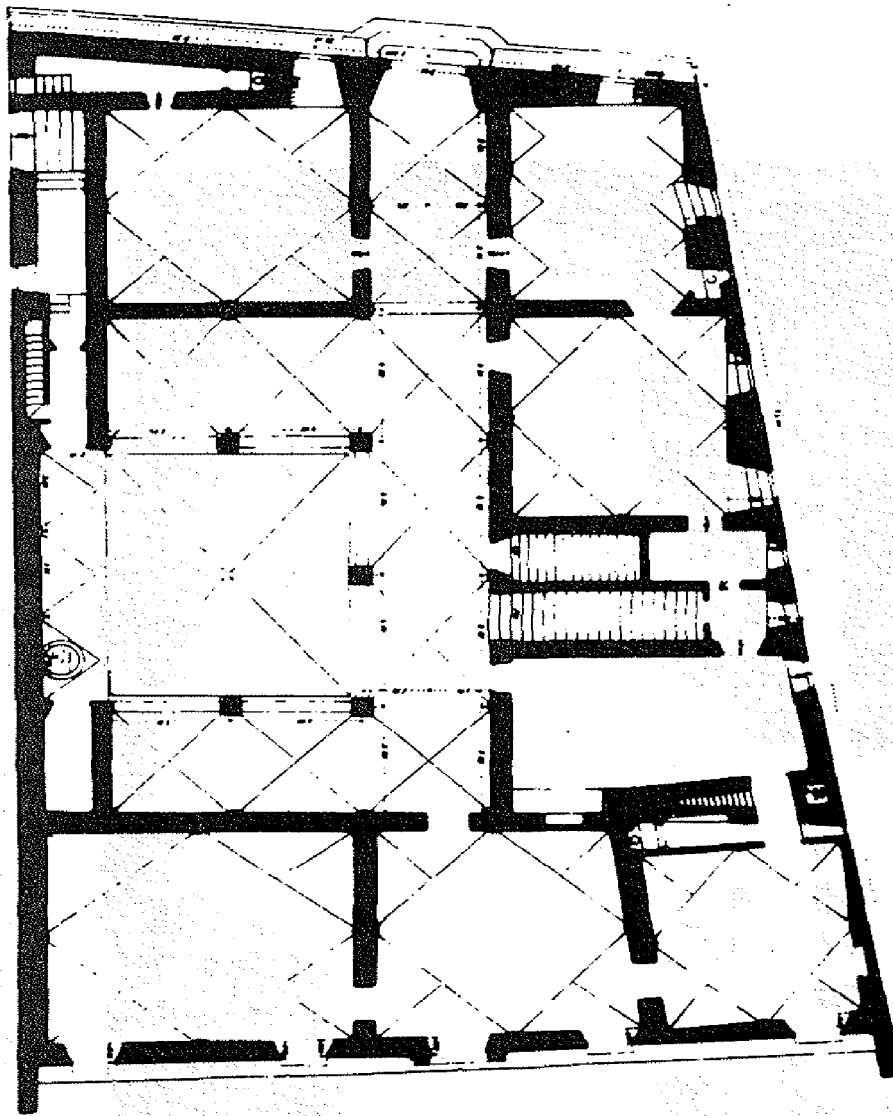
*Figure 4.23* View of Palazzo Rucellai, Florence, from Via del Purgatorio (photograph by the author, 1991).

The builders of the Boni (now Antinori) palace negotiated a trade with the city in 1463 in which they relinquished ground to widen a street at the rear of the building site in exchange for a triangle of land on the broad 'boulevard' built over the defensive zone of the Roman town, the present day Via Tornabuoni, at the front. The new property, still evident in the plan of the palace (figure 4.25), allowed them to swing the façade into the street and command a view that extended to Piazza Santa Trinita almost 400 yards (about 360 metres) away.<sup>25</sup>

The Medici Palace enjoys a similar prominence on the Via Larga (now Via Cavour). Significantly, this was not the main street on which



*Figure 4.24 Elevation of Piazza Strozzi, Baccio d'Agnolo, Florence, 1533 (Uffizi, Gabinetto dei Disegni e Stampe, 132A).*



*Figure 4.25* Plan of the Palazzo Boni-Antinori, Florence.

the property abutted. It is the Via Sangallo at the back of the palace that ran to the city gate. The Via Larga was built in the early fourteenth century to relieve traffic to the centre of the city and, as its name implies, it was given an ample width. The palace is sited just south of an angle in the west side of the street, an angle that was almost certainly adjusted – perhaps even inaugurated – with the construction of the palace in 1444. The result of this adjustment to the street is that the building seems to turn its face to the visitor arriving from the north. It gains a special prominence at the end of the street and becomes the first landmark on the route to the cathedral, the grain market, or the town hall (figure 4.26).



*Figure 4.26* Palazzo Medici, Florence, from Via Larga (now Via Cavour) (photograph by the author, 1991).

## CONCLUSION

In the fifteenth century, private palaces became major monuments in Florence and other Italian cities, as grand and prominent as most public buildings. Sited for visual prominence, they began a process that re-articulated the urban landscape. The revolution was possible only after a sense of hygiene, social decorum, and physical order, embodied in town law, exercised pressure on property owners to control the appendages to their buildings that facilitated private use of the street at the expense of the quality of public space. The relationship between the

individual building and the town was altered in a fundamental way. Instead of taking advantage of public space for work and habitation, private builders adhered more strictly to property lines and accepted as part of the cost of construction the expenses of an elaborately articulated façade. 'Façade', then, represents a new relationship between buildings and the city. It is a concept born in the fourteenth century and matured in the Renaissance. The Renaissance contributions – the conception of the building front as a unified compositional field and the creation of settings in which façade compositions could have a visual effect – build on the achievement of the late-medieval city where, for the first time, private residential buildings were made to contribute to the decorum of the urban landscape.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the hospitality and support of the American Academy in Rome and of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology that made it possible to prepare this paper. He is responsible for translations into English of quotations from foreign-language works.

## NOTES

- 1 The following abbreviations appear in the text: ASS for Archivio di Stato di Siena; ASF for Archivio di Stato di Firenze.
- 2 The example of a neighbourhood street, the *contrada del pozzo a Sancto Martino* in Siena, is typical both of the kind of problem that involved city officials and of the way they dealt with it. A street 'overcome' by galleries projecting from the houses was to be cleared of the obstructions and regularized if, and only if, the owners, who were also to pay for the work, agreed as a group to the project. The government's street official was placed at the disposal of the abutters to organize the work and could be fined if he failed to execute their decision (Lisini 1903: II, 32 (book III, rubric 48)).
- 3 The commune of San Gimignano, in its statutes of 1255, appointed public surveyors, called *terminatores terrarum*, who swear 'to decide questions of boundaries of fields, and [building] lots, and the boundaries of houses, and also the division of houses [when divided in wills], and lots, and commonly held ground, and common possessions. We are to make decisions expeditiously and do not have to record them in writing. We are to establish boundaries, and place markers (*termini*) as we see fit, and also to decide questions of private streets not decided by our predecessors, or a judge of the commune, or settled amicably [by the litigants]'. The surveyors were to receive one *denarius* for each marker from the owners of the property

## PALACES AND THE STREET IN ITALY

- (Pecori 1853: 684–5, from the statutes of San Gimignano compiled in 1255, book I, rubric 48).
- 4 Lisini 1903: 156–8 (book I, rubric 171). A statute dated May 1292 begins 'for twenty years now the government of Siena has spent large amounts of money to rebuild and repair the streets, bridges and wells in the city and its territory. And because there is no officer to look after these things they are deteriorating and have almost reverted to their original sad state'. The city appointed a *giudice de le vie*, with a staff of three, to enforce the legislation about streets, to collect revenues designated for street work and to oversee repair and the completion of new projects. Citizens were to bring complaints about the condition of streets and roads to the *giudice* who had the authority to force anyone who damaged the roads or usurped them for private purposes to pay for their restoration. All responsibilities for streets and roads previously assigned to the *podestà* were expressly transferred to the new official in this document.
  - 5 A *platea*, or lot, was assigned the new *castellanus* from property in an area of development outside the oldest part of town that was purchased for him by the commune. Even if he bought a property on his own, which apparently some settlers did, perhaps to be able to choose the site themselves, they were still obliged to build within the six-month limit in order to receive the tax exemption. In 1314 an addition was made to this rubric that obliged house builders to spend at least 200 lire on construction.
  - 6 Pecori 1853: 734. Statutes of San Gimignano of 1255, book IV, rubric 74. Prospective builders petitioned the commune for the land and, if the present owner did not commit himself to build on it himself, the petitioner was awarded it for the price of 10 lire per *staioro* with the obligation (and potential fine of 100 *soldi* (about 5 lire)) to complete the construction within ten months.
  - 7 ASS, (see note 1) *Viarii* 1, c. 5 r. (book begun April 1290; the following entry, undated, immediately precedes one of May 1299). 'The *Viarii* command that the ground [*platea*] that lies between the house of the sons of Perino and the house of the deceased butcher Ranucci have its boundaries straightened and its surface paved and that it shall become a public street so that no one may build upon it or project jetties above it and that it shall remain open and unobstructed up to the sky [*usque ad celum*]. The cost of the purchase of the land and of the paving shall be borne by the men of the *contrada* of Sant' Andrea and especially by those who have houses next to the *platea* so that those who get most use and convenience [from the project] shall pay the most.'
  - 8 In early-thirteenth-century Volterra, the space in front of the grand residential structures in the main square was conceded to property owners for permanent, masonry structures serving as benches and steps (Fiumi 1951a: 100–1, from the statutes of 1210–22, rubric 192).
  - 9 Collected from the term *fenestra*, the regulation limited the depth of *deschi*, *banchi*, and *predelle* to a single *passetto*, about 4 feet (1.2 metres). The official had the authority to fine offenders 20 *soldi*. A one-*passetto* limit for wood, and straw stored in the street and for 'things' (*res*) hanging from the building was set by *Statuti* 26 (1337), cc. 249 v. and 250 r., rubric 343, ASS. The *passetto* limit applied to activity as well as to material. Saddle-



makers, barrelmakers, wool-workers, spice sellers and others were specifically enjoined not to occupy more than this space on main streets when they sat in front of their shops to work (Lisini 1903: II, 305–6 (book V, rubric 174)).

- 10 The awnings and tables for grocers, butchers and fishsellers who displayed their produce on the Campo had to be dismantled every evening. The city charged each vendor 100 *soldi* annually, or more 'if it can be had' (Lisini 1903: II, 31 (book III, rubric 44)). The only exception to the daily clearing of the Campo was the privilege accorded to new knights of the commune, who were allowed to establish a celebratory 'court' on the Campo (presumably amidst the market stalls) for a fifteen-day period (Lisini 1903: II, 35 (book III, rubric 56)).
- 11 Except in the Campo, sheltering roofs over display tables had to be attached to the shopkeeper's property, whether home or workshop. In 1337 the law became more specific. In the statutes of that year a regulation appeared twice prohibiting mobile display tables in the streets of the city (ASS, *Statuto* 26, c. 250 r. (rubric 343) and c. 253 r. (rubric 370)).
- 12 In 1309 stairs were excluded only if they restricted access. *Usci*, or doorways which required stairs, were prohibited if they blocked anyone's access to their property or narrowed the public street (Lisini 1903: II, 306 (book V, rubric 175)).
- 13 Bridges and arches between buildings were exempted from this legislation if they were more than 30 feet (about 9 metres) above ground. A similar law appeared in the 1469 statutes of the less progressive, late-medieval Viterbo. Someone who owned the property on either side of a public or neighbourhood street, or neighbours who mutually agreed to the arrangement, could occupy one-quarter of the width of the street with each of the buildings as long as the construction did not impede horsemen or pedestrians. It was only in a revision of the statute dated 1487 that the incursions into the street were prohibited (Bibliotheca Comunale di Viterbo, II.A. VII. 8 (Statuto di Viterbo 1469 e Riforme), rubric 76, c. 98 v.–99 r. and c. 98 v. in lower margin for the revision).
- 14 This model study of medieval domestic architecture examines the buildings using archaeological, architectural, documentary and historical evidence. The Via Caprarecce house is discussed on pages 9–12 and a drawing of its façade, with the beam-holes, original doors, windows, niches and stone fixtures clearly indicated, is reproduced as figure 1.7 on page 7.
- 15 The commune in Volterra regulated tower construction from at least 1207. The legislation included a 10-foot (3-metre) limit to the height of the roofs. This was enough headroom for a belvedere but the roof must also have created a significant impediment to the military operations, especially the use of catapults, for which individuals built tall structures. In fact, the legislation specifically prohibited anyone from fighting from above the roof (Fiumi 1951a: 153–4, Statuto G. I (1224), rubric 92 (dated 1207)).
- 16 Andrews (1982) uses masonry construction techniques to date the enlargement of the Palazzo Sacchi and the construction of the *proferlo* to the period immediately following the appointment of Giovanni Giacomo Sacchi as treasurer of the Patrimony of St Peter by Boniface VIII (whose family arms appear on the south wall of the building) in 1296.



- 17 Vitruvius uses the more specifically orientational term *frons* to refer to the porch of a temple (Vitruvius 1970: II, 166 (book III, chapter 2, line 2)). In the 1450s, Alberti uses the same term to refer to the façade of a palace (Alberti 1966: 783 (book IV, chapter 1), and 811 (book IX, chapter 4)), but he also uses the expression *aedificorum facies* to refer to the same element of architecture in a passage where the view of the building is the issue (Alberti 1966: 307 (book IV, chapter 5)).
- 18 In the same document, which refers to the revetment, or 'pelo' of the wall, the authors also write of '*faccie dallato*', the side wall, also reverted.
- 19 There is no reason to believe that this is the first usage for the term, even in Siena, but it could not have been used frequently. When the government prohibited galleries and demanded multi-light windows, after the pattern of the windows of the town hall, on the private buildings surrounding the Campo in the May of 1297 (and repeated the legislation in the statutes of 1309–10), the word *facciata* was not available. Instead the law reads 'qualunque he[di]ficarà casa allato al Campo del mercato, debia fare le finestre a colonnelli et not ballatoio' (Lisini 1903: 116 (book III, rubric 261)). The legislation is repeated in the statutes of 1337, where a change in language gives an index of the progress of the idea of façade, even though the word is still not present: 'si qua domus vel casamentus circa campum fori hedificaretur omnis et singule fenestre talis casamenti et domus que haberent aspectum in campum fori fiant ad columnellas et sine aliquibus ballatoriis fiendis' (ASS, *Statuti* 26, c. 253 v. (rubric 379)).
- 20 The petition is preserved in the records of the *Ufficiali sopra l'ornato* (1427–80) (ASS, *Concistoro* 2125, petition number 29, granted 25 April 1464; published in Braunfels 1953: 254–5, document 10). In his 1521 edition of Vitruvius, Cesare Cesariano, the Milanese architect and heir to the tradition of Bramante in Milan, translates an ancient concept of building front into a contemporary one and in the process gives a synonym, *frontespizio*, for façade (Bruschi *et al.* 1978: 418). *Frontespizio* was in use at least from the fifteenth century. It appears in a building contract of 1460 for a house in Tuscania in Lazio, where it seems to represent the upper part of a wall that screens the roof gable and shields that side of the house from water running from the roof (Andrews 1982: 94).
- 21 Andrews (1982) finds little evidence for wooden structures, and a great deal for masonry, in the urban centres of northern Lazio in the Middle Ages. Tuscany had more timber, exporting it through the twelfth century (Herlihy 1958: 25), but must have been running low by the fourteenth century when the trade was banned. Fires reported by the chroniclers of Florentine history in the thirteenth century have often been taken as evidence of wooden construction in the centre of the city. But the amount of wood used for doors, shutters, galleries, jetties, ceilings and floors, roofs, interior walls, and shop furniture in stone structures is sufficient to explain these events. In Siena, galleries had to be made out of brick after 1302 specifically because of the fear of fire (ASS, *Statuti* 26, cc. 178 r. and v. (rubric 315)). Indeed, the framing of load-bearing walls is the least vulnerable of any wooden element in a building. Documents that identify the materials of houses in the late Middle Ages primarily name stone or brick. Some very modest buildings were made of packed earth but even they, in

## URBAN LANDSCAPES

- Siena, had to have a street wall of brick (Lisini 1903: II, 406–7 (book V, rubric 409); repeated ASS, *Statuti* 26 (1337), rubric 215, c. 160 v.).
- 22 I count, as the immediate predecessors of the Palazzo Medici, buildings without galleries, window boxes or jetties (although sometimes with pent roofs over the ground storey entrances) that address the entire street front as a unified field, articulated in a consistent manner. In the early period this treatment is reserved for very exceptional buildings, seats of the greatest families of the city. In Siena the Palazzo Tolomei, as it was rebuilt 1270–2 (Prunai *et al.* 1971), and in Viterbo the Gatti Palace of the middle of the thirteenth century (Andrews 1982: 40–2) have smooth-faced ashlar surfaces and elaborate tracery in the upper-storey windows. Buildings for similar patrons in the period just preceding the construction of the Medici Palace include the Palazzo Gambacorti in Pisa (about 1380) (Redi 1989: 126) and the Palazzo Vitelleschi in Tarquinia (about 1436–9). In Florence, most ambitious late-fourteenth- and early-fifteenth-century palaces (like the da Uzzano-Capponi Palace on the Via dei Bardi, begun before 1411) have the rusticated base and rough masonry or plastered upper levels already discussed. Some – like the Palazzo Davanzatti of the later fourteenth century or the Ilarione de'Bardi-Canigiani palace of about 1430 (Preyer 1983) – have finished masonry higher on the wall, though never to the roof line. Others, often more modest, were plastered from street to eaves (Thiem and Thiem 1964).
  - 23 ASS, *Viarii*, I, beginning 1290, cc. 4 v. and 5 r., rubric 24. Trachtenberg (1988) discusses the building history of the Palazzo Signoria in Florence (1299–1315) and its relationship to the development of the square that was cleared around it in the course of the fourteenth century. It is not until the fifteenth century that the lessons of the precocious façade design of this public monument were taken up by builders of private residences.
  - 24 Arrangements of this kind in Rome in the later Renaissance are the subject of a chapter in Frommel (1973). The grandest project of this kind is the piazza constructed in front of the Farnese Palace in the 1530s (Spezzaferro and Tuttle 1981). For the formation of public spaces in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Rome within an institutional and social framework, see Connors (1990). A document connected with the construction of the Strozzi Palace provides a good illustration of the exchange of properties between private owners and the city. The government *Deliberazione* conceded all land belonging to the commune within a rectangular site to Filippo Strozzi and received pieces of Filippo's land that fell outside this site 'pro compensazione' (ASF, *Signori e Collegi, Deliberazioni Duplicati*, 25, ff. 388 r.–v., published in Elam 1985: 128, n. 25).
  - 25 The contents of the Boni document were kindly shared with me for this project by Professor Brenda Preyer who will publish it in a forthcoming book on Florentine fifteenth-century palaces.

## REFERENCES

- Alberti, L. B. (1966) *De Re Aedificatoria* edited and translated by Orlandi, G., 2 volumes, Milan: Il Polifilo.

- Andrews, D. (1982) 'Medieval domestic architecture in northern Lazio', in Andrews, D., Osborne, J. and Whitehouse, D. (eds) *Medieval Lazio: Studies in Architecture, Painting and Ceramics*, Papers in Italian Archaeology, BAR International Series 125, Oxford: British Archaeological Reports.
- Baldinucci, F. (1681) *Vocabulario Toscano*, Florence: Santi Franchi.
- Bonaini, F. (1857) *Statuti Inediti della Città di Pisa dal XII al XIV secolo*, 3 volumes, Florence: G.P. Vieusseux.
- Braunfels, W. (1953) *Mittelalterliche Stadtbaukunst in der Toskana*, Berlin: Mann.
- Bruschi, A., Maltese, C., Tafuri, M. and Bonelli, R. (eds) (1978) *Scritti Rinascimentali di Architettura*, Milan: Il Polifilo.
- Caggese, R. (ed.) (1910) *Statuti della Repubblica Fiorentina, Statuto del Capitano del Popolo degli anni 1322-1325*, Florence: Tipografia Galileiana.
- Caggese, R. (ed.) (1921) *Statuti della Repubblica Fiorentina, Statuto del Podestà dell'anno 1325*, Florence: Tipografia Galileiana.
- Cherubini, G. and Fanelli, G. (eds) (1990) *Il Palazzo Medici Riccardi di Firenze*, Florence: Giunti.
- Ciampi, I. (1872) *Cronache e Statuti della Città di Viterbo*, Florence: M. Cellini.
- Connors, J. (1990) 'Alliance and enmity in Roman Baroque urbanism', *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 25: 207-94.
- Consortini, L. (1942) *Le case-torri di Giovanni Toscano in Volterra*, Lucca: Scuola tipografica artigianelli.
- Degli Azzi, G. (ed.) (1913-16) *Statuti di Perugia dell'anno MCCCXLII*, Rome: E. Loescher.
- Dizionario Etimologico Italiano* (1951) Florence: Barbera.
- Elam, C. (1985) 'Piazza Strozzi: two drawings by Baccio d'Agnolo and the problems of a private Renaissance square', *I Tatti Studies* 1: 105-35.
- Filarete, Antonio Averlino (1972) *Trattato di Architettura*, edited by Finoli, A. M. and Grassi, L., 2 volumes, Milan: Il Polifilo.
- Fiumi, E. (ed.) (1951a) *Statuti di Volterra 1210-1222*, Florence.
- Fiumi, E. (1951b) 'Topografia e sviluppo urbanistico al sorgere del Comune', *Rassegna Storica Volterrana* 14: 1-28. Reprinted in Pinti, G. (ed.) (1983) *Volterra e San Gimignano nel Medio Evo*, San Gimignano.
- Frey, K. (1885) *Die Loggia dei Lanzi zu Florenz*, Berlin: W. Hertz.
- Frommel, C. (1973) *Der römische Palastbau der Hochrenaissance*, Tübingen: E. Wasmuth.
- Gaye, G. (1839) *Carteggio Inedito d'Artisti dei Secoli XIV, XV, XVI*, Florence: G. Molini.
- Goldthwaite, R. A. (1972) 'The Florentine palace as domestic architecture', *American Historical Review*, 77: 977-1012.
- Grohmann, A. (1981) *Città e Territorio tra Medioevo ed età Moderna*, Perugia, secc. XIII-XVI, 2 volumes, Perugia: Voluminia.
- Guasti, C. (1887) *Santa Maria del Fiore*, Florence: M. Ricci.
- Herlihy, D. (1958) *Pisa in the Early Renaissance: A Study of Urban Growth*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Kent, F. W. (1972) 'The Rucellai family and its loggia', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 35: 397-401.
- Kent, F. W. (1987) 'Palace, politics, and society in fifteenth century Florence', *I Tatti Studies*, 2: 41-70.

- Lisini, A. (1903) *Il Costituto del Comune di Siena Volgarizzato nel MCCCIX–MCCCX*, 2 volumes, Siena.
- Milanesi, G. (1901) *Nuovi Documenti per la Storia dell'Arte Toscana*, Florence: G. Dotti.
- Moschella, P. (1942) 'Le case a "sporti" in Firenze', *Palladio* 6, 5–6: 167–73.
- Paatz, W. (1931) 'Zur Baugeschichte des Palazzo del Podestà in Florenz', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 6: 287–321.
- Pampaloni, G. (1973) *Firenze al tempo di Dante: Documenti sull'Urbanistica Fiorentina*, Rome: Ministero dell' Interno.
- Pecori, L. (1853) *Storia di S. Gimignano*, Florence: Tipografia Galileiana.
- Pierotti, P. (1960) 'Ricerca dei valori originali nell'edilizia civile medievale in Lucca', *Critica d'arte*, 39: 183–98.
- Pierotti, P. (1965) *Lucca: Edilizia Urbanistica Medievale*, Milan: Edizioni di Comunità.
- Preyer, B. (1977) 'The Rucellai loggia', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 21: 183–98.
- Preyer, B. (1983) 'The "chasa overo palagio" of Alberto di Zanobi: a Florentine palace of about 1400 and its later remodelling', *Art Bulletin* 65: 387–401.
- Preyer, B. (1985) 'Two Cerchi palaces in Florence', in Morrogh, A. (ed.) *Renaissance Essays in Honor of Craig Hugh Smyth*, Florence: Giunti Barbera.
- Prunai, G., Pampaloni, G. and Bemporad, N. (1971) *Il Palazzo Tolomei a Siena*, Florence.
- Redi, F. (1983) 'Dalla torre al palazzo: forme abitative signorili e organizzazione dello spazio urbano a Pisa dall' XI al XV secolo', *I Ceti Dirigenti nella Toscana Tardo Comunale*, Comitato di studi sulla storia dei ceti dirigenti in Toscana, Atti del III Convegno: 5–7 December 1980, Florence: F. Papafava.
- Redi, F. (1989) *Edilizia Medievale in Toscana*, Florence: Edifir.
- Saalman, H. (1990) 'The transformation of the city in the Renaissance: Florence as model', *Annali di Architettura, Rivista del Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio* 2, 73–82.
- Salvagemini, G. (1976) 'La Guerra degli sporti', *Granducato*, 1: 3–12.
- Sanpaulesi, P. (1939) 'Un progetto di costruzione per una casa del secolo XIV', *Atti del IV Convegno Nazionale di Storia di Architettura*, Milan.
- Spezzaferro, L. and Tuttle, R. (1981) 'Place Farnese: urbanisme et politique', *Le Palais Farnese*, Rome, 1, 1: 85–123.
- Spilner, P. (1987) '“Ut Civitas Amplietur”'. Studies in Florentine urban development 1282–1400', unpublished PhD dissertation, Columbia University, New York.
- Suetonius, T. C. (1928) *Suetonius with an English translation*, edited and translated by Rolfe, J. C., 2 volumes, London: Heinemann.
- Taddei, D. (1973) 'Piazza Rucellai in Firenze', *Studi e Documenti di Architettura*, 3: 11–48.
- Thiem, G. and Thiem, C. (1964) *Toskanische Fassaden-Dekoration in Sgraffito und Fresko, 14. bis 17. Jahrhundert*, Munich: F. Bruckmann.
- Toker, F. (1985) 'Gothic architecture by remote control: an illustrated building contract of 1340', *Art Bulletin*, 67, 1: 67–95.
- Trachtenberg, M. (1988) 'What Brunelleschi saw: monument and site at the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 47, 1: 14–44.

## PALACES AND THE STREET IN ITALY

- Villani, G. (1846) *Cronica di Giovanni Villani a miglior lezione ridotta coll'aiuto de'testi a penna con note filologiche di I. Moutier e con appendici storico-geografiche compilate da Franc. Gherardi-Dragomanni*, Florence.
- Vitruvius (1970) *On Architecture*, edited and translated by F. Granger, 2 volumes, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.