



RESEARCH ARTICLE

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

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Abstract

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

Introduction

In April 1482 and May 1484, Pope Sixtus IV (r. 1471–84) twice ordered the destruction of the houses of families belonging to Rome's social and political elite in response to a crime. In April 1482, he ordered the destruction of the Santacroce houses near Piazza Costaguti as punishment for the family's assault on the Della Valle residences and the murder of Girolamo Colonna (died 1482).¹ Two years later, he condemned the Della Valle houses to destruction in response to the support the family had given to Lorenzo Oddone Colonna (died 1484) in

¹For contemporary accounts, see J. Gherardi, *Il diario romano di Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra dal 7 settembre 1479 al 12 agosto 1484*, ed. E. Carusi (Città di Castello, 1904), 44–5, 93–4; G. Pontani, *Il diario romano di Gaspare Pontani già riferito al Notaio del Nantiporto (30 gennaio 1481 – 25 luglio 1492)*, ed. D. Toni (Città di Castello, 1907), 5; S. Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma di Stefano Infessura scriba-senato*, ed. O. Tommasini (Rome, 1890), 87–8; S. dei Conti, *Le storie de suoi tempi dal 1475 al 1510*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1883), vol. I, 134–7. Several phases in the conflict are documented by archival material. This is cited throughout the article.

disobeying the pope.² Both cases were remarkable as the punishment had been banned from Rome since the revolution under Cola di Rienzo (1313–53) in 1347. The latter had imposed that no more houses should be destroyed as the consequence of a crime.³ Pope Paul II (r. 1464–71), however, reintroduced the punishment in 1466. That year, he issued a papal bull ruling that houses belonging to the instigators and main participants of armed fights in the city would be sentenced to destruction.⁴ With this papal bull, Pope Paul II changed the policy towards house-destruction in Rome, and his successor, Pope Sixtus IV, was the one to put the legal reform into practice.

This article studies the cases of house-destruction in 1482 and 1484 within the context of the papacy of Sixtus IV, and against a wider chronological and geographical background. It argues that the reintroduction and application of house-destruction as a legal punishment by the popes was part of their ongoing attempts to assert political and judicial authority in the city, to the detriment of the power exercised by the municipal authorities.⁵ By placing the Roman case within a wider chronological and geographical context, it also shows how it is representative of a broader European evolution. Municipal authorities progressively abandoned house-destruction as a punishment from the end of the thirteenth century onwards, while individuals holding more centralized power continued to use it as a means to assert and display authority.

The article also examines the relationship between the two cases of house-destruction and other practices of demolition of the built environment that took place under the pontificate of Sixtus IV. As is well known, demolition was an integral part of Sixtus' plans for urban renewal.⁶ Porticoes and balconies, but also complete houses, were destroyed to enlarge and improve streets and squares. The article shows that the house-destructions were most likely not imposed because they were part of the plan of urban renewal. The destructions were clearly motivated by political and legal considerations. However, both forms of destruction

²For contemporary accounts, Conti, *Le storie de suoi tempi*, vol. I, 188–92; Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma*, 107–18; Pontani, *Il diario romano di Gaspare Pontani*, 29–31; Gherardi, *Il diario romano di Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra*, 132–3.

³A. Romano, *Cronica*, ed. G. Porta (Milan, 1979), 155–6. See also A. Modigliani, *Cola di Rienzo e il Comune di Roma*, vol. II: *L'eredità di Cola di Rienzo: gli statuti del Comune di popolo e la riforma di Paolo II*, ed. A. Rehberg and A. Modigliani (Rome, 2004), 81–109.

⁴S. Franco and H. Dalmazzo (eds.), *Bullarum, diplomatum et privilegiorum sanctorum romanorum pontificum taurinensis editio locupletior facta collectione novissima plurium brevium, epistolarum, decretorum actorumque S. Sedis a s. Leone Magno usque ad praesens*, 24 vols. (Turin, 1857–72; anastatic reprint 1964), vol. V, 186–9.

⁵See also, for example, A. Esch, *La Roma dei papi, la Roma dei romani. Studi sul tardo Medioevo e sul Rinascimento* (Rome, 2022); M. Gargano, M. Chiabò, A. Modigliani and P. Osmond (eds.), *Congiure e conflitti: l'affermazione della signoria pontificia su Roma nel Rinascimento: politica, economia e cultura. Atti del Convegno Internazionale Roma, 2–3 Dicembre 2013* (Rome, 2014); A. Modigliani, *Congiurare all'antica. Stefano Porcari, Niccolò V, Roma 1453: con l'edizione delle fonti* (Rome, 2013).

⁶Especially F. Cantatore, 'Sisto IV committente di architettura a Roma tra magnificenza e conflitto', in Gargano, Chiabò, Modigliani and Osmond (eds.), *Congiure e conflitti*, 313–38; G. Simoncini, *Roma. Le trasformazioni urbane nel quattrocento* (Florence, 2004); M.V. Piñeiro, 'Una città da cambiare: intorno alla legislazione edilizia di Sisto IV', in F. Benzi (ed.), *Sisto IV: le arti a Roma nel primo rinascimento* (Rome, 2000), 426–33; S. Valtieri, 'La zona di Campo de' Fiori prima e dopo gli interventi di Sisto IV', *L'architettura, Cronache e Storia*, 30 (1984), 346–72.

(as a legal punishment and as part of urban renewal) were part of the same papal policy to withdraw legal and political power from the municipal authorities in favour of the pope and his entourage, and served to destabilize the everyday living environment of Rome's leading citizens.

Destroying houses as a legal punishment in Rome: the case of the Santacroce and Della Valle houses

In April 1482, Pope Sixtus IV ordered the destruction of Prospero and Giorgio Santacroce's houses because of the armed attack they had made on the Della Valle in their houses, and the resulting death of Girolamo Colonna.⁷ The Santacroce's attack on the Della Valle was not an isolated case. It was part of a series of violent acts that had been terrorizing Roman city life for years. The conflict had started during the Vacant See of 1471 as a feud between two individuals⁸ and soon expanded into a large-scale conflict involving the Margani, the Crescenzi, the Colonna and the Orsini, but also the papal cousins, Girolamo Riario (1433–88) and Giuliano della Rovere (1443–1513).⁹

The original vendetta began in 1471 when Francesco Della Valle accidentally wounded Francesco Santacroce with his sword during the violence that usually accompanied the transition period from pope to pope.¹⁰ Offended by the attack, Francesco Santacroce decided to take revenge. He assaulted Francesco Della Valle one day when he crossed Campo de' Fiori. The chronicler Sigismondo dei

⁷There is no official document to support the punishment, but the order for destruction is mentioned by several chroniclers. Infessura wrote that Sixtus IV ordered the destruction of Giorgio Santacroce's house, as well as that of Prospero. Gherardi only mentioned that Prospero's house was destroyed and that Giorgio left the city. Pontani mentions that a *bando* was issued on 11 Apr. 1482, declaring Francesco Della Valle, Francesco Santacroce and Giorgio Santacroce rebels of the state. He did not mention any destruction. Pontani, *Il diario romano di Gaspare Pontani*, 5; Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma*, 87; Gherardi, *Il diario romano di Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra*, 94. Other well-known chroniclers, such as Antonio De Vascho and Sigismondo dei Conti make no mention of any destruction or other punishment. Antonio de Vascho, *Il diario della città di Roma dall'anno 1480 all'anno 1492 di Antonio de Vascho*, ed. G. Chiesa (Città di Castello, 1904), 497; Conti, *Le storie de suoi tempi*, vol. I, 134–7.

⁸Both Gherardi and Conti trace the origin of the conflict specifically to this moment. Gherardi, *Il diario romano di Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra*, 44–5; Conti, *Le storie de suoi tempi*, vol. I, 134–7. A short summary is also given by Infessura. Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma*, 87–8.

⁹See also M.A. Visceglia, 'Factions in Rome between papal wars and international conflicts (1480–1530)', in M. Caesar (ed.), *Factional Struggles: Divided Elites in European Cities and Courts (1400–1750)* (Leiden, 2017), 82–103; A. Esposito, 'Prospero Santacroce', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (2017); A. Modigliani, 'Pietro Margani', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (2008). Tensions among Rome's leading families, and between these families and the popes, were structural features of Roman society throughout the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period. See, for example, G. Chittolini, 'Private wars at the end of the Middle Ages: notes on Italy and Germany in the 15th century', in Y. Hattori (ed.), *Political Order and Forms of Communication in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Rome, 2014), 109–32; C. Shaw, *The Political Role of the Orsini Family from Sixtus IV to Clement VII: Barons and Factions in the Papal States* (Rome, 2007); L. Nussdorfer, *Civic Politics in the Rome of Urban VIII* (Princeton, 1992).

¹⁰On the Vacant See, see J.M. Hunt, *The Vacant See in Early Modern Rome: A Social History of the Papal Interregnum* (Leiden, 2016); M.A. Visceglia, *Morte e elezione del papa: norme, riti e conflitti* (Rome, 2013); J. Rollo-Koster, *Raiding Saint Peter: Empty Sees, Violence, and the Initiation of the Great Western Schism* (Leiden, 2008); L. Nussdorfer, 'The Vacant See: ritual and protest in early modern Rome', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 18 (1987), 173–89.

Conti (1432–1512) mentions that the wound near Francesco's heel left permanent damage. Even after it was healed, Francesco continued to limp.¹¹ Keen on taking revenge himself, Francesco Della Valle disguised himself some time later when his sister, Livia della Valle, and her husband, Prospero Santacroce, invited Francesco Santacroce to their house for dinner. Disguised, he entered the house and killed Francesco Santacroce at the table. Prospero, offended by the murder having taken place in his home, subsequently declared war on the Della Valle, upon which the family armed and enclosed themselves in their houses along the Via Papalis.

The next important moment in the conflict occurred in 1480, when Prospero, prohibited from taking revenge on the Della Valle themselves, murdered Pietro Margani (c. 1410–80), father-in-law of Filippo della Valle, near his house.¹² The murder had direct legal consequences. On 24 October 1480, the Casale di Selva della Rocca, one of Prospero's extramural estates, was confiscated. He himself was most probably forced to leave the city.¹³ On 18 November of the same year, his lawful return to the city seemed to have been secured. On that day, a peace agreement was settled between Prospero and Stefano Margani, Pietro's son.¹⁴ Such official contracts of peace served, among other purposes, as a requirement for exiles to return to the city, as they offered some legal security that new retributive actions between hostile parties would not occur.¹⁵

Multiple peace agreements among Rome's social and political elite over the course of 1481 show, however, that enmities among the families continued, and that the conflict continued to involve more and more people. On 14 January 1481, for example, a solemn ceremony took place between Stefano Margani and Stefano di Francesco Crescenzi (allies of the Santacroce) on the insistence of Pope Sixtus IV.¹⁶ These men, together with many cardinals and members of the curia as witnesses, assembled in the *camera paramentorum* of the house of Cardinal Guillaume d'Estouteville (c. 1403–83). Individuals in prominent social and political positions, such as Gentile Virginio Orsini (c. 1434–97), Stefano Colonna and Battista Arcioni (*conservatore* of Rome at the time) were also present. The purpose was to 'stop and contain the fights and enmities of the city and its esteemed citizens'.¹⁷ Another peace ceremony took place in front of the pope three months later, on 12 April 1481. This ceremony is extensively described by Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra (1434–1516) in his Roman diary.¹⁸ Gherardi emphasizes how the whole Roman *civitas* was sick and suffered

¹¹Conti, *Le storie de suoi tempi*, vol. I, 134.

¹²See also Esposito, 'Prospero Santacroce'; Modigliani, 'Pietro Margani'.

¹³Archivio di Stato di Roma (ASR), Archivio Santacroce, b. 262, f. 54–5, 24 ottobre 1480. Transcribed and cited in F. Vicarelli, 'La collezione di antichità della famiglia Santacroce', in A. Cavallaro (ed.), *Collezioni di antichità a Roma tra '400 e '500* (Rome, 2007), 68.

¹⁴Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ottob.lat., 2551/I:D. Iacovacci, repertorio di famiglie, cc. 419–37. Cited in Modigliani, 'Pietro Margani'.

¹⁵G. Kumhera, *The Benefits of Peace: Private Peacemaking in Late Medieval Italy* (Leiden and Boston, 2017); C. Shaw, 'Peace-making rituals in fifteenth-century Siena', *Renaissance Studies*, 20 (2006), 225–39; T. Dean, 'Violence, vendetta, and peacemaking in late medieval Bologna', in L.A. Knafla (ed.), *Crime, Gender, and Sexuality in Criminal Prosecutions* (Westport, CT, 2002), 1–17.

¹⁶Modigliani, 'Pietro Margani'.

¹⁷'ad sedendas et componendas brigas et inimicitias Urbis et civium specialiter deputati'. Translation by author. ASR, Coll. Not. Cap., Notaio Camillo Benimbene, 175. Cited in Modigliani, 'Pietro Margani'.

¹⁸Gherardi, *Il diario romano di Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra*, 44–5.

from the long-standing conflict. The pope admonished the whole sacred college, the urban magistrates and the citizens of Rome, and urged them to stop the enmities and let the *civitas* heal.

The peace agreements, however, had little effect. On the night of 3 April 1482, Giorgio Santacroce, Prospero's cousin and *condottiere* of the family, marched towards the Della Valle houses with 200 men and five troops.¹⁹ According to Conti, the Santacroce could also count on the support of papal soldiers under the command of Girolamo Riario.²⁰ Other allies of the Santacroce would also have occupied Porta San Sebastiano, possibly to allow additional troops to enter the city, or to provide a safe escape route when necessary. Once they arrived at the Della Valle houses, the Santacroce challenged the men to fight. The Della Valle responded, fighting their opponents for several hours. The outcome was disastrous. Many men were wounded, and three were killed, among them Girolamo Colonna, brother of the powerful and respected Prospero (c. 1460–1523) and Cardinal Colonna. With Girolamo Colonna dead, the Santacroce decided to leave the city, according to Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra 'more out of fear for the opposed faction than from the popes'.²¹ Nonetheless, Pope Sixtus IV ordered the destruction of Prospero's and Giorgio Santacroce's houses as a punishment for their crimes.

While the extreme violence and danger of the situation might have been enough reason for Pope Sixtus IV to intervene and to impose the penalty of house-destruction, his contemporary war with King Ferdinand of Naples (r. 1458–94) may have added to the complexity of the situation. Around the same time that the Santacroce attacked the Della Valle, it was discovered that the lords of Marino were colluding with Naples and were beginning to fortify themselves in their strongholds.²² The pope immediately stationed people in the territory around the city, including Prospero Colonna and his men.²³ A strong reaction to the death of Prospero's brother may have been necessary if the pope were to count on his continued military support (especially if it was true that papal soldiers had participated in the attack). If this was the case, the imposed destruction of the Santacroce houses had little effect. At the end of May, Prospero Colonna would still betray the pope and defect to the lords of Naples. According to Conti, Prospero's betrayal was an immediate consequence of the pope's support for the Orsini in the Santacroce-Della Valle conflict.²⁴

The second case of house-destruction took place two years later at the end of May 1484. This time, it was not the tensions between the Della Valle and Santacroce that were the direct cause of the destruction. The Della Valle houses were destroyed because of the military support the family had given to the Colonna in a conflict that involved the pope directly.²⁵ This conflict had a long-

¹⁹The specific number is mentioned by Pontani, *Il diario romano di Gaspare Pontani*, 5.

²⁰Conti, *Le storie de suoi tempi*, vol. I, 136.

²¹'...ob timorem factionis adverse, magis quam pontifices...Urbe abiit.' Gherardi, *Il diario romano di Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra*, 94.

²²De Vaschi dates the discovery to 3 Apr. 1482, the day upon which other chroniclers situate the attack on the Della Valle. Vascho, *Diario della città di Roma*, 23.

²³For the role of the Colonna in the papal wars, see also Visceglia, 'Factions in Rome'.

²⁴Conti, *Le storie de suoi tempi*, vol. I, 137.

²⁵No official documentation has been found relating to the orders for destruction in this case either. However, the destruction is mentioned in chronicles and diaries, as well as diplomatic letters. Burckard

standing history, but multiple chroniclers identify a new phase when the Colonna refused to return the fiefdoms of Albe and Tagliacozzo to the Orsini.²⁶ The return of these lands had been stipulated in the truce between Pope Sixtus IV and King Ferdinand of Naples, who himself had taken the fiefdoms from the Orsini and given them to the Colonna for their support in his war with the pope. The Colonna would have refused to return the fiefdoms as other stipulations of the truce had not been implemented.²⁷ The Colonna's refusal caused increasing tensions with the Orsini and the pope, so that by the end of April 1484, all parties began to arm themselves in the city. The protonotary Lorenzo Oddone Colonna would have locked himself up in the Colonna complex near Monte Cavallo. He and his partisans also occupied the Porta Maggiore. The pope would have ordered Virginio and Paolo Orsino (died 1503) to gather their armies. Together with those of Girolamo Riario, these were stationed in Monte Giordano and on Campo de' Fiori.²⁸

With all armies ready, the pope first sent an embassy to Palazzo Colonna with the message that Lorenzo should come to the papal palace. According to Stefano Infessura, Lorenzo twice tried to obey the papal order, but each time he was stopped by his own partisans, who were convinced that Lorenzo would never leave the papal palace alive.²⁹ Faced with a double disobedience, Sixtus IV then ordered Lorenzo to be brought to him by force. This order gave rise to a major military operation in which the Orsini, but also soldiers of Girolamo Riario, the Crescenzi, the Santacroce and the Conti were involved. The whole army marched towards the Colonna complex, which it surrounded, invaded, plundered and destroyed. Lorenzo was captured in his chambers and brought to the pope. He was first imprisoned in Castel Sant Angelo and later sentenced to death. Plundering and destruction in Rome continued in the days following the capture of Lorenzo. In the course of these events, Pope Sixtus IV also ordered that the Della Valle houses along the Via Papalis should be demolished because of the support they had given to the Colonna in this fight.

The destruction of the Della Valle residences was somewhat different from the one inflicted on the Colonna complex, as the destruction occurred only after Lorenzo was captured, and as it was carried out by the governor of Rome.³⁰ The governor of Rome

specifies the destruction was carried out by the governor of Rome. Pontani in turn specifies that destruction took place over several days, from 31 May until 9 June 1484. Pontani, *Il diario romano di Gaspare Pontani*, 5; Gherardi, *Il diario romano di Jacopo Gherardi da Volterra*, 133; Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma*, 118; J. Burckard, *Johannis Burckardi Liber notarum ab anno MCCCCLXXXIII usque ad annum MDVI*, ed. E. Celani (Città di Castello, 1907–10), vol. I, 12.

²⁶Conti, *Le storie de suoi tempi*, vol. I, 188. For detailed analyses of the conflict, see Visceglia, 'Factions in Rome'; A. de Vincentiis, 'Papi e baroni di Roma nel XV secolo', in S. Carocci (ed.), *La nobiltà romana nel medioevo* (Rome, 2006), 551–613; P. Cherubini, 'Tra violenza e crimine di stato la morte di Lorenzo Oddone Colonna', in M. Miglio (ed.), *Un pontificato ed una città, Sisto IV (1471–1484). Atti del convegno, Roma, 3–7 dic. 1984* (Rome, 1986).

²⁷According to De Vincentiis, Infessura's diary largely serves to justify the Colonna's actions in this conflict. De Vincentiis, 'Papi e baroni di Roma nel XV secolo', 594–5.

²⁸Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma*, 111.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 111–14.

³⁰Burckard, *Johannis Burckardi Liber notarum*, 12. For the Santacroce houses, there is no information about who executed the destruction.

was the leading prosecutor of the city, an office that had been established during the first half of the fifteenth century when the popes returned from Avignon.³¹ Pope Eugenius IV (r. 1431–7) had appointed the first governor in 1436, but it was only under the pontificate of Sixtus IV that the extent of his jurisdiction was specified. At this time, the governor became responsible for prosecuting all criminal matters that took place within 40 miles of the city walls. In 1473, Sixtus IV also combined the office with the one of vice chamberlain, thus making the governor part of the papal household. The latter's actions might therefore be considered directly reflecting papal policy.³² The fact that the destruction of the Della Valle property was carried out by the governor shows that it was imposed as punishment for a criminal offence. The destruction was a genuine case of house-destruction as a legal punishment.

House-destruction in Rome and elsewhere: princely and municipal authority

When Sixtus IV ordered the destruction of the Santacroce and Della Valle houses, he was acting in accordance with a legal reform introduced by his predecessor. On 22 September 1466, Pope Paul II introduced a papal bull that imposed house-destruction as a punishment for those who declared armed struggle in the city.³³ The bull was addressed to 'those men undertaking vengeance across the city or one of its districts, holding cavalcades or collecting men, making fights, as well as their supporters'.³⁴ The introduction of the punishment was remarkable, especially since it went against municipal legislation. Rome's urban statutes stated that under no circumstances could house-destruction be carried out as a legal punishment in order to 'protect the honour of the city' and to 'not deform the Roman civitas'.³⁵ These clauses had been introduced in 1363 when the Felice Società dei Balestrieri e dei Pavesati had new urban statutes drawn up after the revolution under Cola di Rienzo.³⁶ They were presumably following a reform suggested by Cola himself. When Conte di Cecco Mancino proclaimed Cola's *Ordinamenti dello buono stato* on the steps of the Campidoglio on 20 May 1347, he made it clear that from now on no house in Rome would be destroyed as the result of a crime, but that houses would be confiscated by the municipal authorities instead.³⁷

House-destruction as a legal punishment was a widely used practice in the late Middle Ages, both on the Italian peninsula and beyond.³⁸ The origins of the

³¹M. Pattenden, 'Governor and government in sixteenth-century Rome', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 77 (2009), 260; N. Del Re, *Monsignor governatore di Roma* (Rome, 1972).

³²Especially Re, *Monsignor governatore di Roma*.

³³Franco and Dalmazzo (eds.), *Bullarum, diplomatum et privilegiorum*, 186–9.

³⁴Contra vindictam transversalem in Urbe eiusque districtu sumentes, aut cavalcatas seu hominum collectas facientes, brigososque et eorum fautores.' Franco and Dalmazzo (eds.), *Bullarum, diplomatum et privilegiorum*, 186–9.

³⁵'pro honore urbis' and 'ut romana civitas non deformatur'. N. Del Re (ed.), *Statuti della città di Roma del secolo XIV* (Rome, 1883), 94 (book 2, article 16, De domibus homicidarum non diruendis) and 141 n. 7 (book 2, article 200, Quod non diruatur aliqua domus).

³⁶See also Modigliani, *Cola di Rienzo e il Comune di Roma*, 81–109.

³⁷Romano, *Cronica*, 155–6. See also Modigliani, *Cola di Rienzo e il Comune di Roma*, 72.

³⁸A. Pertile, *Storia del diritto Italiano dalla caduta dell'impero Romano alla codificazione*. vol. V (Bologna, 1965), 348–53; E. Fischer, *Die Hauszerstörung als strafrechtliche Massnahme im Deutschen*

punishment go back at least to classical antiquity.³⁹ In Greek society, house-destruction was imposed as a punishment mainly for major offences such as murder, subversion, treason, misconduct in military expeditions and tyranny, and often imposed in combination with other punishments such as confiscation, exile, cursing and denial of burial. Based on how such punishments were discussed in literary texts, W.R. Connor interpreted house-destruction as a means to extirpate the individual and his immediate kin from society and to purify a site from sin.⁴⁰ According to ancient thought, sin infected all physical objects in the criminal's immediate surroundings. In order to prevent further infection of the community and future generations by this sin, all materials associated with the crime needed to be destroyed. In Greek society, house-destruction was thus an act of extirpation and purification, excluding an individual from the polis, and preventing infection.

At least from the twelfth century onward, both royal, seigniorial and communal authorities all disposed of the right for house-destruction (also known as *Brandrecht*) in various European regions.⁴¹ André Delcourt interpreted the appropriation of the right for house-destruction by municipal authorities in specific as a means to claim supreme sovereignty when developing their cities into more independent political and judicial entities.⁴² The first known urban statutes to include punishments of house-destruction in their books are those of Aire-sur-la-Lys in 1188, but a preamble in the text dates the first official authorization for house-destruction by the municipal authorities to the early twelfth century.⁴³ In Saint-Omer, too, the punishment appears in a charter as early as 1127.⁴⁴ Lille, Arras, Ghent, Bruges, Oudenaerde and other towns soon followed. Delcourt traced the presence of house-destruction as a legal punishment in regions as diverse as Picardy, Normandy, Flanders, Brabant, Hainaut and Westphalia.⁴⁵ Ernst Fischer further elaborated on such punishments for medieval towns in the German lands.⁴⁶ Antonio Pertile in turn reconstructed the presence of such punishments in the statutes of the Italian communes.⁴⁷

Although great differences existed between the legislations of these cities, the use of house-destruction as a legal punishment seems to have been generally preserved for crimes against the *civitas* as a whole, and for the disregard for its political and judicial privileges.⁴⁸ House-destruction, imposed by municipal authorities, has therefore been interpreted as an act of expulsion from the urban community and

Mittelalter (Stuttgart, 1957); A. Delcourt, *La vengeance de la commune. L'arsin et l'abattis de maison en Flandre et en Hainaut* (Lille, 1930); J. Kohler, *Studien aus dem Strafrecht II. Das Strafrecht der Italienischen Statuten vom 12.-16. Jahrhundert* (Mannheim, 1895), 70–2.

³⁹W.R. Connor, 'The razing of the house in Greek society', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 115 (1985), 79–102.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹Fischer, *Die Hauszerstörung*, 100; Delcourt, *La vengeance de la commune*, 16.

⁴²Delcourt, *La vengeance de la commune*, 24–6.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 16–23.

⁴⁶Fischer, *Die Hauszerstörung*.

⁴⁷Pertile, *Storia del diritto Italiano*, 348–53.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*; Fischer, *Die Hauszerstörung*, 95–100; Delcourt, *La vengeance de la commune*.

as an act of revenge against an enemy of the collective.⁴⁹ The connotations of the collective were also important in the punishment's execution. Delcourt found that every member of the urban community was expected to participate in the house-destruction when it was imposed as a punishment.⁵⁰

Although the punishment of house-destruction was integrated into numerous urban statutes from the twelfth century onwards, variations on the punishment were introduced fairly quickly, allowing (complete) demolition to be avoided. For example, conditions were introduced under which the house could be purchased. Demolition could also be replaced by confiscation or by partial destruction. Delcourt has found these clauses in the statutes of Ypres and Hesdin at the end of the twelfth century.⁵¹ Pertile noted that destruction was replaced by confiscation in the documents of Padua already in 1236.⁵² In 1363, as we have seen, Rome followed suit.

The reforms of the Roman statutes in the fourteenth century, and the clause that from now on no house would be destroyed but confiscated, are thus part of a broader observable evolution in late medieval cities, both south and north of the Alps. The motivation cited in the Roman statutes to abolish the practice was to 'preserve the honour of the city' and 'not to deform the Roman *civitas*'.⁵³ In addition to fiscal reasons, Delcourt found similar motivations mentioned in the legal documents of northern cities where alternatives to house-destruction were put forward.⁵⁴ The integrity of the urban fabric and the safeguarding against large-scale material damage thus seem to have taken precedence over the demonstration of political and judicial authority through demolition.

Although municipal authorities progressively abandoned house-destruction as a legal punishment, other levels of the judicial hierarchy continued to apply it. Christopher Friedrichs recently studied the practice for the period 1520–1760 as applied to cases spread across Europe.⁵⁵ Friedrichs argued that the practice gained a new resonance in the early modern period; house-destruction was no longer imposed and carried out by local authorities but by state officials or agents of monarchical power, who wanted to assert their authority through demolition. The reintroduction of the punishment by Pope Paul II, and its execution by Pope Sixtus IV at the end of the fifteenth century, could thus be added as an early case to the list studied by Friedrichs. Here too, political power exerted by a princely authority imposed the punishment, although municipal authorities wanted to abandon the practice.

⁴⁹Fischer, *Die Hauszerstörung*, 151

⁵⁰Delcourt, *La vengeance de la commune*, 71 and 82–95.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 144.

⁵²Pertile, *Storia del diritto Italiano*, 352 n. 54.

⁵³'pro honore urbis' and 'ut romana civitas non deformetur'. Re (ed.), *Statuti della città di Roma*, 94 and 141 n. 7.

⁵⁴Delcourt, *La vengeance de la commune*, 143–56.

⁵⁵C.R. Friedrichs, 'House-destruction as a ritual of punishment in early modern Europe', *European History Quarterly*, 50 (2020), 599–624, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265691420960917>. See also D. Jütte, 'Living stones: the house as actor in early modern Europe', *Journal of Urban History*, 42 (2016), 659–87; K. Härter, 'Images of dishonoured rebels and infamous revolts: political crime, shaming punishments and defamation in the early modern pictorial media', in C. Behrmann (ed.), *Images of Shame: Infamy, Defamation and the Ethics of Oeconomia* (Berlin, 2016), 75–101.

Paul II's judicial reform was, however, recognized by the municipality of Rome. In 1469, the urban statutes were reformed on the initiative of the pope in collaboration with the municipal authorities.⁵⁶ In the new statutes, the aforementioned articles on the non-destruction of houses were maintained.⁵⁷ The municipal authorities thus retained in principle their policy of not destroying houses as a result of a crime or for a broken peace. Nevertheless, the statutes also recognized the changed institutional structure of the city, and the fact that papal legislation might overrule the content of the statutes. This specifically occurred in article 28 of the second book, entitled *De sumptione vindicte*.⁵⁸ This article, addressing violent struggles in the city, recognized the validity of the papal bull next to its own.

It appears, however, that Pope Paul II did not put his legal reform into practice. There is, to my knowledge, no known case of house-destruction as a legal punishment during his pontificate. It was his successor, Pope Sixtus IV, who applied it in April 1482 and May 1484, once, as we have seen, as a punishment for instigating an armed struggle in the city, a second time for military support given to an subordinate of papal authority. Yet, given the large-scale demolitions that took place under the pontificate of Sixtus IV to realize his *renovatio urbis*, one might question whether the pope had additional motivations for sentencing the Santacroce and Della Valle houses to destruction. Is there a relationship between these cases of house-destruction and the pope's plans for urban renewal? And if so, how should this relationship be understood?

Demolition as part of papal policy: Sixtus' project for urban renewal

The reintroduction of house-destruction as a legal punishment was not the only form of demolition of the built environment that took place during the pontificate of Sixtus IV. Destruction was also carried out as part of a programme of urban renewal that aimed to bring order to the city, and improve circulation and hygienic conditions.⁵⁹ During the first years of his pontificate, Sixtus IV mainly focused on improving the streets and squares in the *borgo*, as well as around the Ponte Sisto (which was built around 1475).⁶⁰ From the 1480s onwards, more attention was given to the three streets that defined the Ansa dell' Tevere, i.e. the Via Recta, the Via Papalis and the Via Peregrinorum.⁶¹ It is in this area of the city that the houses of the Santacroce and the Della Valle were also situated.

The Della Valle houses, sentenced to destruction, stood along the Via Papalis where the major palaces of the family are still situated today (Figures 1 and 2).⁶²

⁵⁶Modigliani, *Cola di Rienzo e il Comune di Roma*, 131.

⁵⁷*Statuta Urbis Romae* (Rome, c. 1471), fols. 53v–54r (book 2, article 16, De domibus homicidarum non diruendis & ad iudicatione earum), fol. 82v (book 2, article 119, Quod domos non diruantur pro pace fracta).

⁵⁸*Statuta Urbis Romae*, fols. 66v–67r (book 2, article 28, De sumptione vindicte).

⁵⁹See n. 6.

⁶⁰Simoncini, *Roma. Le trasformazioni urbane nel quattrocento*, 164–9.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 169–85.

⁶²P. Brunori, F. De Rubertis and A. Grassia, 'Palazzo della Valle-del Bufalo e l'"isola" della Valle in Roma', *Rassegna di architettura e urbanistica*, 23 (1990), 138–45; C.L. Frommel, *Der römische Palastbau der Hochrenaissance* (Tübingen, 1973), vol. I, 100 and 163, vol. II, 336–54, vol. III, 148–55.



Figure 1. Fragment of Nolli's map, showing the sections of the Via Recta, Via Papalis and Via Peregrinorum mentioned in a decree of 1480, issued by Guillaume d'Estouteville, for works to be executed in the city, together with the Della Valle *isola* and residence of Prospero Santacroce. ©Giovanni Battista Nolli, Giambattista Piranesi, Carlo Nolli. *La topografia di Roma di Gio. Bat[is]ta Nolli dalla maggiore, in questa minor tavola dal medesimo ridotta: Piranesi e Nolli incisero* [Rome, 1748]. 45.5 x 66.5cm. Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique.



Figure 2. Fragment of Tempesta's plan of Rome, showing the Della Valle *isola* in 1593. The buildings of Lelio, Jacopo and Filippo della Valle, sentenced to destruction in 1482, were part of this building block. ©Antonio Tempesta, *Plan of the City of Rome* (Rome, 1645). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accession Number: 1983.1027(1–12). Edward Pearce Casey Fund, 1983.

At least from 1421 onwards, the family had steadily bought up properties along this street, all belonging to one building block, creating what is often described as the *isola della Valle*.⁶³ Little is known about the original buildings that constituted this *isola*. Yet, they most probably contained protruding staircases, porticos and towers, as did most urban residences of the social and political elite at the time. Remains of a late medieval portico and foundations of a tower in the present-day Palazzo Della Valle shows that the house of Filippo Della Valle (one of the three houses sentenced to destruction) at least contained these elements.⁶⁴

The house of Prospero Santacroce was situated on the corner of Piazza Costaguti and the Via in Publicolis (Figures 1 and 3).⁶⁵ On the *piazza*, remains of a loggia decorated with the Santacroce colours and coats of arms can still be identified. For stylistic reasons, these have been dated to the beginning of the sixteenth century.⁶⁶ It may well be that this loggia belonged to the residence of Prospero as it was rebuilt after its destruction in 1482.⁶⁷ As with the Della Valle residences, this house was also part of a larger series of properties. Many buildings along the Via in Publicolis belonged to the Santacroce.⁶⁸ The current entrances to these properties are all on this street. It is quite possible that this corresponds to the original configuration before the destruction of Prospero's residence. Giorgio's whereabouts in 1482 are, however, unknown. It is quite possible that he lived in one of the houses along the Via in Publicolis, but he may just as well have been living elsewhere in the city.

The Della Valle houses stood along the section of the Via Papalis that was heavily transformed in Sixtus' *renovatio urbis* (Figure 1). It might therefore be possible that their demolition was motivated by considerations of urban planning. This is also suggested by Giorgio Simoncini in his analysis of the urban transformations

⁶³Brunori, Rubertis and Grassia, 'Palazzo della Valle-del Bufalo', 73 n. 4; Frommel, *Der römische Palastbau*, vol. II, 336.

⁶⁴The other houses, sentenced to destruction, were those of Lelio and Jacopo Della Valle. Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma*, 118; Frommel, *Der römische Palastbau*, vol. II, 348.

⁶⁵In 1475, Prospero received the houses in between the Via Recta, *via publica* and *retro domus dicti Prosperis* in 'enfiteusi perpetua' from the rector of Santa Maria in Publicolis. As the houses are indicated as 'retro domus dicti Prosperis', it is clear that Prospero was living on the corner of the Via in Publicolis and Piazza Costaguti at least from this point onwards. ASR, Archivio Santacroce, Pergamene VI, 7. Also cited in I. Ait and A. Esch, 'Aspettando l'Anno Santo: fornitura di vino e gestione di taverne nella Roma del 1475', *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, 73 (1993), 411.

⁶⁶L. Garella, "Pitture sopra le facciate delle case di Rome." Ritrovamenti a palazzo Santacroce ed al Palazzetto Curti', *Alma Roma. Bollettino d'informazioni*, 33 (1992), 124–37.

⁶⁷It has been suggested that Prospero's residence stood on the site where later the Palazzo a Punta di Diamante would be built. At the time of the imposed destruction, however, Prospero held the properties on the corner of the Via Mercatoria and the Via in Publicolis in 'enfiteusi perpetua'. See n. 65. I find it unlikely that Pope Sixtus IV would order the destruction of buildings that were not in the full possession of Prospero, but were rather owned by Santa Maria in Publicolis.

⁶⁸Prospero's father and uncles started to build up the family's presence along this route from 1439 onwards, when they collectively bought a house, next to Santa Maria in Publicolis. A. Esposito, 'Famiglia, mercanzia e libri nel testamento di Andrea Santacroce (1471)', in A. Esch (ed.), *Aspetti della vita economica e culturale a Roma nel Quattrocento* (Rome, 1981). See also N. De Raedt, 'The Santacroce houses along the Via in Publicolis in Rome: law, place and residential architecture in the early modern period', in E. Merrill (ed.), *Creating Place in Early Modern European Architecture* (Amsterdam, 2021), 73–97.



Figure 3. Fragment of Tempesta's plan of Rome, showing the Santacroce buildings in 1593. The house of Prospero Santacroce stood on the corner of the Via in Publicolis and Piazza Costaguti. Next to it, his son, Antonio Santacroce, built the Palazzo a Punta di Diamante shortly after 1498. ©Antonio Tempesta, *Plan of the City of Rome* (Rome, 1645). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accession Number: 1983.1027(1–12). Edward Pearce Casey Fund, 1983.

under Sixtus IV. He argued that the destruction of the Della Valle houses could have made it possible to create a *slargo* along the Via Papalis.⁶⁹ Although there might be truth in this suggestion, it seems, however, unlikely that the imposed demolition was specifically motivated by such a wish to create an open area along the street. As Simoncini noted, the transformation of the Via Papalis should not be understood as the implementation of a single coherent plan, but rather as a gradual transformation taking advantage of ongoing construction sites along its route.⁷⁰ The destruction of the Della Valle residences may therefore have presented an *ad hoc* opportunity to create an additional square, but there is no indication that this was initially part of the plan. Furthermore, if such a *slargo* was ever intended, it was never created. As mentioned before, Palazzo Della Valle, built by Cardinal Andrea Della Valle (1463–1534) on the ruins of the destroyed houses, still contains the remains of a late medieval portico and tower.⁷¹ This means that the house of Filippo Della Valle at least was not completely razed to the ground. It is quite likely that the same can be said for the houses of Lelio and Jacopo della Valle, equally sentenced to destruction by Sixtus IV. A *slargo* was thus never created but parts of the Della Valle buildings were left in ruins.

The house of Prospero Santacroce fell outside of the direct perimeter of Sixtus' plans for urban renewal (Figure 1). Again, it therefore seems unlikely that its destruction was directly motivated by urban planning considerations. Yet, if the hypothesis is correct, that all Santacroce residences had their main entrance on the Via in Publicolis, another link might be made between the cases of house-destruction and Sixtus' plans for Rome. Besides his ambitions for beautification and cleanliness, Sixtus' plans for urban renewal were motivated by military considerations. This is most explicitly suggested by Infessura's well-known testimony of the visit made by King Ferdinand of Naples to Rome in 1475, and the advice he had given the pope at that time.⁷² The king would have warned the pope that he

⁶⁹Simoncini, *Roma. Le trasformazioni urbane nel quattrocento*, 179.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹Frommel, *Der römische Palastbau*, vol. II, 348.

⁷²Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma*, 79–80, 85.

could never be a true lord of the city as long as the streets were narrow, and filled with porticoes and other structures. Such streets could too easily be obstructed during armed conflict, thus preventing the pope and his soldiers from effectively controlling them. By demolishing porticoes and other overhanging structures, by straightening and paving streets, the assertion of military control would become much easier. The short and narrow Via in Publicolis, onto which all entrances to the Santacroce residences may have opened, answers well to the concerns voiced by the king. It would have been quite easy for the family to barricade this street to protect themselves in their houses. The destruction of Prospero's house may have been motivated by such military considerations, in the hope of preventing the family from barricading themselves into their houses in the future.

The house-destructions may thus have contributed to the wider motivations behind Sixtus' plans for urban renewal, not only in terms of improving circulation and hygienic conditions, but also by enhancing military control of the built fabric.⁷³ Considered as a whole, Sixtus' plans also served more broadly to weaken the position of the traditional *cives romanes* in the city. Studies of the housing conditions of local Roman families in the fifteenth century have shown that these families mainly built enclaves in certain neighbourhoods of the city (as was the case for the Della Valle and Santacroce).⁷⁴ By clearing roads of obstructions, but also by building new roads, these spatial structures were cut through and the living patterns of these families were disrupted. The legal reforms, proposed by the papal bull entitled *etsi de cunctarum* of 1480, also mainly encouraged wealthy newcomers (such as cardinals) to settle in Rome and build large-scale residences.⁷⁵ Such newcomers often lacked the local networks needed to buy up (adjacent) properties in order to enlarge existing buildings. By giving them extensive opportunities to expropriate neighbours when they wished to enlarge their residence, they assumed the same, or even stronger position, as the *cives romanes*. These had been able to enlarge residences only because previous generations had increased the family's property portfolio over time. A link between Sixtus' plans for urban renewal and the implementation of house-destruction as a legal punishment can thus be made. Both aimed to destabilize the everyday living conditions of the *cives romanes* and to prevent them from using their houses as gravitational centres of their local power.

Sixtus IV was able to execute his plans for urban renewal because of his increased control of the municipal office of the *maestri de strade*.⁷⁶ This office

⁷³For other examples of urban renewal projects in the Italian Renaissance relating to matters of surveillance, see F. Nevola, 'Surveillance and control of the street in Renaissance Italy', *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 15 (2013), 85–106.

⁷⁴A. Modigliani, 'L'aristocrazia municipale romana nel XV secolo: identità politica e autorappresentazione', in D.G. Cavallero (ed.), *Vecchia e nuova aristocrazia a Roma e nel Lazio in età moderna* (Rome, 2006), 10–31; J.C.M. Vigneur and H. Broise, 'Strutture famigliari, spazio domestico e architettura civile a Roma alla fine del medioevo', *Storia dell'arte italiana*, 12 (Turin, 1983), 97–160.

⁷⁵C.M. Richardson, *Reclaiming Rome: Cardinals in the Fifteenth Century* (Leiden and Boston, 2009); D.S. Chambers, 'The housing problems of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 39 (1976), 21–58.

⁷⁶On the *maestri de strade*, see O. Verdi, *Maestri di edifici e di strade a Roma nel secolo XV. Fonti e problemi* (Rome, 1997); O. Verdi, 'Da ufficiali capitolini a commissari apostolici: I maestri delle strade e degli edifici di Roma tra XIII e XVI secolo', in L. Spezzaferro and M.E. Tittoni (eds.), *Il Campidoglio e Sisto V*

was introduced in Rome in 1143 by the municipal authorities.⁷⁷ Originally, the officials were to settle disputes between citizens when conflict over houses, walls, roads and squares occurred. At the outset, therefore, the *maestri* mainly had a judicial mediating function. Over the course of the fifteenth century, however, the *maestri* were given a more active role in the improvement of the urban fabric under the authority of the papal administration.⁷⁸

While the tendency to control the office and to use its jurisdiction to fulfil a programme of urban renewal had started under Pope Nicholas V (r. 1447–55), it took on a new dimension under Sixtus IV.⁷⁹ Sixtus IV not only provided the *maestri* with a fixed monthly income and brought them under the direct command of the chamberlain, he also largely extended their powers of demolition. The aforementioned papal bull, entitled *etsi de cunctarum*, for example, gave the *maestri* extensive abilities to expropriate and demolish structures that obstructed and prevented the construction of new roads and squares.⁸⁰ In his plans for urban renewal, as with the punishment of house-destruction, the power of decision-making and execution was withdrawn from the municipal authorities in favour of the pope and his entourage.

Before coming to a conclusion, a final observation needs to be made on the circumstances in which the Santacroce and Della Valle houses were destroyed. It is, for example, not insignificant that the pope twice ordered the destruction of residences belonging to the social and political elite when they were already vacated. It is quite possible that Sixtus was only able to destroy the residences because they were empty, and because military defence was absent. A remark made by the Florentine diplomat Guidantonio Vespucci (1436 – c. 1501) in a letter of June 1484 seems to confirm this observation. On the first day of the month, he wrote, both the Santacroce and the Della Valle

were so strong in their houses, that without great effort they could not have been driven out of the city. When they [the Della Valle] saw that Prothonotary Colonna had been taken, they evacuated the city at night with

(Rome, 1991), 54–75; E. Re, ‘Maestri di strada’, *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria*, 43 (1920), 5–102. For the activities of similar municipal magistrates in other Italian cities, see F. Nevola, *Street Life in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven, 2020), 29–65; P. Pertici, *La città magnificata: interventi edilizi a Siena nel Rinascimento: l’Ufficio dell’ornato (1428–1480)* (Siena, 1995); D. Friedman, ‘Palaces and the street in late medieval and Renaissance Italy’, in J.W.R. Whitehand and P.J. Larkham (eds.), *Urban Landscapes* (London, 1992), 69–113.

⁷⁷Verdi, ‘Da ufficiali capitolini a commissari apostolici’, 54.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 54–8.

⁷⁹For the *renovatio urbis* initiated by Nicholas V, see C. Smith and J.F. O’Connor, *Building the Kingdom: Giannozzo Manetti on the Material and Spiritual Edifice*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies (Tempe AZ, 2006); C. Burroughs, *From Sign to Design. Environmental Process and Reform in Early Renaissance Rome* (Cambridge, MA, 1990). On Sixtus IV and the *maestri de strade*, see Verdi, ‘Da ufficiali capitolini a commissari apostolici’, 57–8.

⁸⁰In the same bull, as we have seen, private owners were also given the right to expropriate the properties of their neighbours, if they wished to extend and restore their own. Franco and Dalmazzo (eds.), *Bullarum, diplomatum et privilegiorum*. On the bull and its impact on urban planning and development, see Piñeiro, ‘Una città da cambiare: intorno alla legislazione edilizia di Sisto IV’; Simoncini, *Roma. Le trasformazioni urbane nel quattrocento*, 185.

all their partisans, and also evacuated the house, leaving nothing in the house but some old women. Our Lord [the pope], in order to eradicate all the roots, commanded to throw their houses to the ground, and so they continue to destroy them.⁸¹

On the one hand, the comment relates to how the destruction manifested and confirmed the family's expulsion from the city; the family had left, and so their residences were destroyed. Yet, on the other hand, the comment also suggests that the pope was only able to destroy the houses because they were empty. It is quite possible that a similar sequence of events took place when the Santacroce houses were destroyed. In both cases, then, the families' own decision to leave the city and their houses would have created the opportunity for the pope to condemn the houses to destruction. By destroying the residences, the pope confirmed their expulsion and erased the family's physical presence from the city.

Conclusion

When Sixtus IV destroyed the Santacroce and Della Valle houses, he carried out a punishment that had been abandoned by the municipal authorities and reintroduced by his predecessor. As such, the two cases of house-destruction discussed in this article are part of a broader trend, in which municipal authorities progressively abandoned the punishment while princely rulers still carried it out at other political and judicial levels. Within a Roman context, the house-destructions are also exceptional, as they took place at a time when Rome was already undergoing large-scale demolitions as the result of urban renewal plans. The destruction of the Santacroce and Della Valle houses was not directly motivated by these plans; it was clearly imposed for political and legal reasons. Yet, destruction as a legal punishment, and as part of urban renewal served the same purpose (the destabilization of the everyday living environment of the Roman citizens, and the improvement of military control over the city), and subscribed to the same tendencies (the withdrawal of the power of decision-making and execution from the municipal authorities in favour of the pope and his entourage).

Ironically, however, both the Santacroce and the Della Valle seem to have benefited in the long run from the transformations of the urban fabric, implemented under Sixtus IV. After the pope's death in 1484, the Santacroce and Della Valle were able to return to the city. After their return from exile, they must at first have resided with other family members, or in parts of the buildings that might still have been inhabitable. Over time, subsequent generations built imposing urban residences on the sites of destruction; ones that also benefited from the monumental views made possible, thanks to the enlarged and paved streets created by Sixtus IV. Shortly after 1498, for example, Antonio Santacroce, Prospero's son, built the Palazzo a Punta di Diamante on the corner of Via in Publicolis and Via

⁸¹«stavano in modo forti in casa, che senza grande sforzo non si sarebbero potuti cacciare dalla città. Questi della Valle, veduto preso il prothonotario Colonna, la notte sgombrarono la città con tutti i loro partigiani, et similiter sgombrarono la casa, non lasciata in casa, se non certe vecchie. Nostro Signore per estirpare tutte le radice ha comandato se gittino in terra le loro case, et così continuo si gittino.» Letter transcribed in Burckard, *Johannis Burckardi Liber notarum*, 12 n. 1.

Mercatoria, with a tower that prominently attracts the attention of those heading from Campo de' Fiori towards Piazza Giudea.⁸² On the ruins of his father's residence, Cardinal Andrea Della Valle built the much-celebrated Palazzo Della Valle at least from 1507 onwards.⁸³ In 1510, Francesco Albertini mentions both the residences of the Santacroce and Della Valle as noteworthy buildings in his *Opusculum*.⁸⁴ Both families thus recovered socially, politically, economically, but also architecturally from the difficult period under Sixtus IV. They reaffirmed their presence in the city, and made this explicit through large-scale buildings.

Competing interests. The author declares none.

⁸²De Raedt, 'The Santacroce houses along the Via in Publicolis in Rome'; C. Benocci, 'Palazzo Santacroce tra Via in Publicolis e Via del Pianto: contributi e ricerche', *L'urbe*, 47 (1984), 225–33; P. Tomei, *L'architettura a Roma nel Quattrocento* (Rome, 1942), 239–42.

⁸³Brunori, Rubertis and Grassia, 'Palazzo della Valle-del Bufalo'; Frommel, *Der römische Palastbau*, vol. I, 100 and 63, vol. II, 336–54, vol. III, 148–55.

⁸⁴F. Albertini, *Opusculum de mirabilibus novae et veteris urbis Romae* (Rome, 1510), fol. 52r.

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