The Florentine Palace as Domestic Architecture

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Renaissance Florence experienced a building boom probably more spectacular than that undergone by any other city in Europe throughout the Middle Ages. From the second half of the fourteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth century construction was a general phenomenon throughout the city in all spheres of life—ecclesiastical, public, and private. Besides the completion of the cathedral, one of the largest churches in Christendom, with its great dome by Brunelleschi, the churches and monastic buildings of most of the dozen or so major orders in the city were largely, if not completely, remade. Almost a dozen new charitable institutions (ospedali) and many more, smaller convents were founded; and almost all the city's churches underwent some kind of architectural modification. At the same time a number of guilds erected new halls; and then, above all, there were the palazzi, the large private town houses of rich patricians, and their villas outside the city gates. All this building would be remarkable in any circumstance, but it is especially so in the case of Florence, inasmuch as the city, far from expanding, had experienced in the course of the fourteenth century such a drop in its population that by the beginning of the fifteenth century it was less than half the size it had been at the time of Dante—and it showed no signs of very dynamic growth throughout the period of the Renaissance. What is most remarkable is that this veritable building boom occurred during a period of stylistic innovation that marks one of the most glorious moments in the history of architecture.¹

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¹ The subject of the building of Renaissance Florence has hardly been touched by scholarship. A good general view is to be found in Gene Brucker, Renaissance Florence (New York, 1969), ch. 1. There is nothing comparable to the treatments of the medieval Tuscan city in W. Braunfels, Mittelalterliche Stadtbaukunst in der Toscana (2d ed.; Berlin, 1959) and in Enrico Guidoni, Arte e urbanistica in Toscana, 1000-1315 (Rome, 1971); but for some provocative ideas, see P. Francastel, "Imagination et réalité dans l'architecture civile de '400," Homage à Lucien Febvre—Éventual de l'histoire vivante, 2 (Paris, 1953): 195-206. For the later sixteenth century, see Giorgio Spini, "Architettura e politica nel principato mediceo del Cinquecento," Rivista storica italiana, 33 (1971): 792-845. An impressive list of buildings attributed to the Michelozzo
Private construction was by far the major sector of this building boom; perhaps as many as a hundred palaces were built in the course of the fifteenth century. In the history of art they represent an important stage in the elevation of domestic architecture to the realm of the fine arts and the introduction of a palace style that was picked up by the rest of Italy as well as all of Europe and imitated for the next three centuries. In the history of the city it is obvious that the total effect of the building of so many such vast works of art was the transformation of the physical appearance of the medieval city into the Florence we know today. Fourteenth-century descriptions of the city hardly mention private buildings; but for Benedetto Dei, writing about 1470, they were as important as public buildings in contributing to the glory of his “Fiorenza bella”; and a half century later Varchi almost tripled Dei’s list of thirty notable palaces, adding that if one were to name merely those built after Dei wrote one “would have too much to do.” For Florentines at the time all this palace building clearly had a dramatic effect on the appearance of their city.

As much of an impression as the building of palaces made on contemporaries and as prominent as the palaces are even today on the Florentine scene, they have not been big enough to impress scholars. Even as art objects, to take the most salient aspect of the palaces, they constitute what one of the best architectural historians of Florence has called a no-man’s land. Almost all such structures are anonymous as works of art; they have not even been adequately cataloged. In these circumstances it goes without saying that we know hardly anything about the evolution of palace style in the Renaissance. From an economic point

circle alone is to be found in Howard Saalman, “The Palazzo Communale in Montepulciano: An Unknown Work by Michelozzo,” Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte, 28 (1965): 44–46. The standard bibliographical guide to printed materials for churches and other ecclesiastical buildings is Walter and Elisabeth Paatz, Die Kirchen von Florenz (Frankfurt, 1952–55); but the catalog of buildings in general by Walther Limburger, Die Gebäude von Florenz (Leipzig, 1910), is inadequate and long outdated. It is to be hoped that the recent international effort to inventory surviving urban buildings of the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance will arouse some interest in the urban development of Florence. See Robert S. Lopez, “Enquête sur l’architecture domestique et civile,” in Les constructions civiles d’intérêt public dans les villes d’Europe au Moyen Age et sous l’Ancien Régime et leur financement (Pro Civitate, série Histoire, no. 27 [1969]), annexe, 7–12.

2 Benedetto Dei, “Cronache,” Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASF), MSS, no. 119, fol. 34r.

3 Benedetto Varchi, Storia fiorentina (Florence, 1888), bk. 9, sec. 38. Other Florentines who mention specific palaces are Francesco Baldovinetti (C. von Fabriczy, “Aus dem Gedenkbuch Francesco Baldovinetti,” Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft, 28 [1905]: 539–44); Antonio Billi (Il libro di Antonio Billi, ed. Carl Frey [Berlin, 1892]; Il libro di Antonio Billi,” ed. C. von Fabriczy, Archivio storico italiano, 7 [1891]: 290–568); and Agostino Lapini (Diario fiorentino, ed. G. Odoardo Corazzini [Florence, 1900]).


5 The catalog of Limburger with all of its inadequacies remains the most complete bibliography of printed materials; but Caracci’s unpublished “Elenco degli edifici monumentali” (1896) in the library of the Museo di Firenze com’era (shelf mark 25.D.27) is also useful. There is, however, a recent catalog of those palaces with decorated façades in Gunther and Christel Thiem, Toskanische Fassaden-Dekoration in Sgraffito und Fresko, 14. bis 17. Jahrhundert (Munich, 1964). A new series of fascicles, Tutta Firenze ieri e oggi, which began publication in
Fig. 1. This detail of Bonsignori's aerial view of Florence in the late sixteenth century shows quite clearly how little built up some areas were, even those right in the center of the city. Photograph: Alinari.
of view these palaces are an even bigger unknown. The construction of so many of them represented a significant shift in investment habits of the rich and at the same time provided a considerable stimulus to the internal economy of the city; yet none of this has ever been taken up by economic historians in their continuing and for the most part fruitless debates over the state of the Florentine economy. Finally, the palace remains as big an unknown as a social phenomenon with respect to its function as a home—and what was a palace after all if not a home? It is the social aspect of the palace that is the subject of this article, and I offer it as the prolegomenon to the study of the palace not as an art object that marked a new era in taste but as a home that performed a new function in society.

In the communal era the distinguishing feature of a great family’s presence in the city was the concentration of the households of its various members in the same vicinity so that the family as a whole had a geographic identity in the city. The great monuments of private architecture were in fact those structures that represented the families’ collective public status and expressed their outward involvement in communal affairs. These structures were principally the great towers, where families defended themselves in their violent feuds with one another, and the open loggias on the streets, where residents assembled for public ceremonies in more tranquil times. The tower and the loggia served important public functions for the communal consorteria and symbolized its broad sociability and its internal cohesion in an era when public authority was still very feeble; and they were the focus of the family’s location in the city. Even after the heyday of tower building, however, “new” families still tended to cluster together as they proliferated and grew in importance in business and politics. The Strozzi, for instance, at the opening of the fourteenth century bought up properties concentrated in the area of the present piazza Strozzi, including the piazza itself, which was bound by agreements among all the Strozzi to be preserved forever as their property;
and the area became permanently identified with their presence. In the earlier period these family residential areas may have been something like great compounds, even architecturally enclosing the entire family and offering the possibility of being sealed off in times of public unrest. The sixteenth-century aerial view of the city by Bonsignori in which formal arches serve as entrance-ways to some side streets suggests that areas that may have corresponded to the concentration of residences of particular families achieved identity through architecture. With the possible exception of the so-called loggia of the Cerchi, no such archways survive today in Florence (although in Venice such structures can still be seen).  

Towers, loggias, family residential concentrations—these were the features of private architecture in the era of the commune. Individual buildings or palaces, although sometimes quite large, were not in themselves prominent monuments. Contemporaries do not even bother to mention them in their descriptions of the city. Such buildings had little of what can properly be termed style; hence they lacked esthetic identity. Façades were often made of rusticated stone, but there was little variety and a minimum of decorative elements. At the street level there was usually a row of arched openings for entrances and shops (archi da bottega, as they are referred to in the documents) that ran continuously from building to building, so that the identity of each was somewhat lost in the continuity of the motif. Furthermore, to judge from the literary evidence of their destruction by fire and flood, riot and political vendetta, these earlier buildings could not have been very substantial structures. The worst fire was the holocaust of 1304, which, according to Villani, destroyed more than 1,700 buildings; and we have more than his testimony for the disaster wrought by the flood of 1333, which swept away almost everything along the river. Especially serious was the threat of fire, which was so ever-present that Paolo da Certaldo advised keeping large sacks and rope about the house so that when the alarm came one could collect his personal possessions and make a quick escape. The threat of political violence was just as serious: how often it is that the political annals tell us about the destruction by mob action of the houses of men whose political fortunes had gone awry. Considering all these

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10 The only private palace mentioned by these early chroniclers is that of the Tossinghi, which is described impressively by Malispini: “alto novanta braccia, fatto a colonnelli di marmo, e una torre con esso alta braccia centotrenta”; but it was destroyed in 1299, and considering the problems of dating Malispini’s chronicle we can hardly be sure about the accuracy of the description. See Patzak, Palast und Villa in Toscana, vol. 1, bk. 1: 58, where there is a fanciful reconstruction of the palace.

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Fig. 2, left. The palaces of the Mozzi family, which probably have undergone much refinishing on the exterior, are among the few that survive from an earlier period. With their series of arches at street level, their unadorned façades, and the base of a tower, they represent something of the anonymity of the architecture of earlier palaces. Photograph: Alinari.

Fig. 3, below. Domenico Veneziano's A Miracle of St. Zenobius, a mid-fifteenth-century street scene. Notice the extensive use of wood buttressing (sporti) for protruding upper floors and roofs, a particularly hazardous feature that contributed to the prevalence of fires in the earlier period. Reproduced by permission of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
aspects of their vulnerability it is not difficult to conclude that many of these medieval buildings could not have been the structures their successors were. The fifteenth-century biographer of Brunelleschi, looking back to the historical antecedents of the new palace style of his own era, was probably right in commenting that “during that period the method of building was very crude as may be observed in contemporary and earlier buildings.”

These earlier private buildings not only lacked structural monumental-ity and esthetic identity, but for the most part they had no precise functional identity. They must have been very much like the modern Italian palazzo, with shops below and apartments within. With the commercial activity of the shops at street level and stairways that opened directly onto the streets there was a constant penetration of street life into the palace, so that the private and public worlds were not so clearly demarcated. Within the palace ownership was frequently divided; and shops, apartments, and even single rooms could be held by a number of different parties not necessarily of the same family. Buildings, therefore, did not identify single private residences; and conversely, the private household—even that of a patrician—did not necessarily have an architectural identity. When the very wealthy Messer Pagolo di Baccuccio Vettori wrote out in his diary a description of his house, he found that it was structurally all jumbled up with his neighbor’s, with common walls, shared loggias, and division by floors—and he apparently was not very sure of being able to get an agreement on what the division actually was. A century later Bartolomeo di Tommaso Sassetti (brother of Francesco, the rich business associate of the Medici) inherited the family house, or palace, as he calls it; but it was hardly a very private and distinct building. When the brothers divided it a room that should have remained part of the house somehow went instead to Francesco’s house next door. Moreover, the window of an adjacent house was situated in Barto-

11 Antonio Manetti, The Life of Brunelleschi, ed. Howard Saalman (College Park, Pa., 1971), 40 (commenting on Brunelleschi’s first palace, for Apollonio Lapi).

12 This vagueness about the identity of a building is frequently encountered in the tax declarations of the catasto. There it was customary to describe property in the city by identifying all contiguous properties; and when a declarant listed, for example, a shop that he may have owned in a larger building, he may not have described it as being in the building but may merely have listed the owners of the adjacent properties, whether or not they were other parts of the building. In such a case the fact that the shop was in a larger building would only emerge (if at all) from information on other declarations. This is a major obstacle to using catasto records to reconstruct the city as it appeared in the fifteenth century.

13 “Ricordanza che addii xv di febraio cccclxviii lo Pagolo Vettori feci una scritta di mia mano a Capponcino che la panche e’l tetto della loggia che passa il mio pilastro del muro è in su quello di Capponcino; e il muro della loggia della corte come tiene la loggia e la sala insino al bordone della sala e tutto del detto Capponcino, e dal bordone in su è tutto mio tanto quanto tiene la mia casa, e dinanzi dov’è la loggia è tutto mio il muro infino a’ merli; e a ogni sua petizione debbo levare ciò che io tengo del suo e’l simile de’ fare a nme di sgonbrare dove lui achupassi [sic] del mio”; but then he added out at the side, “non ebbe la scritta da nme.” ASF. Carte Riccardi, no. 521 (ricordi of Messer Pagolo di Baccuccio Vettori, 1351-77), fol. 26r. Besides this residence, which was in the parish of San Jacopo sopra Arno, Vettori possessed five other houses in the city and seventy-eight rural properties. Ibid., fols. 18r–20r.
lomeo's courtyard, and it was possible to enter his house from the window.14 A product of the fifteenth century, when standards of privacy were more highly developed than they had been in the previous century, Sassetti eventually bought up these other properties precisely so he could close himself off in his own residence. But in the fourteenth century it must not have been unusual for even the rich and powerful to live in such an architectural hodgepodge. There may in fact be some basis in Trecento architectural reality for that marvelous sense of space in the Decameron where the continual flow of characters in and out of bedrooms and houses almost defies a definition of privacy.

It is not until the second half of the fourteenth century that the palace begins to come into its own as a distinctive and more conspicuous monument with a clearer stylistic and functional definition. In fact, although archeological research is still lacking, the few palaces traditionally considered medieval are very likely to have actually been built (or much rebuilt) after the Black Death. In any case, the pace of building increased toward the end of the century; and in contrast to the anonymous buildings of an earlier era the homes men now built slowly assumed something of the individuality of minor works of art. Unfortunately that process has never been subjected to a careful morphological analysis. It seems to have begun with the esthetic isolation of façades from their neighbors by emphasis of the principal entrance and eventually by elimination of all other openings at the street level. Slowly over the next century more possibilities were developed for treatment of the entire façade, usually with a complex system of rustication or contrasting use of intonico and stone, but sometimes with an elaborate surface decoration in fresco or sgraffito; and there was more conscious use of decorative elements such as string lines, window moldings, cornices, and even pilasters. Inside, too, there were innovations, notably interior vaulted staircases, the opening up of a large rectangular courtyard surrounded by arcaded porticos and loggias, and the beginning of systematic planning of internal space. With such ideas as these—all expressed with an increasingly classical vocabulary—architects were finally able to endow the private Florentine home with what can properly be called style.

Another dramatic feature of these new homes is the scale on which they were built. There were of course very large medieval palaces (if one is to accept the traditional but dubious dating of some surviving buildings), but even the average Renaissance palace is an extraordinarily massive building for a home, a social fact not usually commented on by art historians. Henry James, for one, was struck by the sheer height of the structures; four centuries after they were built he could still write that they were "the tallest habitations in Europe that are frankly and

14 ASF, Carte strozziane, ser. 5, no. 1750 (accounts and ricordanze of Bartolomeo di Tommaso Sassetti, 1455–71), fols. 181 left, 184 left.
amply habitations—not mere shafts for machinery of the American grain-elevator pattern." They are so beautifully proportioned that we can easily overlook the fact that their usual elevation of three stories is two, perhaps even three, times the height of three-story buildings in our less spacious (and less well proportioned) age. Their horizontal extent is no less impressive. As we know from tax records (the catasto) in almost all cases each palace replaced three or more pre-existing structures, usually including the former family residence. Some, in fact, were not altogether new constructions but primarily new façades behind which several older buildings were simply thrown into a single residence. Virtually all had a large open interior space in the form of an arcaded courtyard; and many originally had private gardens attached to them, even those in the center of the city—so many that both Dei and Varchi considered the fact worth mentioning as a distinguishing characteristic of the Florence they were describing.15

The Renaissance palace, in short, represented the esthetic identification of the private home and at the same time a dramatic enlargement of residential space. These buildings were more significant structurally as well. Looking at this new generation of palaces today it is hard to imagine that flood or fire or even the will of an infuriated mob could do much damage to them, and indeed by the fifteenth century we do not hear anything more about this kind of destruction in the annals of the city. It can be no accident that they increasingly come to be called palaces, not simply houses—"a house, or rather a palace," as they are described time and time again by their owners in tax declarations and private accounts. According to Varchi they were veritable palaces, which had "all the ornaments and all the comforts that houses can have, such as terraces, loggias, stables, courtyards, hallways and rooms, and above all"—he concludes on a more practical note—"if not two, at least one well with healthy and fresh water."16 And the very word palazzo was generally reserved by the architectural theorists only for the homes of princes.

One could speculate on the urban shift, as we would call it today, that must have occurred with the building of palaces throughout the city. To the extent that they replaced former commercial space, the building of so many of them must have had a considerable total effect on the dislocation of local commerce, so that in those areas where palaces were concentrated—contemporary observers singled out the via Maggio, the via dei Servi, the via Tornabuoni, and borgo Pinti—the bustle of street life must have been appreciably reduced. A good example of this transformation is the piazza Strozzi. Although since the early Trecento this was the nucleus of the great Strozzi clan, it was also a busy urban area, full of many modest houses and shops of all kinds. In the mid-fifteenth

15 Dei, "Cronache," fols. 29r–35v; Varchi, Storia fiorentina, bk. 9.
16 Storia fiorentina, bk. 9, sec. 38.
Fig. 4, above. The Castellani palace, built in the second half of the fourteenth century (and later enlarged), represents a stage in the development of increased esthetic identification of the palace. Besides the somewhat irregular arched openings, the principal entrance becomes the central focus of the building; and the rustication of the lower level is an additional embellishment. Photograph: Alinari.

Fig. 5, below. The Pazzi palace, with its contrasting use of rustication and intonico and its richly decorated window moldings. Photograph: Alinari.
Fig. 6, above. Some idea of the scale of Florentine palaces can be had from this comparison of a ten-story modern building and two palaces, the Bartolini (left) (from Grandjean di Montigny and Famin), about the average size of Florentine palaces, and half the short side of the Strozzi (right) (after Stegmann and Geymüller), the largest of fifteenth-century palaces (cf. fig. 8). Rendering by Implementation, Baltimore.

Fig. 7, below. The Corsi palace, whose size is typical of Florentine palaces. Its façade, a combination of intonaco and stone, represents one of the characteristic stylistic types. The palace has no more than a dozen rooms, but notice its size with respect to neighboring buildings. Photograph: Brogi-Alinari.
century Palla di Palla Strozzi cleared out over a half dozen of these small houses (*casette, casolari*) to erect the palace known as the Strozzino; a generation later Filippo di Matteo Strozzi transformed several more into a small palace, and by the end of the century over a dozen different kinds of shops (along with three buildings identified as patrician residences, one complete with tower) were replaced by the great Strozzi palace.\(^{17}\) Altogether, the building of these three palaces, not to mention a few others in the same square, removed considerable street activity from the vicinity and transformed it into a patrician residential center. A more notable instance is the via Maggio, which in the fourteenth century was one of the two principal centers of the flourishing wool business, the single most important industrial activity in the Florentine economy. In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries it became lined with the great palaces that even today make it one of the most authentic Renaissance streets that survive in all Florence, and with their construction the bustling trade was removed from the area. One observer tells us that these palaces in the via Maggio displaced sixty wool shops, and by the mid-sixteenth century only five remained in the entire Oltrarno quarter.\(^{18}\) The new palace style, therefore, not only detached the private residence from street activity but in some cases at least led to a removal of much of that activity from the vicinity, which thereby became more strictly residential. In a sense the Renaissance palace was a kind of coagulant that reduced the fluidity of medieval urban life with its continual interpenetration of the public and private spheres.

With this newly gained aloof presence on the Florentine scene the patrician residence moved into its own as the characteristic monument of private architecture; and if this was the consequence of the withdrawal of the family into a new realm of privacy, so the same social process of involution led to the obsolescence of those earlier patrician monuments that had formerly symbolized the family’s active outward involvement in the public affairs of the commune—the tower and the loggia. The towers had for the most part disappeared by the fourteenth century primarily as a result of the emergence of a new concept of public authority and the government’s deliberate policy of tearing them down in order to reduce the political and military might of the clan. On the other hand, the loggia, the public assembly point for the family, simply became outmoded as the family itself dissolved.\(^{19}\) One sixteenth-century chronicler

\(^{17}\) The property descriptions in the *catasto* declarations of Palla di Palla Strozzi (not Messer Palla di Nofri, as they are identified by Fabriczy) are published by Cornelius von Fabriczy, in “Michelozzo di Bartolomeo,” *Jahrbuch der königlich preuss. Kunstsammlungen*, 25 (1904), Beihft, 102-03. Properties replaced by the palace of Filippo Strozzi are listed in Guido Pampaloni, *Palazzo Strozzi* (Rome, 1903), 44n.


\(^{19}\) For general remarks on loggias, see Guido Carocci *et al.*, *Il centro di Firenze: studi storici*
implies that by his time the loggia was no longer being used; and as far as we know only two of the new projects for palaces in the Renaissance included loggias. The corner of the Medici palace originally opened as a loggia—although the Medici, of course, are never the appropriate example of patrician practice in general; one could argue that their public prominence makes them the exception that proves the rule. Still, in the early sixteenth century even they enclosed their loggia. The other example is the loggia of the Rucellai across the street from the palace designed by Alberti. Built by the most prominent private builder in Renaissance Florence after Cosimo de' Medici, the Rucellai loggia was erected on the occasion of a marriage between the two families. It is, however, perhaps the last loggia to have been constructed. When in the early sixteenth century Varchi drew up a list of surviving loggias there were only twenty-six names on it. It can be ascertained that clearly a third of those had nothing to do with palace projects in the fifteenth century, and there is no evidence that it was otherwise with the rest. Loggias simply had no more function in the life of the patrician family, many of whom walled up these areas to use them for other purposes. In the later sixteenth century they were considered signs of ancient family nobility by some men who looked with nostalgia on these outmoded and disappearing family monuments of a past age. Hence, when a Frescobaldi heiress closed up her family’s loggia in order to make space for four shops, she was accused of avarice and of putting utility before honor and respect for ancient tradition. Sentiment, however, could not revive practicality. By the end of the century Borghini, commenting on the nobility of these family monuments, was able to discern only fourteen, and of these at least six had already been walled up or were in ruins. Public assembly in the streets was obviously a thing of the past for the patrician family, just as it no longer had need for mass defensive action in its towers. The new symbol of its status was now the residence itself.

How do we explain why men felt the urge to build on such a grand scale? Perhaps it is obvious that, in part at least, the phenomenon can be explained as the desire for public display of private status; and if it

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e ricordi artistici (Florence, 1900), 49–53: Marco Tabarrini, “Le consorterie nella storia fiorentina del medio evo,” La vita italiana nel Trecento (Milan, 1905), 115–16; Attilio Schiaparelli, La casa fiorentina e i suoi arredi nei secoli XIV e XV (Florence, 1908), 67–72; and Patzak, Palast und Villa in Toscana, vol. 1, bk. 1:39.


21 Thiem, Toskanische Fassaden-Dekoration, 69–70.

22 Storia fiorentina, bk. 9, sec. 49.


24 “Delle famiglie nobili fiorentini,” ASF, MSS., no. 190, doc. 3.
is not surprising from the point of view of our consumer-oriented society that rich men engaged in such conspicuous consumption, it is something strikingly new in the history of moral thought that now intellectuals broke out of the context of the medieval world and actually sought to justify such spending on moral grounds. In an earlier era extravagant spending was something writers warned against, either because it was improper in a Christian society inspired by Franciscan ideals and on its guard against excessive materialism or (perhaps more realistically in the competitive business community of Florence) because it simply was too dangerous to expose one to the jealousy and envy of other men. The anonymous fourteenth-century Florentine merchant who said that “spending a lot and making a big impression are in themselves too dangerous” offered the kind of advice that is typical of his age.  

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, however, the humanists introduced a new civic ethic; they rejected traditional ideals of Franciscan poverty and worked out instead an explicit moral justification for private wealth. Drawing heavily on Aristotle’s ideas about magnificence and the good man, they praise wealth precisely because it gives man the wherewithal to express his status publicly. Leon Battista Alberti and Matteo Palmieri in their moral tracts could still counsel against extravagant expenditures and call for personal economy, although their arguments were slightly different from those of their medieval predecessors; but when it comes to building, an altogether new attitude is introduced. “The magnificence of the buildings,” says Alberti, talking about houses, “should be adapted to the dignity of the owner.” And Palmieri warns that “he who would want... to build a house resembling the magnificent ones of noble citizens would deserve blame if first he has not reached or excelled their virtue.” 

“But since all agree,” concludes Alberti, “that we should endeavor to leave a reputation behind us, not only for our wisdom but our power too, for this reason... we erect great structures, that our posterity may suppose us to have been great persons.”

Alberti was right; in Florence building did become a measure of a man’s greatness. Giovanni Rucellai, one of the wealthiest merchants and most vigorous builders in mid-fifteenth-century Florence, was explicit on the point: “I think I have given myself more honor, and my soul more satisfaction, by having spent money than by having earned it, above all


28 “Chi sequitasse e valesse assimigliare le magnifiche case de’ nobili cittadini, merita biasimo se prima non ha aggiunte o superate le sue virtù.” La vita civile (Bologna, 1944), 164.

29 Ten Books on Architecture, bk. 9, ch. 1.
with regard to the building I have done.”\textsuperscript{30} Furthermore, what is it that Florentines talk about when they discuss the art patronage of their fellow citizens? Building, almost exclusively. For the adulators of Cosimo de’ Medici his building projects were the best proof of the magnificence of the man; and commentators from Vespasiano to Machiavelli hardly mention anything else with respect to Medici patronage in general.\textsuperscript{31} It is impossible to find any comment in the chronicles and histories of the period on men’s patronage either of sculpture or of painting, the puny private arts; but when men built they made an impression on their fellows and on history, not only with the buildings themselves but in written commentary about them. Furthermore, despite popular myths it was the patron not the artist who made the impression. In his highly laudatory biography of his father, Lorenzo di Filippo Strozzi puts particular emphasis on Filippo’s building projects but never once bothers to mention an architect’s name—not even that of Cronaca, the creator of the Strozzi palace, whom Lorenzo, a man of great learning and interest in the arts, knew well.\textsuperscript{32} In fact, before Vasari there is hardly a contemporary attribution for any of these Florentine palaces, including the Medici and even the Pitti, which was immediately recognized as one of the great landmarks of the city. Palaces were seen not as creations of artists but as monuments to their builders’ magnificence.

The personal splendor these palaces conferred on their builders was amplified by the hope that the structures were to be the monumental foundation of the dynasty that was to extend from the builders themselves. Filippo Strozzi was obsessed with the concern that his great monument be forever exclusively the residence of his family, and in his exceptionally lengthy testament he rambles on in tortuous detail to anticipate all contingencies in the line of his descent to make sure that it would always remain Strozzi property and would never be alienated.\textsuperscript{33} Giovanni Rucellai was less verbose but just as insistent that his palace was always to belong to someone with the name Rucellai (“genie seu stirpe vel consorseria de oricellaris”) and was never to be alienated or even rented. He was particularly adamant in his insistence that whatever happened the palace was under no circumstances to belong to any other Florentine family; in the case of the extinction of the Rucellai the building was to pass to the commune to be used (appropriately) as the residence of an ambassador of a foreign prince—provided that he not be


\textsuperscript{32} Vita di Filippo Strozzi il Vecchio scritta da Lorenza suo figlio, ed. Giuseppe Bini and Pietro Bigazzi (Florence, 1851).

\textsuperscript{33} ASF, Carte strozziane, ser. 5, no. 1221.
Florentine or of Florentine origin! By the sixteenth century a man could best satisfy dynastic ambitions by building a palace; as it was expressed by Michelangelo, who wanted perhaps nothing more from his spectacular career than to re-establish the fallen patrician status of his family in Florence, "a noble house in the city brings considerable honor, being more visible than all one's possessions, and because we are citizens descended from the noblest of lines." Most of the great palaces built in the later sixteenth century were in fact built by those men whose status had been newly established by the grand dukes.

As Michelangelo observed, palaces gave visibility to the status of a family, and to leave no doubt of their identity they were endowed with sure signs of their ownership. Façades proudly bore the coats of arms of their owners; and in some the armorial bearings of the family and even the personal devices of their builders were worked into the very fabric of the structure as decorative motifs. The Pazzi dolphins, for example, constitute the principal element of the capitals and corbels of that family's palace; on the stairway of his, Giuliano Gondi put a modified form of his private insignia on the faces of each of the step ends, and running all the way across the façade of the Rucellai palace are the sails of fortune that had such a personal symbolic importance for Giovanni, its builder. Undoubtedly the most exaggerated case of palatial flouting of ownership is the Strozzi palace, where the Strozzi moons appear everywhere—in the spandrels of the windows, incised on virtually every piece of iron on the façade, worked into the interior corbels (along with falcons and sheep, the builder's own personal devices). Furthermore, a horoscope was cast for the Strozzi palace to determine the propitious moment to begin its construction; an elaborate ceremony celebrated the occasion and a medal was struck to commemorate it. And it may be that such rituals accompanied the construction of other palaces, endowing them with a kind of mystic personality that loomed behind the public symbols of their identity.

In a society of entrepreneurs, where personal magnificence and dynastic ambitions could find such conspicuous public expression, where the competitive instinct must have taken its own course once men started to build, how was the proud patrician to resist the challenge? An ambassador from Venice was impressed with the amounts of money spent by the Florentines, who, he says, were building on the heels

34 ASF, Notarile antecosimiano, L. 130, no. 51. My thanks to Rab Hatfield for this reference. Cf. Il zibaldone quaresimale, 144.
37 Aby Warburg, "Le ultime volontà di Francesco Sassetti," in La rinascita del paganesimo antico (Florence, 1966), 236.
of one another at such a pace that some who had only 60 or 70 florins income in cash might spend as much as 6,000 or 7,000 florins or more for a palace in the countryside. 38 Although apparently he was talking about villas and his figures (and ratios) are exaggerated, he must have sensed something of the building craze Florence was experiencing at the time. The palace of the average patrician—to judge from the evidence of accounts and ricordi—had a book value of between 1,500 and 2,500 florins, which could have represented as much as fifty per cent of his total estate. The really big ones, of course, cost much more—Filippo Strozzi (and his heirs) paid almost 40,000 florins for what was probably the most expensive in the city (equal to over a thousand times the annual salary of a highly skilled workman), 39 and this represented over a third of his total wealth. The builders of some of the most famous of these palaces, however, were not so fortunate as to be rich enough, or secure enough, to afford the luxury of indulging in the new fad of trying to make an impression. For all his smug satisfaction, Giovanni Rucellai did not finish his palace, which after all was primarily no more than a façade. Giuliano Gondi made all Florence sit up and take notice of the new palace he started building in 1489, but he was not able to get it half built (and it stood unfinished until the nineteenth century). Bono Boni presumably finished his in the mid-1460s, but within a decade he was bankrupt and had to sell it. 40 And so with other builders, like Lorenzo de’ Larione, who had to sell his on the heels of bankruptcy, 41 and Bartolomeo Barbadori, whose burden of debts forced him to halt construction. 42 It is surprising how many of these palaces changed hands within a generation of their construction; one suspects that in these cases the family fortune was simply not up to the drain of capital a palace required. Nevertheless, it is in this context of competitive, extravagant, and sometimes reckless egotism that we can partly understand the scale on which these men built as well as their awakening consciousness of style.

The building of palaces appears all the more extravagant when one considers that the inflation of space they represented had a minimum economic value almost entirely limited to its importance for the household economy of the family. To be sure, the rooms on the ground floor might have included an office for the commercial and banking business of the owner, and to this extent he saved something in rent. Datini’s

39 Obviously even approximate equivalents of the dollar and the florin cannot be made; but the cost of the Strozzi palace in relation to today’s skilled worker’s income of ten thousand dollars would be ten million dollars.
42 Manetti, The Life of Brunelleschi, 99.
office (but not his fondaco), for instance, was on the ground floor of his palace, as was the scrittoio of many other merchant bankers, to judge from surviving inventories. But if in addition to these financial interests a patrician had warehouses or shops that were used for industrial production, for the manufacture of silk or wool cloth—and most Florentine patricians probably had investments in such establishments—these were not located on residential premises; they were located elsewhere and sometimes the owner even paid rent for the shop rather than turn over a part of his home for its operation. Furthermore, it was not likely that any space in these palaces was rented out. The earliest of them still had shops that opened onto the street for commercial use, but as palace style evolved these were excluded. To judge from a comment of Lorenzo Strozzi's such an arrangement was considered a blight on the beauty of the building as well as an inconvenience for the owner. Moreover, no interior space was rented as living quarters, and we have no evidence that these palaces were used then as most are used today, as apartment houses. As a matter of fact, in those cases where the entire palace was later rented out, usually as a result of difficulties among heirs or the absence from Florence of the owner, the income was so small that it would have been an insignificant return on the total capital outlay represented by the building. In the 1490s the Antinori (then Martelli) palace was rented for between eighty and a hundred ducats a year; in the middle of the following century half the Strozzi palace (it was built as two residences) was offered for rent at forty-five florins; and a few years later the Corbinelli rented one of their palaces in the via Maggio to Bianca Cappello for fifty florins. At a time when eight per cent was a normal return on an investment these rents would have represented a capital investment of 500 to 1,000 florins, hardly anything like the building costs of such structures.

This extraordinarily low rental potential meant that the market value of a palace was a very nebulous matter. At the end of the sixteenth century, for example, when the Pazzi palace was sold to Lorenzo di Carlo Strozzi, the price was no easy thing to determine. Several consultants were called in. One based his calculation on the capitalization of its net rental value of 180 scudi (after taxes and maintenance expenses) at three per cent. Three per cent was a very low return on an investment for a Florentine, even in the late sixteenth century, and it was obviously used

43 "Disegnando di fare sotto la casa molte botteghe per entrate dei suoi figliuoli: il che arditamente gli era contradetto, mostrando di quanta bruttezza, servitù e incommodo saria alli abitatori." Vita di Filippo Strozzi, 25.
44 Owned then by Carlo d'Ugolino Martelli. ASF, Carte strozziane, ser. 5, no. 1468 (accounts and ricordi of Luigi d'Ugolino Martelli, 1489-92), fol. 108v; no. 1469 (accounts of Luigi d'Ugolino Martelli, 1492-93), fol. 11.
45 ASF, Carte strozziane, ser. 5, no. 136 (accounts and ricordanze of Palla di Lorenzo di Filippo Strozzi, 1552-55), fols. 204r-208v.
to push the value as high as possible; yet the resulting figure of 6,000 *scudi* was so ridiculous that the assessors, “considering the nobility of the site and its beauty as well as other things,” arbitrarily increased it by one-third to 8,000 *scudi*. On the other hand, a detailed builder’s estimate of replacement costs drawn up for the same purpose put a value of 11,900 *scudi* on the structure, a remarkable sum considering the fact that inflated labor costs in the second half of the sixteenth century probably meant that the building could not have been built for even that figure.\(^{47}\) In 1659 the Medici palace was sold to the Riccardi for 40,000 ducats, about the same price it had cost to build two centuries earlier, but as a result of inflation the sale price represented only half the value of the original building cost. Moreover, the Riccardi spent close to three times again that amount (116,623 ducats) to enlarge it to its present size.\(^{48}\) Not only was the rental value of a palace very low, but its resale value was hardly equal to its cost. The enormous structures, in short, were utterly nonproductive as investments.

Although these palaces are to be seen as one of the most flagrant examples of conspicuous consumption by the bourgeoisie that Europe had known up to that time, the intellectuals, the so-called civic humanists, were nevertheless able to find a higher social justification for all this private energy. Above selfish interests there was the common good, and the purely selfish objective could be justified by regarding the total effect such generous and magnificent expenditures had for the embellishment of the city as a whole. It was Palmieri’s view that “although made by individuals it is nonetheless better to treat [such buildings] as communal utilities rather than as private comforts, because they are very important for the universal ornament of the city and they compose the beauty of the city.”\(^{49}\) One could say that this is nothing but the medieval virtue of largesse now given a purely esthetic outlet. Most palaces were self-contained projects, but at least a few were planned more dramatically, in a setting that reached out beyond the buildings themselves to reorganize the immediate vicinity. For instance, we know now that there

\(^{47}\) ASF, Carte strozziane, ser. 3, no. 177 (“Scritture spettanti alla comprina del Palazzo de’ Pazzi, fatta dal sig. Lorenzo Strozzi”), fols. 78, 102r–103r, 112r–13v, 117r–18r, 152. The statement that because of “la nobilità del sito et bellezza che è et ancora altre cose lo stimi più scudi 2000, che tutti fanno scudi 8000,” is found alone at the top of fol. 119r; and considering its location, the hand, and the way these documents are bound together, I have linked it with fols. 102r–103r, where the assessment made on the basis of the rental value of the property occurs.


\(^{49}\) “Questo sarebbe posta in narrare del commodo e ornamento dello splendido vivere, dove si comprende le case magnifiche, gli edifici in publico fatti, le masserizie abondanti, i famigli, cavalli, e altre cose che più tosto per bellezza di vita che per nostro bisogno s’appetiscono, cercano e tengono. Tali cose benché da particolari sieno fatte, nientedimeno perché sono atissime all’universale ornamento della città e fanno la bellezza civile, della quale seguita grandezza, stima et utile civile, più tosto si convengono trattare infra l’utilità commune, che infra i privati commodi, faremo dunque fine a’ privati commodi, e diremo di quegli essere a bastanza detto, e per l’avere diremo dell’utilità communi, cioè di quelle che all’universale corpo della città e tutta la repubblica s’appartengono.” *Della vita civile*, 154.
were plans for a large square next to the Medici palace on which Brunelleschi’s church of San Lorenzo also would have opened. Similarly Filippo Strozzi’s plans to build his huge palace included widening the street, opening a piazza, and possibly incorporating the façade of a nearby church in which he had already shown considerable interest. At any rate (if we are to believe his son) Strozzi was able to plan for such an impressive structure in the first place only by playing up to Lorenzo de’ Medici’s expressed desire to have the city adorned with such beautiful and magnificent buildings. The great Pitti palace, now expanded almost beyond recognition of its original appearance, was deliberately perched on high ground with a piazza to set it off; and the success of this plan is evident in all the early views of the city, where it indeed appears “more resplendent even than Monte Morello,” to quote a contemporary bit of poetry on the subject.

Our knowledge of these few projects, however, is vague; and they were at any rate the exceptions. Most palaces were inserted into the medieval city freed from the earlier communal controls for orderly town planning and without the opening up of vast public spaces characteristic of later urbanistic ideals. The beauty of the urban scene in Renaissance Florence was not (and still is not) found in large squares and public spaces, and certainly not in unitary schemes imposed on the city by either communal or princely authority, but in the collective impression of numerous self-contained private efforts. That impression, however, is not without its own internal coherence. The new palace style did not represent, as has been claimed, “an esthetic of maximum individuality” (which could perhaps be more appropriately said of a modern American city). Indeed, architectural historians have always been impressed with what they call a strong conservatism in Florentine palace style, a point that is especially telling in considering the utter failure of the most original of them all, Alberti’s palace for Giovanni Rucellai, to find any imitators; or the failure of Brunelleschi’s for Cosimo de’ Medici to get built at all; or the discrepancy between the fantasy of architectural settings in painting and the reality of the city’s streets. This conservative taste—albeit with considerable variety within the bounds of its canons—may in fact have been a subconsciously imposed upper limit to the competitive egotism that these palaces represent, so that despite the lack of urbanistic schemes a peculiar stylistic unity emerged, however fortuitously, from all this private and unregulated activity.


53 In this respect the comments of Francastel (“Imagination et réalité”) are very suggestive.

54 J. S. Ackerman, The Architecture of Michelangelo (New York, 1961), 76.
At any rate, Florence (after Venice) may well have been the first city in Europe where the individual private residence comes into its own as the distinctive feature of the urban scene, although palaces elsewhere in Italy have been so much less studied than those of Florence that any generalization on the subject is difficult to make. Here a distinction must be made between private bourgeois residences and those of princes and courtiers, of popes and prelates. Venice, of course, had an even older tradition of spectacular palace building, but the palace there definitely served both a commercial function and a rather more extensive social one as the residence of a larger family group (the fraterna). On the other hand, fifteen-century Genova, another city with a wealthy mercantile aristocracy, was still very medieval in its appearance; and the elevation of domestic architecture there to a notable art form does not get underway until well into the sixteenth century. At any rate, the public display of private residences is certainly not to be found in the great cities of Northern Europe at the time—not in aristocratic Paris, where throughout the entire Renaissance into the seventeenth century the town house fails to make the public appearance it does in bourgeois Florence in the fifteenth century, and certainly not in contemporary London, where street frontages of great houses were rented out as tenements.

Just as the façade of the palace as a public monument embodies the public and civic implications of a new individualistic morality, so the living arrangements behind the façade reflect the changed social conditions underlying that new morality—the withdrawal of the family into a world of privacy. It has been observed that inside a Florentine Renaissance palace the windows are so high that simply to look out from within one has to climb up steps in the window bays to peer over the high sills; such was the exclusion of the outside world. What kind of family was it, then, that enjoyed this privacy? The rationale for building the palaces in the first place was partly at least a desire to express the nobility of the individual patrician, to give vent to his proud ego in a public monument; but when he withdrew within, it was to enjoy its privacy with his family. That is to say, as a residence the palace housed primarily the owner’s immediate family—his wife, his children, perhaps a stray unattached relative here and there, a widowed mother, for example


—and, originally at least, it was certainly not the residence of the larger extended family or clan. Even in those cases where the palace was built by a father for his sons, or by brothers, the building was distinctly divided into the appropriate number of parts, usually with separate entrances at the street level. The privacy of a man’s home meant not only withdrawal from public life but also detachment from most relatives who were not members of his immediate family.

That these palaces were built primarily for smaller family groups emerges from the history of their occupancy and ownership through the generations immediately following that of their builders. Here much can be learned from the history of private wealth, especially from the settlement of estates and the disposition of palaces at each juncture as they passed to successive generations. Since at least as early as the mid-fourteenth century it was usually the case in Florence after the death of a father that estates were eventually divided among his sons. It did not always happen immediately—indeed, legally it could not be done until the youngest son came of age—but one senses that the division could not be put off for long. Anyone who has read through the numerous testimony of private books of accounts and ricordanze is familiar with this process of disintegration of patrimonial wealth with each successive generation, a process that resulted in what one might call the individualization of wealth in contrast to what seems to have been the corporate nature of patrician fortunes of an earlier era. The phenomenon is obviously related to the dissolution of the consorteria and the emergence of the conjugal family with its own private wealth distinct from that of even the closest of relatives. It goes without saying that such division of estates could create financial problems even for the heirs of rich men. Gino di Neri Capponi, for instance, advised his sons to put off the division at least until their financial condition would permit; but his very concern reveals a basic fact of patrician society: the old economic bonds were broken and it could not be taken for granted that patrimonies could be shared by larger family groups.

Periodic division so characterized the history of family fortunes that one feels that by the fifteenth century individual private wealth had become an essential condition of a man’s happiness and that to preserve peace in the family it was probably even necessary eventually to divide

58 The Strozzi and Busini palaces were designed as two separate residences. Palaces with two separate entrances include the Corsi (via Maggio, 50/52), the Velluti-Martellini (via Maggio, 9), the Rustici (via de’ Rustici) and the Machiavelli (via S. Spirito, 5/7); the Strozzinio has three (and within there were three separate households. See Uffizi drawing 1561A, reproduced in Pampaloni, Palazzo Strozzi, 57).

59 “Da soffrire è lo stare insieme un pezzo, tanto che abbiate il modo a dividervi con unità, a che abbiate migliorato condizione.” Rerum italicarum scriptores, ed. Lodovico Antonio Muratori (Milan, 1723-51), 28, col. 1150. The same concern is found in the testament of Francesco Sassetti. Warburg, “Le ultime volontà,” 226-30.

a patrimony among brothers so each could have his own estate. We have
at least one explicit expression of such a sentiment in the ricordanze of
Ugolino di Niccolò Martelli, an important partner in the Medici
business enterprises.61 He and his eight brothers made no division of their
patrimony after their father’s death in 1425, partly because several of
them were still minors, partly because some of them were living abroad;
but with time the pressures mounted. In 1440, probably because the
youngest, Alessandro (b. 1417), had recently come of age, two of the
brothers, Francesco and Messer Domenico, took their shares of the
patrimony and went their own way; and five years later another,
Giovanni, did the same. In 1451 the remaining six divided into two
groups—Ugolino, Bartolomeo, and Martello on one hand; Antonio,
Roberto, and Alessandro on the other—and made a property settlement,
“which division,” wrote Ugolino, “was prompted by Antonio and us in
order not to be disunited and . . . to conserve us in peace.”62 They
divided virtually everything (except certain military gear, which was to
be available to any brother who might take public office) down to the
sheets and kitchen utensils, and the inventories were written up in
the presence of their mother. “We remain content with this,” continues
Ugolino after having made a complete copy of the inventories; “I first
sought every opportune remedy in order not to make this division so
that no harm should come to our family universally in all things, but
for peace and unity among us we made it.”63 For their part, Ugolino and
Bartolomeo kept their property in common—in 1451 Martello was
away in Brittany, and in 1455 he made a final settlement with them—
and in 1457 the two were living together with their large families.64
Yet by the time Ugolino died in 1484 he had a completely private estate,
no part of which was shared with any of his brothers; and hardly a year
passed before his estate in turn was completely divided among his
surviving sons.65 As Ugolino clearly recognized, the family could stay
together only as long as they did not have to share together, as long as
each member had his private wealth and was free to go his own way.
This development in the history of the family obviously has profound
implications for the history of the home. With the inevitable division
of estates as they passed from one generation to the next and the forma-

61 ASF, Carte strozziane, ser. 5, no. 1461 (ricordanze of Ugolino di Niccolò Martelli, 1432–82). References to the property divisions discussed below are fols. 26v–30r, 83r, 65r–70r, 71r.
62 “La quale divisa fu mossa d’Antonio e noi per non istare disuniti e a presso perché eravamo multiplichati in famiglie e per chonservarci con buona pace.” Ibid., fol. 65r.
63 “E noi rimanemo lamententi. Ciercho prima ongni opportuno remedio di non dividere perché se uguitiva danno della chasa universalmente in ciascuna chosa, ma per la pace e unità di noi lo faciamo.” Ibid., fol. 6gr.
64 ASF, Catasto, no. 823 (Leon d’oro, 1457), doc. 181 (declaration of Ugolino and Bartolomeo).
65 Ugolino left six sons. One of these, Carlo, had already received his share of the patrimony before his father’s death; references to the subsequent division among the other five are found in their books of accounts and ricordi: ASF, Carte strozziane, ser. 5, no. 1467 (Messer Ludovico), fol. 89v; no. 1466 (Carlo), fols. 123r, 127v, 128r; no. 1463 (Luigi), fol. 114r.
tion of completely private wealth for the individual patrician, he tended to establish his own living arrangements by withdrawing with his immediate family into a private household. It was not altogether unusual for married sons to live with their father, even when they had their own families; but as soon as the father died, they more often than not sought their own homes. The history of the occupancy and ownership of palaces reveals what seems to be their natural tendency to remain single household dwellings.

In the division of estates, therefore, a family palace could present very special problems. At the same time that there was a tendency for heirs to divide all wealth and to establish independent living arrangements there were pressures to maintain the family residence as a prestigious property that rightfully should belong to them all. It was in fact not infrequent that a testator declared his palace indivisible ("per non diviso") and inalienable. In cases where such strictures were observed the palace could remain the shared property of heirs even beyond one generation, and ownership could thus be fractured into a number of shares. In this way after a couple of generations a palace could become hopelessly divided and would have to be sold. When in 1311 the Strozzi bought two \( \frac{1}{18} \), two \( \frac{1}{36} \), and one \( \frac{1}{6} \) shares of the same house, each segment was acquired from a different member of the Massignhi family; and in 1326 the Strozzi bought another \( \frac{1}{4} \) share.\(^{66}\) In the mid-fourteenth century the Medici bought first nine and then eleven of the twenty parts of a house on the via Larga;\(^{67}\) when the Busini palace was sold in 1473 (to another branch of the family) it involved four transactions for purchase of two \( \frac{1}{6} \), one \( \frac{1}{4} \), and one \( \frac{1}{2} \) shares;\(^{68}\) and when the Medici bought the Pitti palace in 1550 the sellers consisted of seven parties representing thirteen individuals.\(^{69}\)

It is certainly not at all clear that in these cases of multiple ownership the palace actually became the residence of all the owners; but in the fifteenth century when ownership of a palace was divided it could very well mean that if the owners intended to make their residence there, the palace would be physically divided into separate homes. Entries in the ricordanze to this effect are not infrequent: there are descriptions of the division and sometimes lists of the resulting remodeling expenses, so there is no doubt about actual physical division.\(^{70}\) In 1476 Jacopo and

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\(^{66}\) ASF, Carte strozziane, ser. 3, no. 191, fols. 4r-5v (seventeenth-century copy of records of purchase); cf. p. 980 above.

\(^{67}\) ASF, Medici avanti il principato, no. 152 (ricordi of Foligno di Conte d'Averardo de' Medici), fols. 40v-41r.

\(^{68}\) ASF, Catasto, no. 1005 (Leon nero, 1480), fols. 67–68; this today is the Bardi palace in via de' Benci.

\(^{69}\) Francesca Morandini, "Palazzo Pitti, la sua costruzione e i successivi ingrandimenti," Commentari, 16 (1965), no. 1-2: p. 44 n. 2 (where purchase document is published).

\(^{70}\) For example, in 1459 Bernardo Rinieri and his cousin Luca made a notarized division of their house in via del Coconero (today via de' Ricasoli), with the former getting three-fourths of it and the obligation to build a dividing wall; ASF, Conv. sopp., 95, no. 212 (accounts and
Priore di Messer Giannozzo Pandolfini, who had been left without residences after the division of the estate of their very wealthy father (who had died in 1456), bought a large house; but in the presence of a notary they made an agreement by which they very carefully divided it into two separate parts, splitting the entrances, stairways, and two necessari, building a dividing wall and adding a second wall, so that each half would be a completely separate residence. Likewise in 1522 Cristofano di Bernardo Rinieri made an entry in his book of ricordanze of how he and his nephew divided their palace at a cost of 410 florins, and he included all the detailed instructions given to the builders about how new walls were to be built to allow each residence complete separation from the other, even without a means of direct communication between the two. Yet to judge from other entries in the same source Rinieri and his nephew were on the best of terms; they simply wanted private households. In 1516 two grandsons of Pierfrancesco de’ Medici, Giovanni di Giovanni and Pierfrancesco di Lorenzo, divided a palace by lot after engaging two builders to make the division and estimate remodeling costs. The entrance way went entirely to one part and so did the garden; remodeling expenses included walling up doorways, dividing a large room on the piano nobile, and enclosing one side of the courtyard so that each part was completely sealed off from the other. When this kind of division occurred each part of the palace was henceforth considered a separate property. Hence the Del Pugliese palace in the sixteenth century was actually owned by two different families, and likewise in the seventeenth century the great medieval palace of the Spinì, which had long been broken into apartments, was divided between

ricordi of Bernardo di Stoldo di Luca di Piero Rinieri, 1457-1509), fol. 155r (“Giudichomi detti entrate della via del Chochomero e una cortere con 1° pozo e 1° necessario era alla mia chamara terrena andassi in quel modo sino al tetto, e io avessi a fare il muro della trameza di ½ braccio”). Buonaccorso Chelli (or Serchelli) likewise described the work done in his house in via Maggio when he and his brother Piero divided it in 1479 (“ognuno di noi ispendemo in chasa per istare ognuno di per se: Faciamo cieri anchoncini in chase chome si vede”). ASF, Montale di Ripoli, S. Piero a Monticelli, no. 185 (accounts and ricordi of Buonaccorso di Leonardo di Piero Serchelli, 1476-1507), fol. 127.

72 Ospedale degli Innocenti (Florence), 149, no. 648 (accounts and ricordi of Jacopo di Messer Giannozzo d’Agno Pandolfini, 1467-87), fols. 166r-68r. This house, purchased from Francesco Sassetti for 2,500 florins, was on the via del Proconsolo, across the street from the Pazzi palace.

73 “Richordo chome questo di viii di maggio 1522 noi Andrea di Francesco Rinieri mio nipote e io Christofano di Bernardo Rinieri abiamo fatto insieme chompsonesso per dividere la chasa di Firenze che al presente abitiamo a chomune; e detto Andrea à chiamato Bernardo Pistochi muratore e io è chiamato Antonio Pilacchi muratore, i quali àno a fare 2 parti di detta chasa e àno tempo tutto di 24 del presente mese, le quale due parti àno a paregiare, e quella valessi menò àno a rifare chon danaro; e quando aranno fatto dette parti se sareno d’achordo a pigliare quello arà a rifare denari; ne à aver tempo mesi xviii prossimi futuri allora paghando ongni mesi 6 la terza parte insino à l’intero pagamentu”; the detailed instructions follow. The house was in via de’ Ricasioli. ASF, Conv. sopp., 95, no. 220 (ricordanze of Christofano di Bernardo Rinieri, 1496-1553), fols. 31v-33v. Cfr. n. 70 above.

74 Illustrator fiorentino; calendario storico, 1907, pp. 9-12.
two families (and one-half of it was further divided into three separate residences).\textsuperscript{75}

The fact is, however, that most palaces were probably not actually subdivided either legally or physically with the passing of the generations. In Siena a great palace like that of the Tolomei remained the shared property of all members of the vast clan right up through the eighteenth century; by the thirteenth century there already were as many as 120 shares.\textsuperscript{76} In Florence ownership was less diffuse. A man's grown and married sons might live with him in his palace, which according to his testament was to remain the common property of them all, but following his death, and sometime after the legal settlement of the estate, the usual arrangement was a private agreement that turned the palace over to only one of the sons and required the others to move out and find homes of their own. When Ilarione and Andrea de' Bardi divided their patrimony in 1430, they should have excepted the sizable palace if they were to honor their father's instruction. They thought about dividing it into two households, but they found it could not be done conveniently without ruining the entire structure, despite the fact that during the immediately preceding period when they were living in it together they had spent over 800 florins for improvements; and so it passed to Ilarione alone.\textsuperscript{77} When Ugolino di Niccolò Martelli died in 1484 his patrimony was divided immediately, and this included partition of two palaces among six sons. The family palace in the via Martelli was to be shared by five of them, but within a few months Cosimo and Luigi had bought out the shares of the other three, and by 1487 Luigi bought Cosimo's half and thus came into possession of the entire palace.\textsuperscript{78} Meanwhile the other palace (today the Antinori palace), which Ugolino had acquired for his sons, was likewise bought up by Carlo alone.\textsuperscript{79} Perhaps the best example of the businesslike way in

\textsuperscript{75} Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, MSS Tordi, no. 523 (“Quaderno della muraglia che io Geri Spini farò nelle mie tre case del palazzo della Spini per ridurla a una per mio uso,” 1606–14; Spini possessed one-half of the palace). There are some miscellaneous papers attached to this document that trace the occupancy and ownership of the palace; see also Luigi Passerini, “Il palazzo Spini,” in his Curiosità storico-artistiche fiorentine (Florence, 1866–75), 2: 63–80.

\textsuperscript{76} G. Prunai, G. Pampaloni, and Nello Bemporad, Il palazzo Tolomei a Siena (Florence, 1971), 81–84.

\textsuperscript{77} “Anch'ora veduto e rintrovato che il detto Andrea e Ilarione tenevano e possedevano comunemente e per non diviso uno palagio grande chon due orti nel quale amenedue abitavano . . . e perchè il detto palagio non si poterà comodamente dividere che non si ghastasse però ongi parte del detto palagio a vero overo à nel detto palagio è tutto e intero, il detto palagio al detto Ilarione aggiudichiano e a esso Ilarione diciamniamo apertenersi per piena ragione di dominio e proprietà, avere tenere e possedere e ciò che al detto Ilarione e alle sue rede da quinzi innanzi piacierà perpetualmente di fare.” Today Palazzo Canigiani, via de' Bardi, 28/90. The palace had been bought in 1414 for 2,200 florins; when the division of the patrimony was made it had a value of FL 3,093 3s. 9d. ASF, Conv. sop., 79, no. 119 (accounts and ricordi of Ilarione di Lippaccio de' Bardi, 1420–31), fol.; 255v–57v, 172. Cf. above, p. 993.

\textsuperscript{78} ASF, Carte strozzianee, ser. 5, no. 1463 (accounts and ricordi of Luigi d'Ugolino Martelli, 1484–88), fols. 12, 114r, 115v–120r, 122r, 125v–126r. The palace, which had a value of 2,000 florins di suggetto, was in via Martelli; cf. above, p. 999.

\textsuperscript{79} ASF, Carte strozzianee, ser. 5, no. 1466 (accounts and ricordi of Carlo d'Ugolino Martelli,
which brothers could settle the problem of commonly owned palaces is
the case of the five sons of Antonio di Leonardo Gondi. They lived to-
gether for twenty years after his death in 1486 until the youngest reached
his majority in 1506 and the patrimony was finally divided. When it came
to the palace the brothers drew up a written agreement by which they
recognized that the house would remain in the possession of two of them
while the other three were to move out; and since obviously the three
could not move out immediately further arrangements were made and
again there was a written agreement, according to which the three were to
share expenses at specified rates and pay rent until such time as they
could find new quarters. Within only a few months, however, all three
had left, while Antonio, one of the two remaining brothers, took up what
was to become a permanent residence in France. The family palace
therefore remained in effect the single family dwelling of Alessandro.
Finally there is the case of the five Guicciardini brothers, who shared
ownership if not residence of their father’s palace for about eleven years
after his death; but when Girolamo married in 1524 it was, significantly,
one of the stipulations of his bride that he have the palace for himself
alone. Thus came the inevitable settlement, and the other brothers had
to find homes of their own.80

The Florentine palace, then, was more often than not a residence of
a single conjugal family. Despite the desires of testators to save the family
residence from the inevitable division of their estates among sons, it
usually ended up as the property—and the residence—of only one man;
and by the sixteenth century, in some cases at least (the great Pandolfini
palace, for example),81 primogeniture became an explicitly recognized
principle of inheritance of palaces. Hence the enlargement of the private
family dwelling that these palaces mark in the history of domestic
architecture was not a consequence of family growth. On the contrary, as
we have already seen, the enlargement of the private family dwelling
occurred precisely at a time when the communal clan had lost much
of its cohesive force and the family was reduced to its minimum size.
Perhaps we can say that the enlarged private dwelling was an ironic
consequence of the dissolution of the family clan, inasmuch as that
dissolution of the larger social group released the forces of individualism
that led to such spectacular palace building. Likewise, the abandonment
of the loggia, long the public symbol of the sociability of the clan, is an
aspect of the phenomenon of the social fragmentation of the family.
In short, the peculiar development of palace architecture in Renaissance

81 ASF, Carte strozziane, ser. 2, no. 116, doc. 2 (copy of act of donation of the palace by
Giannozzo to his nephew Pandolfo d’Agnolo, 1520).
Florence reflects a fundamental transformation at the very base of Florentine society. Alberti, with all his nostalgia for a former style of family life (which he probably in fact never really experienced), sensed that something very profound and ultimately inexplicable was happening in Florentine society: "To make two families out of one requires double expense, and many things happen that it is easier to judge of by experience than by talk, easier to feel than to explain. Indeed, I am not pleased with this dividing of families, this going in and out of separate entrances."82

The palace represented a new world of privacy, and it was the privacy of a relatively small group. Further evidence for this proposition—and at the same time the best indication we have of the kind of private world that the Florentine patrician created for himself—comes from a closer inspection of the general disposition of space within the palace. Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the use of that space is the small part of the total cubic area incorporated in these vast structures that was available for actual residential use. If from the outside these palaces appear to spread over a vast area it must be remembered that inside an appreciable part of that area—perhaps a fourth, sometimes a third—was actually left open. The center of the palace and of life within it was the enlarged square or rectangular courtyard with open arcades on the ground level and usually an open loggia on the third, or top, level. As to their elevation, as high, as has been said, as a six- or seven-story modern office building, we again find the exterior appearance deceptive. For the most part there were actually only three floors, and of these the lower had little living space while a good part of the upper opened as a loggia facing onto the courtyard. Consequently the inhabited apartment consisted of not much more than a dozen or so rooms—if indeed even that many—mostly on the middle floor. This basic plan remains essentially the same regardless of the size of the overall structure, so that the largest palaces simply had larger rooms, not more of them. In other words, despite the massive block these buildings appear to be from the outside, there was not a correspondingly large residential space within at the disposition of the family. These palaces are indeed impressive for their sheer size if for nothing else, but they loom even larger when one realizes how deceptive their appearance is in disguising the relatively small internal area that was actually inhabitable. They were obviously designed to give a small family an extraordinarily spacious, private world of its own that extended well beyond their actual living chambers. The most innovative feature of the palace, in short, is perhaps best described

**Fig. 8.** The ground area of the Strozzi palace (left) (from Stegmann and Geymüller) is almost fifty per cent larger than that of the White House (right). The Strozzi palace is also almost twice as high (see fig. 6), but it has only three floors to the White House’s four. The upper floors of the White House, with the president’s private quarters, contain several dozen rooms laid out to the even smaller scale of twentieth-century living. Although the Strozzi palace is exceptional in being the largest palace to have been built in the fifteenth century and in having been designed for the two families of brothers, it illustrates clearly that a dramatic increase in scale did not change the basic plan for a palace. The number of rooms did not increase, but their size did—perhaps the clearest evidence we have that the function of these buildings was not to accommodate a highly complex patrician style of life. Rendering by Implementation, Baltimore.

as the luxurious inflation of private space around the nucleus of a relatively modest-sized apartment.

It is difficult to penetrate much further into the privacy of these palaces to determine the deeper social implications of living arrangements within. We simply lack the kinds of documentation that would lead us directly into the subject. Florence of course is exceptional for the survival of a remarkable quantity of personal diaries and letters, chronicles and histories, and imaginative and thoughtful literature written by her citizens from the fourteenth century onward; but personal household arrangements and the intimate relations of members of a family were not the subjects that Florentines very often wrote about. In all the vast literature we find only random remarks here and there that at best bear indirectly on the subject of the disposition of space within a palace. There are, for example, numerous contemporary descriptions of the Medici palace in the fifteenth century, but most of them are literary ventures occasioned by great quasi-public ceremonies and none men-
tions actual domestic arrangements in the Medici home. Likewise Alberti's famous treatise, where there is much about domestic economy and familial affections, has little to say about practical household management that is relevant to understanding the internal organization of a palace.

Even the authors of the theoretical architectural literature on houses seem to have little sense of the physical arrangements and internal functions of a palace. In the great treatises by Alberti and Filarete, both Florentines of the fifteenth century, despite considerable interest in the higher social functions of buildings and the city as a whole, there is nothing about how the architect is to lay out the private palace for actual living other than very general advice on kitchens, stables, plumbing, storage, and so forth. When it comes to arrangement of living quarters there is virtually nothing, and it is almost impossible to uncover the underlying assumptions of these theorists about the kind of life the family was to have within. In this respect, incidentally, their relatively slight interest in the private patrician palace may be related to the fact that although they were both born in Florence, they lived most of their lives away from the city, so that they really did not have Florence in mind when they wrote. When Alberti writes, for example, that the townhouse should have a chapel and that more attention should be given to the merchant's shops than to the beauty of the interior of his house, one can rightfully wonder whether Alberti was thinking about Florence. He was, of course, more interested in discussing humanist ideals than in describing reality; but the irrelevance of much of what he has to say may also be evidence that the private bourgeois palace (as distinct from the princely palace with which he as well as Filarete concern themselves) was indeed a distinctively Florentine development during the early Renaissance and not yet a reflection of architectural practice elsewhere.

It is generally held that architectural theorists of the later sixteenth century broke the spell of humanist idealism, so that no longer was there the Albertian preoccupation with the city in the platonic sense, as the perfect abode of the perfect society. Yet for all their greater practicality with respect to urban planning, the treatises (or rather the notes for treatises) of the Florentines Bartolomeo Ammannati and Giorgio Vasari il Giovane show as little concern for practical living arrangements. Both

85 I know of only two Renaissance palaces with chapels: the Medici-Riccardi and that of Pierfrancesco de' Medici (see above p. 1001)—and the Medici, of course, are always a very special case. Chapels were added to many palaces later, however.
men were interested in houses for all strata of urban society, and both left actual designs; but apart from service arrangements there is no indication of the function of rooms. On Vasari's designs the terminology consists of salone, sala, and camera, but these are related to size not function; and the terms are no more precise than they are either in the fifteenth-century inventories or in the seventeenth-century dictionary prepared by Baldinucci. In short, the Florentine architectural treatises from Alberti to the younger Vasari give us no help in understanding the domestic uses of interior space; and the readers of what these men have to say about palaces might well remark, along with a critic of another era, that "tis very fine; but where d'ye sleep and where d'ye dine?"

This is not the kind of question that has even been raised by architectural historians; their interest in the practical problems of the organization of interior domestic space is as slight as Renaissance theory is irrelevant. Historians at best follow the theorists themselves in exhaling the organization of space within these palaces for being based on certain rational principles that somehow allow the creation of a more purely human environment. When historians get around to considering actual living arrangements, however, they are likely to dismiss them as completely inadequate and to explain that the motivation for building palaces in the first place was a desire to impress rather than to accommodate. While it is not difficult to be somewhat put off by the inconveniences posed by these palaces for twentieth-century living one must remember that to ignore the question of practical domestic accommodations is to overlook the fact that however unplanned and inadequate these palaces may appear to us today they must nevertheless have conformed to the patrician style of life. It may in fact be the case that in this respect these palaces hold the key to an understanding of that life style. If architectural historians would concentrate more on the social realities of a building's function than on architectural theory, style, and techniques, some of the most innovative features of domestic architecture in the Renaissance might be uncovered, and at the same time we might learn something very significant about private aspects of patrician culture.

88 “Quest'edificio [the Palazzo Medici] che può veramente dirsi la prima Wohnhaus moderna in Italia, non tanto per i criteri di comodità domestica cui risponde, ma proprio perché tali criteri sono superati in un’invenzione, governata da una ragione puramente umane: e in questo Michelozzo è piantamente rinascimentale.” Ottavio Morisani, Michelozzo architetto (Milan, 1951), 52. “The building [also referring to the Medici palace] is intended to absorb evenly the life of the patron in all its complexity, and there is nothing to prevent us from seeing this coordination of purposes as a result of the desire for uniform development of personality.” Paul Frankl, Principles of Architectural History: The Four Phases of Architectural Style, 1220–1900, trans. and ed. James F. O’Gorman (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), 165. Frankl’s call for the study of “purposive intention” has not been heeded by architectural historians of the Renaissance (although in various places Ackerman has hinted at its importance); and the sociologists have been as negligent in the study of domestic space (see, for example, Amos Rapoport, House Form and Culture [Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1969]).

89 “Naturally, these structures were built to be looked at more than to be lived in . . . and it is hard to imagine where one slept, washed, or found privacy.” Ackerman, The Architecture of Michelangelo, 78. Cf. Giuseppe Samonà, “Palazzo,” in Enciclopedia italiana, 25: 962.
The best prospect for penetrating the interior of these palaces and getting some sense at least of the physical organization of domestic space is the study of household inventories and the interior decorative arts. Schiaparelli's remarkable book was a first attempt at presenting a description of palace interiors based on inventories, but it is seriously flawed by its failure to consider various problems of his sources. Nevertheless, it has yet to be followed by a more analytical study. Indeed most of the decorative arts—furniture, maiolica, tapestries—have remained largely untouched by scholarship, and virtually nothing has been done on them from the wider perspective of social history. It is quite clear, however—and not at all surprising, considering the implications of the enlargement of domestic space represented by the palace—that paralleling the evolution of domestic architecture there is a very notable development of the decorative arts. Palaces, after all, had to be furnished—and they were, in ways not at all possible heretofore. Earlier all kinds of domestic activities went on in the same rooms, and furniture tended to be simple in its forms and adaptable to different functions. By the fifteenth century, however, the inventories reveal quite clearly that rooms were beginning to have more specialized functions not only with respect to domestic activities but also with respect to their occupancy by specific members of the family. Furniture therefore became more appropriate to these functions. For example, storage furniture, such as chests, developed in a number of forms as it was increasingly necessary to have more space for the storage of the more numerous possessions of a society that consumed more luxury objects, and the chair evolved with respect to both comfort and form. The new style of private life found expression in these interior decorative arts, and it is in this period that such mundane objects as chairs, tables, chests, pottery, and even picture frames were raised at least to the level of the minor arts. In fact it was precisely this extraordinary demand for such possessions that gave birth to a vigorous Florentine artisan tradition whose importance for the total Florentine economy has never been properly assessed either for the Renaissance or for the continuing tradition of arts and crafts that is the economic basis for Florence's survival today. The social, economic, and artistic repercussions of palace building go much beyond their mere construction.

Despite the lack of documents and scholarship on the organization of interior space and on the decorative arts, one thing is clear: the palace represented a new world of privacy, and it was the privacy of a relatively small group. Although Alberti may have longed for the old sociability his sense of private family life was distinctly of his own time. The household he depicts in his dialogue on the family is that of a single
conjugal family, a self-contained social organism living in isolation and privacy and sealed off from the broader social and civic world outside its palace door. For Alberti privacy is the hallmark of family life. Not even servants intrude; and he has nothing to say about old and faithful family retainers who might have endeared themselves to their master and become virtually members of the family. When the one servant, Buto, appears it is not in the discussion of domestic life but at the beginning of book 4 as comic relief: and he certainly is not an utter dependent of the family. To judge from private books of accounts and *ricordi* and from household inventories, servants seem not to have been very numerous. There were perhaps not more than two or three for wealthy families, even those with large palaces. Moreover, the rate of turnover among servants could be quite high, employment sometimes lasting only a few months.91 There is nothing in all this of the social expansiveness of the aristocratic family of the baroque age surrounded with its retainers and servants and playing out a sumptuous quasi-public social life on a truly palatial scale.

Within the isolation of the palace with its spacious privacy and increasing elegance, where relations were more secluded and less extended, where the family withdrew into itself, is it surprising that men found a keener appreciation of the values of domestic life? Alberti's book itself is the most attractive expression of this new sense of the home as an intimate relation among husband, wife, and children, but is not much of the culture of the Florentine Renaissance rooted in the new style of life being played out within the palace? The focus of that culture, in fact, is put on women and children, with the renewed interest in the education of children—merchant pedagogy, as it has been recently termed92—and with the remarkable rise in the status of women—for Alberti (at least in the dialogue on the family) the woman was a veritable *capofamiglia*, keeper of the keys, mistress of the household, and privy to almost all her husband's secrets. And the other woman in the lives of these patricians is invariably their children's wet nurse, on whom they lavished gifts and whose importance is to be measured by her prominence among the vital family statistics that constitute the private diaries of the period.

How else is one to explain the fascination, almost the obsession, with children and the mother-child relation that is perhaps the single most important motif in Florentine art during the first century of the Renaissance, with its *putti*, its children and adolescents, its secularized madonnas, its portraits of women. Works of art with these themes dominated

91 In the mid-sixteenth-century census the population included a large number of servants (Battara, *La popolazione*), but few households had very many; in via Maggio only eight of twenty-seven households had more than two, and only three had more than five; and the two households in the great Strozzi palace had only five each. ASF, MSS, no. 179 ("Strade di Firenze"), fols. 210–11, 253r.

the local art market; they were produced in great number and in the cheapest media to meet the increasing demand for them. What is their essential quality if not "the naive idealization of home life, the love for children and the pure cult of womanhood that speak to us from them,""93 those very values that were being bred within the privacy of the family palace? The first point Cardinal Dominici makes about the education of children in his tract on the family written at the beginning of the fifteenth century (and dedicated to a woman) is that children should be surrounded with pictures of child saints and young virgins.94 According to the cardinal a child's initial learning process is through the eyes, and the underlying assumption that this experience involves the child in a subject-object identification with pictures may have important implications for our understanding of the fascination with children in Florentine art. Is it possible to understand in these terms such developments in Florentine art as the juvenescence of formerly venerable older men like King David, who from bearded Old Testament king in the medieval tradition becomes the youthful symbol of the political vigor of the city,95 or like Saint John the Baptist, heretofore represented as a hairy semibarbarian, who now sheds so many years in the course of a century that the patron saint of the city himself ends up being represented as a mere baby playing alongside the Christ child under the protective care of the Mother of God?96 How else is one to understand the strikingly peculiar iconography of much of Florentine Renaissance art?

Perhaps it is nothing but a happily appropriate coincidence (for this argument) that the building inaugurating the Renaissance in architecture was Brunelleschi's Ospedale degli Innocenti, an orphanage for abandoned children; but it is certainly not coincidence that the interior arrangements were planned with the most remarkable care and sensitivity to make the buildings suitable to their function. Further study of the gradual evolution of the internal organization of the Innocenti as an orphanage will most likely reveal a number of innovative features designed to bring the life of the children more in line with the domestic temper of the times.97 It was probably as original for its institutional organization as for its architecture. And if the new sense of domesticity and fascination with children surfaced to the level of public sensibilities

93 Wilhelm von Bode, Florentine Sculptors of the Renaissance (London, 1908), 143.
94 Giovanni Dominici, Regola del governo di cura familiare (Florence, 1860), 154.
97 For the volume to commemorate the recent restoration of the Ospedale, A. Piccini has made the first step to reconstruct the functional organization of the buildings: G. Morozzi and A. Piccini, Il restauro dello spedale di Santa Maria degli Innocenti, 1966-1970 (Florence, 1971). The documentation for the administration of this orphanage in the fifteenth century is considerable; and it merits study.
in the Innocenti, the same concern also may have penetrated the inner sanctum of the cloister in a most intriguing way—at least we might so judge from the testimony of Francesco di Tommaso Giovanni, a well-off property owner on the via Maggio. In 1452 he recorded giving his daughter, a nun in the convent of Monticelli, a wooden Christ child, with two changes of elegant clothes, three velvet hats, a tabernacle and altar, and “other little things for him.”98 The mind boggles trying to imagine what Suor Angelica did with her doll and her Lord and his wardrobe in the sanctity of her convent, yet is this not to be seen as another of the varied manifestations of the fascination with children so characteristic of Florentine culture? Perhaps there is in part a demographic explanation, as David Herlihy has suggested, for the enhanced importance of the mother within the home and a consequent change in child-rearing practices.99 But perhaps also the vast internal domestic space of the palace is to be understood ultimately as the objectification of what Eric Erikson has called the spatial mode of woman, so that by heightening her “sense of vital inner potential” and opening her life to those “modes of activity which include and integrate her natural dispositions,” the wider stage of domestic life brought altogether new cultural forces into play.100 At any rate we shall very likely need more psychological penetration into the palace and into domestic life if we are ever to understand much of Florentine civilization.

In a sense the Florentine palace sums up a civilization. Representing the new esthetic consciousness of the patrician and at the same time reflecting the changed conditions of family life that accompany the social transformations of the fourteenth century, the palace is the expression of Renaissance individualism both as a monument to its proud builder and as his castle where he could escape into the luxurious privacy of domestic life. And the furnishings with which he enjoyed that privacy, from pottery to religious pictures, reflect the values of domestic privacy and intimacy that he cultivated within. If the Renaissance begins to fade away in the later sixteenth century, so in fact did the palace have to adapt to new conditions and functions. In fact perhaps nothing better brings home the points I have tried to make about Renaissance palaces

98 ASF, Carte strozziane, ser. 2, no. 16 bis (ricordi of Francesco di Tommaso di Francesco Giovanni, 1444–58), fol. 16r: “Ricordo che insino a di . . . di giugno 1452 donai a Suora Angelica mia figlia monacha in Monticelli al lato alla Porta di San Piero Gattolini 1ª bambino di legno con 2 veste, 1ª di chermise piano con fermiglio di perle e 1 di velluto allesandro con fregi d'oro, e 3 berette di velluto chermise e 1ª ghirlanda di frangia rossa grossa e 1 tabernacolo di legno dipinto e con 1 altare e con palii d'altare e veli e altre cosette per lui; avemolo da mona Lapa de' Damiani da Pisa el quale donò alla Mea dicendo volendo per dare a Suora Angelica.”


100 “Womanhood and the Inner Space,” in Erikson’s Identity, Youth and Crisis (New York, 1968), 261–84.
as domestic architecture than the sad subsequent history of many of them. In later periods their extravagant privacy becomes outmoded: when they had to accommodate the more elaborate style of the aristocratic household they were cut up into more rooms, the mezzanines were opened up into new apartments, loggias were enclosed, chapels built; and where requirements of a more sumptuous social life of the baroque period did not lead to remodeling, economic pressures frequently did, so that previously open areas were enclosed, apartments were carved out to be rented, and at the street level shops were inserted into the façades. In these ways the proud private home of a Renaissance patrician gradually grew old as it underwent a metamorphosis from the geometric simplicity of its original open spaces and classicistic design into the chaos of apartments and shops most of them are today. But that is another story—a story of further social transformations, of changing styles of life, of the degeneration of a culture, and of the sad modernization of Renaissance Florence.