

A Renaissance Architecture of Power

Princely Palaces in the Italian Quattrocento

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The Medici Palace, Cosimo the Elder, and Michelozzo: A Historiographical Survey

*Emanuela Ferretti**

The Medici Palace has long been recognized as an architectural icon of the Florentine Quattrocento. This imposing building, commissioned by Cosimo di Giovanni de' Medici (1389–1464), is a palimpsest that reveals complex layers rooted in the city's architectural, urban, economic, and social history. A symbol – just like its patron – of a formidable era of Italian art, the palace on the Via Larga represents a key moment in the development of the palace type and influenced every other Italian centre. Indeed, it is this building that scholars have identified as the prototype for the urban residence of the nobility.¹ The aim of this chapter, based on a great wealth of secondary literature, including articles, essays, and monographs, is to touch upon several themes and problems of relevance to the Medici Palace, some of which remain unresolved or are still debated in the current scholarship. After delineating the basic construction chronology, this chapter will turn to questions such as the patron's role in the building of his family palace, the architecture itself with regards to its spatial, morphological, and linguistic characteristics, and finally the issue of authorship. We can try to draw the state of the literature: this preliminary historiographical survey comes more than twenty years after the monograph edited by Cherubini and Fanelli (1990)² and follows an extensive period of innovative study of the Florentine early Quattrocento,³ as well as the fundamental works

* I would like to thank Nadja Naksamija who checked the English translation, showing many kindnesses.

- 1 For a discussion of the importance of Cosimo's palace as a prototype within the Italian context, see Marco Folin, "La dimora del Principe", in *Il Rinascimento italiano e l'Europa: luoghi, spazi, architettura*, eds. Donatella Calabi and Elena Svalduz (Vicenza: Angelo Colla, 2010), 345–365.
- 2 *Palazzo Medici Riccardi di Firenze*, eds. Giovanni Cherubini and Giovanni Fanelli (Florence: Giunti, 1990).
- 3 This bibliography is vast; worthy of mention are the following studies: Staale Sinding-Larsen, "A tale of two cities. Florentine and Roman visual context for fifteenth-century palaces", *Acta ad Arcaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia* VI (1975): 163–212; Francis W. Kent, "The Making of a Renaissance Patron of Arts", in *A Florentine Patrician and his Palace. Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone*, II (London: The Warburg Institute-University

by Dale Kent on Cosimo the Elder⁴ and Francesco Caglioti on the commissioning of Donatello's *David* and *Judith*.⁵ The latter study has tackled these two sculptural masterpieces – both illustrious residents of the Medici Palace until 1495 – within a vast network of interwoven plotlines, some of which also relate to architecture (Fig. 11.1).

Construction Chronology

Cosimo the Elder launched his building campaign in the early months of 1445.⁶ In a letter addressed to Giovanni di Cosimo de' Medici (1421–1463) dating from March of that year there is a description of the demolition of the existing houses on the corner of Via Larga and Via Gori – described as the “dismantling of the corner” (*il disfacimento del canto*) – in view of the construction of the new palace.⁷ “The demolition is a marvel to see” (*È tutto sgombro che è una magnificentia a vedere*), went on the letter with regards to the clearing of the area earmarked for the new palace, which was also described in the tax declaration of 1446 as being under construction.⁸ In actuality, despite the importance of the project,

of London, 1981), 9–65; Brenda Preyer, “The Rucellai Palace”, *ibid.*, 155–225; Richard A. Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence. An Economic and Social History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Brenda Preyer, “The ‘Chasa over Palagio’ of Alberto di Zanobi: a Florentine Palace of about 1400 and its Later Remodelling”, *The Art Bulletin* 65 (1983): 387–401; Francis W. Kent, “Palaces, Politics and Society in fifteenth-century Florence”, *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 2 (1987): 41–70; Francis W. Kent, “Il palazzo, la famiglia, il contesto politico”, *Annali di Architettura* 2 (1990): 59–72. The post-1990 bibliography pertaining to issues regarding fifteenth-century Florentine architecture and relevant to the study of the Medici Palace will be cited in subsequent pages of this paper.

4 See Dale W. Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

5 Francesco Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici*, 2 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 2000).

6 See Dale V. Kent, Francis W. Kent, “Two Comments of March 1445 on the Medici Palace”, *The Burlington Magazine* CXXI (1979): 795–796. This paper gives more details about the date of circa 1444, first suggested by Aby Warburg, “Der Baubeginn des Palazzo Medici”, *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 11 (1908–1911): 87; concerning the date of 1446 proposed later on, see Isabelle Hyman, “Notes and Speculations on S. Lorenzo, Palazzo Medici, and an Urban Project by Brunelleschi”, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (1975): 100–102.

7 Ser Alessio Galluzzi to Giovanni de' Medici, 13 March 1445 (*stile corrente*) in Florence, Archivio di Stato, *Mediceo avanti il principato*, VII, 253, quoted in Kent and Kent, “Two Comments”, 795.

8 See Hyman, “Notes and Speculations”, 102, n. 24.

documentation regarding its construction is rather scarce and can be found primarily in an account book pertaining to the basilica of San Lorenzo.⁹ In addition to the accountancy relative to the construction of the new basilica, this source also contains explicit references to the Medici Palace, weaving together, among other things, a lost “book of the palace of Cosimo” (*libro di palagio di Cosimo*) – that is, the “libro della muraglia” dedicated entirely to the accounts concerning the construction of the palace. This missing source, otherwise available for numerous other Florentine palaces from the Renaissance,¹⁰ would have put to rest a great many doubts still surrounding the Medici Palace. Nevertheless, some indirect documentation is still available, and has yet to be properly identified.

Significantly, 1447 was the year in which Cosimo de’ Medici reintroduced the Feast of the Magi (depicted in the pictorial cycle by Benozzo Gozzoli in the chapel of the palace) after a long period of suspension. Michelozzo, a member of the Company of the Magi, in charge of organizing the festivities, was called in to take part in these preparations, which involved a lavish procession from the church of San Marco to the city centre along the Via Larga,¹¹ where the construction of Cosimo’s residence was under way.

The date of Cosimo’s move to the new palace – which can thus be considered the moment when the building works were drawing to an end – is also uncertain, proposed by some to be 1456 and by others 1458, the year in which the patron’s tax declaration, the *portata al catasto*, was drawn up at the new residence.¹² Already by 1457, however, the palace could accommodate important works of art, such as the two busts of Piero and Giovanni de’ Medici intended for their respective chambers. In the same year, the commissioning of Donatello’s *Judith* was under way; the statue and its columnar

9 This ledger is the point of departure for the work of Isabelle Hyman, *Fifteenth Century Florentine Studies: The Palazzo Medici and Ledger for the Church of San Lorenzo* (New York and London: Garland, 1977, submitted as a Ph.D. dissertation in 1968).

10 See Vanna Arrighi, “Il libro dei conti ‘Libro di debitori e creditori’ tenuto per Bartolomeo Scala da Francesco di Luca Seralbizzi”, in *La casa del cancelliere: documenti e studi sul palazzo di Bartolomeo Scala a Firenze*, ed. Anna Bellinazzi (Florence: Edifir, 1998), 13–58; Vanna Arrighi, Elisabetta Insabato, “I ‘libri di muraglia’ negli archivi familiari fiorentini: un primo censimento”, in *Architettura e identità. I*, eds. Lucia Corrain and Francesco Paolo Di Teodoro (Florence: Olschki, 2013), 341–354, with an exhaustive bibliography.

11 Rab Hatfield, “The Compagnia de’ Magi”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 113.

12 Preyer, “The Rucellai Palace”, 183, n. 4, suggests the date of 1456. In disagreement with this date are Howard Saalman and Philip Mattox, “The First Medici Palace”, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 44 (1985): 329, who propose 1458 as the *post quem* date on the basis of the tax declaration (*portata al Catasto*) cited by Hyman, *Fifteenth Century*, 78.

base were intended to adorn the garden of Cosimo's new palace, starting in the late 1460s.¹³

The Urban Context

The Medici Palace is situated at the heart of the Gonfalone del Leon d'Oro in the Florentine district (*quartiere*) of San Giovanni, between the fifth and the sixth circle of walls;¹⁴ the Medici, originally from the Mugello, the hilly region north of Florence, settled in this area in the first half of the 14th century.¹⁵ It is here that the most important properties of the family could be found, transformed between the 1430s and 1440s into a single large *palagio* complete with a *hortus conclusus*.¹⁶ The Via Larga was an urban axis of unprecedented size designed during the 1330s. Its dimensions were all the more extraordinary when compared with the surrounding network of narrow streets, and especially the continuation of the Via Larga itself towards the cathedral (then called Via degli Spadai, today Via Martelli), which used to be significantly narrower than its present shape, acquired only at the beginning of the 19th century.¹⁷

In his "Life of Brunelleschi" Giorgio Vasari – influenced by the *Libro di Antonio Billi* and by Anonimo Magliabechiano – linked the construction of the Medici Palace to a greater urban project devised by the architect, which would have included a grandiose residence in a location different from the present one.¹⁸ In fact, rejected because of its excessive size and thus its political and economic connotations, Brunelleschi's project, according to Vasari, envisioned the construction of a magniloquent building free on three of its sides. Situated at the present site of the church of San Giovannino, opposite San Lorenzo, the palace would have served as a physical and conceptual juncture point between two squares: the *piazza* in front of San Lorenzo and another new empty area near San Marco, where the palace that was actually built stands today. The

13 About the two busts: Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici*, vol. 1, 55ff; he has shown conclusively that the *Judith* was not part of a fountain, in contrast to what had often been previously suggested: 87 ff.

14 Giovanni Fanelli, *Firenze: Architettura e città*, vol. 1 (Florence: Sansoni, 1972), 26–36.

15 Hyman, *Fifteenth Century*, 44–47.

16 Doris Carl, "La casa vecchia dei Medici e il suo giardino", in *Palazzo Medici*, eds. Cherubini and Fanelli, 39.

17 Caroline Elam, "Il palazzo nel contesto della città: strategie urbanistiche dei Medici nel Gonfalone del Leon d'Oro, 1415–1430", in *Palazzo Medici*, eds. Cherubini and Fanelli, 44.

18 Ibid.

solution thus conceived would have given rise to a palace type hitherto reserved exclusively for public buildings, be it secular or religious, which would have, therefore, come dangerously close to inciting envy.¹⁹ The story of Brunelleschi's project being rejected by the patron immortalized in the words of Vasari must have taken shape during the Medici papacy of Leo X (1513–1521). At that time, the Florentine urban context into which Cosimo's palace was inserted must have seemed quite modest in comparison with that of papal Rome, marked by the great transformations carried out under Julius II (1503–1513) and his Medici successor.²⁰

Although Brunelleschi's project for the Medici should probably be relegated to the realm of myth, one should nevertheless keep in mind the spatial relations between the residence of Cosimo the Elder and the Via Larga, the San Lorenzo complex, and other religious poles of Medicean authority (first and foremost, the convents of San Marco and Santissima Annunziata). Equally important was the choice of the corner location for the new building, clearly preferred to the alternative idea of remodelling the adjacent old house of the Medici. As Caroline Elam has argued, the modern viewer – who considers the square to have been the ideal form of Renaissance urban planning – may have lost the sense of the importance of the street corner, which was in fact deeply rooted in the mind of the 14th- and 15th-century viewer, especially in Florence.²¹ Indeed, the corner section of the Medici Palace was highlighted on the first floor by a monumental coat of arms of the family, while on the ground floor – through a contrasting play of volumes and voids – the powerfully rusticated walls dematerialized in the grand arches of the built-in loggia.²² Moreover, as one approached from the Via degli Spadari – that is, from the direction of the cathedral – this angle was brought into relief even further because of the widening of the area in front of the small medieval church of San Giovannino.²³

19 Hyman, "Notes and Speculations", 108.

20 This issue is meticulously reconstructed in Elam, "Il palazzo nel contesto della città", 44–47.

21 Ibid., 47: "[...] poiché ormai siamo abituati [...] a considerare ideale urbanistico la piazza costruita in modo coerente su un asse che fa da punto focale con gli edifici collocati al centro, abbiamo forse perduto il senso dell'angolo, così radicato nella coscienza dell'osservatore nel Trecento e Quattrocento, soprattutto a Firenze".

22 For the function of the loggia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and in the Medici Palace in particular, see Richard A. Goldthwaite, "The Florentine Palace as Domestic Architecture", *The American Historical Review* 77 (1972): 981–985. For the closing off of the loggia, see in this paper n. 96.

23 The church (built in 1351) and the square in front of it were transformed respectively starting in 1579 (by Bartolomeo Ammannati) and 1655 (regularizing of the area with regards to

One may add that when Cosimo began the construction of his palace, the opposite street corner was already occupied by the *palagio* of the Della Casa, under construction from around 1411 and subsequently incorporated into the 17th-century Panciatichi Palace.²⁴ Giovanni Cavalcanti, who witnessed the start of the works for the palace of the Della Casa, wrote that he saw one of its corners built atop a pillar of a bridge “over the Mugnone”; when Cosimo began work on his palace, he too encountered very thick walls under the foundations.²⁵ In addition to establishing the importance of the palace corners (*canti*) for the definition of the urban fabric, Cavalcanti’s account thus also highlighted the presence of a bridge that probably spanned the moat surrounding the city walls (this was the first circle of walls built in the communal period, but the fifth in all).²⁶ His mention of “enormous walls” (*grossissime mura*) in the foundations of Cosimo’s palace may be a reference to the remnants of this medieval protective enclosure, but it may have also been a symbolically resonant reference to the palace as a “bastion along a wide and straight street with a military character”.²⁷

Coinciding with the period in which the construction of the Medici Palace began, Dietisalvi Neroni (a member of a family with close ties to the Medici until the conspiracy of 1466) was starting work on his own palace on a parallel street, called Via dei Ginori, adjacent to Cosimo’s garden. Neroni’s property efforts included the remaking and improvement (including in a social sense) of a wide area of the medieval city, which was peppered with hovels, dark and narrow alleyways, and a public (and morally ambiguous) bath house for women, the so-called *stufa delle donne*.²⁸

the front of the church): see Giuseppe Richa, *Notizie Istoriche delle Chiese Fiorentine*, vol. 5 (Florence: Stamperia di Pietro Gaetano Vivani, 1757), 144–145.

- 24 Anna Floridia, *Palazzo Panciatichi in Firenze* (Rome: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Treccani, 1993), 18–19.
- 25 “Viddi fondare un canto del palagio di Agnolo di Ghezzo [Della Casa] in sulla coscia d’un ponte che attraversava la Via dal detto canto a San Giovannino de Gori, sotto il quale intesi che correva Mugnone. E di poi quando si fondò il palagio bello di Cosimo, nel cupo delle fondamenta si trovò grossissime mura”. *The ‘Trattato politico-morale’ of Giovanni Cavalcanti, (1381–c. 1451). A Critical Edition and Interpretation*, ed. Marcella T. Grendler (Geneva: Droz, 1973), 99, quoted in Floridia, *Palazzo Panciatichi*, 15.
- 26 For the fifth circle of walls of Florence, see Fanelli, *Firenze*, vol. 1, 24–25.
- 27 Roberto Gargiani, *Principi e costruzione nell’architettura italiana del Quattrocento* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2003), 75: “Decisiva è la modifica delle dimensioni delle singole pietre che divengono ciclopiche, montate in modo che le facce di alcune di loro sporgano sino a 30 centrimetri configurando il baluardo di una strada larga e rettilinea a carattere militare”.
- 28 Pietro Ruschi, “Le ‘case’ dei Neroni nella Via del borgo San Lorenzo. Un’importante vicenda urbana e architettonica nella Firenze di metà Quattrocento”, in *Palazzo Neroni a Firenze. Storia, architettura, restauro*, ed. Paola Benigni (Florence: Edifir, 1996), 47–74.

Moreover, the Cambini and the Ginori families (both close friends of the Medici) transferred to Cosimo some of their property on via Ginori in order to facilitate the building of his palace towards San Lorenzo.²⁹

The Patron

The great era of construction that transformed Florence into a “city of palaces”, in the words of Benedetto Dei,³⁰ was anchored around three precise chronological moments: from 1414 to 1423, after 1427, and from 1454 onwards.³¹ This tripartite chronology was dictated by specific events: 1423 marked the end of a long period of peace for Florence and the beginning of its conflict with Milan. The year 1427 saw the establishment of the *catasto*,³² the new instrument of taxation, which had direct consequences for the construction of new patrician palaces (which were exempt from tax if they were a family’s principal residence) but also for the use of these buildings, given the permanent removal of shops from their ground floors.³³ Finally, the Peace of Lodi, signed in 1454, inaugurated a new period of stability and brought about a drastic diminution of onerous loans for wealthier citizens. Within this temporal frame there was yet another highly significant occurrence: in 1444 Cosimo de’ Medici and his faction managed to impose the creation of a *balia* – a type of authority endowed with extraordinary powers – which was intended for emergency situations, but which the Medici used as an instrument of control over the city’s

29 Dale Kent, *The Rise of the Medici. Faction in Florence 1426–1434* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1978): 70; Sergio Tognetti, *Affari e mercati di una compagnia mercantile-bancaria nella Firenze del xv secolo* (Florence: Olschki 1999), 78–79.

30 Benedetto Dei, *La Cronica dall’anno 1400 all’anno 1500*, ed. Roberto Barducci, preface by Anthony Molho (Florence: Francesco Papafava, 1985): 78.

31 Nicolai Rubinstein, “Palazzi pubblici e palazzi privati al tempo del Brunelleschi, problemi di storia politica e sociale”, in *Filippo Brunelleschi: la sua opera e il suo tempo* (Florence: Centro Di, 1980), vol. 1, 28–29.

32 Emilio Conti, *L’imposta diretta a Firenze nel Quattrocento (1427–1494)* (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1984).

33 The spaces that did not produce income were not taxed, which may have been one of the motivations for the elimination of shops from the ground floors of Florentine palaces. Brenda Preyer, “The ‘Chasa over Palagio’ of Alberto di Zanobi: A Florentine Palace of About 1400 and its Late Remodelling”, *The Art Bulletin* 65 (1983): 393. As argued by Belli, the lack of shops on the ground floor was a distinct marker of the palace owner’s social status. Gianluca Belli, “Gli spazi del mercante e dell’artefice nella Firenze del Quattrocento”, in *Nati sotto Mercurio. Le architetture del mercante nel Rinascimento fiorentino*, eds. Donata Battilotti, Amedeo Belluzzi and Gianluca Belli (Florence: Polistampa, 2011), 60–61.

political life for many years, displacing the traditional governing bodies of the Florentine Republic.³⁴

The qualitative leap made by Cosimo on the political stage was immediately echoed in the launching of the most important of a series of architectural commissions for which he was responsible:³⁵ his own palace. As the head of a great banking enterprise of pan-European relevance, Cosimo – after more than twenty years of war and heavy financial contributions paid into the state coffers – was the only man in Florence capable of undertaking a project of this magnitude. His exceptional architectural patronage in the context of early Quattrocento Italy has by now become a well-established *topos* in the history of Renaissance art;³⁶ in particular, emphasis has been placed on the close relationship between the promotion of architectural works and the idea of magnificence, which was articulated and developed in theoretical writings and treatises in this period.³⁷ The extent to which these aspects characterized a complex and nuanced figure such as Cosimo has been a topic of a vast and elaborate debate, analysed in depth in the rich bibliography³⁸ that has traced down precise references to the theories of Alberti and others.³⁹ Biographies of Cosimo have underlined abundantly, and in apologetic tones, his role as a promoter of the arts, as further emphasized in the poetic writings celebrating the most important fruits of his patronage.⁴⁰ Moreover, considerations found in the twentieth book of Filarete's treatise have also been of great importance: here, the author provided a list of

34 Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence Under the Medici, 1434 to 1494* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 21–22, 124–127.

35 Up until then, Cosimo had devoted himself to the construction of religious buildings in and out of the city, whilst, for his private use, he had invested in the ancestral lands of the Mugello, north of Florence, from which the family originated (with the restructuring of the Trebbio and Cafaggiolo residences), and in the villa at Careggi on the edge of the city. See Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici*, with bibliography for each site.

36 Alison Brown, "The Humanist Portrait of Cosimo de' Medici, Pater Patriae", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 24 (1961): 186–221; Anthony David Fraser Jenkins, "Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage of Architecture and Theory of Magnificence", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 162–170; Goldthwaite, "The Florentine Palace", 991–992; Kent, "Palaces, Politics", 43–44, 62–64; Nicolai Rubinstein, "Cosimo *optimus civis*", in: *Cosimo "il Vecchio" de' Medici, 1389–1464*, ed. Francis Ames-Lewis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 5–20; Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici*, 117–121.

37 Fraser Jenkins, "Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage", 162–170; Gene Brucker, *Renaissance Florence* (New York: Wiley, 1969), 103, 107–108.

38 Brown, "The Humanist Portrait of Cosimo"; Antonio Natali, *L'umanesimo di Michelozzo* (Florence: Studio Per Edizioni Scelte 1980; Florence-Siena: Maschietto & Musolino, 1996), 22–28; Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici*, 107–115.

39 Fraser Jenkins, "Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage", 163; Rubinstein, "Palazzi pubblici", 30.

40 Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici*, vol. I, 12–21.

buildings commissioned by Cosimo and, while mentioning the names of many workers, emphasized above all Cosimo's role as the originator of these projects, presented almost as having an authorial role.⁴¹

Scholars have long wondered about the significance of the palace in Via Larga in the context of Cosimo's considerable architectural activity. This question has been part of a broader investigation into the motivations behind the construction of a great number of palaces in 15th-century Florence, with an emphasis on the social and economic role they played in the Renaissance city. Richard Goldthwaite saw the construction of these palaces as a consequence of a new structure of the Florentine family, which moved from the extended family group, typical of the medieval *consorterie*, to the establishment of the "conjugal family", in which personal property was kept separate from that of close relatives.⁴² According to this interpretation, the palace would have constituted the clearest confirmation of the patron's wish to represent himself in the urban context not as a member of an extended clan but rather as a single individual, tied to a circumscribed family nucleus. This interpretation has been revisited by Rubinstein and especially by F.W. Kent, who has demonstrated that there was actually no radical fissure between medieval corporatism, on the one hand, and Renaissance individualism, on the other. According to Kent, the palace was the expression of the power and wealth of the family, and the family's insertion into its respective *gonfalone* was even more important than its presence in a more prestigious or convenient location inside the city.⁴³ The motives that induced people to "turn into stone" enormous amounts of money were thus the expression of the gradual "aristocratization" of the economically dominant classes, which subsequently led to something of a homogenization between the old and the new families within the city's oligarchy.⁴⁴ Seen from this perspective, the construction of a palace was a way to distinguish oneself from the lower classes and give concrete form to one's social status; it was a "manifesto" of nobility⁴⁵ in an urban context characterized by a close connection between the aristocracy and the city.⁴⁶ In this sense, Cosimo's palace assumed a special role, becoming a secondary, if not alternative, seat for the government of Florence.⁴⁷ It was this circumstance that, in an extraordinary game of mirrors,

41 Fraser Jenkins, "Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage", 169.

42 Goldthwaite, "The Florentine Palace", 991.

43 Kent, "Palaces, Politics", 48.

44 On these issues, see Gene A. Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, 89–91; Philip Jones, "Economia e società nell'Italia Medievale", in *Storia d'Italia. Annali*, vol. 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 1978), 245–247.

45 Kent, "Palaces, Politics", 54.

46 Jones, "Economia e società", 249.

47 Kent, "Palaces, Politics", 62–63.

eventually gave the courtyard of the Palazzo Vecchio a look closely linked to that of the Medici residence.⁴⁸

Caglioti's studies on the commissioning of Donatello's *David* and *Judith* have shown how Cosimo and Piero de' Medici entered into an open competition with the great public commissions, emulating their characteristics in the decoration of their interiors.⁴⁹ In addition, the Medici used images, as well as architecture, in both a political and personal sense, making direct references to Augustan and Imperial Rome.⁵⁰ Indeed, the palace in Via Larga, designed to appear heroic and celebrated in literary works composed specifically to eulogize it, was covered in classicizing references in its façades and ornamentation.⁵¹ Cosimo, and later his son Piero, wove a dense web of references to ancient Rome into the architecture and the precious and varied decorations – from the heavy rustication of the exterior,⁵² to the columns of the courtyard, to the smallest of ornaments – which inspired the chronicler Giovanni Calvacanti to compare the Medici Palace to the Roman Colosseum.⁵³ This conceptual framework seems also to have informed the principal plan of the palace in terms of its sequence from the hallway to the porticoed courtyard to the garden, anticipating the attempts at rehearsing the configuration of the ancient *domus*, which would come to characterize the architecture of the second half of the 15th century,⁵⁴ resulting in projects such as the palace of the “Medicean” Bartolomeo Scala.⁵⁵

48 Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Palazzo Vecchio 1298–1532* (London: Clarendon Press, 1995), 28, 131, 134, 144–145.

49 Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici*, vol. 1, 216.

50 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 242.

51 See *infra* n. 102

52 Rab Hatfield, “Some Unknow Descriptions of the Medici Palace in 1459”, *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 107–161.

53 “Ed ora che non c'è più da murare fratescamente, [Cosimo] ha cominciato un palagio, al quale sarebbe a lato il Culiseo di Roma disutile”, Giovanni Cavalcanti, *Istorie fiorentine* (Florence: Tipografia all'Insegna di Dante, 1839) vol. 11, 210. The quotation is discussed in Kent, “Cosimo de' Medici's Patronage”, 223 and by Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici*, vol. 1, 217; see also, Massimo Bulgarelli, *Leon Battista Alberti. 1404–1472. Architettura e storia* (Milan: Electa, 2008), 102.

54 Christoph L. Frommel, “Abitare all'antica. Il Palazzo e la Villa da Brunelleschi a Palladio”, in *Rinascimento da Brunelleschi a Michelangelo. La rappresentazione dell'architettura*, eds. Henry Millon and Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani (Milan: Bompiani, 1994), 183–204; Georgia Clarke, *Roman House-Renaissance Palaces: Inventing Antiquity in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 255–273.

55 Linda Pellecchia, “Architects read Vitruvius: Renaissance Interpretations of the Atrium of the Ancient House”, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 51 (1992): 377–416; Arnaldo Bruschi, “Brunelleschi e la nuova architettura fiorentina”, in *Storia dell'architettura*

The Building and Its Architect

The Medici Palace can be understood as a real “point of accumulation”, in which elements of the Florentine tradition, both distant and close, come together with a range of original compositional and spatial elaborations. The building, therefore, establishes a rich dialogue with the themes developed in previous decades (which were themselves informed by medieval examples),⁵⁶ combining them with original solutions. A new standard was thus established in terms of spatial rationalization, circulation, and functions, as celebrated (in anticipation of the building’s completion) in Filarete’s treatise, which provides a detailed description of the palace.⁵⁷ Thanks to the richness of its interior decoration, Cosimo’s residence could be defined today as a “veiled royal palace”,⁵⁸ or what in the 15th century was known as a palace “rege dignum”, worthy of a king, for Pope Pius II Piccolomini.⁵⁹

The regularity and the rationality of the floor plan are qualities that have been recognized in the existing scholarship, which has identified them as principal distinctive characteristics, much more innovative than the articulation of the façades. As to the shape of the courtyard, its four sides do not have the same dimensions: the side opposite the entrance (the western section) is expanded in width and covered by a barrel vault ceiling, creating a space for feasts and celebrations. Of particular interest is the sequence of empty and built spaces organized along visual axes studded with sculptural moments of great relevance: the main longitudinal axis is structured by a sequence composed of the hallway, the courtyard – at whose centre stands Donatello’s *David* – the loggia and the garden; the latter was also marked by a transversal axis, and defined on the south side by the central arch of the external loggia and on the north side by Antonio Rossellino’s fountain and Donatello’s *Judith*. Under Piero de’ Medici the internal decoration of the *hortus* was completed by the addition of two ancient sculptures of *Marsyas* (restored by Mino da Fiesole and Verrocchio) placed to the sides of the passageway through the protective wall towards Via dei Ginori, as well as an ancient *Priapus* above the door leading from the garden to the *loggiato*.⁶⁰

italiana. Il Quattrocento, ed. Francesco Paolo Fiore (Milan: Electa, 1998), 105; Francesca Bordoni, “Il palazzo di Bartolomeo Scala”, *Bollettino del Centro di Studi per la Storia dell’Architettura* 42–44 (2005/07 [2009]): 263–266.

56 Preyer, “The ‘casa o ver palagio’”, 391–392.

57 Antonio Averlino known as il Filarete, *Trattato di architettura*, eds. Anna Maria Finoli and Liliana Grassi (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1972), vol. 2, 695–698.

58 Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici*, vol. 1, xvi.

59 Enea Silvio Piccolomini, *I commentarii*, ed. Luigi Totaro (Milan: Adelphi, 1984), vol. 1, 352.

60 Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici*, vol. 1, 359–360, 372–380; vol. II, fig. 18.

The theme of the regularly porticoed courtyard as the truly grandiose heart of the house had already been tried out in the Busini palace and the palace of Niccolò da Uzzano,⁶¹ a continuation of the 14th-century tradition, key examples of which were the courtyard of the Bargello and the pre-Michelozzean courtyard of the Palazzo Vecchio.⁶² The refined architectural and sculptural decoration that adorned the courtyard of the Medici Palace, however, had an added value: from the aforementioned *David* by Donatello to the eight roundels in the frieze above the arches,⁶³ to a series of ancient portrait busts (including one of the Emperor Hadrian) placed in niches and crowned by large Medicean rings with pointed diamonds and feathered wings, which were located above the doors leading to the ground floor and the garden and *in situ* from at least the 1470s.⁶⁴

The ground floor, moreover, was defined by a clear system of connections, constituted by the hallway-courtyard-stairs sequence, around which were the spaces for work and living, public and private. On the first floor, this 'spinal cord' was repeated in the stairs-vestibule-hall sequence: in other words, the second flight of stairs leads on to a large space (the vestibule, or *ricetto*) from which one enters the great hall with three windows overlooking the courtyard, whilst on the opposite side the stairs lead to the chapel. Such innovative horizontal and vertical articulation was extremely clear and functional, and it was thus unsurprisingly taken up in the Florentine palaces of the second half of the 15th century, ultimately spreading to Rome with Antonio da Sangallo the Younger and the "*setta sangallesc*a".⁶⁵ The individual components in this type

61 Dating the Busini Palace is still an open problem. After a first date of before 1427 proposed by Saalman (who thus brought it close to Brunelleschi), the same scholar subsequently placed its construction in the 1440s, cautiously suggesting a connection with Michelozzo. Saalman and Mattox, "The first Medici palace", 340, n. 44. Brenda Preyer suggests a probable starting date of around 1411. Preyer, "The 'casa o ver palagio'", 387, n. 4.

62 Hyman, *Fifteenth Century*, 148–164.

63 Nicole Dacos, "La fortuna delle gemme medicee nel Rinascimento", in *Il tesoro di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, eds. Nicole Dacos, Antonio Giuliano and Ulrico Pannuti (Florence: Sansoni, 1972), 131–156: 147. For a discussion of the considerable bibliography concerning the significance of these roundels, see Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici*, vol. 1, 394 n. 53.

64 For the columns of the courtyard, see Arnaldo Bruschi, "L'Antico e la riscoperta degli ordini architettonici nella prima metà del Quattrocento", in *Roma, centro ideale della cultura dell'Antico nei secoli XV e XVI*, ed. Silvia Danesi Squarzina (Milan: Electa, 1989), 410–434; Clarke, *Roman House*, 176–178. With regards to the *David* in the courtyard, see Caglioti *Donatello e i Medici*, vol. 1, 101–104; and for the busts, *ibid.*, 215.

65 Gustavo Giovannoni, "Giovanni Mangone architetto", *Palladio* 3 (1939): 104; Arnaldo Bruschi, "L'architettura dei palazzi romani della prima metà del Cinquecento", in *Palazzo Mattei Paganica e l'Enciclopedia italiana* (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1996), 3–122.

of spatial organization did not constitute a novelty in themselves;⁶⁶ rather, the novelty came from their overall composition, their insertion into a geometrically structured grid. The staircase with its double parallel flights of stairs, in particular, was vaulted⁶⁷ and, though still of modest dimensions, represents a significant step in the direction of ostentation and monumentality typical of the staircases of the later Renaissance and beyond.⁶⁸

While the uses of the different spaces in the Medici Palace have been studied by Wolfer Bulst,⁶⁹ Brenda Preyer has demonstrated the exemplary value of some of the arrangements of the rooms and their location within the palace⁷⁰ (Fig. 11.2). The ground floor included an apartment in the southern wing, consisting of a large hall and a bedroom, as well as an additional smaller space through which one could reach the *scrittoio* (a business office or a study), located between the stairs and the corner loggia. This apartment was probably used in summer, given its proximity to the garden in the back and the adjacent loggia, to which it was directly connected by a door.

The space to the north of the palace, contiguous with the garden and, again, with the porticoed wing of the courtyard, is known as the “*camera grande terrena di Lorenzo*”, the large ground-floor room belonging to Lorenzo.⁷¹ The *camera terrena* is a type of space frequently mentioned in the inventories of 15th-century Florentine palaces.⁷² Its function was not codified, and there are still uncertainties

66 The type of hallway that goes through the ground floor and connects the street with the courtyard was already in place in late medieval palaces, as was also the courtyard with a loggia which looks on to it. See Saalman and Mattox, “The first Medici Palace”, 338.

67 *Ibid.*, 340. Howard Saalman, “The Palazzo Comunale in Montepulciano: an unknown work by Michelozzo”, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 28 1/2 (1965): 9, notes that the vaulted stairs were a novelty introduced in Tuscany around 1420, but recalls that, at the same time, the stairs of the palazzo of Uzzano-Capponi were not vaulted.

68 Alice Jarrad, “The escalation of ceremony and ducal staircases in Italy, 1560–1680”, *Annali di architettura* 8 (1996 [1997]): 159–178; Linda Pellicchia, “Stepping up. Observations on the Renaissance staircase in Florence”, *Opus Incertum* 11 (2008), 4: 42–49.

69 Wolfer A. Bulst, “Die ursprüngliche innere Aufteilung des Palazzo Medici in Florenz”, *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 14 (1969–1970 [1970]), 4: 369–392; *idem*, “Uso e trasformazione del palazzo mediceo fino ai Riccardi”, in *Palazzo Medici*, eds. Cherubini and Fanelli, 98–129.

70 Brenda Preyer, “Non solo facciate: dentro i palazzi Pazzi, Lenzi e Ridolfi Guidi”, *Opus Incertum* 11 (2008), 4: 6–17.

71 *Libro d’inventario dei beni di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, eds. Marco Spallanzani and Giovanna Gaeta Bertelà (Florence: S.P.E.S., 1992).

72 James R. Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace in Florence. Magnificence and Splendour in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 123, provides an analysis of many

as to its use in the Florentine palaces in general,⁷³ and in the Medici Palace in particular: its location close to the loggia and the courtyard suggests uses that were not only private but also public, in addition to its possibly being meant as a summer residence or as a guest room.⁷⁴ Moreover, it is as yet unclear why Lorenzo the Magnificent ended up adorning this room with the precious *Battle of San Romano* cycle by Paolo Uccello, which he had bought in the 1480s, as has been recently established with precision.⁷⁵

On the first floor (Fig. 11.3) the residence was made up of three apartments. On the Via Larga and on Via dei Gori there were, respectively, the main apartment for Piero de' Medici and another similar one of equal importance for Giovanni di Cosimo, and subsequently for Giuliano di Piero. Each was organized according to a comparable sequence of hall (*sala*), room (*camera*), anti-chamber (*anti-camera*), and study (*scrittoio*). Cosimo's chambers (*camera* and *anti-camera*) were located along the south wing, overlooking the garden.⁷⁶ The family chapel, the oldest surviving *sacellum* within the walls of a private palace in Florence,⁷⁷ completed the arrangement: in this quiet space, as Leon Battista Alberti suggested, Cosimo the Elder received Galeazzo Maria Sforza in 1459.⁷⁸

Once again, the distribution of rooms that can be observed in Cosimo's palace was not an utter novelty, rehearsing, for example the sequence of rooms found in the old Medici Palace on Via Larga, with which it also shared the fact

inventories from the archives of the "Magistrato dei Pupilli" preserved in the Archivio di Stato in Florence.

- 73 See the considerations regarding this space in Pazzi Palace: Preyer, "Non solo facciate", 7.
- 74 Lindow, *The Renaissance Palace*, 121–122.
- 75 See Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici*, vol. 1, 256–281, whose discoveries correct the whole of the vast preceding bibliography on this extremely important commission and the manner of its display within the palace. A reconstruction of the furniture of the room is provided by Anna Maria Amonaci and Andrea Baldinotti, "La camera grande terrena di Lorenzo", in *L'architettura di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, eds. Gabriele Morolli, Cristina Acidini Luchinat and Luciano Marchetti (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 1992), 126–128; Andrea Baldinotti, "La giostra crudele di San Romano. Storia e immagine di una battaglia", in *Bagliori dorati. Il Gotico internazionale a Firenze 1375–1440*, eds. by Antonio Natali, Enrica Neri Lusanna, Angelo Tartuferi (Florence: Giunti, 2012) 329–338: 333–337.
- 76 Bulst, "Uso e trasformazione", 108–119, based on "inventory" of 1492 and on Filarete's Treatise: see also *Libro d'inventario dei beni di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, eds. Spallanzani and Gaeta Bertelà.
- 77 Cristina Acidini Luchinat, "La Cappella medicea attraverso cinque secoli", in *Palazzo Medici*, eds. Cherubini and Fanelli, 82–97; Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici*, vol. 1, 298–299; Riccardo Pacciani, "Spazi e forme del culto in palazzi d'area fiorentina, 1370–1470", *Opus Incertum* 11 (2008), 4: 30–42.
- 78 Bulst, "Uso e trasformazione", 112.

that the most important apartment was assigned not to the head of the family, but rather to the eldest son.⁷⁹ Its size and furnishings, however, were radically new. The corner hall on the *piano nobile* of the Medici Palace (Fig. 11.3, no. 1) – the “sala grande” – was originally of extraordinary dimensions (20 m by 9.8 m, with a height of 7 m); five windows on one side and two more on the other provided light for this vast space. The grandeur of the hall was enhanced by the presence of three paintings depicting the *Labours of Hercules* by Antonio Pollaiuolo, as well as two other important works, namely the *St John the Baptist* by Andrea del Castagno and a *Group of Florentine Lions* by Francesco Pesellino.⁸⁰

In the house of a banker as famous as Cosimo, the *scrittoio* – the physical and symbolic place for the family’s business – was of great importance.⁸¹ Identified as the principal seat of the Medici Bank, it was located in rooms on the ground floor, to the right of the entrance hallway. The proposals put forward by Bulst concerning the functions of these ground-floor rooms, however attentive and well thought out, can only be regarded as hypotheses; as such, they have recently been revised.⁸²

The inventory of 1492 mentions another *scrittoio* in correspondence with the first landing of the principal staircase (which no longer exists), and another on the first floor, near the *anti-camera* of the main apartment overlooking Via Larga. This room, a precious treasure chest whose ceiling and floor were decorated by Luca della Robbia,⁸³ held in Piero de’ Medici’s time a collection of books and precious objects that have been identified for the most part, such as the famous *Farnese Cup*.⁸⁴ The most precious ancient gems kept in the *scrittoio*

79 Saalman and Mattox, “The casa vecchia”, 341.

80 Wolfgang A. Bulst, “Die Sala grande des Palazzo Medici in Florenz. Rekonstruktion und Bedeutung”, in *Piero de’ Medici “il Gottoso”*, eds. Andreas Beyer and Bruce Boucher (Berlin: Artefakt, 1993), 89–127; Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici*, vol. 1, 181. For the transformations of the hall at the end of the seventeenth century, see most recently Francesca Funis, “The floor and the ceiling of the Sala di Carlo VIII in the Palazzo Medici Riccardi in Florence. 2. Craftsmen, installation and materials in the reconstruction of the hall”, in *Conservation of historic wooden structures*, ed. by Gennaro Tampone, vol. 2 (Florence: Collegio degli Ingegneri, 2005), 81–82; Preyer, “Non solo facciate”, 14, n. 24 where it is hypothesized that the hall of the Pazzi Palace was slightly bigger (21 m).

81 De Roover, *Il Banco dei Medici*, 28.

82 Amedeo Belluzzi, “Le architetture mercantili a Firenze nel Cinquecento”, in *Nati sotto mercurio*, eds. Belluzzi, Battilotti and Belli, 114–115.

83 Giancarlo Gentilini, *I Della Robbia: la scultura invetriata nel Rinascimento* (Florence: Cantini, 1992), vol. 1, 85; Luke Syson, “The Medici Study”, in *At home in Renaissance Italy*, eds. Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis (London: V & A Publications, 2006), 288–293.

84 *Libro d’inventario dei beni di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, 17–18; and Belli, “Gli spazi del mercante e dell’artefice nella Firenze del Quattrocento”, 57–58, 71, n. 265.

were replicated in the marble *tondi* decorating the courtyard.⁸⁵ Piero's *scrittoio* became a true prototype, as attested by Diomedes Carafa's request to have a reproduction of it painted in 1468.⁸⁶ Of great importance, as far as decoration and furniture are concerned, was also the *scrittoio* of Giovanni de' Medici, which was left unfinished at his death in 1463.⁸⁷

New and important studies have been devoted to the façade of the Medici Palace as an autonomous architectural subject, with particular attention paid to the Florentine palaces of the Renaissance. Scholars have examined its semantic characteristics, its stylistic, compositional, and material qualities, as well as its iconological value.⁸⁸ The subject of the façade of the patrician residence as a unified and organic palimpsest, influenced by notions of homogeneity, rationality, and geometry, was born in the communal city of the late Middle Ages. This concept of the façade was closely related to the squares and the network of public streets planned and organized by the municipal authorities,⁸⁹ for whom the management of the architectural and public works became the mirror of the wealth and power of the *civitas* and its governing bodies. In the Florentine context of the 15th century, the façades of the palaces, with their monumentality and ubiquity within the urban fabric, created a space of great importance in the context of European urban history, which provided the grounding for the subsequent development of great Renaissance palaces.⁹⁰ In this sense, the Medici Palace was representative of the definitive modern concept of the façade, which has been studied according to two main

85 For the *tondi* in the courtyard, see *supra* n. 63.

86 Eve Borsook, "A Florentine Scrittoio for Diomedes Carafa", in *Art, the Ape of Nature: Studies in honour of H.W. Janson* (New York: Abrams, 1981), 91–96, where the influence this room had on the *studiolo* of Federico da Montefeltro in Urbino and in Gubbio is also recalled.

87 Amanda Lillie, "Giovanni di Cosimo and the Villa Medici at Fiesole", in *Piero de' Medici "il Gottoso"*, 191–192; Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici*, vol. 1, 48 and n. 89.

88 David Friedman, "Il palazzo e la città: facciate fiorentine tra XIV e XV secolo", in *Il palazzo dal Rinascimento a oggi*, ed. Simonetta Valtieri (Rome: Gangemi, 1989), 101–112; Gianluca Belli, "Ex quadratis lapidibus: i parametri bugnati nell'architettura del Quattrocento a Firenze" (Phd. diss., University of Florence, 1995); Gianluca Belli, "Forma e naturalità nel bugnato fiorentino del Quattrocento", *Quaderni di Palazzo Te* 4 (1996): 9–35; Charles Burroughs, *The Italian Renaissance Palace façade. Structures of Authority, Surfaces of Sense* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Gianluca Belli, "Il disegno delle facciate nei palazzi fiorentini del Quattrocento", *Opus Incertum* 11 (2008) 4: 19–30; Matteo Burioni, "Begründungen des Gemeinwesens. Performative Aspekte frühneuzeitlicher Palastfassaden", in *Das Auge der Architektur. Zur Frage der Bildlichkeit in der Baukunst*, eds. Andreas Beyer, Matteo Burioni and Johannes Grave (Paderborn: Fink, 2011), 289–320.

89 Friedman, "Il palazzo e la città", 101.

90 Ibid.

types of observations: on the one hand, reflections on the importance of the compositional and stylistic choices, and on the other, the morphology of the rusticated surface. One piece of evidence that the historians agree on is the reference to the Palazzo della Signoria, a prototype referenced in the handling of the stone walls as well as in the absence of bays for the shops on the ground floor.⁹¹ As with their artistic patronage,⁹² the choice of the Palazzo della Signoria as a model confirms the aforementioned approach of Cosimo the Elder and his son Piero, competing with the great public commissions in the city. There are, however, substantial differences with regards to regularity and geometry of the façade, especially given its role as a prototype. The façade on the Via Larga is articulated through ten windowed sections (and nine on Via dei Gori), which became seventeen in Riccardi's imitative late 17th-century extension.⁹³ The front façade is vertically organized in three registers, differentiated with *all'antica* cornices at the level of the window sills (Fig. 11.4). The bold expressivity of the rough rustication on the lower level – distinctive in its naturalistic treatment and its depth of relief – stands in contrast to the two upper floors, where the *pietraforte* wall gradually diminishes in ruggedness towards a pseudo-isodomum solution of smooth stones on the *piano nobile*, and a compact and unified wall of smooth collinear stones on the top floor.⁹⁴ The façade is crowned with an imposing cornice, the result of a combination of antiquarian elements assembled together with a certain degree of freedom, as on the pulpit in the cathedral of Prato,⁹⁵ following a tendency that subsequently marked a particular trend in Florentine architecture in the following century. This cornice, in any case, is the first example of an *all'antica* cornice in the 15th century⁹⁶ (Fig. 11.5).

At the corner, the unified appearance of the base was interrupted by the loggia, closed off in 1517 by Michelangelo with his famous “kneeling windows”.⁹⁷

91 Belli, “Forma e naturalità”, 26–27; Clarke, *Roman House*, 167, with previous bibliography. On the issue of the shops within the palaces constructed between the 14th and 15th centuries, see Preyer, “The ‘chasa o ver palagio’”, 283–284.

92 Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici*, vol. 1 209.

93 Frank Büttner, “All’usanza moderna ridotto’: gli interventi dei Riccardi”, in *Palazzo Medici*, eds. Cherubini and Fanelli, 156–158.

94 Some interesting observations about the *facies* of the rustication of the first floor of the Medici Palace can be found in Preyer, “The Rucellai Palace”, 188.

95 Gargiani, *Principi e costruzione*, 75.

96 Bruschi, “Brunelleschi”, 105.

97 Amedeo Belluzzi, “Il tema delle finestre inginocchiate nell’architettura di Bartolomeo Ammannati”, in *Arti a confronto. Studi in onore di Anna Maria Matteucci*, ed. Deanna Lenzi (Bologna: Editrice Compositori, 2004), 137–144; Howard Burns, Scheda n. 9 “Studio in pros-

The regularity and the geometry of this façade have been well observed.⁹⁸ However, as already noted by Francesco Milizia and more recently by Forster,⁹⁹ the arrangement of the openings on the first and second floors does not strictly cohere with the great bays of the ground floor as far as the alignment of the vertical axes goes. As a result, the autonomy of the ground floor from the upper floors was emphasized, following a solution which was already used for some buildings constructed in the previous decades.¹⁰⁰ We should indeed recall that a total homogeneity in the composition of Florentine palace façades was achieved only in the second half of the 15th century, and it was one of the most sumptuous results of the evolution of façades in that century.¹⁰¹

An analysis of the material character of the rustication has also enabled scholars to formulate an interesting hypothesis: the sculptural effects of the stones were verified in situ, a fact seemingly borne out by the different morphology of the blocks on the ground floor of the Via dei Gori section – which are more refined and more regular – in comparison with those on the Via Larga, which are less regular and characterized by a more rugged finish¹⁰² (Fig. 11.6). The very size of the stones of the Medici Palace is also striking, anticipating the cyclopean blocks used for the Pitti Palace.

Even if the main reference point for the walls of Cosimo's palace was the Palazzo Vecchio, the use of rustication there was enriched by additional references traceable to ancient Roman sources, of which the contemporaries were duly aware while seeking to revive its magnificence.¹⁰³ This type of

petto frontale e sezione, di una finestra inginocchiata per palazzo Medici di Firenze”, in *Michelangelo e il disegno di architettura*, ed. Caroline Elam (Venice: Marsilio, 2006): 178–181.

98 Charles R. Mack, “The Rucellai Palace: Some New Proposals”, *The Art Bulletin* 56 (1974): 517–529.

99 Natali, *L'umanesimo*, 45; Kurt W. Forster, “The Palazzo Rucellai and Questions of Typology in the Development of Renaissance Buildings”, *The Art Bulletin* 58 (1976): 109.

100 For the palaces constructed between the end of the fourteenth and the first decades of the fifteenth century, see Preyer, “The ‘chasa over palagio”.

101 Belli, “Il disegno delle facciate”, 19.

102 Gargiani, *Principi e costruzione*, 75.

103 Kent, “Palaces, Politics”, 51–52. Hyman, *Fifteenth Century*, 87–89, 110 n. 78, recalls that Paolo Cortesi in the *De Cardinalatu* praised Cosimo for referencing the “forum of Trajan” in the decoration of the façades of the Medici Palace; see also Howard Burns, “Quattrocento Architecture and the Antique: Some Problems”, in Ralph Robert Bolgar, *Classical Influence on European Culture, 500–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 273–274. This topic becomes even more significant in Biondo Flavio (first edition 1474; the edition consulted here is: *Italia Illustrata*, Taurinorum [Turin: Bernardinus Sylva, 1527], 304–305): “Quid quod privatae aedes suae recens in via Lata extractae Romanorum olim principum et quidem primariorum operibus comparandae sunt: quin ego ipse qui Romam meis instauravi

stone cutting also recalled the walls built by the distant inhabitants of Etruria, as mentioned by Leon Battista Alberti, who commented on the large, irregular stones used on their fortresses.¹⁰⁴ This connection was later emphasized by Serlio in his reflections on the Tuscan and the “rustic” orders in reference to his wish to “join the language of the ancient Etruscans to that of modern Tuscans.”¹⁰⁵

The transformation of traditional stylistic elements of a medieval derivation can also be recognized in the design of the mullioned windows,¹⁰⁶ which, in an arrangement derived from those present in public palaces or religious structures from the 13th and 14th centuries, appear for the first time on a private residence, adorned with heraldic emblems celebrating the family. The attempts to determine with precision the start date for the construction have reopened the current debate concerning the author of the design, which has been polarized around the names of Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) and Michelozzo (1396–1472) ever since Giorgio Vasari’s account, which itself was based on previous 16th-century sources.¹⁰⁷

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- scriptis, affirmare non dubito nullius extare privati aedificij principum in urbe Romana reliquias, quae maiorem illis aedibus prae se ferant operis magnificentiam”. A similar idea can be found in Giovanni Pontano’s *De Magnificentia*, Libro XII [first edition, 1498]: “Ad Cosmi auctoritatem addidere plurimum tum villae diversis in locis ab ipso aedificatae singulari cum magnificentia, tum domus, in qua condenda pervetustum atque obliteratum iam structurae morem modumque revocavit, qui mihi id videtur egisse, ut dicerent posteris qua via aedificarent”. (The edition consulted here is Giovanni Pontani, *I trattati delle virtù sociali*, ed. Francesco Tateo (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1965), 103); Roberto Pane, “Le *Effemeridi* di Joaniopiero Leostello”, *Napoli Nobilissima* 7 (1968), 3–4: 77–85 (83).
- 104 “Visuntur et vetusta oppida cum Etruria tum et Vilumbriae tum et apud Hernicos lapide astructa praegrandi incerto et vasto, quod mihi quid opus vehementer probatur: quondam enim prae se fert rigiditatem severissimae vetustatis, quae urbis ornamento est. Ac velim quidem eiusmodi esse urbis murum, ut eo spectato horreat hostis et mox diffidens abscedat”: Leon Battista Alberti, *L’Architettura*, ed. Giovanni Orlandi, introduction and notes by Paolo Portoghesi. (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1966), VII *Libro*, II, 538; Gargiani, *Principi e costruzione*, 76.
- 105 James Ackerman, “The Tuscan/Rustic Order: A Study in the Metaphorical Language of Architecture”, *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 42 (1983) 15–34.
- 106 Brenda Preyer, “L’architettura del palazzo mediceo”, in *Palazzo Medici*, eds. Cherubini and Fanelli, 62; Pietro Ruschi, “Conferme michelozziane per il palazzo di Dietsialvi Neroni a Firenze”, in *Michelozzo scultore e architetto (1396–1472)*, ed. Gabriele Morolli (Florence: Centro Di, 1998), 223; Bulgarelli, *Leon Battista Alberti*, 95–97.
- 107 Brenda Preyer, “L’architettura del palazzo mediceo”, in *Palazzo Medici*, eds. Cherubini and Fanelli, 68–69.

Although there are no surviving documents, such as receipts or letters, that would definitely prove that Michelozzo was the architect of the Medici residence, after more than twenty years since Brenda Preyer's essay – which had argued for a possible attribution to Brunelleschi – the majority of scholars believe that Michelozzo was indeed the architect. Arnaldo Bruschi has emphasized that his Brunelleschian inspiration, which can be seen, for example, in the capitals in the courtyard that are topped with impost stone blocks (*pulvini*), just like the columns of the Ospedale degli Innocenti, actually harked back to tradition,¹⁰⁸ the more congenial framework for Michelozzo, as he worked on his original designs in terms of both the general plan and specific construction details.

The previously mentioned register preserved at the Archivio del Capitolo at San Lorenzo, studied by Hyman, is a precious source that contains important information for the history of the construction works and not only with regards to chronology. It provides, for instance, an account of the work on the capitals, the *sgraffito* decoration of the courtyard, and the exchanges of materials and skilled workers between the two construction sites of the Medici Palace and San Lorenzo.¹⁰⁹ The latter was a common practice, which we find again in the Ginori palace, adjacent to that of the Medici.¹¹⁰ For the skilled work, in particular, this document names some master workers renowned in Florence, such as Nanni di Miniato, known as il Fora,¹¹¹ or the more famous Pagno di Lapo Portigiani and Maso di Bartolomeo, both linked to Michelozzo.¹¹² On this point we should recall that Michelozzo, as previously mentioned, never appears in

108 Bruschi, "Brunelleschi", 105. A similar observation is made by Marvin Trachtenberg, "Archaeology, Merriment, and Murder: The First Cortile of the Palazzo Vecchio and its Transformations in the late Florentine Republic", *The Art Bulletin* 71 (1989): 568, n. 2. The relationship between the architectural elements (such as columns and capitals) on the Medici Palace and the Ospedale di San Paolo was pointed out in Richard A. Goldthwaite and William Rearick, "Michelozzo and the Ospedale di San Paolo in Florence", *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 21 (1977) 3: 283.

109 Hyman, *Fifteenth Century*, 136–140. The information is not always univocal: for example, for the carving of the capitals, it is not specified which capitals were meant.

110 Giuseppina C. Romby, "Le 'spese di murare' e il rinnovamento delle dimore fiorentine nel Quattrocento. La casa di Francesco di Piero Ginori", *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 53 (2009) 2–3: 234.

111 Hyman, *Fifteenth Century*, 138; concerning Miniato, Francesco Caglioti, "Su Isaia da Pisa. Due 'angeli reggicandelabro' in Santa Sabina all'Aventino e l'altare eucaristico del Cardinal d'Estouteville per Santa Maria Maggiore", *Prospettiva*, 89–90 (1998): 139, n. 132.

112 Hyman, *Fifteenth Century*, 138; Harriet McNeal Caplow, "La bottega di Michelozzo e i suoi assistenti", in *Michelozzo scultore e architetto*, ed. Morolli, 231–236.

the payments listed in the register; this is a circumstance encountered in the majority of the main Renaissance construction projects, and thus it does not invalidate Vasari's claims. At the same time, we might accept, with Brenda Preyer,¹¹³ that it is not quite correct either to accept at face value the assumption that, given that the master workers linked to Michelozzo have been proved by the sources to have worked on the site, it should follow that he himself was "naturally" part of the project.¹¹⁴

In favour of an attribution to Michelozzo,¹¹⁵ there is the fact that all Cosimo's other architectural activities had this artist as his trustworthy architect,¹¹⁶ pre-figuring the exemplary relationship between patron and architect that was to take root between Lorenzo the Magnificent and Giuliano da Sangallo. The role Cosimo had in the government of the city was probably the reason why Michelozzo was put in charge of building the new custom house, the Dogana, and of the Palazzo Vecchio,¹¹⁷ a project which anticipated by ten years the most important general redevelopment of the first courtyard of the palace, designed by the same architect under the protection of Cosimo. We are thus witness to Michelozzo's promotion to a public role, heightened two years later by his appointment to "capomaestro della lanterna e della cupola", four months after Brunelleschi's death.¹¹⁸ Between the appointment at Palazzo Vecchio and the nomination to the highest levels of technical administration of the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, there was the construction of the Palazzo Medici, a commission whose prestige and requisite commitment were compatible with the role that the architect was assuming in Florence, in the shadow of his powerful patron Cosimo de' Medici.

An additional piece of the puzzle – one that still needs to be clarified – concerns a new document from the archives of the Opera del Duomo in Florence. The document indicates that Cosimo, through Michelozzo and Battista d'Antonio, gave several stones (which were at the "Piazza San Lorenzo" and perhaps earmarked for the Medici Palace) to the Opera del Duomo for

113 Preyer, "L'architettura del palazzo mediceo", 69, n. 82.

114 Hyman, *Fifteenth Century*, 136–139, followed in historiography especially with regards to the San Lorenzo project.

115 Ruschi, "Le 'case' dei Neroni", 72–73 n.48.

116 Howard Saalman, "Tommaso Spinelli, Michelozzo, Manetti and Rossellino", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 25 (1966) 3: 155–157; Miranda Ferrara, Francesco Quinterio, *Michelozzo di Bartolomeo* (Florence: Salimbeni, 1984); Natali, *L'umanesimo*.

117 Saalman, "The Palazzo Comunale", 32.

118 Corinna Vasić Vatovec, "Michelozzo a Santa Maria del Fiore. La lanterna della cupola e il modello per la sistemazione del tamburo", in *Michelozzo scultore e architetto*, ed. Morolli, 179–190.

the interior frames of the marble niches in the “tribune morte”. A definite and unanimous evaluation of this source with regard to Michelozzo’s role in the building of the Medici Palace is complicated by the fact that he was also named the architect of the same institution.¹¹⁹

Research is always open to the challenge posed by the discovery of new sources, and in the case of the designer of Palazzo Medici, the issue should also take into account the actual role of the architect in the process of being recognized as an independent, intellectual figure: one of the achievements of the city’s culture of the 15th century still in need of further investigation.

119 This important testimony has emerged as this chapter goes to print: Florence, Archivio dell’Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, VIII. 4. 1, c. 32. We consider it useful to bring it to scholarly attention, as it might trigger new ideas regarding the attribution of the Medici Palace. As a preliminary consideration, we can note that in the acquisition of wood that Cosimo made from the Opera del Duomo (presumably for the palace), Michelozzo never appears: see *ibid.*, cc. 19, 21v, 35, 43, 44, 45, 62, 64, 76.



FIGURE 11.1 *Medici Palace, the corner between Via Cavour (Via Larga) and Via dei Gori with the closed Loggia by Michelangelo's windows.*

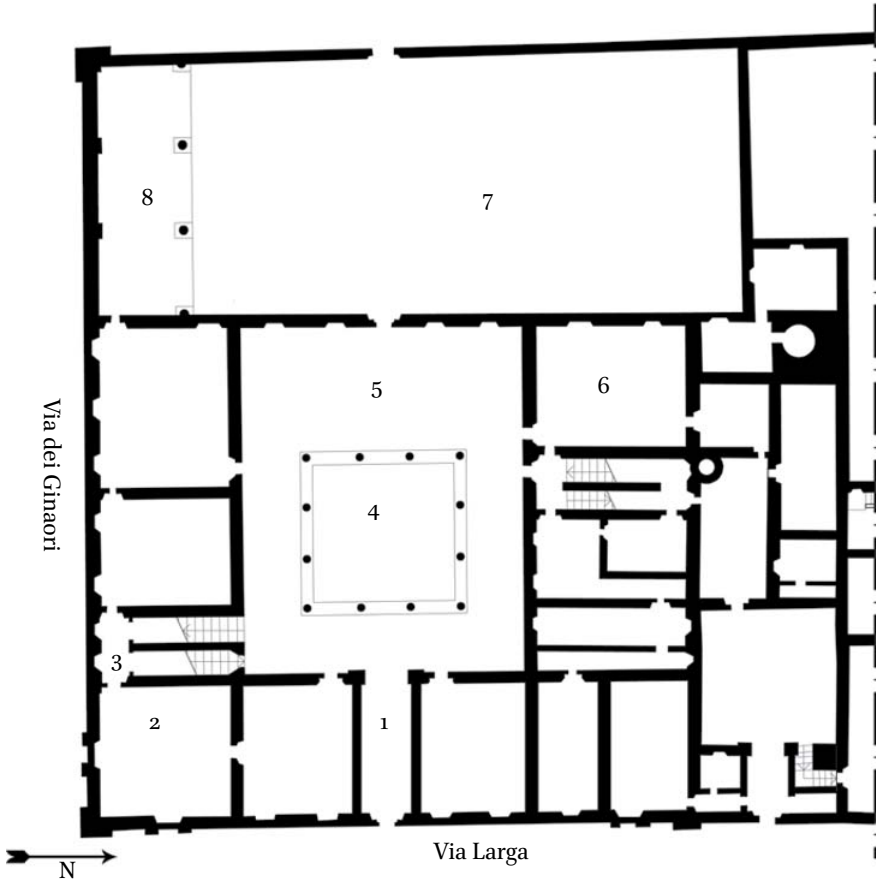


FIGURE 11.2 *Medici Palace, plan of ground floor, a. 1650.*
 Drawing based on a 17th-century plan in Florence, Archivio di Stato:
 1 Androne; 2 Loggia (closed c.1517); 3 Main staircase; 4 Courtyard; 5 Wing of
 courtyard for banquet and feast; 6 Camera grande di Lorenzo; 7 Garden;
 8 Loggia on the garden.

FROM BULST, "USO E TRASFORMAZIONE", 113–115.



FIGURE 11.3 *Medici Palace, plan of first floor (piano nobile), a. 1650.* Drawing based on a 17th century plan in Florence, Archivio di Stato: 1 Sala grande (great hall); 2 Main apartment (2.1 Camera; 2.2 Anti-camera; 2.3 Scrittoio); 3 Other apartment; 4 Cappella; 5 Main staircase; 6 Terrace. FROM BULST, "USO E TRASFORMAZIONE", 113–115.



FIGURE 11.4 *Medici Palace, the façade on via Larga. The windows of first floor.*



FIGURE 11.5 *Medici Palace, the façade on via Larga. The upper floor.*



FIGURE 11.6 *Medici Palace, the façade on via Larga. The bugnato of the ground floor.*