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Communal Spaces and Buildings in the Making: Pistoia's Piazza del Duomo (14th–18th Centuries)

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This paper deals with the relationship between continuity and change in architectural history, or, to be more precise, with the relationship between the continuity of built structures and the changes in their uses and meanings, using as a case study the Piazza del Duomo in Pistoia. The piazza is a kind of fossil of the communal age, surrounded as it is by the main public buildings of the late medieval city whose physical appearance has not been radically altered over time and whose functions have even remained largely stable. And yet the buildings are at the same time characterized by a history of continuous change, as a result of the Florentine conquest and the loss of political autonomy, as well as the internal evolution of the local ruling class. The paper focuses on these transformations, which adapted the public buildings to functions quite different from those for which they were originally built, all while preserving their external appearance, in order to ideologically exalt the ancient roots of civic identity as the main cornerstone — fictitious but credible — of Pistoia's urban image.

Keywords: town halls; Tuscany; Pistoia; urban history; urban images; civic identity

Introduction

Looking at Pistoia's main square today — what was called the *platea communis* at the end of the Middle Ages — we see a system of spaces and architectures that took shape in the 14th century and has from a structural point of view remained largely unchanged ever since (**Figure 1**). On the south side of the square we find the cathedral with its bell tower and the bishop's palace and on the west side the baptistery and the Palazzo Pretorio (Palazzo del Podestà), while opposite the Palazzo Pretorio is the communal palace. For more than 600 years these buildings, although they have undergone many alterations, have defined the square and given it its distinctive features. Only the north side of the square looks very different today than it did at the end of the 14th century, when it was occupied by two buildings that were replaced by a noble palace in 1786 and the Istituto nazionale della previdenza sociale headquarters in 1938.[1] As a whole, it is a remarkable example of continuity, not only from an architectural point of view but also from a functional one, since almost all these buildings (with the exception of the bishop's palace, which was abandoned by its owners at the end of the 18th century) still fulfil the same functions for which they were originally built. The square remains the site of a bi-weekly market that is held on the same days as it was held in medieval times and whose customs are not too different from the medieval ones.

Figure 1: Pistoia, Piazza del Duomo (clockwise from left: communal palace; cathedral and bell tower; ancient bishop's palace; baptistery dome; Palazzo Pretorio). Public domain.

In the following pages I show how this architectural and functional persistence has been accompanied by the development of very different uses and practices over the centuries, although they are often presented under the cloak of continuity. While it cannot be said that this cloak has been entirely false, as it has undeniably shaped the square and its surrounding buildings through consciously planned and implemented programmes, becoming a hallmark of local identity, this is only part of the story. We cannot stop at the architectural forms alone; to do so without considering the social practices that affect buildings risks overlooking their actual uses and their constant adaptation to the evolving needs of society.

The First *Palatium Communis*

The first mention of a *palatium communis* in Pistoia dates to 7 September 1211, when the consuls and the men of the castle of Granaglione gathered there to swear obedience to the *podestà* of Pistoia and his successors (Santoli 1906: 15–16). The date is significant: only a couple of years earlier, on 6 February 1209, the commune of Pistoia had received the investiture of all the 'iura, rationes, possessiones, iuspatronatus, comitatum et districtum' to which the commune could lay claim according to previous imperial diplomas (Gai 1985: 18–20) from Emperor Otto IV. In this context the construction of a palace can certainly be seen as a clear sign of communal self-consciousness — indeed, the first seal of the city seems to date back to these same years (Gai 1995: 395) — but we should not overestimate its consequences. The institutional topography of Pistoia remained fluid for many years to come, and the city councils alternated between meeting at the commune's and bishop's palaces, in the square, and at the cathedral and other churches in town (Santoli 1906: 198–199, 232, 241–243, 298).

Indeed, the first *palatium* was smaller than the later one and seems to have been used for restricted council meetings. General assemblies continued to be held in the cathedral or in the square for a long time. Besides for councils, the palace was also used as the seat of the main communal magistracies and in particular, from the second decade of the 13th century on, of the foreign *podestà*: among the one or more rooms where he had to carry out his duties was a court venue mentioned in a late 13th-century document as having been on the ground floor, under a loggia (Santoli 1906: 357, 22 April 1294). On the other hand, there is no evidence that the palace had rooms for officers or magistrates to live in. In fact, we know that for many years the *podestà* and his retinue of judges, notaries and guards — about 20 people at the end of the 13th century — continued to live in private houses that were rented for them

by communal authorities (Santoli 1906: 95, 127, 189, 193, 197, 201, 228, 268–269, 283). It seems that at first even the *anziani* were free to live in their own homes, as confirmed by the laws that forbade them to interact with the *podestà*, the *capitano del popolo*, or other city magistrates outside their assigned premises (Nelli and Pinto 2002: 10).

We can assume that the original structure of the palace followed a pattern that was then rather widespread in the Po Valley, namely, that of the so-called *broletto*, consisting of a loggia on the ground floor and a council hall above that was accessed by an external staircase.[2] Among the best-preserved contemporary examples are the Arengo in Novara (**Figure 2**) and the Palazzo della Ragione in Bergamo, which may give us an idea of what the Pistoia palace might have looked like (*Complesso* 2011; Buonincontri 2016). As for its location, even if we do not have precise records, I see no reason to doubt that this first palace stood exactly where we still find it today, next to the cathedral, near a marketplace, as was the case in many other Italian cities (**Figure 3e**). The original core, now almost completely absorbed by later additions, probably corresponds to the section under the balcony facing the courtyard; the thickness of the walls and the level of the foundations would at least suggest as much (**Figures 4a, 4c**).[3]

Figure 2: Novara's *broletto*. Public domain.

Figure 3: Pistoia's *platea communis* in the late Middle Ages (elaboration by the author on the basis of *Catasto leopoldino*, 1825–1826): a. cathedral (11th–12th centuries); b. bell tower (11th century); c. bishop's palace (11th–12th centuries); d. baptistery (1301–1361); e. communal palace, the first block (before 1211); f. communal palace, later additions (1333–1346); g. Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo (ca. 1292); h. Palazzo Pretorio (1367–1389); i. Loggia del Giuramento (1333); l. Palazzo del Capitano di Custodia (1337–1339, 1526, 1629–1642); m. seat of the *maggior sindaco*, later Opera di San Jacopo (1347, 1364, 1495–1498).

The Palaces of the *Comune di Popolo*

The first 'popular governments' were established in Pistoia in the early 1360s, but initially this political change did not seem to result in any major public works programmes.[4] While the *capitano del popolo* is first mentioned in local sources in 1263, it seems he did not have a permanent seat at that time but was instead housed in a tower belonging to the Saraceni family (**Figure 3g**), which had been used as a temporary residence for the *podestà* in previous decades (Santoli 1906: 246). Only after 20 years

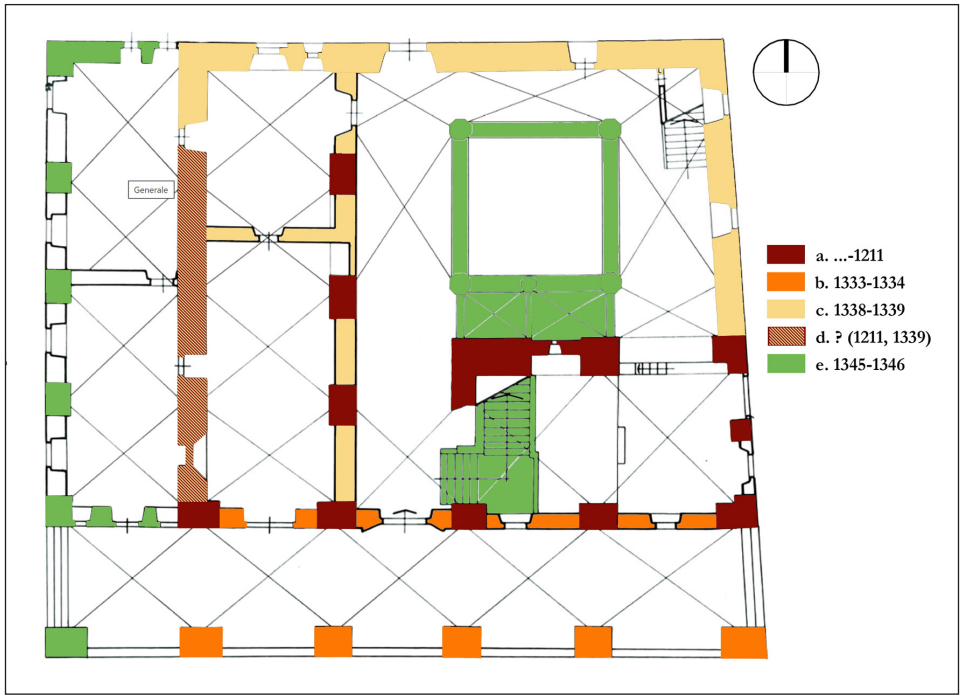

Figure 4: The building history of Pistoia's communal palace (elaboration by the author on the basis of Rauty 1991: 269).

was the Saraceni tower designated as the official residence of the captain (Nelli and Pinto 2002: 25). In the following years, the complex was often referred to as 'palatium communis et populi', although it seems that a real campaign to enlarge or unify the cluster of pre-existing buildings did not begin until 1292, when the captain bought part of a house and land 'justa palatium quod de novo fit et construitur pro populo' (Santoli 1906: 352).[5] Today, it is difficult to imagine what the palace — which would be abandoned in the next century — might have looked like. The sources mention a court bench on the ground floor, and probably there was at least a council hall above (Santoli 1906: 343–344). The double lancet windows that are still visible are difficult to date, but they seem to follow the shapes of the nearby bishop's palace (**Figure 5**).

The gradual transformation of the complex to the south of the square into the official seat of the *capitano del popolo* likely made finding a new residence for the *podestà* and his staff necessary as well. At first, they must have been housed in the old *palatium communis* to the west of the square, often mentioned in the 1280s as the *podestà*'s residence (Santoli 1906: 315, 324, 326, 328, 331, 340). This was a temporary solution, however, as starting in November 1283 the communal authorities began what seems to have been a systematic purchasing campaign on the opposite side of the *platea communis*, near the baptistery of San Giovanni in Corte (Santoli 1906: 326–331; Santoli 1954: 41–84; Gai 1988: 33–34).

Figure 5: Pistoia's Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo. Photo by the author.

Although the first records of the existence of a palace for the *podestà* in this area date to half a century later, we can assume that the land purchased in the 1280s was bought for this purpose and that before the end of the century the eastern side of the square was also occupied by one or more communal buildings used as the seat of the *podestà* (**Figure 3h**). One of them — we do not know whether it was a new building or a remodeling of existing structures — must have been quite imposing, as from at least 1330 onwards it was referred to as a 'palatium' (Provvisioni 1: 41v; 4: 78r, 164v; Regesti 2015: 88, 731, 950). A document from 1339 describes its boundaries and confirms that it stood exactly where it would be rebuilt 30 years later, larger than before to accommodate not only the *podestà* but also his ever-growing retinue (Statuti 2: 92v; Gai 1988: 33, 43).

After 1289, the sources no longer refer to the communal palace as the residence of the *podestà* but rather as the seat of a new magistracy created a few years earlier (following the Florentine example) as the highest political authority of the city, composed of 12 (later eight) *anziani* and a *gonfaloniere* of justice (Santoli 1906: 343–344; Altieri Magliozzi 1985: 61–64). At first, according to the *Breve et ordinamenta Populi Pistorii* (1284), these officials had to live wherever the *consiglio generale del popolo* decided and were forbidden to dine or play games with the other city magistrates, and so they probably did not have any premises of their own (Nelli and Pinto 2002: 10, 102). After 1289 onwards, as far as we know, however, the *anziani* and the *gonfaloniere* were required to live in the communal palace, which likely led to the enlargement of the building, as suggested by the purchase of neighboring houses and lands by the commune in April 1294 (Santoli 1906: 357–373; Beani 1909a: 24).

As we have seen, this was not an isolated measure. In the last two decades of the 13th century, the city authorities — backed by laws authorizing property expropriation 'pro manutenendo et conservando pacifico et bono statu civitatis' (Nelli and Pinto 2002: 24) — had undertaken a systematic purchasing campaign around the *platea communis* in order to ensure that each of the city's most important magistrates had his own seat that could accommodate those who were expected to carry out official duties there. In addition to the palaces for the *capitano del popolo* and the *podestà*, official residences were also arranged during this period for the city chancellor, the *maggior sindaco*, and the notary of the *capitano di custodia*, and living quarters were arranged for the keepers of the belltower (which housed the communal *masseria*), who had to remain in the building for the duration of their assignment (Nelli and Pinto 2002: 37, 68–69; Provvisioni 1: 8v; 5: 77r; 9: 119v; 12: 113r; Regesti 2015: 20, 1169, 3998, 6074).

That the holders of a municipal office should live somewhat segregated from their fellow citizens in order to be able to devote themselves fully to their duties was a common idea at the time. All Tuscan cities of the period adopted similar measures aimed at linking the exercise of an office to residence in the same building, effectively making official premises and living quarters one and the same (for some examples, see Cerretelli 1990: 22–23; Ceccarelli Lemut 2004: 132–133). This initiative was motivated by civic and practical concerns — the desire to confine the magistrates so as to better control and protect them from undue pressure — but also by the desire to emulate the city that was set to become the capital of the region, Florence, where under the so-called *primo popolo* similar arrangements had already been made at the Palazzo del Bargello (1255) and would soon be implemented in even more grander ways in the Palazzo Vecchio (Rubinstein 1995: 6, 18, 97–100). Indeed, the solutions — both functional as well as formal and aesthetic — employed in Pistoia in the late communal

age seem quite consonant with those effected in Florence at more or less the same time, which is not surprising, since by the end of the century Florentine influence in Pistoia appears to have been stronger than ever.[6] Influence between the two cities, however, did not always run in one direction. Certain approaches (such as that of providing the highest magistracy of the city with a monumental residence in the main square) were first experimented with in Pistoia and only later adopted in Florence. It is a proof, if it were ever needed, of the complexity of the dialogue between centre and periphery in a vibrant polycentric world like that of Duecento Italy (Castelnuovo and Ginzburg 2019).

At the beginning of the 14th century the landscape of Pistoia's *platea communis* was quite different from that of the previous century. The primacy of the city's main religious buildings was no longer challenged by a single *palatium communis*, surrounded by a multitude of private towers that temporarily housed this or that office. Instead, there was now a crown of buildings, all of which were communal property and permanently assigned to the various governing bodies into which the municipal administration had come to be structured (**Figures 3e, 3h, 3g**). The permanent assignment of these government departments to specific buildings not only resulted in an increase in the number of buildings owned by the commune but also in changes in how they were used and thus their structure. A number of separate public seats, typically open to collective use on the ground floor (mainly occupied by offices and shops), with the upper floors or the rear reserved as "service accommodations" for magistrates, replaced the few multifunctional premises that had previously been used by several magistracies together, who had shared council halls and courtrooms. Municipal offices proliferated and spread across the town, a pattern that has been widely observed also in other Italian cities of the time, whose 'street life' was for this reason often characterized by a marked intermingling of public and private activities affecting open spaces as well as communal offices themselves (Nevola 2020).

The New Palazzo degli Anziani

Whether and to what extent the plans initiated by 'popular' governments in Pistoia during the last 20 years of the 13th century were ever carried out is not known, but what is certain is that the crisis of the Florentine protectorate soon led the city into a disastrous war that ended in a dramatic defeat in 1306, and that the following years were no less turbulent (Francesconi 2007a). A period of relative calm did not begin until 1329, when a peace was signed with Florence, which in effect meant submission, a state of affairs that was formally acknowledged in 1401 (Gai 1981a; Gai 1981b; Zorzi 2004). In this climate of surrender, a new campaign of public works was launched in the early 1330s aimed at the construction of a new circle of walls (Bottari Scarfantoni 2020) and on the

overall renovation of the *platea communis*, the goal being to turn it into the material and symbolic heart of the city government.

The town hall, which according to a local historian had been damaged by fire in 1298, was the first building to receive attention (Salvi 1656–1662: 1:257). Between 1333 and 1334 the ground-floor loggia was closed (**Figure 4**) and work began on a new portico in the piazza 'pro ipsa domo amplianda et accrescenda', that is, to make the upper hall large enough to accommodate the new general council (Provvisioni 4: 25r, 94v, 35r-v; Regesti 2015: 543, 583, 779). The work started at Via Cartoleria (now Via Ripa del Sale) 'usque ad scalas quibus ascenditur dictam domum dominorum Antianorum' (Provvisioni 4: 172r; 5: 21r; Regesti 2015: 972, 1069). The exact location of this staircase is not recorded, but in my opinion — which is at odds with the consensus — it is unlikely that the reference was to the internal staircase that still exists: first because the original design of the new porch provided for four — rather than three — arches, confirmed by the very shape of the first and the fifth pillars of the porch, which are slightly wider than the others and therefore clearly designed to be angular (**Figure 6**); and second because the timing of the work indicates that the inner courtyard area underwent a radical renovation completed only around the middle of the century.[7] The staircase leading to the first floor thus may have originally been external (very common in the *brolettos* of the Po Valley), situated next to the fifth pillar of the portico, and was perhaps slated to be replaced by the internal staircase only once the additions had been completed.

Figure 6: Pistoia's communal palace (Palazzo degli Anziani, then Palazzo dei Priori, and then Palazzo Comunitativo). Photo by the author.

In January 1338, a commission of eight 'experti hedificiorum' (two for each *porta*, i.e., borough, of the town) was appointed to draw up a new general plan 'in cartis membranis et designari et pingi ordinate porte et muri, fenestre, volte, camini, giardini, schale, camere dominorum et famulorum, sale, coquine, aqueducti, curte, puteum, introithus, parietes et tecti et locus librorum' (Provvisioni 5: 297r; Regesti 2015: 1718). Two expert members of this commission were later appointed to alternate every two months in supervising the building site (Provvisioni 5: 305r; Regesti 2015: 1739).[8] The system may not have worked well enough, however, since as early as July 1338 a petition called for two master builders (a carpenter and a stonemason) to be employed on a permanent basis. The rotation practice nevertheless continued in the following months, and in 1339 the direction of the works was entrusted to two experts chosen from among the city's Franciscans, whose building skills were renowned (Provvisioni 6: 36r; Regesti 2015, 2039) (**Figure 4**).[9] These rotations confirm the importance of the borough representatives in the city's guild system and in the management of the main public building sites.

In February 1339, in order to complete the palace 'secundum picturas et designaturas factas', the *anziani* began a new expropriation campaign at the rear of the palace, along Via Cartoleria, where several towers were already being used as dwellings for the palace's servants, the *maggior sindaco*, and the city chancellor (Provvisioni 6: 10v, 14r; Regesti 2015: 1944, 1956).[10] Despite financial problems, the work on the main body of the palace must have been completed by the autumn of 1339, because wood for the roof was purchased at that time, and in the following years the new rooms were painted (in the Camera Comunis on the ground floor, in particular, a 'pictura Virginis gloriosae Mariae cum aliis sanctis', which is still preserved, was painted before 1344 [Provvisioni 8: 29v; Regesti 2015: 3184)]).[11]

A third phase of construction began in August 1345, after it was decreed that 'fiant due murelle illius grossitudinis cuius sunt alie murelle dicti palatii super quibus volvantur et fiant quatuor arcus magni, super quibus fiant testudines seu volte, supra quibus voltis fiat sala in qua debet consilium congregari', with the goal of 'fortifying' the palace and enlarging the hall for the *consiglio generale del popolo* (Provvisioni 9: 5r-v; Regesti 2015: 3387, 3390) (**Figure 4**). Local historiography has variously —but in my opinion incorrectly — interpreted the measure, identifying the two new 'murelle' with the two northern pillars of the loggia facing the square (Rauty 1991: 268–269; Tesi 1995a: 133–134), but if we identify them with the corner pillar and the next one built along Via Ripa della Comunità, many hitherto unresolved contradictions can be resolved (Folin forthcoming).

It is likely that the new extension project involved not only the addition of another bay towards Via Ripa della Comunità but also the construction of a new staircase leading

to the first floor (internal, not external: hence the meaning of the term 'fortify') and thus a thorough rearrangement of the courtyard, which unsurprisingly was still under construction in 1346, as were the stairs (Provvisioni 9: 88v; Regesti 2015: 3832). That the courtyard was still under construction so late, a point that has curiously escaped the attention of scholars who have so far studied the history of the palace, is important because a later chronology than is usually assumed (i.e., mid-14th rather than late 12th century) makes sense of the Florentine echoes (Morozzi 1972: 264–265; Tesi 1995a: 135).[12] These resonances are not only formal, such as those that have been noticed with the octagonal columns, the capitals or the balcony of the Bargello, but also functional, including the idea of opening the living quarters of the highest authorities of the city to an internal claustrum, as was done in the Palazzo Vecchio (Rubinstein 1995: 18, 98; Trachtenberg 1989).[13]

If this reconstruction is correct, Pistoia' communal palace represents a very original hybrid concept. On the outside, the building refurbishment in the 1320s followed the traditional layout of the previous century, preserving the L-shaped ground loggia on the square and along Via Ripa della Comunità. Inside, on the other hand, the model of the Bargello and Palazzo Vecchio was followed, so that the upper floors of the palace — intended for the residence of the *anziani* and the *gonfaloniere* —overlooked a central courtyard around which the vertical connections between the floors revolved. Indeed, the Trecento history of Pistoia's communal palace provides a typical example of that building-in-time practice that Marvin Trachtenberg (2010) identifies as a distinguishing feature of late medieval construction habits.

The 14th-century Renewal of the *Platea Communis*

As the work on the Palazzo degli Anziani progressed, the other sides of the square were also gradually renovated. In 1333, construction of a loggia for housing the grain market and hosting the oath-taking ceremony for new magistrates began (Provvisioni 4: 38r, 39r; Regesti 2015: 588, 590; Bottari Scarfantoni 1998: 42–43) (**Figures 3, 7**). Vaulted and frescoed — records mention a Madonna in majesty among the patron saints of the city painted in 1344 and a cycle of illustrious men restored in 1497 — this loggia was the focal point of civic liturgies for centuries to come, and not just on official occasions. Indeed, from the 15th century onwards, it was referred to as 'loggia of the oath and theatre', or simply 'loggia of the theatre' (Chiappelli 1913: 14).[14] The similarities between Pistoia's loggia (destroyed in 1772) and the Florentine Loggia della Signoria, planned as early as 1356 but only built 20 years later, are truly remarkable, morphologically, functionally and in terms of their relationship to the neighboring palace.[15] The chronology suggests that if these similarities resulted from one building's design emulating the other's, then the Pistoian building must have influenced the Florentine building and not the other way

round, although in this case it seems more appropriate to speak of widespread practices of appropriation of urban spaces by local authorities aimed at turning the fronts of the city squares and streets into stage settings endowed with symbolic meanings (Elet 2002; Nevola 2020).

Figure 7: View of Pistoia's cathedral; 1608. On the left is the Loggia del Giuramento (Santi Giovanni e Zeno 232: 23r). Courtesy of Ministero della cultura, Archivio di Stato di Pistoia, prot. n. 1329–2024.

The 1330s also saw the renovation of the northern side of the square, where two new public buildings were built to house the most important Florentine authorities in the city, the *capitano di custodia* and the *maggior sindaco* (**Figures 3l, 3m**). The first was

built around a courtyard and had a tower — probably an older structure incorporated into the new building — to which the communal bell was moved, thus symbolically marking the transition from the old popular regime to the new Florentine protectorate (**Figure 8**).[16] The construction of a loggia began in 1337, and the work was probably largely completed by 1339, when an order was issued to purchase the stones and lime needed to pave the courtyard and the area in front of the benches that ran along the façade (Provvisioni 5: 264v, 270v, 276v; 6: 53v; Regesti 2015: 1637, 1649, 1662, 2107; Bottari Scarfantoni 1998: 40).[17] Work on the seat of the *maggior sindaco* began in 1347, when the upper floors of the buildings that stood in the area were connected with city-owned shops on the ground floor (Provvisioni 9: 119v, 141v; 12: 148v; Regesti 2015: 3998, 4115, 6277). Construction was soon interrupted by the plague but resumed in 1364, although it was probably never completed, as a full-scale renovation of the palace — which by then housed the Opera di San Jacopo (**Figure 9**) — was undertaken less than a century later (Gai 1990: 14). Thereafter, the two buildings, amidst fires, ravages, and partial renovations, underwent a long period of decay that ended with their demolition in 1631 and 1934, respectively (Gai 1990; Tesi 1995b).

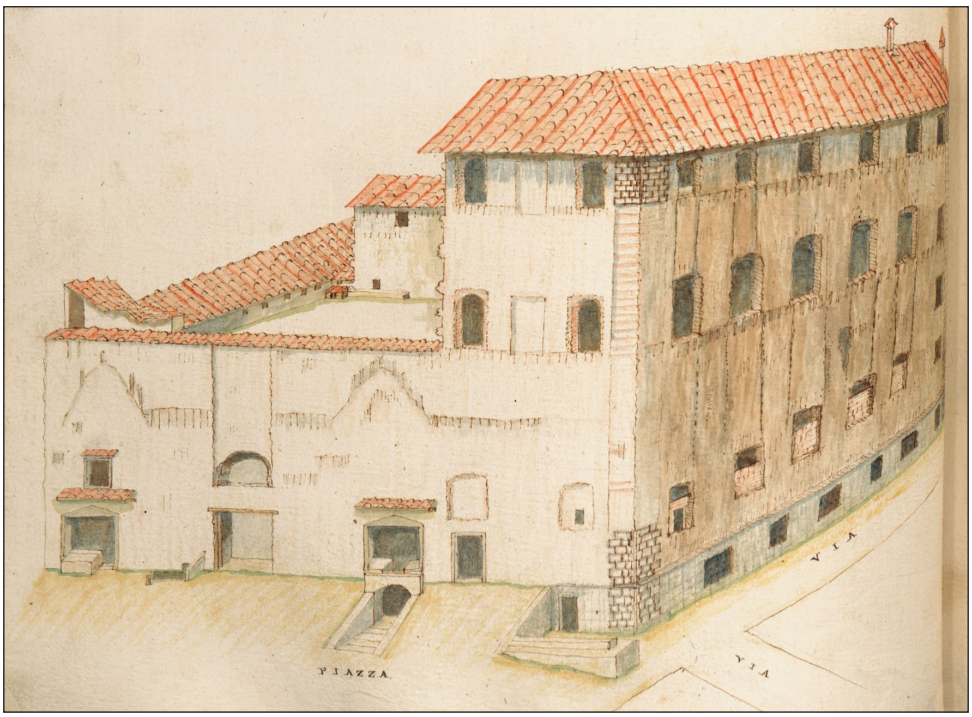

Figure 8: View of the Palazzo del Capitano di Custodia, 1727–1737 (Sapienza 444: 33r). Courtesy of Ministero della cultura, Archivio di Stato di Pistoia, prot. n. 1329–2024.

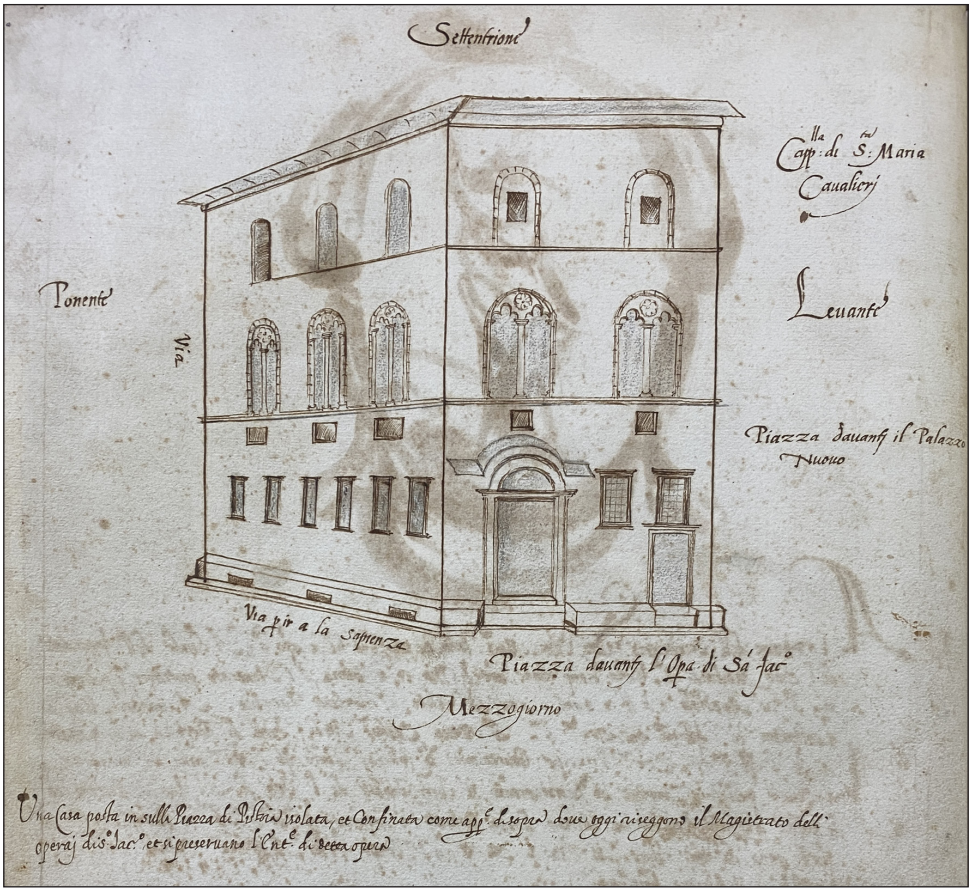

Figure 9: View of the seat of the Opera di San Jacopo, 1565 (San Jacopo 382: 1v). Courtesy of Ministero della cultura, Archivio di Stato di Pistoia, prot. n. 1329–2024.

Finally, in the last 30 years of the century, the western front of the square was also thoroughly reshaped by the volume of the "new" Palazzo del Podestà (**Figures 3, 10**), work on which began in 1367 and was completed in 1394 (Gai 1988; Santoli 1954). As Lucia Gai has convincingly argued, is the new palace was in fact the extension of a pre-existing 'palatium vetus', probably corresponding more or less to the southeastern wing of the present building, that is, the first four bays of the façade overlooking the square, on which the main entrance is intentionally centred (1988: 34–36). The fifth bay is in fact the result of the late 14th-century extension, while the last two date from a 19th-century "restoration". Behind the main front, the palace had to be completely rearranged around the central courtyard, which is recorded as being under construction in the 1380s, while the rear elevation on Via degli Orefici, as well as the northern elevation, continued to reflect the composite origin of the building (**Figure 11**).

Figure 10: Antonio Terreni, *Veduta di S. Giovanni di Pistoja*, 1801 (Fontani 1801). The Palazzo Pretorio is on the right.

Figure 11: View of the back elevation of the Palazzo Pretorio, 1764 (Sapienza 448: 28v–29r). Courtesy of Ministero della cultura, Archivio di Stato di Pistoia, prot. n. 1329–2024.

Thus, in 1382, when the layout of the *platea communis* was described in the so-called *Liber censuum*, the square appeared to be surrounded on all sides by public buildings that had finally replaced the last remaining private houses (Santoli 1906: 490–493) (**Figure 3**).[18] It may seem paradoxical that this renovation effort aimed at transforming the market square into the city's main civic space was undertaken at the very time when Pistoia's communal institutions were in deep crisis and that it was actually carried out under Florentine rule. In this coincidence we can certainly see the result of the shrewd policy pursued by the new rulers, who were always keen not to impose their power by force but rather to promote their image as "peacemakers" of local factions. It is also easy to understand why the foreign "patrons" would only be interested in resuming public works that had been left unfinished because of infighting, namely, in order to show the advantages of the new regime (Neri 1999: 5–9; Zorzi 2004; Francesconi 2008).

But perhaps there was also another element at play: the idea, then widespread throughout Italy, that one of the first duties of any ruling authority (whether citizen or foreigner, republican or 'tyrannical') was to defend, if not actively promote, a cluster of values embodied in the 'honour and profit', 'ornament', 'convenience', 'dignity and beauty' of the town and its inhabitants (Nevola 2000; Maire-Vigueur 2008; Maire Vigueur 2010; La Monica 2010; Internullo 2022, 321–341). In the 14th century, this idea was certainly shared by both the Pistoieses and the Florentines, regardless of the conflicting interests that divided them, and indeed it served as the basis for dialogue and mutual legitimation: the dignity and beauty of Pistoia could not but represent a common good, a shared heritage for all citizens and so the commitment to promoting such values became one of the guiding principles of local *buon governo*.

In the centuries that followed, the beauty — 'pulchritudo' — of the urban space of the city would become a leitmotif in Pistoia's political debates, invoked by private citizens and generations of magistrates, as well as Florentine rectors, whenever it seemed appropriate to appeal to the unquestionable authority of a higher principle. As a Florentine governor wrote in 1569, 'The beauty of the city … is one of the main features to be considered when arriving [in Pistoia]' (Minuti 1892: 320). And as early as in 1516, a young notary who had arrived in the city a few years earlier to practise his profession could not find a better reason to justify his request for citizenship than to declare himself 'attracted by the beauty and amenity of the city, as well as by the good and pleasant conversation of its citizens' (Raccolte 12: 33v–34r). Only a few years later, the *priori* could justify the cost of repaving the *platea communis* by recalling that

> the square of our city is not only the most beautiful and embellished corner of it but perhaps the most beautiful or one of the most beautiful squares not only in Tuscany

> but in the whole of Italy, and we should do everything possible to preserve and maintain its beauty and pulchritude, not to mention to make it as beautiful as possible. (Raccolte 12: 42v, 20 June 1521)

The Residence of the *Anziani*, later *Priori*

In 1401, as we have seen, Florentine rule in Pistoia was ratified by a formal act of submission, soon confirmed by a statutory reformation (1402): the city lost its few remaining vestiges of sovereignty and was incorporated into the domain of the Republic of Florence with the purely honorary title of 'nobilis socia et foederata'.[19] However, in accordance with the custom of the time, Pistoia's communal institutions were not suppressed but rather left in place, albeit deprived of any real autonomy. The key governing offices (such as the *podestà* and the *capitano di custodia*, who replaced the *capitano del popolo*) became the monopoly of the rulers, while other municipal magistrates such as the *gonfaloniere* and the *anziani*, whose name was soon changed to *priori* in accordance with Florentine custom, played a purely representative role (Gai 1980: 12–16, 34–41; Dedola 1994; Neri 1999: 7–12, 23–32). The *platea communis* offered a transparent architectural crystallisation of this institutional arrangement: the northwestern sector of the square was bordered by the new seats of the Florentine rectors — the palaces of the *capitano di custodia*, the *podestà*, and the *maggior sindaco* — on which the conquerors had immediately painted their insignia 'to show their authority' (Salvi 1656–1662: 2:208). At the other end of the square, next to the cathedral, stood the single block of the "old" communal palace, where the city councils continued to meet and the *priori* had their residence. The *priori* remained, even if only formally, the 'supreme magistrates' of the city: they were the living expression of Pistoia's municipal pride and of the double face that the city —subject to Florence but also blazoned like few others — would maintain until the end of the *ancien régime*.

Indeed, it seems that great care was taken in the city to emphasise the strong continuity of the new system of government with the past, at least in appearance. As in the previous century (and until the 18th), the *priori* continued to be elected every two months, in pompous ceremonies that included solemn parades through the city, at the end of which they would lock themselves up in the palace. Once there, they would not exit until the end of their mandate, except collegially and with their entire retinue of servants and valets, dressed in full regalia (Minuti 1892: 320; Raccolte 6: 560r–563v, 765r, 42r, 44v–45r). Still in full regalia, they took the oath that Florentine rectors had to take on assuming office under the loggia in the square; they received distinguished visitors and ambassadors; they took part in the religious services and ritual pageants

that marked the city's calendar (Gai 1980: 36–37).[20] Richard Trexler's (1980) and Edward Muir's (1981) studies document the relevance of these ceremonies in civic life, although in this case they were not so much meant to reflect the real power of local authorities as to disguise the latter's loss of autonomy.

The *priori*'s duties were in fact limited and included only minor administrative tasks in addition to their representative ones, which should have left plenty of free time, since the statutes forbade gambling or receiving prostitutes in the palace (especially during the day, for fear of scandal; at night the penalties were less severe), while expressly permitting licit games such as chess or tarot (Raccolte 6: 42r).[21] The palace inventories of the 16th and 17th century mention the presence in the *priori*'s rooms of many board games (games called trickery, bullets, and madman), and an echo of this character of idleness that the exercise of public office in Pistoia must have taken on under Florentine rule is perhaps preserved in the frontispiece of the third volume of Michel'Angelo Salvi's *Historie di Pistoia* (1656), in which we see Glory and Fortune playing chess under the hovering of Pistoian Peace (**Figure 12**).[22] This situation was noted as early as 1580 by Montaigne who, after visiting the city's palaces and churches, remarked that

> this poor city pretends to make up for its lost liberties by maintaining a vain semblance of its ancient state. There are nine priors and a Gonfalonier, who are elected every two months and have the charge of public order. They are maintained by the duke, as they were formerly by the Republic, and lodged in the palace, which they scarcely ever quit, save when they go out all together, being kept continually under restraint. The Gonfalonier walks in front of the Podestà (the ducal officer who possesses all the real power) and returns no salutation made to him, simulating a dignity which is altogether imaginary. I felt pity at the sight of men thus satisfied with these apish tricks. (1903: 3:31–32)

Like the *priori*, the palace that housed them also seems to have retained a rather symbolic function in the early modern period, fossilizing itself in the forms it had assumed at the end of the Middle Ages or at least being perceived as having done so. Thus, in 1569, the Florentine governor Giovan Battista Tedaldi could mention among the 'great ornaments' of Pistoia — besides the 'very beautiful and ancient' cathedral — two memorials of the time of the Crusades that had been displayed for centuries in the communal palace: the gigantic effigy of Grandonio, the mythical warrior who had conquered Majorca in 1115, frescoed in one of the halls, and the sculpted head of a Moor hanging menacingly above the main entrance (Minuti 1892: 321) (**Figures 13, 14**).[23] The governor, on the other hand, did not mention the great Medici

coats of arms that had been affixed to the same façade at great expense between 1513 and 1529 to celebrate the accession of the two Medici popes to the papal throne: in his eyes, apparently, the image of the palace remained anchored to an ancient past of lost grandeur far more fascinating and distinctive than the pompous emblems of recent Florentine power.[24]

Figure 12: Giacinto Gimignani, engraving depicting an allegory of the history of Pistoia, 1662 (Salvi 1656–1662, frontispiece to vol. 3).

Figure 13: Pistoia's communal palace, Sala Ghibellina: portrait of Grandonio dei Ghislieri, 15th century. Photo by the author.

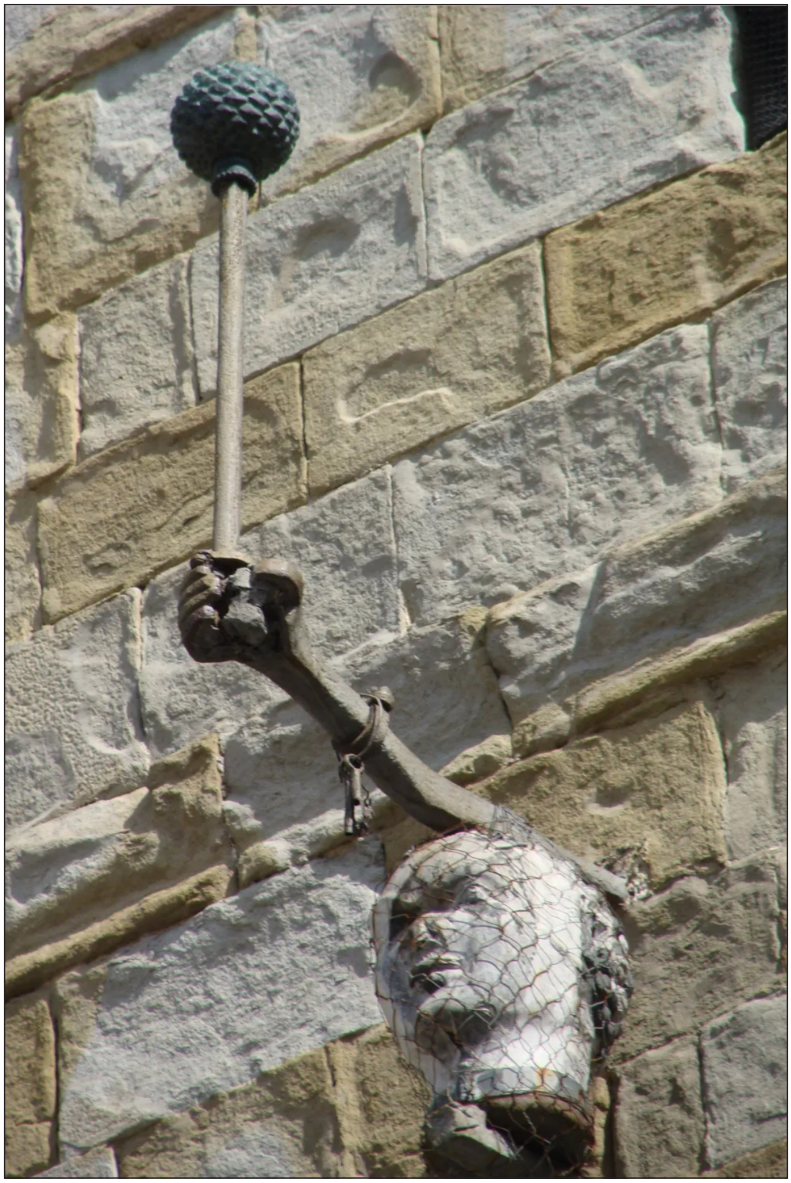

Figure 14: Pistoia's communal palace, façade: moorhead and mace, 12th–13th centuries. Photo by the author.

Beneath the appearances, however, history was moving on, and many of the functions of the palace in the early modern period had changed since the late Middle Ages, as had the character of civic magistracies and the very physiognomy of Pistoiese society. As a result of trends in Italy and beyond during the 15th and 16th centuries the local ruling class began to transform into an increasingly closed and hereditary body characterised by a strong aristocratic identity (Gai 1980: 22–23, 28–34, 62–66; Vivoli 2004; Francesconi

2011). It was a gradual process, with a first moment of crystallisation in 1477, when a new council was established in the city called the *consiglio dei graduati*. This council was limited to those who had held the two highest municipal titles (*gonfaloniere* and *operaio* of San Iacopo) and was in charge of determining which families were worthy of having their members appointed to the most important communal offices and therefore entitled to claim to be part of Pistoia's elite.[25]

From that moment on, access to the palace and the offices it housed became the first distinguishing feature that allowed the Pistoiese patriciate to mark its own rank and act as a ruling class (albeit, as we have seen, with little power). This is confirmed by local sumptuary laws, which from the mid-16th century on adopted access to communal offices as a benchmark to distinguish three orders of people with different degrees of dignity within the city society: at the top, equated to 'knights or doctors', were the members of the '*consorteria* or kinship who either already were or would become *graduati*'; second were those and their spouses who held or would hold 'ordinary offices of the Commune of Pistoia'; third were those who had not held or would not hold such offices (whose wives, however, were quite distinct from 'peasants' and 'public or street harlots', who occupied the lowest rung of the social ladder [Raccolte 6: 1116r–1120v ('Capitoli sopra li vestimenti e ornamenti delli uomini e delle donne della città di Pistoia' (1558)]).[26] We have here a paradigmatic example of that process of transformation of city councils into oligarchic bodies described by Christine Shaw (2006) as typical of many early modern Italian cities, all the more sharper in this case since Pistoia was not a city-state but rather subject to the rule of the Republic of Florence first and later the grand duchy of Tuscany later.

The common references to the palace in the sources of the period as 'magnifico', 'nobile', and 'illustrissimo' were therefore not merely formulaic. They made explicit the very real relationship between the building and the groups that had, over the years, come to monopolise city communal institutions. Pistoia's patriciate represented this relationship as having always existed and used it as a way to justify the timelessness of its class privileges. In reality, however, the adjustment necessary to adapt the palace's appearance to the new aristocratic habits of its inhabitants must have been considerable. One of the first steps taken to this end was to clear the shops that once surrounded the palace. Between the 15th and 16th centuries, they were gradually removed from the 'usciali' (arcades) that had been opened under the front loggia and from along the flanking streets: these measures were justified by the need for space but appear above all to have been prompted by image concerns (Raccolte 12: 68v–69r, 14 and 22 May 1517) (**Figure 15**).[27]

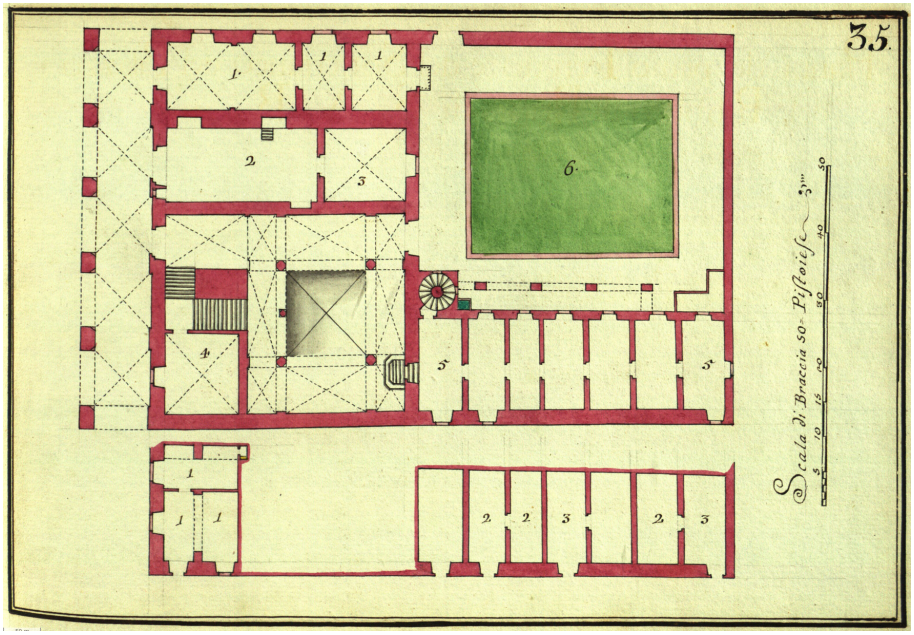

Figure 15: Plan of the ground floor and basement of Pistoia's communal palace, 1770–1780 (Palazzi di SAR: 35). 1. royal chamber office; 2. customhouse; 3. *provveditore*'s room; 4. chancellery; 5. chancellery of rivers and roads; 6. garden. The rooms marked 1 at the bottom of the plan are salt storerooms, while those marked 2–3 are the salt warehouses.

The greatest changes, however, were made to the two upper floors of the palace, which over the early modern period were refurbished several times and designated as living quarters for the *priori* and their servants. The first mention of the existence of a 'camera in qua morantur Anthiani' in the palace dates back to 1289: this was probably a common dormitory, as suggested by the fact that it was referred to as a 'dormentorio' in subsequent centuries and by the original setup of the Palazzo Vecchio for its *priori* (Rubinstein 1995: 97–100). It was a layout — and a vocabulary — with clear monastic overtones, which seem to have been deliberately intended to give an almost sacred aura to the spaces reserved for the residence of the city's highest authorities: in the same years, for example, in Florentine communal palaces the inner courtyard was referred to as a 'claustrum' (Trachtenberg 1989: 577; Frati 2018: 74, 80).

As in Florence, however, it was not long before the 'dormitory' in Pistoia was divided into separate rooms, which by 1453 (Tesi 1995a: 139) occupied the entire northern wing of the first mezzanine that was accessed from the first floor by an internal staircase (**Figure 16**). Over the years, the original simplicity of the rooms must have given way to rich furnishings and decorations, as suggested by the *Libri delle spese per l'adornamento del palazzo* kept by the *operai del palazzo* (the officers in charge of the building's

maintenance), where expenditure for the purchase of tapestries and wall hangings, backboards and sideboards, banquettes and silverware is not uncommon.[28]

The fact that a considerable part of this expenditure was devoted to the embellishment of the living quarters of the *priori* and *gonfaloniere* is confirmed by the inventories of the palace's furniture, which begin to be kept continuously in 1533 and document the increasing richness of the furnishings that adorned the rooms of the 'dormentorio'. The last of these inventories, dated 1716, records the existence of crystal mirrors and satin baldachins, inlaid buffets and gaming tables, and gilded chairs and armchairs as well as an enormous quantity of silver objects, the list of which fills five folio pages (Massaio del Comune 24: 52v–56v). The most lavish rooms were those of the *gonfaloniere*, who at the beginning of the 18th century had not only two rooms on the first mezzanine but also a reception suite on the first floor, consisting of three rooms and an antechamber (Fabbrica del palazzo 1, Libro della fabbrica del Palazzo de' Signori Priori e della cappella' [1698–1705]) (**Figure 17g**). According to the inventory of 1716, there were no less than 48 armchairs and 25 chairs, gilded and upholstered in leather or velvet, about 20 paintings with guilloché frames (these were mostly of sacred subjects but also included portraits of the grand dukes of Florence, Pope Clement IX and the Duchess Maria Pallavicini Rospigliosi), and a golden guilloched torch holder, a large mirror, and a wooden model of the Chapel of San Jacopo (Massaio del comune 24: 25r–31v).[29]

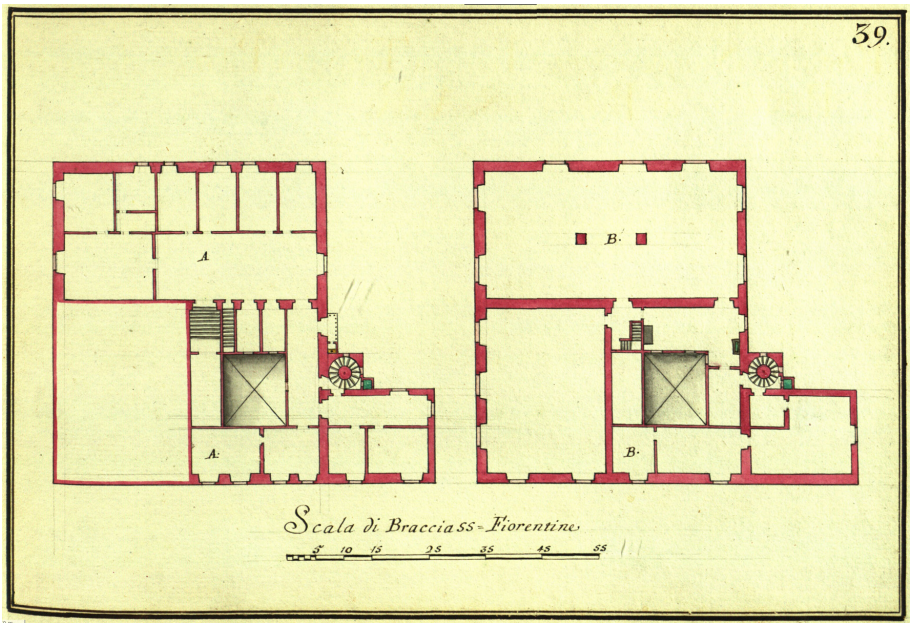

Figure 16: Plan of the second and third floors of Pistoia's communal palace, 1770–1780 (Palazzi di SAR: 39). a. dormitory; b. attic.

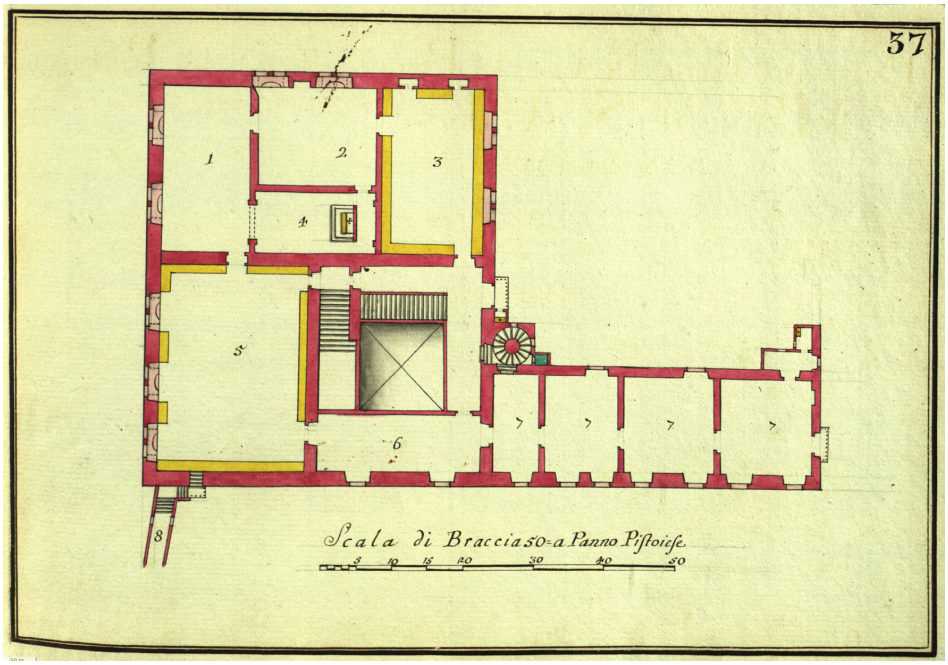

Figure 17: Plan of the first floor of Pistoia's communal palace, 1770–1780 (Palazzi di SAR: 37). 1. winter hall; 2. Ghibelline rooms; 3. summer lounge for the academy; 4. chapel; 5. council hall; 6. Guelf rooms; 7. *gonfaloniere* rooms; 8. passage.]

The entire upper floor of the palace above 'dormentorio' was occupied by service rooms (kitchens, pantries, barber's shop, dinettes) and lodgings for the servants, whose tasks from 1553 onwards were governed by a strict set of duties in accordance with the etiquette in vogue at court at the time (**Figure 16**). The 'lower household', based on the ground floor, consisted of 'tavolaccini' (messengers and ushers), while the 'upper household' was made of up trumpeters, valets, and cooks under the direction of a butler who were responsible for attending to the personal needs of the *priori* and for performing the duties of seneschal and bursar. The members of the upper staff were obliged to reside in the palace and never to leave it for any reason, except to march together, in livery, behind the *priori* on parades (Raccolte 6: 604r–605v, 610r-v).

In all, no fewer than 50 people lived and worked permanently on the upper floors of the palace. Initially, they could only access their quarters by means of a single vertical connection, the aforementioned staircase, which the highest magistrates shared with the humblest servants and noble visitors. To avoid this inconvenience, in 1637 a passage was built between the council hall and the cathedral (**Figure 17.8**), so that the *priori* could have access to their box in the choir without having to mix with the common people (D'Afflitto and Mannini 1982: 28). Later, in 1681, a spiral staircase was built at the rear of the palace that directly served all the floors of the building up to the top floor,

thus providing the inhabitants with a quick — as well as exclusive — means of access to their quarters (Raccolte 4: 145r–149v; D'Afflitto and Mannini 1982: 29) (**Figure 18**).[30]

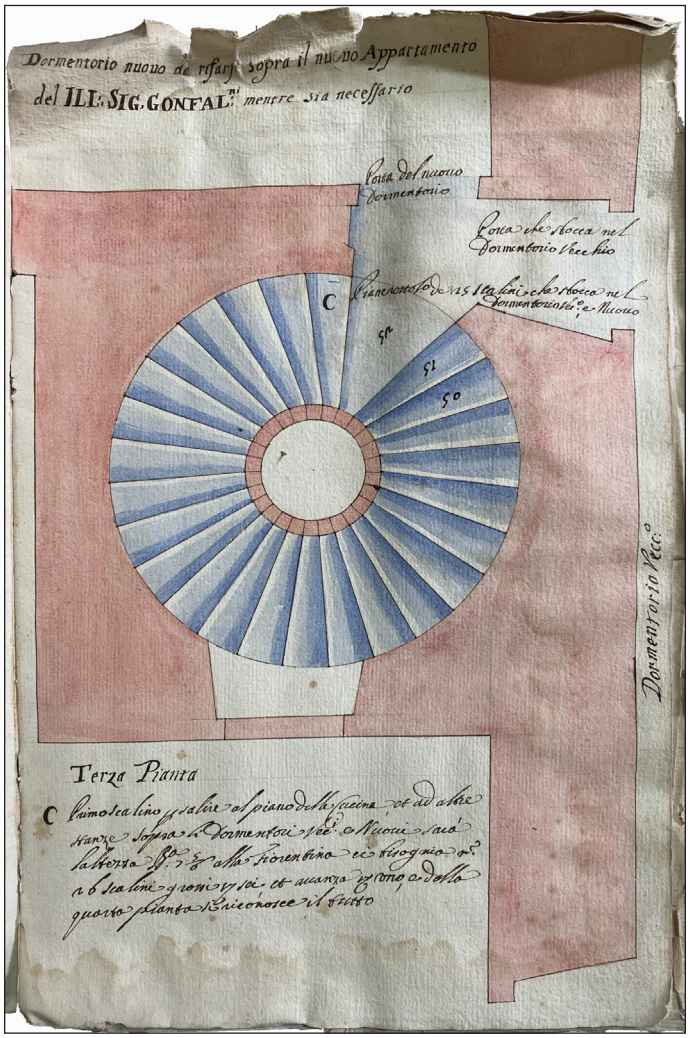

Figure 18: Plan of the third level of the spiral staircase built at the back of Pistoia's communal palace, 1681 (Raccolte 4: 147r). Courtesy of Ministero della cultura, Archivio di Stato di Pistoia, prot. n. 1329–2024.

The halls and lounges on the first floor were affected by the same process of renovation aimed at updating the image of the palace by transforming it from an emblem of the "popular" character of the city magistracies into a privileged stage for noble sociability (**Figure 17**). Again, the furnishings and decoration — as well as the way the rooms were used as recorded in the sources — give us the measure of the change.[31] In theory, the *priori* resided on the first mezzanine, while the first floor below

was reserved for the collegial use of the councils and main magistracies of the city. By the mid-16th century, however, everyday practice must have been quite different, for in 1555 the city statutes included a rule forbidding the *priori* to 'keep beds in rooms of the palace other than in those of the dormitory' (Raccolte 12: 560r). A century later, the plan for a new suite for the *gonfaloniere* submitted by one Pier Maria Rutati in 1641 gives us an extraordinary insight into how the rooms on the first floor were used. The attached drawing shows that the northern rooms — once reserved for board meetings —had been converted into 'salotti' (living rooms) that were at the disposal of the inhabitants, who would use them seasonally, following a custom common among the nobility of the time (Raccolte 4, Pensiero et inventione [...] della nuova abitatione dell'Ill. sign. Gonfaloniere; Raccolte 13: 65r, 98r-v, 127r) (**Figure 19**).[32] A report on the state of the building a few years later tells us that at least one of these living rooms ('la terza sala dove si giuoca') was being used as a place of leisure rather than as an office (Raccolte 13: 95r; Raccolte 95r-v, 129r-v, Visita del palazzo della Signoria fatta dall'ill. sign. cavaliere e baron Bartolomeo Bracciolini, March-April 1659).

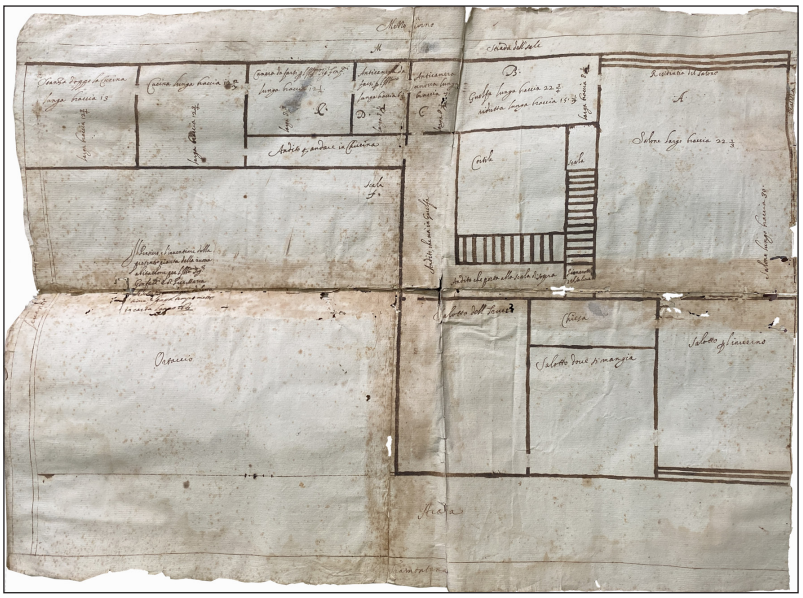

Figure 19: Pier Maria Rutati, plan for the *gonfaloniere*'s new apartment, 1641 (Raccolte 4). Courtesy of Ministero della cultura, Archivio di Stato di Pistoia, prot. n. 1329–2024.

In fact, by this time even the 'royal hall' had long been used for purposes quite different from its original ones. We know that starting in the early 16th century it was repeatedly used to stage comedies and plays that the city's high society attended, and these performances were probably followed by parties and banquets (the 1606 carnival play, according to an eyewitness, was attended by 'a crowded and noble audience of

citizen and foreign gentlemen' [Chiappelli 1913: 18–19]). The theatrical installations were temporary at first, but they became so popular that in 1666 a 'comedy hall' was built ('stanzone delle commedie') in the rear garden of the palace, with adjoining 'rooms for the comedians' (Raccolte 4: 146r–147v; 13: 97v; Tesi 1995a: 139) (**Figure 20**). The date is relevant because in the same year one of the lounges on the first floor (the so-called Camera Ghibellina, previously used as a 'summer living room') was permanently assigned as the host space for the public meetings of the Accademia dei Risvegliati, a literary academy founded 20 years earlier, one of whose main tasks was to organize musical and theatrical performances. For several decades after, the concerts and academic conferences held in the palace, which, unusually, were open to ladies, attracted visitors from beyond the city walls and were sometimes attended by the grand dukes and the cream of the Tuscan aristocracy (Chiappelli 1913: 17–34).[33]

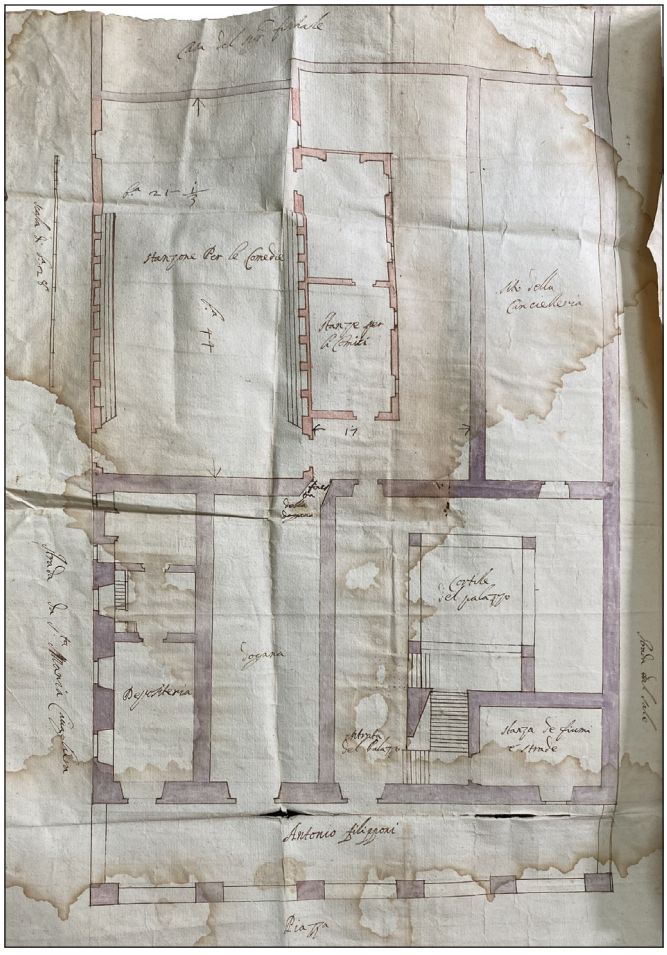

Figure 20: A. Filipponi, plan for a theatre hall in Pistoia's communal palace, 1666 (Raccolte 4: 146r–147v). Courtesy of Ministero della cultura, Archivio di Stato di Pistoia, prot. n. 1329–2024.

Epilogue

The obligation for the *priori* to reside in the palace was apparently lifted in 1739; later, the Lorraine reforms thoroughly reorganised the city's administration and changed how people were able to access to local offices (Sordi 1991; Chiavistelli 2012).[34] Thus, even before the fall of the old regime, the skin — and the name — of Pistoia's communal palace was changed once again. Once it was turned into a 'palazzo comunitativo' (1777), it lost all its residential functions and became primarily the seat of the newly formed Pistoia civic community.[35] The revolution was just around the corner: after all traces of the period when it had been the stronghold of aristocratic rule over the city had been erased, it was imbued with the new patriotic values that local society embraced with increasing enthusiasm in the age of the Risorgimento. In the second half of the 19th century the palace — which was used as a stage for pompous civic liturgies such as the *parentali ai grandi italiani* and tributes to the remains of Ugo Foscolo on their way to burial in Santa Croce — came to be celebrated as a monumental symbol of the 'historical-political memories of the people and community of Pistoia': a tangible embodiment of the city's long-espoused libertarian ideals (Tigri 1853: 155).[36] It was in this context of both municipalist and neo-medieval revival (the two aspects were often closely intertwined) that the fictitious image of continuity we began with took shape, conveyed by several "conservative" restoration campaigns carried out until the end of the last century.

Notes

[1] For an outline on Pistoia's Piazza del Duomo and its surrounding buildings, see Gurrieri 1995.
[2] For an overview of the *broletto*, see Tosco 2016.
[3] About the possible layout of the 13th-century palace, see Rauty 1991, 268–269 and Tesi 1995a, 129–131.
[4] On popular governments in Pistoia, see Francesconi 2015: xv–xx and Francesconi 2020: 69–75.
[5] For a more general overview, see Beani 1909b and Rauty 1991: 272–273.
[6] For urban planning in Florence at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, see Trachtenberg 1997. On Florentine influence Pistoia in late 13th century, see Francesconi 2015: xvi–xvii.
[7] On the 14th-century palace, see Rauty 1991: 268–269, Tesi 1995a: 130–143, Bottari Scarfantoni 1998: 36–38, Rauty 2003, and Folin forthcoming.
[8] For later appointments, see Regesti 2015: 1743, 1775, 1812.
[9] For the 1338 petition, see Provvisioni 5: 336r and Regesti 2015: 1817.
[10] See also Rauty 2003; his idea that the purchases were intended to provide the *anziani* with temporary housing, however, is questionable.
[11] On the *pictura*, see Boggi 2007: 255 and Guazzini and Ravalli 2022: 144. On the purchase of timber and tiles for the roof, see Regesti 2015, 2075, 2092, 2174, 2912.
[12] In the case of the Palazzo Pretorio, work seems to have begun at the front; the courtyard was undertaken at a later stage (Gai 1988: 35–36).
[13] For Bargello's courtyard, see Yunn 2015, 123–178.
[14] On the decorations, see Boggi 2007: 256.
[15] On the Loggia della Signoria and civic loggias in 14th-century Tuscany, see Sexton 1997: 176–268 and Sexton 2015.
[16] On the Palazzo del Capitano di Custodia (later known as the Palazzaccio), see Gai 1990.
[17] For the meaning of the benches, see Elet 2002.
[18] On the *Liber censuum* and its date, see Francesconi 2007b: 161–162.
[19] On the annexation of 1401 and its consequences, see Gai 1980, Zorzi 2004, and Francesconi 2011.
[20] For the oath of Florentine rectors, see Minuti 1892: 307.
[21] For the laws on prostitutes, see Raccolte 433v and Gai 1980: 36–37.
[22] On the allegory, see Gai 1980: 97. As for the games recorded in the inventories, see, for instance, Massaio del comune 24: 33r–34r.
[23] On Grandonio's figure in Pistoiese imagery, see Gai 1985: 5–10.
[24] For the Medicean coat of arms, see Raccolte 12: 21r-v, 26r and Gai 1980: 24.
[25] On the *consiglio dei graduati*, see Vivoli 204: 12–13 and Francesconi 2011, 422. On the shrinkage of Pistoia's ruling class, see Gai 1980: 38–40.
[26] Similar distinctions are made in the 'Capitoli sopra il vestire' issued in 1547 (476r–484v) but not in the *capitoli* of 1529 and 1506–1508 (Raccolte 467r–468v; 12, fasc. 14: 2r–7v). On Pistoia's sumptuary laws, see Zanelli 1895.
[27] On shops within aristocratic palaces, see Conforti 2008 and Nevola 2011.
[28] For the entry and exit registers kept by the *operai* of the palace, see Altieri Magliozzi 1985, 145–147.
[29] For the portrait of Maria Pallavicini Rospigliosi, see D'Afflitto and Mannini 1982: 29 and Mazzi 1982: 49–50.
[30] A staircase leading from the dormitory down to the 'uscio del soccorso' already existed in the early 16th century (Raccolte 12: 27r, 12 September 1516).
[31] For the main renovations carried out on the first floor in the early modern period, see Tesi 1995a: 135–136, 138–139. Some information on the refurbishment of the halls can also be found in D'Afflitto and Mannini 1982.
[32] A later project to refurbish the *gonfaloniere*'s lodgings was presented in 1666 (96r-v). On seasonal apartments, see Howard 2001.
[33] On the Accademia dei Risvegliati, see Fedi 2011.
[34] For the abolition of the requirement to live in the palace, see Tigri 1853: 161.
[35] For the background regarding these changes, see Petracchi 2000.
[36] For the *parentali ai grandi italiani* and the tribute to Ugo Foscolo, see Cappellini and Dominici 2017: 14, 18–23. On the history of the Palazzo Comunitativo between the 19th and 20th centuries more generally, see Tesi 1995a: 36 and Breschi 1982.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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