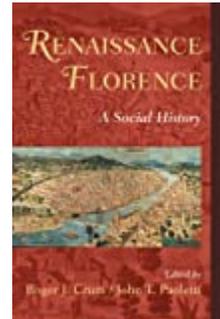




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Reviewed by Ann Moyer (Department of History, University of Pennsylvania)

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City Culture: Places, Spaces, and People in Renaissance Florence

Florence is almost surely the most studied city in early modern Europe, and has been so for some time. High literacy rates and well-preserved archives, as well as its cultural productivity, have made it a target for decades of scholars in a variety of fields. Those who specialize in other regions of Italy in particular have been known to grumble on occasion at the degree to which, as a consequence, Florence and things Florentine are simply taken as the norm or model for the entire peninsula. An advantage of this concentration of interest, however, is the specificity and depth that are possible in examining local culture in late medieval, Renaissance, and early modern European society by building upon such a well-established base of knowledge. The articles that make up the present volume serve as a compelling example. The choice of title is unfortunate, for it suggests an anthology that updates or summarizes the range of social-historical scholarship that has bulked so large in the archival research on Florence over the past several decades. In fact, this collection focuses more specifically on space, places, and objects in the urban experience of Florentines and others in the city. The various essays build on the substantial research in Florentine social history or the his-

tory of art, and integrate the two disciplines in a valuable and innovative collection. Editors Roger Crum and John Paoletti lay out the main themes and goals in an introductory essay. As art historians, they acknowledge a particular debt to the earlier work of social historians such as Richard Trexler's interest in civic and public ritual, Richard Goldthwaite's studies of the economies of building and painting, and a number of others. Their work had the effect of "de-aestheticizing" works of art and especially architectural spaces, helping art historians see the objects of their study with fresh eyes. Crum and Paoletti have grouped the contributions into categories: the city itself as theater; the public realm; private spaces; gender and space; Christian religious space; and a final section on workshops and art production. John Najemy leads off with a general discussion of city space and politics from the communal era through the sixteenth century. The great families of medieval Florence identified with particular neighborhoods and marked them especially with their house towers; even the *primo popolo*, the guild government of the mid-thirteenth century, met in one. The bell towers of city halls built in the following decades set limits with their own height on the height of those towers

in family hands. Civic authority made visible its new superiority to family power. Leonardo Bruni later praised the familial *palazzi* of his age; and the Medici dukes continued to make symbols both of family houses and civic structures. Sharon Strocchia follows up with a survey of the city's principal outdoor urban spaces: its piazzas, street corners (*canti*), gates, and bridges. From here, attention moves to one and then another set of specific public spaces, beginning with the city's civic heart in the Piazza della Signoria. In the late thirteenth century this piazza set off the new *palazzo* of the priors, with its Guelf party alignment and guild-based rule solidified by the Ordinances of Justice passed in the 1290s. Not only did it provide a gathering place for meetings of the full citizenry and for hearing speeches; its location on the former site of the houses of prominent Ghibelline families spoke eloquently to Florentines about the power of city and party over private families and interests. The square itself underwent several expansions over time, chronicled by Stephen Milner. Sarah Blake McHam follows up with a discussion of the Palazzo della Signoria itself. It too was subject to numerous remodelings, expansions, and embellishments with sculptural commissions. Savonarola's political reforms of the 1490s led to a new meeting room (now known as the Room of the Five Hundred), redecorated in the sixteenth century by Cosimo I. The changes in the building not only correlate with changes in governmental structure; their decorative programs also reveal an interest in recalling the past both of the city and of the building itself to the Florentines and others who conducted business there. Guilds not only participated in the running of the city; they and other corporate bodies developed and maintained charitable institutions of various kinds. Feeding the poor and indigent, housing foundlings and orphans, and caring for the sick were among the tasks supported by groups of Florentines. The groups and their charitable projects were often housed in buildings of some significance, as Philip Gavitt recounts. The urban poor themselves had fewer resources to leave architectural marks upon the urban fabric; many of their divisions of space left traces that are harder now to discern. By the late fifteenth century, the city was mapped not only into the parishes and militia districts known by their banners, but also festival brigades known as "*potenze*" that left marks of their boundaries still identifiable on the walls of city buildings. These groups, which drew their membership mainly from lower social and income levels, celebrated May Day and other holidays, including Carnival, and also made pilgrimages to local shrines. They went into decline in the early seventeenth century; David Rosenthal attributes the cause primarily to the era's reli-

gious reform impulses. They were able to develop their alternate mapping of the city, divided among these various festival "kingdoms," especially because each of the city's individual neighborhoods and official *gonfaloni* included residents at all social levels, rather than clustering them into solidly wealthy or poor sections. Neighborhood identities remained strong throughout the era, though Nicholas Eckstein notes that by the sixteenth century they competed with other, more city-wide types of community identity that arose especially with that era's increasing degree of social stratification. Other uses of space have also left only the faintest of traces. The Wool Guild organized the itineraries or visiting wool merchants during the fourteenth century by channeling them into specific routes and itineraries with visits to the guild hall and relevant clusters of shops. Thus they orchestrated to a significant degree the Florentine experience of these visitors to the city. The aim, according to Adrienne Atwell, was to promote foreign trade by presenting a uniform, impressive, and organized experience to foreign traders. House towers may have ceased to define the environs of Florence's big families by the fourteenth century, but real estate remained a way to express identity, as seen in the term "house" (*casa*) to refer both to family and to dwelling. Florentines developed a variety of legal incentives that encouraged ownership and investment in private residences. *Palazzo*-building accelerated already in the fourteenth century and really hit its stride in the fifteenth and finally stabilized as a style that persisted long afterwards. Their owners filled these very substantial residences with items not only for personal comfort but also for display, contributing to the development of both artistic and artisanal production in the city. Michael Lingohr, Roger Crum, and John Paoletti discuss the development of these spaces and the issues attached to those who were permitted, or invited, to see and to visit them. Domestic spaces were of course a particularly female realm. The growing use of this space by visitors in search of favor for positions and other preferments from powerful families provided an arena in which the women of these powerful families, above all the Medici, could exercise political and social patronage. Street life was more clearly dominated by men, though women of lower classes faced fewer restrictions on their movement, and those of the major houses certainly managed to circulate through the city. Natalie Tomas and Guido Ruggiero discuss these issues of gendered space, the latter reminding us of the powers of jest and ridicule in displays of dominance among Florentine men. Florence's numerous churches saw extensive and famous rebuilding and remodeling during this period. Their artistic his-

tories are well known and much examined; the relationships of those changes to the liturgical functions of these spaces are often less familiar. Robert Gaston takes the reader through a number of these sacred spaces as understood and described by a range of contemporaries clerical and lay, from the Archbishop Antonino to Francesco Bocchi. Wealthy donors and major families sought and found a presence in these buildings, with family chapels that challenged architects seeking Renaissance balance and decorum in their plans. On the other hand, as Jonathan Katz Nelson shows, the incorporation of such chapels successfully into the design might also provide a source of patronage revenue important to the successful completion of the project. Santa Croce, Santa Maria Novella, Santo Spirito, the great medieval churches of the friars and mendicants, had all been built in sections of town that still had open space both for these large churches and the equally large piazzas that accompanied them. Both the indoor and outdoor spaces served to accommodate the preaching for which these orders were known. Peter Howard traces their development, and the continued innovations in the placement and design of pulpits. Convents also had an increasing need for space throughout the Renaissance; while the number of male mendicants in Florence declined through the fifteenth century and after, the number of women continued to climb. Sandra Weddle discusses their foundations, influence, and

the patronage they enjoyed. A final section investigates issues specific to art production. Anabel Thomas assesses the importance of the artists' workshop system in their business development, the use of out-of-town commissions to raise their professional profiles, and the organization of major projects. At the same time, the media and business of print-making were expanding, and with it the market for smaller art objects. Statuettes, reliefs, terra-cottas, and medals fed a growing taste for the collection of art objects among a wider group of people. Patricia Emison treats this development along with the concurrent increase in the importance and status of the individual artist. Andrea Bolland concludes the collection with a focus on the latter phenomenon, most obvious in the image-making surrounding Michelangelo. Substantial notes and bibliography expand this volume to a very hefty size. Yet unlike many large encyclopedic collections of recent years that serve mainly to digest the authors' and other longer works on the subjects at hand, this volume contains much that is new without merely descending into detail and the particular. It points to the value of accumulated local knowledge and scholarship in allowing for richer and finer-grained historical understanding. It also serves as an example of the continuing fruitful collaborations between history and the history of art that have long characterized Renaissance studies.

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