

Papal and municipal authority in the city: house-destruction as a legal punishment in Renaissance Rome

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This article focuses on house-destruction as a legal punishment, as prescribed and practised in Rome over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It argues that the reintroduction of the punishment by Pope Paul II (r. 1464–71), and its application by Pope Sixtus IV (r. 1471–84), should be read against contemporary papal attempts to increase their political and legal authority in the city, to the detriment of the authority wielded by municipal officials. By setting the Roman case against a wider chronological and geographical background, it also shows how it was representative of a broader European evolution, in which house-destruction was progressively abolished by municipal authorities, but continued to be practised by individuals holding more centralized power as a means to assert and display authority. Finally, it shows how house-destruction as a legal punishment was used as a political tool by Pope Sixtus IV alongside other practices of demolition as part of his urban renewal programme.