SHORTER NOTICE

The Castellated Façade of Montepulciano's Palazzo Comunale, 1440: An Image of Florentine Territorial Hegemony

by KOCHING CHAO

ABSTRACT

This article explores the connection between the castellated façade of Montepulciano's Palazzo Comunale and Florence's development into a territorial state in the mid-fifteenth century. In 1440, the *comune* of Montepulciano commissioned a new façade for its town hall from the prominent Florentine architect Michelozzo. While scholars have widely accepted Michelozzo's design as an imitation of Florence's Palazzo della Signoria, hitherto unpublished documents preserved in Montepulciano's Biblioteca Comunale e Archivio Storico 'Piero Calamandrei' enable further interpretation of the town hall's fortress-like profile from a geopolitical and military perspective. According to the new textual evidence, Montepulciano maintained a close cooperation with the Dieci di Balìa — Florence's war committee — from the late 1430s onwards and contributed to its military efforts against Milan, which climaxed in the battle of Anghiari the same year that the façade renovation was initiated. In view of Florence's decisive victory in the battle, this article argues that the familiar castellated appearance of the new façade was a celebratory manifestation of the city's military pride and that this was shared by the town. The architecture of the town hall can also be seen as testifying to the role played by castellation in expressing Florence's territorial ideology.

On 16 October 1440, the *comune* of Montepulciano drafted a letter commissioning the Florentine architect and sculptor Michelozzo (1396–1472) to make a folio-sized drawing for the façade of its thirteenth-century Palazzo Comunale, the restoration of which it had commenced earlier that year.[1] Although no drawings or other archival documents survive to confirm Michelozzo's authorship, the attribution made by Howard Saalman in the 1960s is not disputed.[2] Arguing that the façade is 'a symmetrised and simplified version' of that of the Palazzo della Signoria in Florence (Figs 1 and 2), Saalman situated Montepulciano's communal palace in a Florentine civic architectural tradition and pointed to the influence of a prominent cultural centre on architectural progression.[3] In subsequent literature, however, the Montepulciano façade has often been characterised

Fig. 1. *Montepulciano, Palazzo Comunale, renovated 1440–c.1465*
to a design by Michelozzo, photograph of 2016 by the author

Fig. 2. *Florence, Palazzo della Signoria, built 1299–1314,*
photograph of 2016 by the author

reductively as an out-of-date, mechanical copy of its Florentine model.[4] Such a view-point neglects the symbolism of communal palaces as cornerstones of local civic and historical identity, and does not recognise the interrelationships between the centre and periphery in the Florentine territorial state.[5] The aim of this article is to provide further interpretation of Michelozzo's design, which takes better account of the civic agency behind the town hall's fortified and quasi-Florentine appearance.

The original construction of Montepulciano's Palazzo Comunale in the mid-thirteenth century marked the town's transition in 1243 from a fortified settlement (*castrum*) to a politically autonomous territory (*terra*).[6] In addition to serving as a residence and office for local magistrates, the communal palace was an important site for public events and ceremonies.[7] Even after the jurisdiction of the town was ceded to the Sienese in 1260, and then to the Florentines soon after 1404, the palace was still, for the *poliziani* (as local residents and their government referred to themselves), the nucleus of their public life. Given the building's significance to the local *comune*, it is all the more striking that its new façade resembles that of Florence's seat of government, and this prompts two major questions. Why did the *poliziani* decide to adopt a Florentine architectural model for their town hall when no other *comune* in the Florentine state made any such alteration to theirs? And why did they launch the façade project in 1440, almost half a century after the town came under Florentine rule? Making use of hitherto unpublished sources in Montepulciano's Biblioteca Comunale e Archivio Storico 'Piero Calamandrei', this article provides answers by re-examining the 1440 façade project in respect to its building history, the legal procedures adopted for its execution, and the scheme's contemporary geopolitical and military context. In so doing, it furthers understanding of the role played by Montepulciano's civic palace in Florence's surging territorial hegemony and, more broadly, the relationship between the central government in the city and the local communes that formed its strategic defensive outposts.[8]

A JOINT PROJECT OF CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Functioning as the administrative, juridical, civic and military locus, the communal palace was central to the life of a *comune*, and its construction, expansion, renovation or repair often entailed a series of legal, constitutional and administrative procedures. This was very much the case in Montepulciano. According to the minutes of the governing assembly, a petition to renovate the façade of the Palazzo Comunale (*facies anterior palatij*) was proposed by the town's standard-bearer (*gonfaloniere*) and priors on 27 February 1440, and was subsequently approved by the general council.[9] The petition claimed that 'repairing the communal palace façade was necessary since its dilapidated state was an obstacle to the good functioning of the building', and that 'any expenses related to the project were for the common utility and honour of the *comune*'; it then added that 'the façade of the aforesaid palace shall be constructed in the manner and form that would be deemed useful and honourable for the *comune*'.[10] This resolution, in addition to explaining the need to renovate the façade, initiated a legal procedure for carrying out the project. A committee was formed to supervise the work, entrusted with the tasks of estimating the budget for the renovation and providing a financial evaluation for the communal treasurer (*camerarius*).[11]

The Montepulciano resolution might appear to suggest that the façade renovation was a small-scale local decision, because much less discussed is the Florentine government's involvement in the project. Minutes of the assembly from 27 February 1440 show that this meeting was overseen by Totto di Buoninsegna de' Machiavelli, a commissioner of Florence's special war committee, the Dieci di Balìa, rather than by the Montepulciano priors as would normally have been the case, and that he offered encouraging advice on 'utility' and 'common good'.[12] In his study of late fifteenth-century Florentine governing strategies, William Connell has noted that the appointment of commissioners from Florence to its subject cities and towns can be understood as an indicator of crisis, as their responsibilities included not only commissioning and overseeing fortifications in Florence's subject towns and cities, but also reconciling internal conflicts between local and central government, as well as acting as mediators in times of war between the Florentine government and its war captains (*condottieri*).[13] Totto de'Machiavelli came from one of Florence's old oligarchic families, and one that had close connections with Montepulciano.[14] His father, Buoninsegna Filippo de'Machiavelli, who served as a Florentine prior in 1383 and 1396, had been one of four officials sent to supervise the construction of a Florentine stronghold (*càssero*) in Montepulciano in 1392.[15] His brother, Giovanni di Buoninsegna de'Machiavelli, served as the chief magistrate (*podestà*) in Montepulciano from 1439, the year before the new façade was proposed.[16] This record of public service in both Florence and Montepulciano would have contributed to the family's understanding of central and local Montepulciano governments, making Totto an appropriate choice to facilitate discourse between the two.

In fact, a missive of 29 February 1440 reveals that on 27 February, the day when the façade project was approved under Totto's supervision, the *poliziani* received a letter from their envoy in Florence, who had been sent to the city to file a petition to the Florentine Signoria for an exemption from food supplies requested by the Dieci.[17] The *poliziani* were claiming that the exemption was needed because of the poor yield of the harvest, but the boldness of the request is indicative of the local *comune*'s semi-autonomous status, and this helps to explain why Totto had been sent there. The presence of Totto in Montepulciano not only implies the importance of the Dieci in fostering central–local dialogue; it also draws attention to the central government's monitoring of local public affairs, and its awareness of the renovation project from an early stage. Given that the Dieci was an extraordinary committee only formed during wartime, what also needs explaining is why it showed any interest in Montepulciano's façade renovation, and whether the town hall was somehow related to the state's military campaign. These matters become much clearer through examination of the military and diplomatic situation at around the time the town hall façade was commissioned.

FLORENCE'S TERRITORIAL DEFENCE AND THE BATTLE OF ANGHIARI, 1440

Montepulciano, a rural agricultural community, is situated in southeast Tuscany, a little over a hundred kilometres from Florence (Fig. 3). Although its peripheral location within the Florentine state may not be particularly significant, its position overlooking the Valdichiana (the Chiana river valley) nevertheless had great strategic advantages both for the town and for Florence.[18] As the highest settlement in the valley (607 m above sea

Fig. 3. The Florentine and Sienese republics in the fifteenth century, map drawn by the author

level), Montepulciano enabled Florence to monitor military undertakings of rival states, in the Val d'Orcia to the west and as far away as the Lago di Trasimeno to the east. More immediately to the east, in addition, was the Ponte a Valiano, one of the major bridges across the Chiana river, which gave easy access to subject *comuni* scattered along its sides.[19] The town's strategic value became especially great in the 1430s. It was then that the duke of Milan, Filippo Maria Visconti, began taking steps towards expanding his rule and focusing his efforts on central Italy.[20] The duke's military captain, Niccolò Piccinino, established a garrison near the northern end of the Valdichiana in October 1436, in preparation for an invasion of Florentine territory.[21]

Montepulciano's involvement in Florence's war against Milan was recorded by Niccolò Machiavelli. In his *Istorie fiorentine*, he mentioned that in 1440 a ciphered missive had been intercepted by Florentine secret agents in the town.[22] The letter had been sent to Niccolò Piccinino by his counterpart Cardinal Giovanni Vitelleschi, the military captain of Pope Eugenius IV. Even though the contents of this letter were not decoded,

Vitelleschi's attempt to contact Piccinino was in itself suspicious, since until that time there had been an alliance and private friendship between Eugenius and the de facto ruler of Florence, Cosimo de' Medici, whom Eugenius had supported against the duke of Milan.[23] Florence feared that Vitelleschi would change sides and send his troops from Rome to cooperate with Piccinino in Tuscany to the north, thereby surrounding much of Florence's territory. As it turned out, Eugenius was persuaded by the Florentine government of Vitelleschi's plan to merge with the Milanese force and had Vitelleschi arrested for treason and sent to prison, where he died shortly afterwards.[24]

Yet the exposure of this plot was not enough to slow the Milanese duke's ambition. Tensions continued to rise in Tuscany as Piccinino led the Milanese troops to merge with those of their ally, the count of Poppi in the Casentino, and to threaten the Valdichiana to the south. A missive sent by the *poliziani* to the Dieci in Florence on 17 June 1440 (original in the appendix on page 16, document 1) reveals the impact that the Florentine–Milanese conflict was having on the Valdichiana region:

> Magnificent fathers and most honoured Lords. We hope Your Magnificence is aware that Niccolò Piccinino or his brigades are on the battlefield in the territory of Cortona. With this letter, we beg your lordships to intervene quickly in Valiano. Its loss would bring great harm to Cortona, Castiglion [Fiorentino], Fojano, and it would cut off our access to the Fortezza of Valiano. Having seen this evil, we have sent some of our men there, as well as to the Torre di Chiana. We hope the said Torre di Chiana will be saved, but we have grave doubts about Valiano because it has not been properly fortified, and for many other reasons and shortcomings that we do not mention out of respect. Furthermore, we have information from our source that, of the men stationed in Valiano to defend the fortress, around seventeen have fled. For God's sake, Magnificent Lords, send mercenary infantrymen quickly to defend the place, because if you do not do that, it will be lost, bringing great harm to the land. Apparently Baldoccio is in Fighine, a fortified town belonging to Orvieto, 14 miles from us, and we are doubtful about him, although he cannot attack us except through Sienese territory. It is said that he [Baldoccio] is Niccolò Piccinino's infantry captain, but he says he is his own man and no other's. We hope Your Lordships know the truth about this and we await your information. We are ever ready to serve Your Magnificence. Written in the territory of Montepulciano, on 17 June 1440, at 23 o'clock.[25]

This letter conveys Montepulciano's vulnerability, as well as the determination of the *poliziani* to defend it. It also implies that Florence had delegated responsibility to the *poliziani* for guarding the key strongholds and castles scattered to the west of Lago di Trasimeno, such as the towers of Valiano and Chiana. More generally, the request for foreign mercenaries indicates the poliziani's awareness of the pressing nature of the central government's military operations against the Milanese.

On 29 June 1440, only twelve days after the letter requesting military support, armed conflict between the Florentine and Milanese broke out near the fortified town of Anghiari, around 40 km northeast of Montepulciano. Piccinino, acting on advice from the exiled Florentine Rinaldo degli Albizzi, organised a surprise attack on the Florentine troops who were encamped there, calculating that without the leadership of Francesco Sforza — Florence's *condottiere* who was in Lombardy guarding Venetian territory — they could easily be defeated.[26] However, led by the war commissioners

Neri di Gino Capponi and Bernardo (or Bernardetto) d'Antonio de' Medici, and the war captains Pier Giovanni Paolo Orsini and Baldaccio d'Anghiari, the Florentine troops not only defended the town successfully, but crushed Piccinino's army, which was forced to retreat to Lombardy.[27] As a result, the duke abandoned the ambition to annex Florence.

Although no major battle took place within the territory of Montepulciano, the town's inclusion in Florence's secret-agent network, as well as its participation in the dominant city's military manoeuvres in southeast Tuscany, underscores the crucial role of peripheral settlements in Florence's national defence. Thus, in view of the rising crisis in the Valdichiana from the 1430s onwards, it is not surprising that the Dieci showed its concern about the town's 200-year-old communal palace, as the appearance of this civic palace was vital for the perceived wellbeing and security of both the town and Florence.

THE CIVIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CASTELLATED FAÇADE

News of the victory over Milan at Anghiari reached Florence almost instantly. The two Florentine war commissioners sent a letter to Cosimo de' Medici informing him that their tactics in the battlefield had 'crushed him [Piccinino] and scattered all his people'.[28] The significance of the victory was recognised immediately. Not only was a great celebratory procession organised in just two days, this taking place on 1 July when the campanile of Florence's duomo was lit as though for the feast day of St John the Baptist, but the two commissioners also received great honours from the Florentine government on their return to the city.[29] Historians regard the Battle of Anghiari as a critical event in the rise of Florentine territorial hegemony and a significant increase of Florence's civic confidence.[30] That Florence's *gonfaloniere*-for-life Piero Soderini commissioned Leonardo da Vinci to paint the battle on the wall of the Salone Grande, the largest assembly hall in the Palazzo della Signoria, in 1502 testifies to its continuing historical importance to Florentines.[31]

Montepulciano was swift celebrate and acknowledge the implications of the victory. In a letter of 2 July 1440, the *poliziani* congratulated the Dieci and passionately reaffirmed their fidelity to Florence (original in the appendix on page 16, document 2):

> Magnificent priors and our most honoured lords. On hearing of Tuscany's great victory ensuring the preservation and health [of the region] against the tyrant duke of Milan and Niccolò Piccinino, we wish to express to your Magnificence our most ardent joy and utmost delight. Even the night before your envoy arrived here we celebrated with fireworks and a great feast this victory which had been communicated to us by the *podestà*, by the priors of Fojano and by Paolo da Ghiacceto, Captain of Arezzo, via his own horseman. That evening we had fireworks and had the bells rung, and tomorrow we will have a procession to give thanks to God and St Peter and St Paul who secured such a great victory against the tyrant, which will result in his final extermination, for the glory and eternal fame of the glorious Florentine people and for the preservation, union, health and peace of the whole of Italy. Although your envoy was to have been given 30 florins, we gave him two, reserving the greater gift for when he will bring us news of the present or future death of N.[iccolò] P.[iccinino], true enemy to your Magnificence.[32]

Fig. 4. *Montepulciano, Palazzo Comunale, view from the south, photograph of 2016 by the author*

While hosting feasts and processions to hail military achievements was customary in Italian *comuni*, the celebratory feast in Montepulciano had an even greater significance because it was held on the same day that Florence held its own, as if to mirror the celebration taking place there.[33] The engagement of the *poliziani* in this salutation of Florence's military achievement may be seen not only as a proclamation of their allegiance to the dominant city, but also as a deliberate manifestation of Florence's rule over the town.

The letter of congratulation also draws attention to the town's awareness of the rhetorical debates on tyrants and republics which were informing the armed conflicts of this time. For instance, the *poliziani* congratulated Florence for its military success against its 'true enemy' (*vero inimico*), Niccolò Piccinino, and for the victory 'against the tyrant' (*contro al tiranno*), the duke of Milan. Such rhetoric, as Hans Baron has noted, has

Fig. 5. *Montepulciano, Palazzo Comunale, upper portion, view from the northeast, photograph of 2016 by the author*

its roots in the development of Florence's republican identity during the late fourteenth century, in response to Duke Gian Galeazzo Visconti's interference.[34] Thus, in contrast to the tyrannical duke of Milan, whose conduct harmed his subjects, the Florentine state's republican character and its role as the protector of liberty were highlighted. From this perspective, Florence's defeat of the duke at Anghiari not only substantially reduced Milan's military threat, but also, even more importantly, validated the Florentine republic's military campaign and legitimised its territorial pursuits. Furthermore, the rhetoric surrounding the victory at Anghiari, by linking Florence's reputation with its military success, defined Florentine rule in the region as peaceful and righteous.

Considering Montepulciano's cultural, political and military affiliations with Florence, it is most unlikely to be coincidental that, only three months later, the *poliziani* commissioned Michelozzo, one of the city's most prominent architects and the state's military engineer, to design a façade that paid tribute by mimicking the Palazzo della Signoria. It also becomes clear, in comparing the two façades (Figs 1 and 2), that their resemblance is due in particular to their defensive features and fortified elements. Like the Palazzo della Signoria, Montepulciano's new façade features narrow ground-floor openings contrasting with large arched windows on the upper storeys; moreover, its ground floor is covered with rusticated masonry, even though the two upper storeys

Fig. 6. *Montepulciano, Palazzo Comunale, detail of the upper portion, photograph of 2016 by the author*

are smooth-faced, and the three main storeys are crowned with machicolations and crenellations. The building is then surmounted by a looming tower, likewise topped with machicolations and crenellations, supporting a belfry that is a little narrower but which very much resembles the earlier Florentine building's 'Arnolfo Tower'. Even the projecting machicolations, with their triangular corbels rising from a continuous string course, and the flat-topped crenellations above them echo the Florentine prototype and thus imitate the city's seat of government.

While it seems reasonable to see the castellated design of Montepulciano's town hall as a response to Florence's war against Milan, the extent to which the façade was intended to take on a defensive function is very questionable. The defensive capabilities of the newly faced building, with its travertine cladding covering only the façade and small areas on the building's south and north sides (Figs 4 and 5), are minimal. The projecting machicolated galleries have no 'murder holes' (*cadutoi*) beneath them, which would enable missiles to be aimed at attackers, while the apertures between the triangular corbels, seemingly for shooting arrows, are in fact blind (Fig. 6).[35] The absence of these combat features could be a result of the timing of the new façade's construction. The renovation had barely progressed during the first half of 1440 when the conflict between Florence and Milan was at its climax, and it was largely postponed until
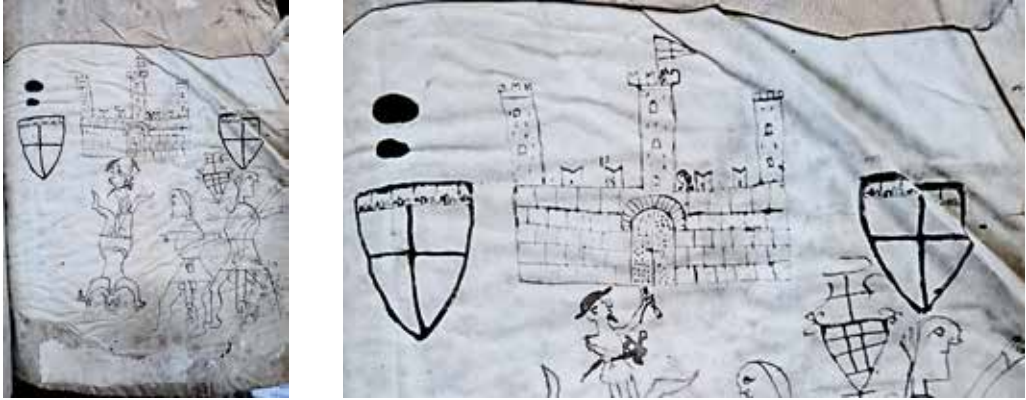
Fig. 7. *Sketch of the* càssero *from the thirteenth or fourteenth century (full page and detail), from the Archivio di stato, Montepulciano, photograph of 2018 by the author*

October 1440, three months after the battle of Anghiari, which was when the *poliziani* sent their invitation to Michelozzo.[36] As Florence's state engineer, Michelozzo would most certainly have understood the significance of Florence's victory at Anghiari, which freed Montepulciano from the pressure of war.[37] He may also have taken the view that there was no need, especially after the end of the war, for the refurbished building to have any particular defensive capability.

At the time of Michelozzo's commission for the Palazzo Comunale, there already existed in the town a *càssero* (stronghold) commissioned and constructed by the Florentine government after 1392, which would have been much more suitable for military purposes than the town hall.[38] A previously unpublished sketch found on the flyleaf of a volume of the town's financial accounts may refer to this structure (Fig. 7).[39] The depiction of quintessential military architectural elements, including three watchtowers, swallow-tailed merlons, a lock on the portal and the grid of lines covering the main structure imitating fine masonry, vividly expresses the building's fortified strength and its potential as a power base. Furthermore, the presence of a man wearing a hat and holding an object resembling a bunch of keys to the fortress gate implies the building's high security (the curious depictions beneath this appear to be later additions).

The fourteenth-century Florentine *càssero* complex deteriorated over time and was replaced by a neo-gothic *fortezza* during the nineteenth century.[40] A section of its old protective stone barrier survives, however, and provides archaeological evidence to the location of the *càssero* immediately next to the town's highest and safest entry point, the Porta San Donato (Fig. 8).[41] This position, close to the town centre and a couple of hundred metres southwest of the Palazzo Comunale, would have allowed Florence to control the town's defensive system, and enabled Florentine forces to be admitted, while the *càssero* would also have been an ideal place of refuge if the town's outer defences had fallen.

Compared to the *càssero*, then, Montepulciano's town hall would have had much less defensive value and would have been much less likely to be used by Florentine forces

Fig. 8. *Montepulciano, masonry remains of the* càssero, *photograph of 2018 by the author*

as a stronghold. It is from this perspective that the new façade's architectural character — theatrical and rhetorical, rather than genuinely military — comes into clearer focus. By carefully incorporating a range of fortification motifs into his design, Michelozzo overlaid a quasi-militaristic and Florentine-like mask on to the town hall's existing body, transforming the minor civic palace into a monument commemorating the city's, as well as the town's, military triumph at Anghiari. For the *poliziani*, the castellated facing of their new town hall would have linked them with the victory. It may even have expressed the transition of the identity of Montepulciano from a minor rural town to an integral part of the Florentine state. For Michelozzo and his Florentine compatriots, the appropriation by a peripheral settlement of the appearance of Florence's seat of government would have offered tangible evidence of the city's presence and dominance over Tuscany, architecturally embodying Florence's self-fashioning as a potent and outward-facing sovereign state. The convergence of the local communal palace with Florentine civic iconography may thus mark the moment when the civic ideologies of Montepulciano and Florence overlapped and reinforced one another. In this way, Montepulciano's new façade expands understanding of the dynamics of architectural and cultural dialogue between Florence and subject towns in the mid-fifteenth century and at the dawn of the city's territorial hegemony.

Fig. 9. *Vicopisano, fortress, upper portion of façade designed by Filippo Brunelleschi after 1436, photograph of 2017 by Daniele Napolitano*

In view of architectural development more generally, the castellated façade of Montepulciano's Palazzo Comunale underscores the twofold role of fortified elements: as a defensive measure, and as a symbol of political and military power. This is perhaps the reason why the fortified exteriors of many of Florence's governmental buildings, including the thirteenth-century Palazzo del Podestà as well as Palazzo della Signoria, were carefully preserved during the Renaissance, because they signified Florence's honourable history and political longevity.[42] It is perhaps also worth noting, in connection with the Montepulciano façade, that the machicolated galleries at the top combine to form an entablature: the lower arches functioning as an architrave, the plain horizontal strip in the middle framed by string courses serving as a frieze, and the battlements acting as a cornice or crown at the top. The arrangement thus fulfils a very similar role to that of the massive cornice crowning Florence's Palazzo Medici, also designed by Michelozzo and begun in 1444.[43] The primarily aesthetic role of these castellated elements is further suggested by their elegant profiles. While the projecting brackets supporting the machicolated galleries in Florence's Palazzo della Signoria

Fig. 10. *Bologna, Casa Berò (or dei Carracci), late fifteenth century, photograph of 1880 by Pietro Poppi*

and Montepulciano's communal palace are of simple triangular shape, the fifteenth-century fortress designed by Filippo Brunelleschi in Vicopisano (after 1436) features stepped brackets that are better suited to defence (Fig. 9), although this building may have been similarly intended to carry a symbolic message.[44] What might appear to be fortification features in later buildings can also be very unsuited to defensive purposes, as is the case with the late fifteenth-century Casa Berò (or dei Carracci) in Bologna (Fig. 10), which has ornamental machicolations to support the overhanging upper storey, rather than to offer any practical means of fortification.[45] From this perspective, it seems fair to characterise Michelozzo's design for Montepulciano as a work of art fulfilling a primarily symbolic and aesthetic role, rather than adding any defensive value to the structure. It thus epitomises, in quattrocento Florence, the civic and theatrical significance of castellation as a form of architectural expression.

APPENDIX

1. Montepulciano, Archivio storico, 'Copialettere', vol. 3, f. 80v, 17 June 1440

The Montepulciano *comune* writes to the Dieci, reporting on the military activities of Niccolò Piccinino's troops in the region of Valdichiana, including Castiglion Fiorentino, Fojano and Cortona.

[Addressed to] Magnificis Dominis Decem

Magnifici patres et domini nostrori honorandissimi. Essendo N.[iccolo] picci[ni]no o sue legate brigate a campo in quello di cortona come essere noto ala magnificentia vostra speriamo. Per la presente la signoria vostra preghiamo che con presteza provengga a valiana. La quale perdendosi gran danno farebbe a cortona a castiglioni a fojano et a noi torrebbe il passo nella forteza di valiana mandati abbiamo di nostri huomini et similemente nella torre di chiane veduto aperto male et da chi era guardata la dicta torre speriamo si salverà di valiana fortemente dubitiamo per non essere stata fortificata et per molti altre ragioni e mancamenti i quali per honesta taciamo. et pure in questo punto aviso abbiamo dat[o] [a]i nostri come gia circa huomini diceasette [insert] di valiana [end of insert] atti alla difensione de luogo se ne sono fuggiti. per dio Magnifico Signore con presteza prevedete con fanti forestieri ala conservation del luogo perche non prevedendo si perdera et grandissimo danno risultera al paese. Baldaccio è in fighini uno dei castelli d'orvieto qui presso a noi a miglia xiiij del quale dubitiamo benche da lui noi non possiamo essere offesi sennò pel territorio di senesi. Dice lui essere Capitano di fanti di N.[iccolo] P.[iccinino] et lui dice essere suo huomo e non d'altri. Speriamo che la Signora Vostra habbia il vero. Dala quale dicio informatione aspettiamo. Parati sempre Vostra Magnificentia. Datum in terra montispolicis 17 Junij MccccxL. a hore xxiij.

2. Montepulciano, Archivio storico, 'Copialettere', vol. 3, f. 82v, 2 July 1440

The Montepulciano *comune* writes to the Dieci, congratulating Florence on its victory over Milan and Niccolò Piccinino.

[Addressed to] Magnificis Dominis Decem balie comunis florentie

Magnifici priores et domini nostri honorandissimi. Intesa la inmensa [sic:immensa] victoria di toscana conservatione e salute obtenuta contro al tiranno duca di milano et N.[iccolò] p.[iccinino] con la Magnificentia vostra per la presente con ardentissima iocundita et letitia grandissima ci rallegriamo. Et benche per noi la sera inanti che il vostro mandatario qua fusse per noi fuochi et festa grandissima fusse fatta per cagione della detta victtoria. La quale a noi significata fu per lo podesta e priori di Fojano et per paulo da Ghiacceto, Capitano d'Arezzo per proprio cavallaro niente di meno hier sera al'aiuta dela nostra festa e fuochi co suoni di campane fare facemmo. et domattina la processione faremo per render gratia alo ecterno iddio e a san piero e a san paulo nel cui di tale stata victoria s'a[c]quisto contro al tiranno. Per la quale seguirà il suo ultimo exterminio in gloria e perpetua fama del glorioso [insert] Magnifico [end of insert] popolo fiorentino. et di tutta la italia conservatione unione salute e pace. Al mandatario vostro benche f. 30 fusse dar facemo f. 2. Riservandoli maggior dono quando a noi recherà la presente o subsecuta morte di N.[iccolo] p.[iccinino] ala magnificentia vostra vero inimico. Parati sempre Vostro Magnifice. Datum in terra montispoliciani die ij julij MccccxL.

Biography

Koching Chao is assistant professor at Si Wan College, National Sun Yat-sen University, in Taiwan, where she teaches European art and architectural history. Her research interests lie in political and civic aspects of Renaissance art and architecture, particularly in quattrocento Florence. She is currently working on a funded research project on the influence of classical architectural theory on Renaissance military design. Email: koching.chao@mail.nsysu.edu.tw

Notes

1   Montepulciano, Biblioteca Comunale e Archivio Storico 'Piero Calamandrei' [hereafter MBC], 'Copialettere', vol. 3, f. 87v; Howard Saalman, 'The Palazzo Comunale in Montepulciano: An Unknown Work by Michelozzo', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 28 (1965), pp. 1–46 (p. 38, appendix 1, document 7). See also Miranda Ferrara and Francesco Quinterio, *Michelozzo di Bartolomeo* (Florence: Salimbeni, 1984), pp. 196–98.

2   Saalman, 'The Palazzo Comunale in Montepulciano'. Niccolò Rodolico had earlier speculated that the façade belonged to the circle of Antonio da Sangallo the Elder: Niccolò Rodolico and Giuseppe Marchini, *I palazzi del popolo nei comuni toscani del Medioevo* (Milan: Electa editrice, 1962), pp. 161–62.

3   Saalman, 'The Palazzo Comunale in Montepulciano', pp. 28–31.

4   See, for example, Isabelle Hyman, *Fifteenth Century Florentine Studies: The Palazzo Medici and a Ledger for the Church of San Lorenzo* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Publishing, 1968), pp. 155–56; Antonio Natali, *L'umanesimo di Michelozzo* (Florence: Maschietto & Musolino, 1996), p. 103.

5   The construction of civic palaces is found not only in major city republics such as Florence, Siena and Volterra, but also in minor towns and settlements such as Scarperia and Massa Marittima. See Rodolico and Marchini, *I palazzi del popolo*, p. 12; Franco Cardini and Sergio Raveggi, *Palazzi pubblici di Toscana: I centri minori* (Florence: Sansoni, 1983), pp. 37, 46–48; Francesca Bocchi, *Per antiche strade: Caratteri e aspetti delle città medievali* (Rome: Viella, 2013), p. 235.

6   A document of 1 July 1281 refers to the existence of a communal palace and implies that it was built between 1243 and 1281: Florence, Archivio di Stato [hereafter ASF], 'Diplomatico pergamene del comune Montepulciano dal sec. XI', f. 1.1r. For an Italian summary, see ASF, *Inventario*, 1913 (originally *Indice degli Spogli delle Cartapecore dell'appresso Provenienze. Comunità di Montepulciano*), p. 168, also available at <www.archiviodigitale.icar.beniculturali.it/it/185/ricerca/detail/153754> [accessed 27 June 2023]. On the establishment of the Montepulciano *comune* in 1243, see Jean Louis Alphonse Huillard-Bréholles, *Historia diplomatica Friderici Secundi: Sive constitutiones, privilegia, mandata, instrumenta quae supersunt istius Imperatoris et filiorum ejus. Accedunt epistolae Paparum volet documenta varia*, 6 vols (Turin: Bottega D'Erasmo, 1963), IV, part 1, p. 164; for an Italian translation, see Duccio Pasqui and Paolo Barcucci, *Montepulciano: Città nobile di Toscana* (Montepulciano, 2006), p. 16. Paolo Pirillo, in *Forme e strutture del popolamento nel contado fiorentino* (Florence: Le Balze, 2005), defines a *terra* as a fortified settlement (p. 29). According to Andrea Zorzi, *terre* and *borghi* were distinct from cities and their relationship with the central government played a crucial role in stabilising Florence's territorial control: Andrea Zorzi, 'The "Material Constitution" of the

Dominion', in *Florentine Tuscany: Structures and Practices of Power*, ed. by William J. Connell and Andrea Zorzi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 6–31 (pp. 7–9).

7   ASF, 'Diplomatico pergamene del comune Montepulciano dal sec. XI', 1 July 1281, 9 June 1294, 28 August 1297.

8   8 Andrea Zorzi, 'Verso Est: L'espansione del dominio fiorentino nella toscana orientale', in *Il castello, il borgo e la piazza: I mille anni di storia di Figline Valdarno, 1008–2008*, ed. by Andrea Zorzi and Paolo Pirillo (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2012), pp. 142–43.

9   MBC, 'Deliberazioni del Consiglio generale e dei Priori', vol. 31, ff. 238r–v; Saalman, 'The Palazzo Comunale in Montepulciano', pp. 37–38, appendix I, document 5c. The transcriptions of documents 5 a–c in Saalman's appendix mistakenly record the date as 20 February. The general council approved the petition for a new façade by 55 votes to 5.

10 MBC, 'Deliberazioni', vol. 31, ff. 237r–v, author's translation; Saalman, 'The Palazzo Comunale in Montepulciano', p. 37, appendix I, document 5a.

11 MBC, 'Deliberazioni', vol. 31, f. 239r (2 March 1440); Saalman, 'The Palazzo Comunale in Montepulciano', p. 38, appendix I, document 6.

12 MBC, 'Deliberazioni', vol. 31, f. 238r; Saalman, 'The Palazzo Comunale in Montepulciano', pp. 37–38, appendix I, document 5c. On the Dieci's distinctive role, see Giuseppe Pampaloni, 'Gli organi della Repubblica fiorentina per le relazioni con l'estero', *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*, 20 (1953), pp. 270–71; Lauro Martines, *Lawyers and Statecraft in Renaissance Florence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 198–200; and Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence Under the Medici (1434 to 1494)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 34–35, 77. In medieval scholasticism, the notions of 'utility' and 'common good' acted as cornerstones of harmonious civic society, and as moral benchmarks against which civic virtues (*honestas*) were evaluated. See, for example, Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 46–47, 68; and Matthew S. Kempshall, *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought: Moral Goodness and Material Benefit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 54–75.

13 William J. Connell, 'Il commissario e lo stato territoriale', *Ricerche storiche*, 18 (1988), pp. 592–93. See also Stephen J. Milner, 'Rubrics and Requests: Statutory Division and Supra-Communal Clientage in Fifteenth-Century Pistoia', in *Florentine Tuscany: Structures and Practices of Power*, ed. by William J. Connell and Andrea Zorzi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 312–32 (p. 328).

14 Between 1390 and 1409, Machiavelli family members were elected six times to the Tre Maggiori, the Florentine republic's highest executive offices, and twice as the supreme magistrate — the standard-bearer of justice. See David Herlihy *et al.*, eds, 'Florentine Renaissance Resources: Online Tratte of Office Holders 1282–1532' (2000), available at <cds.library.brown.edu/projects/tratte> [accessed January 2023].

15 Buoninsegna Filippo de'Machiavelli sat twice on the Florentine Signoria in 1383 and 1396 and was the Florentine commissioner to Montepulciano in 1391. See Davide Shamà's dataset of Italian noble family genealogy, 'Genealogie delle famiglie nobili italiane' (2003), at <sardimpex.com/M/Machiavelli.asp> [accessed January 2023]. Also see Cesare Guasti, *I capitoli del comune di Firenze: Inventario e regesto*, 2 vols (Florence: Cellini, 1896), I, p. 120.

16 Giovanni died during his term of office in 1439: see Shamà, 'Genealogie delle famiglie nobili italiane'.

17 MBC, 'Copialettere', vol. 3, f. 68v.

18 Although most settlements along the Valdichiana are on hilltops, none is higher than Montepulciano. The major communities north of Montepulciano are Lucignano (373 m), Fojano (318 m), Sinalunga (365 m) and Torrita (325 m). On the strategic value of Montepulciano, see Koching Chao, 'Valdichiana and the Rise of Florence in the Late Fourteenth and Early Fifteenth Centuries: A Road to Rome, A Road to Territorial Power', *Concentric*, 48, 2 (2022), pp. 21–45.

19 On the strategic importance of the Ponte a Valiano, see Carlo Starnazzi, *Leonardo Cartografo* (Florence: Istituto Geografico Militare, 1948), p. 130, n. 16; Enrico Guidoni and Angela Marino, *Territorio e città della Valdichiana* (Rome: Multigrafica, 1972), p. liv.

20 On Florence's wars with Filippo Maria Visconti during the 1420s, see Gene Brucker, *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 446–51; John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200–1575* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 269–70; Antonio Lanza, *Firenze contro Milano: Gli intellettuali fiorentini nelle guerre con i Visconti (1390–1444)* (Anzio and Rome: De Rubeis Editore, 1991), pp. 97–118.

21 Spinello Benci, 'Storia di Montepulciano', in *Storia di Montepulciano*, ed. by Duccio Pasqui, 7 vols (Sala Bolognese: Arnaldo Forni Editore, 2005), III, 4, pp. 74–75; Emanuele Repetti, 'Montepulciano', in *Dizionario geografico fisico storico della Toscana* (Florence: Autore, 1839), pp. 464–93 (p. 476).

22 Niccolò Machiavelli, *Le istorie Fiorentine*, 3rd edn (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1851), p. 260: 'Teneva quella Repubblica in tutti i luoghi diligenti esplorator di quelli che portavano lettere, per scoprire se alcuno contra lo stato loro alcuna cosa ordinasse. Occorse che a Montepulciano furono prese lettere, le quali il patriarca scriveva senza consenso del pontefice a Niccolò Piccinino; le quali subito il magistrato preposto alla guerra presentò al papa.' See also Charles C. Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence: The 'De militia' of Leonardo Bruni* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), pp. 159–60.

23 Dale Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance: The Patron's Oeuvre* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 166–67; Najemy, *A History of Florence*, p. 267.

24 As a favour to Eugenius IV, the Florentine government sent Luca Pitti to protect the Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome: see Gino Capponi, *Storia della Repubblica di Firenze*, 3 vols (Florence: G. Barbèra Editore, 1875), II, p. 18; Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, pp. 158–61.

25 MBC, 'Copialettere', vol. 3, f. 80v, author's translation.

26 The Venetian-Florentine alliance co-hired the condottiere Francesco Sforza to defend the Venetian border with Milan: see Kurt S. Gutkind, *Cosimo de' Medici, Pater Patriae, 1389–1464* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), pp. 149–50. On Piccinino's attack on Anghiari, see Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, pp. 168–70, and Niccolò Capponi, *La battaglia di Anghiari: Il giorno che salvò il rinascimento* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2012), pp. 154–68.

27 From 1436 to 1444, Bernardo de' Medici (1393–1465) was appointed many times by the Signoria as Florentine ambassador and commissioner, serving in the Marches, Bologna, Venice and Milan, and was also one of the Florentine delegates to conclude the Peace Treaty of Lodi in 1454: see John Spencer, *Andrea del Castagno and his Patrons* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 18–19, 23. On the contribution of Neri di Gino Capponi and Bernardo de' Cosimo to the Battle of Anghiari, see Pagolo di Matteo Petriboni, *Priorista (1407–1459): With Two Appendices (1282–1406)* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2001), pp. 297–98, and Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance*, pp. 49, 272. Machiavelli claimed that only one man died in the battle (*Le istorie Fiorentine*, p. 271), but recent research estimates that more than 6000 horses and 3000 infantrymen were involved, with around 60 deaths, 400 injured and 1800 Milanese soldiers captured: see Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, pp. 169–70; Spencer, *Andrea del Castagno and his Patrons*, p. 18; Capponi, *La battaglia di Anghiari*, pp. 154–56; and Nicoletta Marcelli, 'Pier Soderini, Leonardo da Vinci e la Battaglia di Anghiari', *Interpres: Rivista di studi quattrocenteschi,* 36 (2018), pp. 191–213.

28 John Spencer has noted that the two commissioners emphasised their sacrifice for and dedication to their *patria*, requesting rewards for themselves and their families: 'N.[iccolò] P.[iccinino] venne a ore 19 ½ qui da Borgho chon tutte le sue gienti per rompere noi, et noi abiamo rotto et frachassato lui.' For a transcription and translation of the letter, see Spencer, *Andrea del Castagno and his Patrons*, pp. 18–19, 152–53.

29 To celebrate their military success, the Florentine government rewarded them each with a pennon, a horse, a shield with the Florentine emblem and a helmet: see Spencer, *Andrea del Castagno and his Patrons*, p. 19.

30 Defeat at the battle of Anghiari probably forced the duke of Milan to sign the peace treaty of Cavriana with Florence in 1441. The significance of the battle recurs in subsequent Florentine chronicles and commentaries: see, for example, Poggio Bracciolini, *Historia Fiorentina* (Venice, 1476) and Niccolò Machiavelli, *Opere storiche*, ed. by Alessandro Montevecchi and Carlo Varotti, 2 vols (Rome and Salerno: Salerno, 2010), II, p. 324. On the aftermath of the battle and the fall of Filippo Maria Visconti's military strength, see Najemy, *A History of Florence*, pp. 283–89; Gutkind, *Cosimo de' Medici, Pater Patriae*, pp. 149–50; Lanza, *Firenze contro Milano*, pp. 13–37; Zorzi, 'The "Material Constitution" of the Dominion', p. 12.

31 See Günther Neufeld, 'Leonardo da Vinci's *Battle of Anghiari*: A Genetic Reconstruction', *Art Bulletin,* 31 (1949), pp. 170–83; H. Travers Newton and John R. Spencer, 'On the Location of Leonardo's Battle of Anghiari', *Art Bulletin,* 64 (1982), pp. 45–52; Barbara Hochstetler Meyer, 'Leonardo's Battle of Anghiari: Proposals for Some Sources and a Reflection', *Art Bulletin,* 66 (1984), pp. 367–82; Gianluca Belli and Emanuela Ferretti, 'La Sala Grande di Palazzo Vecchio e la Battaglia di Anghiari di Leonardo da Vinci: Dalla configurazione architettonica all'apparato decorativo' (Florence: Olschki, 2019). Another artwork depicting the battle was a *cassone* panel (late 1460s, now in the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin): see Meyer, 'Leonardo's Battle of Anghiari', pp. 369–71.

32 MBC, 'Copialettere', vol. 3, f. 82v, author's translation.

33 The comparison of simultaneous events in different cities to a live broadcast is suggested by Fabrizio Nevola in *Siena: Constructing the Renaissance City* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 64. See also Fabrizio Nevola, *Street Life in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), pp. 113–20.

34 Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955).

35 On Florentine fortified civic architecture, see Staale Sinding-Larsen, 'A Tale of Two Cities: Florentine and Roman Visual Context for Fifteenth-Century Palaces', *Institutum Romanum Norvegiae: Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia,* 6 (1975), p. 171; David Friedman, 'Il palazzo e la città: Facciate fiorentine tra XIV e XV secolo', in *Il palazzo dal Rinascimento a oggi*, ed. by Simonetta Valtieri (Reggio Calabria: Gangemi, 1988), p. 106; Gianluca Belli, 'Forma e naturalità nel bugnato fiorentino del Quattrocento', *Quaderni di Palazzo Te*, 4 (1996), pp. 9–35 (p. 14).

36 No archival evidence survives referring to progress on the façade between 2 March and 16 October 1440.

37 Between 1430 and 1440, Michelozzo was commissioned by the Florentine authority as the consultant for fortifications at least four times in Lucca, Lago di Castigliano and Castellina de Greve: see Ferrara and Quinterio, *Michelozzo di Bartolomeo*, pp. 43–44, document 22 (ASF, *Catasto 825*, Portata 1457, Quartiere S. Giovanni, Gonfalone Drago).

38 On Florence's construction of a *càssero* in Montepulciano, see Guasti, *I capitoli del comune di Firenze*, I, pp. 120–22; *Fortezza e Liceo Classico a Montepulciano: Storia di un complesso architettonico e di una istituzione scolastica*, ed. by Editori del Grifo (Montepulciano: Editori del Grifo, 1990), p. 32.

39 According to the archivist Antonio Sigillo, the accounting book, known as the Gabelle, was rebound and the selection of this parchment as its new flyleaf at the end of the book might have been accidental (personal communication, 2018).

40 The *fortezza* was designed by the Sienese architect Augusto Corbi in *c.* 1885: see Mauro Cozzi, *Antonio da Sangallo il Vecchio e l'architettura del Cinquecento in Valdichiana* (Genoa: Sagep edtrice, 1991), pp. 60–61; *Fortezza e Liceo Classico a Montepulciano*, pp. 73–94.

41 Guasti, *I capitoli del comune di Firenze*, I, p. 120, act 22–23 (for 6, 7 and 23 November 1392): 'in quel luogo della terra che parrà loro più sicuro'.

42 For Florence's first communal palace, Palazzo del Podestà, see Amee Yunn, *The Bargello Palace: The Invention of Civic Architecture in Florence* (London: Harvey Miller, 2015), pp. 123–78. For the construction and expansion of the Palazzo della Signoria, see, for example, Alfredo Lensi, *Palazzo Vecchio* (Milan: Bestetti e Tumminelli, 1929); Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Palazzo Vecchio, 1298–1532: Government, Architecture, and Imagery in the Civic Palace of the Florentine Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Maria C. Salemi, *Palazzo Vecchio a Firenze* (Florence: Nardini, 2001).

43 Ferrara and Quinterio, *Michelozzo di Bartolomeo*, pp. 207–12.

44 Eugenio Battisti, *Brunelleschi: The Complete Work* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), pp. 233–43. See also Giovanni Ranieri Fascetti, *La rocca del Brunelleschi a Vicopisano: Un simbolo dell'espansionismo fiorentino alle soglie del Rinascimento* (Pisa: CLD Libri, 2000).

45 See, for example, Gino Chierici, *Il Palazzo Italiano dal secolo XI al secolo XIX* (Milan: Antonio Vallardi, 1964), p. 158.