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# The Governor, the Bishop, and the Patricians: The Contest for the Cathedral Square in Spanish Milan (1535–1706)

Stefano D'Amico \*

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**Abstract:** »Der Gouverneur, der Bischof und die Patrizier: Der Wettstreit um den Domplatz im spanischen Mailand (1535–1706)«. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the ambitious reorganization of the urban fabric sponsored and supervised by princes or ruling elites, usually aimed at establishing the power and prestige of the central authority, transformed most Italian cities. However, the separation within the city center between a political and ceremonial space, usually centered around the palace of the prince, and a marketplace, that came to characterize most urban contexts, did not occur in Milan. In order to preserve peace and stability in a period of intense warfare, the monarchy sacrificed an invasive oversight of the city and abdicated a higher degree of local power, choosing instead to delegate it to the urban patriciate, the merchant elites, and the Ambrosian church. Free of any restriction, and in order to preserve their financial interests and emphasize their political prominence, the families of the urban elites maintained the economic function of the area around the cathedral square at the expense of the royal-ducal palace and articulated an alternative power network anchored to their palaces in the residential neighborhoods outside the city center.

**Keywords:** Milan, Spanish Empire, Early Modern Italy, urban space, ceremonial, court, royal palace.

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## 1. Introduction

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Between the 16th and the 17th centuries, most Italian cities underwent massive modifications of their fabric (Fantoni 2002, 53-8). Princes and their representatives promoted and effected substantial urban planning and reorganization in major centers like Palermo, Naples, Rome, and Turin (Fagiolo and

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Madonna 1981; Galasso 1998; Strazzullo 1978; De Seta 1981; Hernando Sánchez 2008; Simoncini 1990; Krautheimer 1985; Pollak 1991; Symcox 2004).

The reorganization of the city implied a clearer differentiation of the spaces for politics, business, and recreation. Princes and rulers better defined and separated different buildings and activities: government and justice administration, workshops and stalls, ceremonies and games located until the middle of the 16th century side to side in the same urban areas, were now concentrated in specific spaces. By the beginning of the 17th century, it was easier to identify separate districts for government, business, and manufacturing in most Italian and European cities, like Venice, Florence, Seville, and Antwerp (Calabi 2004, 12-4).

The reorganization and re-figuration of urban space affected, in particular, the city center and the area around the prince's palace, seat of the court and symbol of political power. Contemporary Italian treatises emphasized the significance of the palace within the urban context: it was the architectonic representation of the prince, the central organ on which all other parts depended, and therefore also symbolized the entire city, magnifying its value and splendor. Palazzo Pitti in Florence and the new royal palace in Turin epitomized this function of the princely court (Fantoni 2002, 63). In 1615, Francesco di Giorgio Martini wrote that the palace should be located in the best part of the main square, and in the same year Vincenzo Scamozzi stated in his *L'Idée dell'architettura universale* that "the palace of the prince [...] has to dominate and tower over all or most of the city. It has to be in a favorable position on the main square [...] or in another large and open area, with space in front of it, so that its majesty and greatness be magnified"<sup>1</sup> (Fantoni 2002, 82). Urban decorum represented an absolute necessity in the area around the palace and any activity that could disrupt it had to be removed. In earlier times, the main square had frequently been used as government center and major marketplace, but since the end of the 16th century, economic and ceremonial spaces became more clearly separated.

While this process can be clearly observed in cities like Venice, Florence, and Naples, Milan in the period of Spanish rule (1535–1706) represents a rather unique case. The last Sforza Dukes had opened up and beautified the city in an attempt to emphasize the element of urban decorum so important to the Renaissance aesthetic; they had also started the construction of a new cathedral re-figuring the main square as a ceremonial space with the relocation of some of the markets that took place there. However, after a few timid attempts, the Spanish authorities seemed unable to continue the renovation of the city center, even going so far as to neglect the royal-ducal palace, residence of the governor and symbol of the central power. In Milan, a clear

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<sup>1</sup> "Il Palazzo del Principe [...] dee vedere e signoreggiare, ò tutta, ò buona parte della medesima città. Questo luogo dee essere adunque in qualche bello aspetto di Piazza principale [...], ò altro luogo grande, e specioso all'innanzi, che l'accresca maestà, et apporti grandezza."

differentiation between political and market spaces was never fully introduced, and the center of the city continued to be characterized by a high concentration of workshops and retailers, especially on the and around the royal ducal palace. The few attempts by the cathedral square central authorities to gentrify the area constantly failed against the opposition of the urban elites.

The purpose of this essay is to illustrate these dynamics and demonstrate how the unique position of Milan within the Spanish Empire, characterized by the overall weakness of the crown in relation to the powerful patrician and merchant elites, and the prestigious Ambrosian church, significantly affected the organization of the city center. Especially since the end of the 16th century, the new geo-political role of Milan as a major Spanish stronghold in Europe, and the priority for Madrid to ensure the loyalty of the local elites, constitute essential factors in understanding the lack of strong interventions by the king and his agents in the urban fabric.

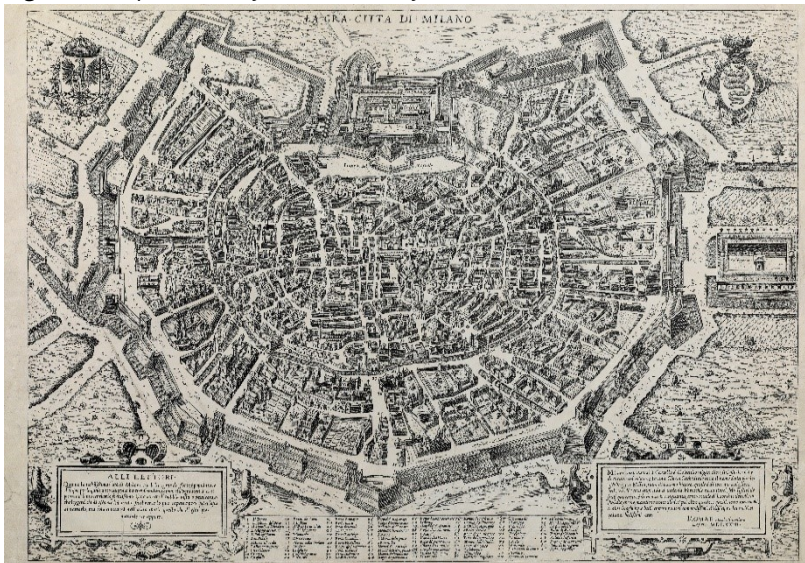
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## 2. A Large and Productive City

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In the middle of the 16th century, Milan was the fourth largest European city in terms of population (around 120,000 people) and one of the largest in terms of size (Fig. 1).

**Figure 1** Map of Milan by Antonio Lafréry, 1573



Source: Milan, Civica Raccolta Bertarelli, P.V. g. 6-13.

Milan could not compare with Florence, Rome, or Venice in terms of harmony and magnificence and gave most visitors the impression of a compact, massive city without a clear architectural plan. Only the new cathedral, still under construction, and the large number of smaller churches erected in the city deserved their praises (D'Amico 2012, 8-9, 17-8).

However, if some travelers lamented the absence of space and perspectives, others emphasized the pragmatic character of the city. An anonymous French traveler remarked in 1606 how "space is not wasted with gardens and empty lots, but is completely filled with multistory buildings inhabited by gentlemen and merchants, but above all by craftsmen of all sorts" (Bideaux 1981, 47). In his famous tract, *Il Negotiante*, written in 1638, Domenico Peri described Milan as a concrete city, whose beauty was related to its function as a productive and commercial pole (Borlandi 1989, 42).

The area around the cathedral and the Broletto Nuovo, the city hall, represented the center of the city's commerce, enlivened by all sorts of shops and activities (Salvatori 1994, 243-66). A multitude of artisans and small traders populated the buildings around the central square, especially in the tangle of streets and alleys located on the southwestern side of the cathedral. In 1603, stopping in Milan on his way to London, Pietro Duodo, the Venetian ambassador, remarked how in this area "streets acquire an extraordinary beauty" due to the number and the attractiveness of the shops (Benzoni 1989, 26). In 1677, the Polish noble Thomas Billewicz noticed how in every street, the first floor of all buildings was occupied by shops (Maczak 1989, 313).

The Broletto Nuovo constituted the center of the city's radial system since the urban plan of 1228 (Soldi Rondinini 1984; Boucheron 1998, 102-6). All the major arteries from to the six main gates (*porte*) and the five minor ones (*pusterle*) led to it. Besides being the seat of the civic administration and the symbol of civic pride, the Broletto represented the center of the urban economy and finance and the meeting point of merchants and businessmen. Its square, surrounded by shops and offices of notaries and moneychangers, was the seat of the grain market and, in 1605, the building itself became also the city's public granary (Torre [1674] 1714, 232).

Around the Broletto, several streets (*contrade*) were named after the craft that characterized each street. Besides implementing new rules of urban decor, the organization of these streets made guild members easier to control and represented a landmark for foreign visitors and buyers (Welch 2005, 100). This feature, although certainly not uncommon in old regime cities (Battara 1958, 11-3 for Florence; Gheza Fabbri 1988, 33 for Bologna), was particularly striking in Milan (Zanoboni 1996, 10-1), as it emerges from a description of the *contrade delle arti* from the 16th century (Morigia 1592, 260). The concentration of the more specialized crafts in specific streets seems to have increased even more at the beginning of the 17th century. Gualdo Priorato wrote that under the governorship of the Count of Fuentes (1600-1610) "on

his order, with much prudence the crafts were located in separate streets, each one inhabited by those sharing the same profession, without confusing different kinds of shops”<sup>2</sup> (Gualdo Priorato 1666, 116).

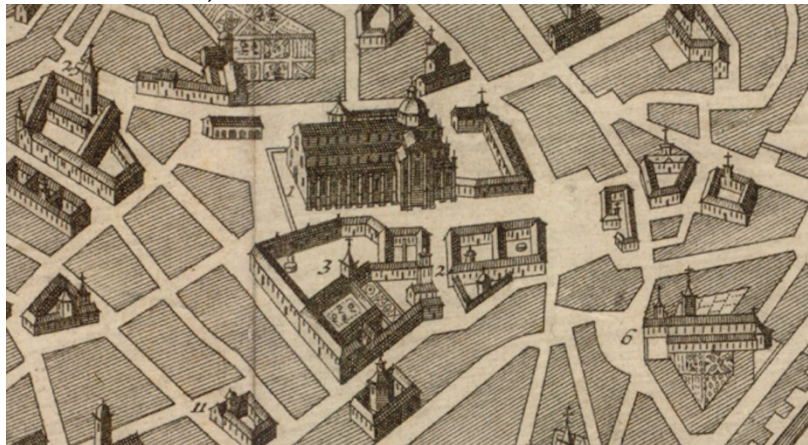
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### 3. The Cathedral Square

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Just east of the Broletto, the cathedral and the contiguous royal-ducal palace, residence of the Spanish governor and seat of the major state offices, symbolized ecclesiastical and secular power and represented the neural poles of the city center (Fig. 2).

**Figure 2** The City-Center with the Cathedral (1), the Archbishopric (2), the Royal-Ducal Palace (3), and the Broletto (25). Detail in Map of Milan by Jan Blaeu, 1704



Source: Milan, Civica Raccolta Bertarelli, P.V. m. 3-60.

The cathedral square represented the center of urban sociability: all sort of processions and both secular and religious celebrations took place on its grounds. However, the square constituted a contested space in which different jurisdictions and representations of power faced each other in a constant struggle for influence (Barbot and Mocrelli 2011, 263-5).

With the construction of a new cathedral, which started in 1386, the square had been taking a new configuration. In 1458, Duke Francesco Sforza had clearly stated how he intended to shape the area according to the Renaissance ideas of urban decorum, demolishing the older churches and other structures in order to create space for the new building (Rossi 1985, 12). The push for the

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<sup>2</sup> “furono per suo ordine con molta prudenza disposte l’arti separatamente in contrade, ogn’una habitata da quei d’una medesima professione senza confondersi le botteghe l’une con l’altre.”

gentrification of the main square became more urgent after the decision to restore the royal-ducal palace as the residence of the representative of the crown. In fact, while under the Visconti and the Sforza, the castle had represented the official residence of the prince, with the French occupation and the following Spanish rule, the ducal palace had returned to be the seat of the court.

The royal-ducal palace, residence of the governor and seat of the state government, embodied the undisputed headquarter and symbol of central power (Bascapè 1970). In Milan, considering the physical absence of the prince, visual signs were even more important as vehicles to assert his power. In early modern political thought, the presence of the king was considered fundamental as he was perceived as the soul and the head of his kingdom and could not be separated from it. The viceroys, and in the case of Milan, the governors, represented the king who appointed them, and art and architecture were the major instruments they could use to display the presence of the absent monarch. The local courts, represented in the provinces' lesser-scale replicas of the royal court in Madrid, and public rituals and ceremonies were used to project the royal presence, to create a symbolical communion between the king and his people (Pérez Samper 1997, 388).

At the beginning of the Spanish period, while Charles V only visited Milan twice for short periods in 1533 and 1541, his governors seemed to be intent on following the ducal tradition and leaving a clear imprint of the new imperial power on the urban fabric. This agenda aligned itself with Charles V's promotion of the politicization of architecture as an effective instrument to legitimize his imperial power throughout all his territories (Fantoni 2002, 45).

In an attempt to demonstrate the strength and reach of the Spanish power, Spanish viceroy Toledo (1532–1555), in one of the most important interventions in Renaissance Italy, completely reorganized Naples with massive modifications of the urban fabric. Besides expanding the fortifications and opening new squares and ceremonial avenues, Toledo also built a new vice-regal palace and a quarter for the lodging of the Spanish garrison in a grid of streets nearby (Hernando Sánchez 1994, 2008). This new center of gravity, symbol of the royal power, occupied the western side of the city, leaving the more popular neighborhoods and the market square to the far eastern side (Marino 2011, 9-10).

Once appointed governor of Milan in 1546, Ferrante Gonzaga, undertook a similarly ambitious plan to renovate the center of the city and the cathedral square. He sponsored a project to rationalize and embellish the urban fabric in order to create a new imperial city ready to welcome Charles V's son Philip during his three-week visit to Milan in 1548. Extensive works supervised by architect Domenico Giunti widened and straightened the main arteries connecting the gates to the center and opened up the cathedral square, with

the demolition of several shops and the old basilica of S. Tecla (Archivio Storico Civico, Milano [ASCMi], *Località Milanesi*, 154; Rossi 1995, 37; Soldini 2007, 257-80). The main square, although still narrow, was paved and beautified, with changes that would characterize its appearance until the 19th century. In 1549, a Mantuan agent, impressed by the scale of the building sites, reported that he had found “a new Milan with many new constructions in the making”<sup>3</sup> (Soldini 2011, 128).

Before Gonzaga’s interventions, the cathedral square was a crowded market full of merchants’ stalls selling all sorts of goods. On its northern side, it hosted the fish market, and on its southern side dozens of women sold vegetables and fruit (*Annali* 1877-85, vol. 4, 115-8).

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#### 4. The Royal-Ducal Palace

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A prominent factor behind the gentrification of the city center was the decision by the Spanish governors to move their residence to the royal-ducal palace, on the southern side of the cathedral square. Gonzaga commissioned Giunti for some important renovations, and in the 1580s and 1590s, under Philip II’s rule, artisans embellished the royal palace with imperial decorations. The porticus towards the garden was covered with frescoes of Charles, Philip and his son, and the governors of the State from Antonio de Leyva to the Duke of Frías (Cremonini 2012, 30; Leydi 1999, 187, 193).

However, while the Spanish viceroy Fernando Ruiz de Castro ordered the construction of a new and more grandiose palace in Naples at the beginning of the 17th century, the Milanese royal-ducal palace sank into decadence and fell to pieces despite the constant complaints of the governors, who also lamented the lack of decorum of the surrounding area. After the renovations promoted by Ferrante Gonzaga and Philip II, the palace was neglected for many decades and most governors felt the palace did not represent a residence worthy of their status (Cremonini 2012, 30-1).

The royal-ducal palace reproduced all the dimensions of the king’s court on a smaller scale, with its political, cultural, and religious aspects (Álvarez-Ossorio Alvaríño 2008, 429; Daolmi 1998, 130). Because of its central role, in most Italian cities like Rome, Florence, Turin, and Palermo, patrician residences tended to cluster around the palace as proximity to the prince or his representative marked status and ranking in the urban social hierarchy (Florescu 1985). In the case of Naples, the families of the aristocracy chose to reside in the vicinity of the palace of the viceroy, despite the fact that they would place themselves under the control of the Spanish garrison lodged in the contiguous neighborhood (Labrot 1979, 53). In contrast, the center of

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<sup>3</sup> “un nuovo Milano, colletante fabriche che vi si fanno.”



Milan was not characterized by aristocratic settlements, but by retail shops, warehouses, and workshops, and by buildings populated by a multitude of artisans and small traders. The royal-ducal palace did not exert any power of attraction and the patricians and great merchants preferred to live in residential neighborhoods removed from the hustle and bustle of the city center (D'Amico 2012, 18-29). Giacomo Lanteri wrote in 1560 that in Milan the patricians had their residences far from the main squares while the merchants stayed close to the squares and the public streets and help to embellish the city with their goods (Barbagli and Pisati 2012, 154). The area around the main square was not considered a dignified location for an aristocratic residence: in 1637, Carlo Alberto Pallavicini, a merchant of ribbons, decided to move out of his house in the Duomo Square after a successful marriage with the daughter of a rich haberdasher, as it was populated with “women, charlatans, mountebanks, boys, porters and all the scum of the square, not being convenient to the reputation of the aforementioned merchant”<sup>4</sup> (Barbot 2008, 181).

A certain degree of activity around the palace was expected: in fact, because of the quantity and diversity of people visiting or working at the court, goods and services had to be promptly available. Still, the area around the palace was supposed to be characterized by cleanliness and order and to serve as the model of urban decorum (Fantoni 2002, 89). In Milan, the central authorities were not successful in protecting the palace of the governor, which was almost physically suffocated by the market structures that covered its walls (Fig. 3).

The space around the Duomo and the Ducal court continued in fact to be a permanent market, populated by retailers and peddlers. Haberdashers, innkeepers, bakers, druggists, and fruit sellers displayed their goods on a variety of stalls in the square.<sup>5</sup> The square had become the center of popular activity (Liva 1995, 305), frequented by the urban poor and by “spongers and vagrants who stay on the cathedral’s steps trying to sell their goods”<sup>6</sup> (Grida of July 15, 1585, quoted in Fasano Guarini 1980, 158). Mountebanks and charlatans performed there, attracting large crowds of passers-by and beggars.

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<sup>4</sup> “Donne, ciarlatani, montinbanco, ragazzi, facchini, et ogni altra feccia della Piazza, cos ache non conviene alla riputazione del detto suplicante.”

<sup>5</sup> The Fabbrica del Duomo owned five shops under the Coperto dei Figini, four shops and thirteen stalls on the side of the ducal court (Archivio della Curia Arcivescovile di Milano (ACAM), *Sezione X, Metropolitana*, LXXV, 105). Already in the medieval period, shops and stalls were widespread in this area (Spinelli 1988, 253-73).

<sup>6</sup> “Li scrocchi et vagabondi che stanno ai scalini del Duomo a vendere.”

**Figure 3** Sebastiano Giuliense, Scene Carnevalesche in Piazza del Duomo (c. 1650-60). The Royal-Ducal Palace is on the Right Side



Source: Milan, Palazzo Morando / Costume Moda Immagine, Museo, 847. Copyright Comune di Milano. All rights reserved.

Seventeenth-century views of the cathedral square clearly illustrate the vibrancy of the space, often depicting patricians and plebeians mingling and taking advantage of the opportunities for shopping and entertainment. Certainly, that was not a prerogative of Milan as other Italian cities are portrayed in a similar manner (Katritzky 2006, 431, 447-53, 457-9). Especially in times of festivities and celebrations, the main square served as the major gathering point, with boisterous crowds examining the goods displayed by the sellers and enjoying theatrical representations. In 16th-century Venice, the area around San Marco Square, next to the church and the ducal palace, was populated by vagrants and peddlers, sellers of eggs, poultry, and salami, surrounded by piles of garbage. However, by the end of the century a series of decrees by the Senate and the *Maggior Consiglio* had managed to remove the stalls and hawkers, guaranteeing a certain degree of urban decorum to the central square and the centers of religious and secular power (Calabi 1993, 193-5). In Florence, Cosimo I, from 1540 to his death in 1574, reorganized the center of the city and introduced order and decorum in the area around his court, moving his residence first to the Palazzo della Signoria and then to Palazzo Pitti and creating the administrative pole of the Uffizi. The river Arno then separated the new princely palace, and the patrician residences that soon concentrated around it, from the medieval center with the traditional market areas (Calabi 2004, 61-3, 133; Barbagli and Pisati 2012, 85).

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## 5. The Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo

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What complicated the Milanese case was the fact that governors actually exerted very little control over the area around the square. In fact, to better supervise the reorganization of the central square, between 1477 and 1491, Duke Gian Galeazzo Sforza had granted the right to use the space on and around the cathedral to the *Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo*. This powerful institution, composed of secular and ecclesiastical members of the major Milanese patrician families, was in charge of the administration of the new cathedral since the beginning of its construction. The Fabbrica was independent from both the city and the central government and represented an important instrument of the urban oligarchy (Soldi Rondinini 2001, 596). Its directing board, led by the archbishop or his vicar general, and the Vicario di Provvisone, the head of the civic administration, included three canons of the cathedral, three jurists elected by their college, and twelve members of the most prestigious families of the Milanese patriciate, two from each city district. One of them, elected treasurer, acquired enormous power in the managing of the conspicuous revenues of the institution. The composition of the Fabbrica reflected the leading families of the urban elites in the different periods, with an effective mix of old aristocratic lineages like the Visconti, the Trivulzio, the Arcimboldi, and new rising families who created their fortune as merchants and bankers, like the Crivelli, the Negroli, and the Omodei. The members of the board were carefully listed every year (*Annali* 1877-85). Besides controlling the area around the cathedral, the institution owned hundreds of buildings and shops throughout the city and enjoyed a preferential relationship with many craft guilds (Barbot and Mocarrelli 2011, 255-61). In the early seventeenth century, 70 percent of the city's masters of the guilds of *pateri* (retailers of second-hand clothes and haberdashery), *offelari* (sweets makers), and barbers, rented their workshops from the Fabbrica (Barbot 2008, 66).

In 1548, Governor Gonzaga ordered to free the square from all market structures and granted the Fabbrica the use of the area known as the Verzaro, just southeast of the cathedral, where all the shops and stalls had to be transferred (Mocarrelli 2009, 151). Also the fish market was initially moved there, but after 1555 the sale of fish and meat would be confined in the square of St. Stefano in Brolo, which, just south of the Verzaro but next to the canals, could better deal with the strong stench and the disposal of the products (*Annali* 1877-85, Vol. 4, 17-8, January 26, 1555).

The Fabbrica strongly resisted any attempt to gentrify the area as the rental of the market spaces guaranteed a steady income. In fact, Gonzaga's measures to free the cathedral square from any stall and shop proved unsuccessful as, still in 1572, the Fabbrica owned 47 shops there that were

rented with an annual revenue of 2,222 lire (approximately 90,000 euro today) (ACAM, *Sezione X*, Metropolitana, LVIII, 33). Among the renters we find 11 greengrocers, 9 poulterers, and 7 fruit sellers. At the end of the 16th century, the Fabbrica received 14,128 lire (around 580,000 euro), almost one fifth of its overall income, from the market spaces rented on the square (Biblioteca Ambrosiana Milano, Ms. A 202 suss., 89r). In 1592, 13 shops were located right next to the walls of the royal palace (*Annali 1877-85*, Vol. 4, 188-9, March 22, 1582).

The dramatic changes occurring in the last part of the 16th century in the European arena and their effects on Milanese political dynamics may help to explain the weakness of the Spanish crown in its interaction with the local elites. In fact, even though Philip II may have originally fostered serious intentions to strengthen royal authority in the state and in the city, the dramatic changes of the political scenario convinced him otherwise. After the start of the revolt of the Netherlands in 1567, Milan developed an even more relevant strategic role as an essential crossroads in the Spanish path to Flanders (Parker [1972] 2004, 42-69). The city and its state were fundamental in the training and supplying of Spanish troops coming from the Iberian ports through Genoa, before they crossed the Alps and the German Habsburg land and finally reached the Flemish territories.

Unable to repress the Dutch revolt and facing growing tensions within the empire, Philip II and his successors gradually abandoned all projects of centralization in order to prevent any conflict with their Milanese subjects. The Spanish kings strictly limited the high degree of autonomy enjoyed by Gonzaga and the other early governors (Signorotto 2003, 229-30). The governors' tenure rarely exceeded three years, and their dependence on the monarch and the *Consejo de Italia* progressively increased. The orders coming from Madrid were clear: it was essential to eliminate any reason for conflict with the local elites in favor of compromise and collaboration. The preservation of "peace and tranquility" became the top priority in the Spanish agenda in Lombardy. The king and his representatives were therefore very careful not to cross the powerful patrician families who controlled the Fabbrica.

In 1594 and 1599, the Fabbrica requested and obtained the right to use the space previously occupied by the gate and the corner of the court of the palace to expand the facade of the cathedral, and in the following years it continued to sacrifice the decorum of the square for profit, erecting and renting out all sorts of stalls and small shops (*Annali 1877-85*, Vol. 4, 292, September 12, 1594; 332, January 21, 1599; Barbot 2008, 59-69; Mocarrelli 2009, 151). In that period, Notary Giacomo Filippo Besta wrote that the square "would look much larger and pleasing if not for the obstacle of many shops

and stalls, sellers of cloths and fruit, from which the Fabbrica del Duomo makes a good deal of money”<sup>7</sup> (Gatti Perer 1985, 22).

At the beginning of the 17th century, the Count of Fuentes was the last governor to embark on significant works of urban renovation. Besides completing the Palace of the *Capitano di Giustizia*, which housed one of the main judicial offices of the state and the major Milanese prison and was located next to the Verzaro, Fuentes ordered the construction of the *strada nuova* in 1603 to connect the new building to the royal palace. He also started other projects for the beautification of the center that he was never able to finish (Rossi 1995, 44). In this context, in 1605, he once again tried to free the cathedral square from all market functions decreeing the transfer of all stalls and shops to the nearby Verzaro, basically reiterating the orders issued by Gonzaga 60 years earlier. This decision caused a reshuffling of the shopkeepers active in the city center and potential damage for the Fabbrica, which demanded to be reimbursed by the governor in case of financial losses (*Annali* 1877-85, Vol. 5, 32-3, December 18, 1605). The sale of cheese, fruit, and vegetable was mostly moved to St. Stefano, and the Verzaro was mainly reserved to the haberdashers with 24 new wood and metal shops built at the expenses of the Fabbrica for the safety of their wares. The Fabbrica invested 35,342 lire (around 1,450,000 euro) in the new shops but expected to be paid back by the haberdashers (*Annali* 1877-85, Vol. 5, 69, November 30, 1610; Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milano, Ms. G 289 inf.).

In the following decades, the limited powers of the governors and the fear to alienate the local elites through an open display of the image of the monarch basically eliminated any royal intervention in the urban fabric. With the beginning of the first war of Mantuan succession (1613–1618), and the reopening of the conflict with the Netherlands after the twelve-year truce in 1621, the strategic and military importance of Milan increased exponentially. From 1628, after the start of the second war of Mantuan succession and the descent of the French army into northern Italy, to the Peace of the Pyrenees signed with France in 1659, the State of Milan became the backdrop to almost continuous military operations (Sella and Capra 1984, 9-16). In these years, the internal stability of the State, the support of the native population, and the prevention of possible revolts constituted absolute priorities for the general interests of the Spanish Empire, and the few modifications of the urban fabric were all related to specific military needs (ASCMi, *Località Milanesi*, 107).

Free from any interference from the governors, the deputies of the Fabbrica did not waste any time and already in 1617 built new shops adjacent to the walls of the royal court (*Annali* 1877-85, Vol. 5, 101, June 22, 1617). In

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<sup>7</sup> “molto più vaga e più grande si dimostrerìa se non vi fossero gli impedimenti di molte botteghe posticce da tenda, di mercerie di teli e frutti delle quali la fabrica del Domo cava buona somma di denari.”

1631, in the aftermath of the great plague that hit the city causing the death of almost half of the population, the Fabbrica condoned the rent to 65 tenants of shops and spaces in the cathedral square (*Annali 1877-85*, Vol. 5, 165, last entry of 1631). In the subsequent decades, a public scale, a lottery shop, and the hut of a hermit also found place in the main square with the assent of the Fabbrica (*Annali 1877-85*, Vol. 5, 200, September 30, 1642; 266, January 24, 1658). The hermit's stone hut, destroyed by some "evil people" in 1651, was rebuilt and taken apart only after his death in 1660 (*Annali 1877-85*, Vol. 5, 234, June 22, 1651; 272, May 20, 1660). In these difficult years characterized by war, plague, and economic crisis, the decorum of the city center was also disrupted by the great number of vagrants and beggars that crowded the area in front of the royal palace and the cathedral. In 1644, the Fabbrica decided to hire a guardian in charge to expel the poor from the cathedral (*Annali 1877-85*, Vol. 5, 206-7, April 28 and May 12, 1644). Frequently as well, charlatans would set their tents and counters in the square paying rent to the Fabbrica, while a multitude of peddlars sold their wares, usually food, without any authorization (*Annali 1877-85*, Vol. 5, 268, January 23, 1659; 306, April 5, 1674).

It was not until the 1680s that a certain degree of urban decorum came to characterize the central square and the area around the palace; under pressure by the Spanish and the city authorities, the Fabbrica relinquished most of its rights on the rental retail spaces in exchange for a conspicuous amount of money. The deputies calculated in 68,431 lire (around 2,600,000 euro) the capital necessary to replace, at a rate of 4.5%, the annual rent previously provided by the tenants. The city quickly collected private donations for the slightly lesser amount of 10,000 scudi (around 2,350,000 euro) eventually accepted by the Fabbrica as payment (*Annali 1877-85*, Vol. 6, 4-6, February 3, July 9, July 23, July 29, 1682; ASCMi, *Località Milanese*, 150, 7; Soldini 2007, 275; Canosa 1996, 198). All the wooden shops and stalls were demolished, but apparently the Fabbrica still retained the rights to rent the more permanent structures, as in 1688 it was still renting two shops next to the gate of the royal-ducal palace. However, while the central square had finally been at least partially cleared and beautified, that did not directly benefit the palace and its symbolic role within the city. In fact, especially in the last decades of the 17th century, in a chaotic political context determined by the decline of Spanish power, challenges to the preeminence of the governor's court intensified. The major Milanese families, as well as some prestigious Spanish families residing in the city, openly defied the ceremonial primacy of the king's representative by organizing lavish parties and functions in their own residences (Cremonini 2003, 22).

In 1698, as a final offense to the main symbol of the royal power within the urban fabric, a group of merchants and craftsmen proposed converting part of the royal-ducal palace into a market, setting up a fair open to the public in one of the main salons (ASCMi, *Località milanesi*, 255, 4). While the initiative

did not go through for the opposition of some of the urban guilds, it epitomized the final victory of the local political and economic elites in the control of the city center, safeguarding its traditional market functions from the claims of the Spanish king and his representatives.

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## 6. Royal Celebrations and Jurisdictional Conflicts

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There were actually short times when the chaos and commotion that characterized the main square were temporarily suspended: on the occasions of specific festivities like the Ambrosian carnival or for the births, funerals, or visits of members of the Habsburg dynasty; magnificent ephemeral structures were erected throughout the city – always on the cathedral square – and celebrations could last for days or even weeks (Rossi 1995, 22; Fantoni 2002, 150). In 1605, for example, for the birth of Philip IV, Philip III's first son, the governor organized jousting, parades and theatrical representations, and the construction of a fire-producing volcano in the cathedral square represented the climax of the event. Not even wars and epidemics could stop these events: despite the appearance of the plague on the horizon, the birth of Balthasar Carlos, the first son of Philip IV, in November 1629, led to months of celebrations that culminated on February 4, 1630, with fireworks in the cathedral square around a structure representing Mount Etna designed by Francesco Richini (Fig. 4).

On these special occasions, the square was freed from stalls and vendors, cleaned, and closed with a fence painted and decorated with the colors and the family arms of the Habsburgs.

Since the beginning of the 17th century, these periodical public celebrations and visits of members of the royal family and their representatives, and the impressive ephemeral structures accompanying them, would become the main visual reminder of the presence of the king and Spanish rule.

However, also the use of the square for royal ceremonies and spectacles encountered often serious obstacles. In 1661, for example, the Fabbrica refused to remove some wooden shops from the square in occasion of some royal celebrations and only a conspicuous sum of money offered by the governor convinced it to comply with the request. Still, the Fabbrica protested the fact that stages had been built in the square without its authorization (*Annali* 1877-85, 275, May 12 and 25, 1661). Not only did the governors have to compromise with the demands of the Fabbrica, but, in their pursuit for power and prestige, they also had to deal with another instrument of the urban elites, the Milanese church. Their neighbors, the Archbishops, represented in fact formidable opponents considering their strong position in their relationship with the Spanish crown. Besides its deep-

seated presence at the vertex of the political system, the urban patriciate maintained constant control over the city's ecclesiastical hierarchies, ensuring that its members occupied the top offices of the church. While an effective royal *patronazgo* allowed the Spanish crown to handle the ecclesiastical affairs of Spain, Naples, and Sicily (each one under the supervision of a cardinal-protector) with ease, Madrid had very limited power over the Milanese church and the choice of the archbishops. In a report written in 1656, Governor Caracena emphasized the strong temporal power of the church in the province and, at the same time, the extreme weakness of his king who controlled very few ecclesiastical benefices and was therefore unable to use them as incentives to win the loyalty of his Milanese subjects. In the case of a jurisdictional battle between Madrid and Rome, the urban elites would usually side with the Pope, who had the power to reward their relatives in the clergy with profitable offices (Signorotto 1996, 248-64).

**Figure 4** Mount Etna on the Cathedral Square. Celebrations for the Birth of Balthasar Charles (1630)



Source: Milan, Civica Raccolta Bertarelli, AS m. 51-17.



Starting with Carlo Borromeo in the 1570s, Milanese archbishops opposed all kinds of profane performances claiming that the sound of trumpets and drums pushed the faithful out of churches and enticed the people to attend secular spectacles not only on holidays but also during mass. They therefore banned, under penalty of excommunication, all celebrations and games at those times (Turchini 1995, 516; Bernardi and Cascetta 1997, 235). The use of the cathedral square for secular events became increasingly problematic and governors were frequently forced to confine dances and celebrations in the courtyard of their palace. In the contest for control of the central square, the weakness of the royal power proved extremely detrimental; while, between the 16th and 17th centuries, in other Italian principalities the palace and its court became the focal point of the city and sometimes also physically incorporated the cathedral within its walls, like in the cases of Urbino and Turin, in Milan, the governor constantly fought with the archbishop and the Fabbrica for the right to occupy the space adjacent to his residence (Fantoni 2002, 164-7).

The palace never became the cultural and aesthetic center of Milanese ceremonial life and the governors often had to rely on the models offered by the urban elites. The palace was not even considered a worthy residence for the representatives of the crown. In 1649, when queen Mariana of Austria, daughter of Emperor Ferdinand and spouse of Philip IV, visited Milan among great celebrations, she was not lodged in the royal-ducal palace as a guest of the governor. Instead the powerful Senator Bartolomeo Arese welcomed her with a princely reception and hosted her in his grandiose, newly built residence (Signorotto 1996, 153; Porro Lambertenghi 1880, 286). Even after the renovations by governor Ponce de Leon in the 1660s, some of the governors used the palace as a working space, but still preferred to live in more comfortable houses offered to them or rented from the local nobility. Ponce de Leon himself lived at palazzo Durini, and his successors, Paolo Spinola Doria and the Count of Melgar, resided on the Corso di Porta Orientale in the house of Count Gabrio Serbelloni (Cremonini 2012, 30-1).

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## 7. Conclusion

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In the 16th and 17th centuries, the ambitious reorganization and re-figuration of the urban fabric sponsored and supervised by princes or ruling elites, usually aimed at establishing the power and prestige of the central authority, transformed most Italian cities. However, the separation within the city center between a political and ceremonial space, usually centered around the palace of the prince, and a marketplace, that came to characterize most urban contexts, did not occur in Milan.

In the Lombard capital, the area around the cathedral square remained the pulsing heart of the city's economy, an open space characterized by workshops, counters and stalls, and all sorts of craftsmen, traders, and peddlers.

While a number of powerful Castilian viceroys turned Naples into the most prominent viceregal court of the Spanish monarchy, Madrid controlled and limited the power of the Milanese governors, who felt restricted in their sphere of influence. After the 1530s, the physical and symbolical space of the Neapolitan court, centered around the new viceregal palace and the Spanish quarter, gradually permeated the urban fabric making the vicerealty a model amongst the provinces of the empire. In Milan, the royal-ducal palace, located just next to the cathedral, never managed to become the ceremonial center of the city, and the governors were engaged in a constant battle with the urban elites in order to assert at least some partial control over the space surrounding it. The governor's palace in Milan never experienced a full renovation and suffered from an almost physical suffocation by the market structures owned by the powerful *Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo*. This institution, and the ecclesiastical hierarchies, both expressions of the Milanese patriciate, strongly limited the power of the central authorities and also opposed their attempts to use the square for royal celebrations and events.

The weakness of the crown and the lack of royal intervention in the urban fabric found their roots in the particular role of Milan within the Spanish Empire, especially since the last decades of the 16th century. In order to preserve peace and stability in a period of intense warfare, the monarchy sacrificed an invasive oversight of the city and abdicated a higher degree of local power, choosing instead to delegate it to the urban patriciate, the merchant elites, and the Ambrosian church. Free of any restriction, and in order to preserve their financial interests and emphasize their political prominence, the families of the urban elites maintained the economic function of the area around the cathedral square at the expense of the royal-ducal palace and articulated an alternative power network anchored to their palaces in the residential neighborhoods outside the city center.

As a result, the spatial organization in early modern Milan did not experience a transition from a horizontal to a vertical centrality dictated by the needs of decorum and power of the king. The cathedral square remained an inclusive and lively space where multiple urban actors and institutions coexisted and performed, fulfilling different demands of spiritual, secular, and economic nature.

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