

The Material Culture of Magnificence in Early Modern Cities

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Nele De Raedt - *Building a City Residence in Early Modern Italy: Magnificence as a Contribution or Threat to Social and Political Order?*

Abstract

This paper explores the specific conditions and restrictions, imposed by the urban environment, to the creation of magnificent city residences by the social and political elite of Renaissance Italy. Traditionally, city residences were considered to be an ornament to the city, creating the expectation for wealthy citizens to contribute to the city's splendor by building such a residence. However, building a magnificent residence in the city was not without controversy. Multiple authors, both ancient and modern, attributed Rome's decline to the ever-growing desire for luxury and opulence among its elite. Political theories equally warned for envy among citizens, destabilising the stability of the *civitas*. This paper examines discussions of the design of the city residence in architectural and political theories in Renaissance Italy as a means of addressing the specific conditions created by the urban environment for the exercise of magnificence in early modern cities.