

RECONSTRUCTING A LOST SPACE  
THE GHETTO MAPPING PROJECT AT THE MAP\*

*Introduction*

L'ANTICO CENTRO DELLA CITTÀ  
DA SECOLARE SQUALLORE  
A VITA NUOVA RESTITUITO  
The ancient centre of the city  
from centuries-old squalor  
to new life was restored [Fig. 1]

This inscription, located on the top register of the triumphal arch in Piazza della Repubblica, marks the location of the most bustling cultural crossroads of early modern Florence: the Jewish Ghetto. Founded by Grand Duke Cosimo de' Medici I in 1571, it was demolished in 1888 as part of a radical urban *risanamento* spawned by the "Firenze Capitale" movement. The Ghetto was located just a stone's throw from the Duomo and at the end of a long axis of commercial centres, including Ponte Vecchio, Mercato Nuovo, and Mercato Vecchio.

The establishment of the ghetto of Florence was the final result of a long process that started the year before. In 1570, Cosimo I appointed five magistrates to conduct a comprehensive census of the Jewish population. The survey gathered information about the population including professional positions, so as to identify an area in the centre of Florence where the population could be relocated. The creation of the ghetto has traditionally been interpreted as an attempt by Cosimo I to align his court and administration with the Counter-Reform Church whose Pope, Pius V, had granted Cosimo the grand ducal title that same year. What officially justified such a major diversion from an other-

wise lenient and generally tolerant attitude of the Medici toward the Jews was a series of financial misconducts committed by Jewish bankers. These bankers allegedly lent money at too high an interest rate, violating the articles of the official charts (*condotte*). Though such violations may well have happened, according to official documentation, it is unlikely that they occurred to such an extent as declared. Turning what was likely a specific crime into a generalised fault of the entire Jewish population of Tuscany would justify not only the process of mass relocation/deportation but also the ensuing economic and financial wounds that would affect both Jews and Christians.<sup>1</sup>

Segregating the Jews certainly satisfied one of the requirements of the Counter-Reform Church (complete separation between Christians and infidels) and corresponded perfectly to Cosimo I's political plan that aimed to give the court complete control over its territory. The making of the Florentine ghetto was also a complex financial process that placed the area in a list of the Medici's private properties in the historical city centre which were restructured and modified so as to become a coherent, unique space, isolated from the rest of the city and easily guardable. Such a diversion from the Venetian ghettoization pattern – that utilized no forms of confiscation but rather the renegotiation of the renting contracts, forcibly passed from Christian to Jewish tenants – can be considered a direct consequence of the new strategy adopted by Cosimo I in his attempt to use the ghetto as both a political asset and a lucrative business. Banning the Jews from any productive profession, narrowing their profes-

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<sup>1</sup> Jews and Christians shared common professional bonds, and the Jews themselves played a leading in supporting the lower classes economically.

sional scope to a few basic activities (money-lending and second-hand cloth selling, financially minor but certainly economically relevant), and forcing them to reside into the ghetto, would ensure its owner (the Medici) a constant number of tenants. This set up would also provide customers for the surrounding Christian milieu of businesses offering services unavailable within the ghetto. Historians, including economic historians, have largely underestimated the nature and meaning of such a bond intertwining the ghetto and the city, the Jews and the Christian majority, in both cases two entities spatially divided but economically bound and, to some extent, co-dependent.

In 1888, the entire area of the ghetto – which comprised an entire city-block – was completely demolished and removed to create space for *Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II*, an elegant late 19<sup>th</sup> century square (after WWII re-named *Piazza della Repubblica*). Despite this monumental loss, copious amounts of unpublished archival, photographic, cartographic, artistic, and archaeological material have survived, recently collected by staff and fellows of the Medici Archive Project (MAP). Utilizing our open source software developed for early modern archival databases, MAP intends to construct a new, dedicated platform specifically geared towards the urban and architectural history of the Florentine Ghetto. Innovatively, by employing the most recent technologies in 3D architectural modeling and rendering, MAP plans to visualize this rich vein of primary multimedia material through a digital reconstruction of the Florentine Ghetto.

### *The History and Life of the Ghetto through Archival Collections*

The vast amount of material held in Florentine archives allows for the detailed reconstruction of both the original appearance and histori-

cal evolution of the Jewish quarter in Florence. It is possible to study the area of the city that will eventually be occupied by the Ghetto looking at the tax records such as the *Catasto*, the *Decima Repubblicana* and the *Decima Granducale*. The former, used in Florence from 1427 to 1480, was used by Guido Carocci in 1900 to draw a tentative plan of the area with the streets and the name of the owners of the buildings as they existed in 1427.<sup>2</sup> This is a useful starting point as it shows the city one hundred fifty years before the construction of the Ghetto. It is our plan to trace all later changes by following the *Decima records* until 1561, only a few years before Cosimo I radically transformed the area in 1570.<sup>3</sup> This important step will help us understand the reasons why this area was chosen to host the Tuscan Jews, and area that was, in fact, situated at the core of the old city, in the middle of the market, and only a few steps from the palace of the Archbishop and the Cathedral of Florence.

Before the Ghetto was established, Jews were not present in this part of the city. The synagogue and other Jewish institutions were located on the other side of the river between the Old Bridge and Palazzo Pitti, a street eventually called “via dei Giudei” in the 18th century.<sup>4</sup> The reconstruction of this area of the city pre-Ghetto is also important because, to save time and money, the existent buildings were only superficially transformed to host the new Jewish residents.<sup>5</sup> The changes made are fundamental to understand how the specific needs of the Jewish community were addressed. The construction of the first stage of the Ghetto, (February 1571 to March 1572) is recorded in two books at the *Archivio di Stato di Firenze* (from now on ASF).<sup>6</sup> These volumes contain all the information pertaining to the operation: the descriptions of all the properties to be appropriated and their value, the day-to-day list of the workers involved

<sup>2</sup> G. CAROCCI, Il Centro di Firenze (Mercato vecchio) nel 1427. Archivio Storico Comunale di Firenze (from now on ASCFI), and Archivio Museo Firenze Com'Era (from now on AMFCE) 1598 (cass. 52, ins. B).

<sup>3</sup> The decree by Cosimo I to forcibly move all the Tuscan Jews into the two established ghettos in Florence and Siena is dated October 3, 1570. S.B. SIEGMUND, *The Medici State and the Ghetto of Florence – The Construction of an Early Modern*

*Jewish Community*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2006, pp. 201-222.

<sup>4</sup> FERDINANDO L. DEL MIGLIORE, *Firenze città nobilissima illustrata*, Stamperia della Stella, Firenze 1684, p. 520.

<sup>5</sup> The census of Tuscan Jews before the ghetto is in Archivio di Stato di Firenze (from now on ASF), Magistrato Supremo, 4449, cc. 94.

<sup>6</sup> ASF, *Nove Conservatori del Dominio e della Giurisdizione fiorentina*, 3696 and 3697.

with the restoration and transformation of the existing buildings from masons to goldsmiths, and the daily provisions of building materials and their sources around the city. Every single payment has been recorded, providing invaluable insight into the costs of labour and materials.

This first nucleus of the new Jewish quarter, called *Ghetto Vecchio*, spanned two city blocks and featured two gates, one facing the market square and the other *via de Succhiellinai*. A visual record of this first stage is rendered in the Buonsignori's axonometric view of the city of Florence, drawn only few years after the completion of the Ghetto Vecchio [Fig. 1].<sup>7</sup> All the shops rented to Jews were facing the internal alleys and squares, while the ones facing the external streets were owned by or rented to Christians which made the Ghetto invisible at street level. Furthermore, as visible in the Buonsignori map, the presence of gated arches similar to those found in the Ghetto was quite common, with several streets closed off at night for security concerns. The living conditions in the seventy-two apartments of the original Ghetto were very different, following the diversity in the previous buildings, from working-class homes to palaces. Their height also depended on the previous structures, even if few new floors were added during construction. At the centre of the square at the heart of the Ghetto there was a well, perfectly located for the needs of the shops, especially the slaughterhouse and the butcher. Many other buildings had their own wells.

After its completion, the Ghetto became a possession of the Grand Dukes and its operations were supervised by the office in charge of the personal estate of the Medici family: the *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*. The life of the Ghetto, from its foundation to the early nineteenth century, has been recorded in eighty-nine

volumes of the *Scrittoio*, and the information they contain has never been processed in a comprehensive manner. Among these, all the expenses to maintain the buildings of the ghetto, such as the vast amount of money spent in 1670 to repair many apartments and most of the roofs damaged after a fire.<sup>8</sup>

In 1678, the first textual description of the Ghetto is given by Carlo Troiani, the Granducal supervisor.<sup>9</sup> He recorded thirty-three shops and seventy-nine residential units, for total of 328 rooms and a total revenue of 1,541 *scudi*. This simple account assigns to each unit or shops a specific number, includes the number of rooms in each apartment, the name of the tenant, and the amount of the lease. At times it lists the presence of a terrace or storage rooms under the roof, but overall the description makes it very difficult to understand the exact disposition of each unit.

In 1684, Ferdinando Del Migliore dedicated a chapter on the Ghetto in his book on Florence. He recalled the previous history of the Jewish community and praised Cosimo I for his wisdom in establishing the Ghetto. One of the examples of how much the construction was planned favouring Jewish traditions, is the use of open terraces on top of the buildings instead of the traditional pitched roof.<sup>10</sup> The Medici coat of arm was placed above the gate facing the market, and an inscription stated the magnificence of Cosimo I.<sup>11</sup>

Toward the end of the seventeenth century, a number of the Jewish community members led to the decision to enlarge the original Ghetto. On February 25, 1705, Cosimo III decided to transform two adjoining city blocks, eventually named *Ghetto Nuovo*.<sup>12</sup> In order to plan the new addition, a detailed list of the Jews living in Florence was compiled: in addition to those living inside the ghetto, 105 families resided outside its boundaries, renting apartments scattered in

<sup>7</sup> STEFANO BUONSIGNORI, *Nova pulcherrimae civitatis Florentiae topographia accuratissime delineata*, Firenze 1584. Only one copy of the original map survives at the Uffizi.

<sup>8</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 6559. «Libro Mastro del Ghetto segnato G, 1660-80», c. 199.

<sup>9</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 3559, vol. 1. It survives only in a copy made in 1708.

<sup>10</sup> «[...] i quali per confermarsi maggiormente al lor rito antico, d'avere la sommità delle Case i Terrazzini con parapettj o sponde in cambio di Tettora

chiamati dalla Scrittura Solari, parlando di Davide, spasseggiasse nel Solario del suo Real Palazzo, quando vedde Bersabea se lamentem super Solarium suum». FERDINANDO L. DEL MIGLIORE, *Firenze città nobilissima illustrata*, cit., p. 520. Del Migliore probably refers to the old Jewish custom to provide families with an open space for the building of huts for *Sukkot*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 528.

<sup>12</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 2526, ins. 1.

many areas of the city.<sup>13</sup> These accommodations appear to have been quite luxurious, with advanced amenities and servants, the result of a process during which the wealthier families of the Jewish community moved out from the Ghetto in search of better quarters.

On March 3, 1705, a notice was sent to all the owners of properties located on the two blocks that were incorporated into the Ghetto inviting them to a meeting to discuss the purchase of their residential and commercial spaces.<sup>14</sup> In June, the officials chose two estimators to appraise the properties to be acquired: engineer Pier Antonio Tosi and the contractor Orazio Totti.<sup>15</sup> This time, the process of purchase was a much longer affair that included landlords starting legal trials against the *Scrittoio* in order to raise the value of their properties. If, at the time of the *Ghetto Vecchio*, the owners were obliged to follow the Granducal will, in the case of the *Ghetto Nuovo* they were supposed to ask for the market value. Several plans with annotations stating the good condition and revised measurements of their properties were attached to these petitions in order to support the landlords' claims for a higher price. They are invaluable documents to reconstruct the appearance of these buildings before being incorporated and transformed.

In May 1708, a new and more detailed description of *Ghetto Vecchio* was drawn by Francesco Buratti.<sup>16</sup> This time, in addition to the name of the tenant and the amount of the lease, there was an explanation of the relative location of each unit in the building. This new account identifies apartments and shops using the same numbers assigned in the 1678 description, making possible a direct comparison between the two versions.

We know that a wooden model of the planned *Ghetto Nuovo* existed, and was placed on

display.<sup>17</sup> In response to this project, the Jewish community wrote a letter to the officers of the *Scrittoio*, criticizing the deficiencies and providing suggestions from the perspective of the final tenants.<sup>18</sup> One of the most urgent concerns was the final height of the proposed new buildings: in the officers' opinion, apartments located above the third floor would have been difficult to reach for children and elderly people. In addition, the number of wells is deemed insufficient for the needs of the new residents, and the width of the communal staircases not large enough for opposite genders to cross at the same time in opposite directions without touching. Furthermore, the letter also criticized the fact that all the new units have the same dimensions and quality, without consideration for families with different needs and status. In addition to the letter, and possibly with the hope to influence the design of *Ghetto Nuovo*, the Jewish community offered two thousand scudi to support the construction.<sup>19</sup> The careful comparison between their concerns and the executed project will shed light on the degree to which the Jewish community played a role in shaping the design of the new structures.

The construction of *Ghetto Nuovo* took longer than the older part of the ghetto, in part because the new area was larger than the previous one, in part because several buildings had to be rebuilt from their foundations. Mismanagements and malpractices were frequent and led to a number of trials against the original contractors.<sup>20</sup> These were dismissed in 1710 by the *Scrittoio* officers who started the search for new contractors with detailed timelines. These documents are incredibly useful because they list the works already completed and the ones to be started. Only on November 1, 1715 the works were officially concluded.<sup>21</sup> As in the case with the construction of *Ghetto Vecchio*, comprehensive

<sup>13</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 2526, ins. 1b.

<sup>14</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 2526, ins. 3.

<sup>15</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 2526, ins. 4.

<sup>16</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 3559, vol. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Several documents refer to the model and plans with the project of *Ghetto Nuovo*, among

which ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni* 2526, ins. 20.

<sup>18</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 2526, ins. 2.

<sup>19</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 2526, ins. 6.

<sup>20</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 2526, ins. 18 and 20.

<sup>21</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 2526, ins. 3, c. 25.

accounts of all the expenses survived; the total cost of the purchase of properties and construction was more than sixty thousand *scudi*. But the new apartments and shops were not deemed very appealing: two years after the conclusion of works, many of these were still unoccupied, «lacking useful spaces such as storage rooms for firewood, pantries, laundry rooms». The Jews complained that «every apartment is made of an entry, one living room, a kitchen, and two bedrooms». Even if rent rates were competitive for the Florentine market, «30 *scudi* on the first and second floor, 28 *scudi* on the third, and from 18 to 22 for the forth, with more than 95 steps to climb», many families decided to remain in their expensive apartments outside the Ghetto, and pay an average of 60 *scudi*.<sup>22</sup>

From these accounts, it seems that *Ghetto Nuovo*, with all the problems during its construction, offered a less comfortable housing option than that found in the old apartments of *Ghetto Vecchio*. In 1721, the engineer Tosi completed a full textual and visual description of the enlarged Ghetto.<sup>23</sup> Seventy-two new units were added to the seventy-nine of *Ghetto Vecchio*, for a total of 151 apartments with a total of 598 rooms, twenty-nine cellars, and sixty-four terraces. This book is organized with text on the left page, describing each unit in detail with the specific function and the relationship from one to another. It also includes a plan drawn for every apartment, cellar, and shop of the Ghetto. Each apartment is identified by a letter, shared by all units on the same staircase, and a progressive number starting from the lower floor. There are indexes with the list of the units, a summary of their composition, and a general plan of the whole Ghetto. In addition, the preparatory

material for it survived: two volumes with the sketches and the measurements in *braccia fiorentine*, but following the same organization of the final volume.<sup>24</sup> These plans are extremely well drawn, and they have been used to understand each floor plan of the Ghetto at this time [Fig. 2]. Finally, a volume curated by Bernardo Sansone Sgrilli and Francesco Bartolini in 1743 has the most detailed written description of the Ghetto, with information about the quality of the fixtures, the decorations of the apartments, and the multiple functions of the spaces.<sup>25</sup> He listed 150 apartments, fifty-five shops inside the Ghetto, and twenty-seven facing the outside streets.

Even though a full survey of the material has not been completed, it appears that only accounts recording minor maintenance works survived after 1743.<sup>26</sup> In this same year, after several appeals, the Jewish community was finally granted the ownership of the *Scuola Italiana* and the *Scuola Spagnola*. Full inventories of the two synagogues with a plan were compiled by the engineer Angiol Maria Mascagni.<sup>27</sup> In 1804, a new monumental staircase was added to the Spanish School with a substantial alteration of the appearance of the old square of the ghetto.<sup>28</sup>

In 1775, the *Scrittoio* decided to sell out all properties of the Ghetto.<sup>29</sup> A public auction was organized, but the deteriorated conditions of the buildings discouraged possible investors. Only after important consolidation works were carried out between 1777 and 1779 was the Ghetto sold for 34,584 *scudi* in 1779.<sup>30</sup> Two Jewish families, the Finzi and the Della Vida, purchased the majority of the properties. In 1794, the power to open and close the three gates of the Ghetto was transferred to the Jewish community, and in 1834 they decided to have them always open.

<sup>22</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 3562, ins. 3, c. 25, 26, 29.

<sup>23</sup> ASF, *Piante dello Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 26.

<sup>24</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 3559, ins. 2 and 3. Preparatory volumes for *Piante dello Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 26.

<sup>25</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 3559, ins. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Among these documents, the deeds of sale of the two synagogues made in 1750.

<sup>27</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 1352,

ins. 6 and 7.

<sup>28</sup> ASCFI, CA141, c. 184m. «Relazione dell'Ingegnere sulla domanda della Comunità del Ghetto di occupare una porzione di suolo nella Piazza del Ghetto Vecchio allo scopo di costruire una scala per la scuola».

<sup>29</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 2527, ins. 1.

<sup>30</sup> ASF, *Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, 3562, ins. 23, and *Scrittoio* 2527, ins. 16 and 24. The latter is the last official document about the administration of the ghetto by the *Scrittoio*.



The census of 1841 listed 1543 Jews living in Florence: 103 families in the *Ghetto Vecchio* and 141 in the *Ghetto Nuovo*.<sup>31</sup> The average number of people living in one apartment was more than eleven, a clear indicator of the low level of living conditions. In middle of the nineteenth century, the area of the ghetto was clearly deteriorated. Many Jews had moved outside of the area, and a new monumental synagogue was to be built between 1874 and 1882 in a recently developed area of the city. In 1880, the City of Florence established a committee to investigate the state of the Ghetto, chaired by Pietro Torrigiani, future mayor of the city. The members of the committee made several “explorations” inside the Ghetto, describing in detail their observations about the architecture and the residents in a report presented to the Municipal Council of Florence on February 11, 1881.<sup>32</sup> Almost all the apartments were deemed not suitable for living due to bad maintenance and decay of all the common fixtures. A few units were combined into bargain hotels and homeless accommodations. The bordering neighbourhoods of the centre of Florence were not much better, and in 1885 the city decided to clear the majority of the area to build a modern city centre, organized on an orthogonal grid of streets with shops and public buildings. The project encountered a strong resistance, especially from abroad. Art scholars and lovers of Florence wrote articles criticizing the proposed demolitions on the major newspapers in Europe and North America.<sup>33</sup> Torrigiani, then mayor of Florence, personally defended his decisions using a strong language: «Rest assured, however, that the vandalisms feared do not and could not enter into the programme of the Florentine civic administration».<sup>34</sup> A full pam-

phlet was published and sent to the European embassies and most important libraries around the world.<sup>35</sup>

The clamour over the demolitions produced a great number of documents recording every step of the process. First, many local painters became fascinated with this historical area of the city damned to shortly disappear. “Old Florence” became the subject of many sketches, watercolours, and paintings by Telemaco Signorini, Dante Mattani, and Ricciardo Meacci among others [Fig. 3].<sup>36</sup> Second, the archaeologists were called to record the findings during the demolitions of the old structures. A specifically appointed Archaeological Commission monitored the demolitions, and surveyed the medieval buildings and the ruins of the ancient Roman city that re-appeared after eighteen centuries.<sup>37</sup> Every architectural fragment and fresco that was deemed artistically significant were saved and catalogued.<sup>38</sup> All the medieval findings were transported to the Museum in the Convent of San Marco and the ancient ones to the newly opened Archaeological Museum.<sup>39</sup> Third, all the documents related to the expropriation of properties and the subsequent demolition works were kept in the City archives.<sup>40</sup>

### *Reconstructing the Florentine Ghetto: Methods and Further Goals*

The long history of the Florentine Ghetto and the typologically diverse archival material discussed above made it necessary to decide a few important principles at the beginning of our work. The diversity in precision, scale, and intent of the documents led to a forced compromi-

<sup>31</sup> ASF, *Stato Civile di Toscana*, 12116.

<sup>32</sup> ASCFI, CF7157, f. A2. «Centro di Firenze. Carteggio 1863-1899».

<sup>33</sup> Many were collected and still conserved in ASCFI, CF7157. For example: «The Proposed Demolition of Florence,» *The Times*, December 2, 1898.

<sup>34</sup> ASCFI CF7157. Pietro Torrigiani, «To the Editor of the Times», *The Times*, December 12, 1898.

<sup>35</sup> «Le temute demolizioni nel centro di Firenze».

<sup>36</sup> Many sketches by Signorini and Mattani are preserved at the *Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi*, while Meacci's are at ASCFI.

<sup>37</sup> Archivio della Soprintendenza Archeologica Toscana (from now on ASAT), Archivio Disegni.

<sup>38</sup> ASCFI, CF7162 and CF7163. «Oggetti d'arte e d'antichità».

<sup>39</sup> The catalogue of the artworks transported to the Museum of San Marco is: M. SFRAMELLI, *Il centro di Firenze restituito*, Bruschi Libri & Libri, Firenze 1989. The ancient Roman fragments are today stored in the courtyard of the Archaeological Museum of Florence.

<sup>40</sup> ASCFI, CF7159 and CF7160. «Campione dei proprietario/affittuari da espropriare».

se during the process during which we merged these sources in a single model representing the 5,000 square meters of the ghetto area.

The visual documents produced during the final two years of material existence of the Ghetto – by far the most reliable and most carefully produced – were taken as the documentary basis for our reconstruction. The plan of the ground floor drawn immediately before the beginning of the demolition works in 1888 provides the overall dimensions for our model.<sup>41</sup> The accuracy of this map has been compared to the French cadastral map of 1833, and other drawings were prepared by the archaeologists working to preserve the memory of the old city centre. The most significant sketches for our purpose are a plan of the second floor of the western part of the Ghetto and the partial elevation of a north-south cross-section of the *Ghetto Vecchio*.<sup>42</sup>

Along the three-hundred year long history of the Ghetto, a specific moment had to be selected as a starting point for the making of our digital model. We decided that the years following the construction of the *Ghetto Nuovo* stood as the period that provided the richest collection of textual and visual documents. Consequently, starting here would provide the best tools to fully render all the buildings from the ground to the roof, inside and outside.<sup>43</sup> The descriptions made in 1721 include the totality of the ghetto areas, both *Vecchio* and *Nuovo*, a most favourable period, close to the original plans of Cosimo I and Cosimo III, and before the decadence experienced by the community and the buildings during the second half of the eighteenth century.

For these reasons, the apartments and shops described in *Piante dello Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni*, volume 26, constitute the core of our model. The plans in this volume have

two major problems: they provide only a vague indication of their location in the ghetto, and, because they were drawn separately, the plans do not match along their shared borders. In order to solve these issues, all the drawings in their original format have been printed, identified, and located on the floorplans of the Ghetto, from the ground to the eight floor. A certain degree of flexibility has been taken considering the heights of the floors of different buildings and the presence of mezzanines between levels. Because the authors of the original survey were drawing each shop and apartment separately, they had little interest in preserving the consistency from adjacent units. This resulted in numerous compromise solutions, which forced the change of communal walls in order to become coherent with both sides. The effort is focused on limiting as much as possible the changes and on maintaining the overall geometric proportions of each space. When possible, in order to limit the irregularities, the drawings from volume twenty-six have been compared with others representing the same portions of the Ghetto.<sup>44</sup>

Unfortunately, only a small number of elevations of the structures of the Ghetto survived, a recurrent issue in the study of the architecture of the period. As a result, we cannot be sure of the heights of the floors and windows. The number of stairs in stairways connecting two floors can help to estimate the height of the floor, assuming a constant measurement in the risers, or the vertical portion of each stair. Likewise, we have taken as prototype the proportions of the windows depicted in the images of the Ghetto, and we assumed that their geometry could be extended to all windows for which we have no information to work with.

The most obscure aspect of each building in the Ghetto is its roof. No depiction of any

<sup>41</sup> ASCFI, drawing n. 411801. This survey is by far the most reliable, with precise measurements and a comprehensive approach to the whole area.

<sup>42</sup> ASF, Catasto Leopoldino, Comunità di Firenze, F. ASAT, Archivio Disegni, 42-11 and 2-1.

<sup>43</sup> This is not the first attempt to use this material to study the original appearance of the ghetto. Before the use of computer-aided design software, there have been two limited attempts to visualize the ghetto: C. LISCIA, *Il ghetto di Firenze nei secoli XVII*

*e XVIII*, B. Arch. thesis at University of Florence 1980, and M. BINI, *La città degli ebrei: Firenze dal ghetto all'edificazione del Gran Tempio*, Alinea Editrice, Firenze 1995.

<sup>44</sup> Partial surveys representing ground floor plans of shops taken during the previous two centuries have been collected by FRANCESCA CECCHI, *Le botteghe artigiane nella Firenze medievale raffigurata nei cabrei*, in «Memorie Domenicane» 44 (2013), pp. 459-476.

exists, and we can only rely to the building traditions that existed in Florence during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In our model, we assumed that a traditional pitched roof covered with Tuscan “coppo e tegola” tiles have been employed to cover all tops but the ones with open terraces described in volume 26. This solution is confirmed by the analysis of the Buonsignori axonometric view of Florence, in which the buildings are covered with parallel straight lines, a drawing simplification for a tiled roof.<sup>45</sup>

The final model is, most importantly, a tool representing every single space of the Ghetto, which scholars will be able to use to spatially visualize their research [Fig. 4]. The three-dimensional digital model is the ideal base to show daily routines of people and goods moving inside its border, connecting apartments with shops, schools with synagogues. The data from the descriptions made after the completion of the *Ghetto Nuovo* provides specific information on all internal spaces, their functions and their basic furniture among the most important. The result is a model comprising 151 apartments divided in 23 buildings, 55 rented spaces on the ground floor – shops, storage rooms, offices, baths with a very high level of definition. Our goal is to share a fully navigable digital reconstruction in which it would be possible to navigate, and in which related information gathered by other scholars can be visualized. After the completion of the model based on the reconstruction of the Ghetto in 1721, we plan to continue the development of an historical timeline on which it would be possible to scroll and visualize the area of the Ghetto in different periods of its history: before the

construction of the ghetto, after the creation of the first nucleus in 1571, the dilapidated Ghetto in the middle of the nineteenth century, and after its demolition.<sup>46</sup>

The Ghetto of Florence represented for more than two centuries the heart and main point of gravity of the Jews of Florence, originally a heterogeneous minority consisting of two main separate *nationi*, namely that the Italian-*Italkim* and the *Levantine*, a collective label at that time including also both Iberian “Ponentine” and Levantine *Sephardim*. Belonging to the real estate properties of the Medici family, the Ghetto of Florence was not only heavily guarded – as the vast majority of the Jewish ghettos in early modern Europe – but also under the constant economic and fiscal supervision of the Medici’s bureaucracy and administration in charge of assuring the financial profitability of this area. This led to the redaction of more than hundred volumes, mainly accounting books, now making up the *Scrittoio* collection, amounting to more than 30,000 folios and chronologically covering a gap of three hundred years (ca. 1588-1888), on the whole offering one of the most detailed and comprehensive representation of the economic features of the Ghetto.

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<sup>45</sup> BUONSIGNORI, *op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> The progress of our research and the future de-

velopments are visible on the website of the project:  
<http://www.medici.org/ghetto-mapping-project>.



## SUMMARY

Established in 1570 by Gran Duke Cosimo I, the ghetto of Florence had been the barycentre of Jewish life for more than two centuries, until 1888, when it was entirely demolished as part of a major urban plan aiming to reshape the form and the physiognomy of the city centre. Thanks to a comprehensive survey of Medici archives, more than 200 volumes produced during the Medici and Lorena rule have recently been found. Thanks to the information within these documents (ranging from cadastral paper, through maps, blueprints, watercolours, late 19<sup>th</sup> century photos, to verbal description and accounting registers) it was possible to produce a very faithful virtual 3D model. A reconstruction of the ghetto's economies, demographics and socio-cultural features are also amongst the goals of this newly launched project.

**KEYWORDS:** Ghetto of Florence; Virtual reconstruction; Medici's Florence.



Fig. 1 - Detail of the area of the Ghetto Vecchio.

STEFANO BUONSIGNORI, *Nova pulcherrimae civitatis Florentiae topographia accuratissime delineate*, 1584.

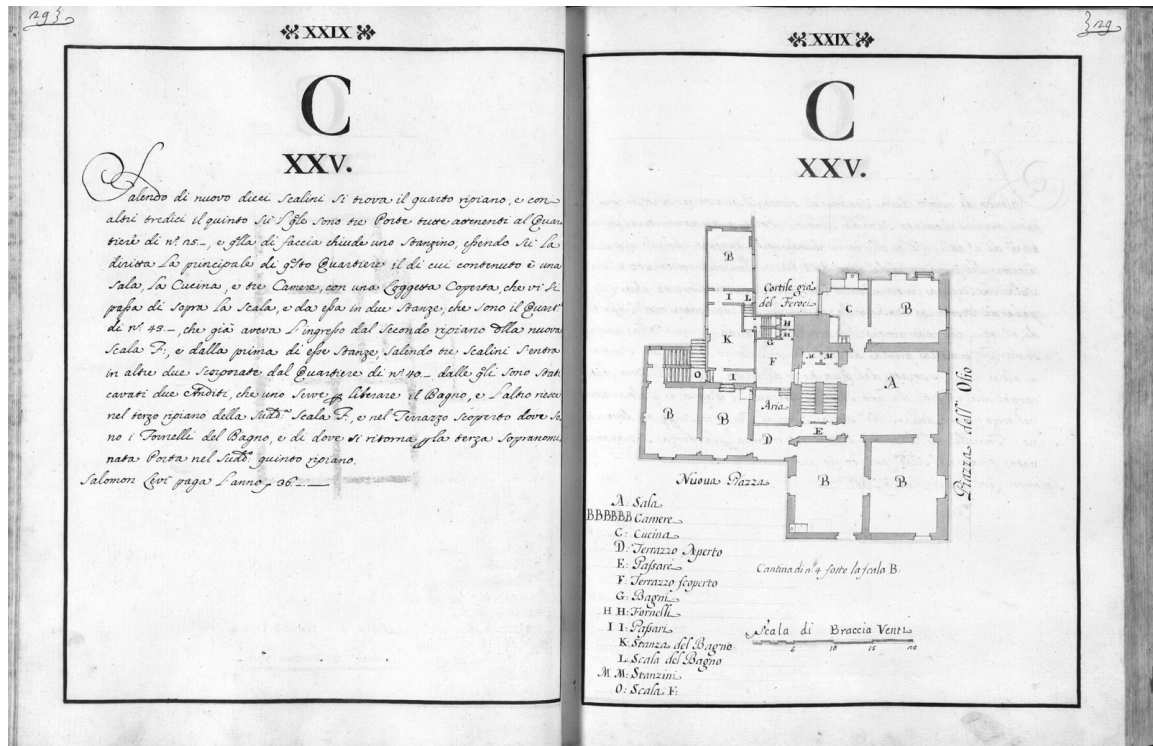


Fig. 2 - Textual description and plan of apartment C25 in 1721.  
(Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Pianta dello Scrittoio delle Regie Possessioni, 26, c. 29r)



Fig. 3 - Ricciardo Meacci, Piazza della Fonte nel Ghetto, circa 1885.  
(Archivio del Museo di Firenze com'era, n. 4041. Today at the Archivio Storico della Città di Firenze)



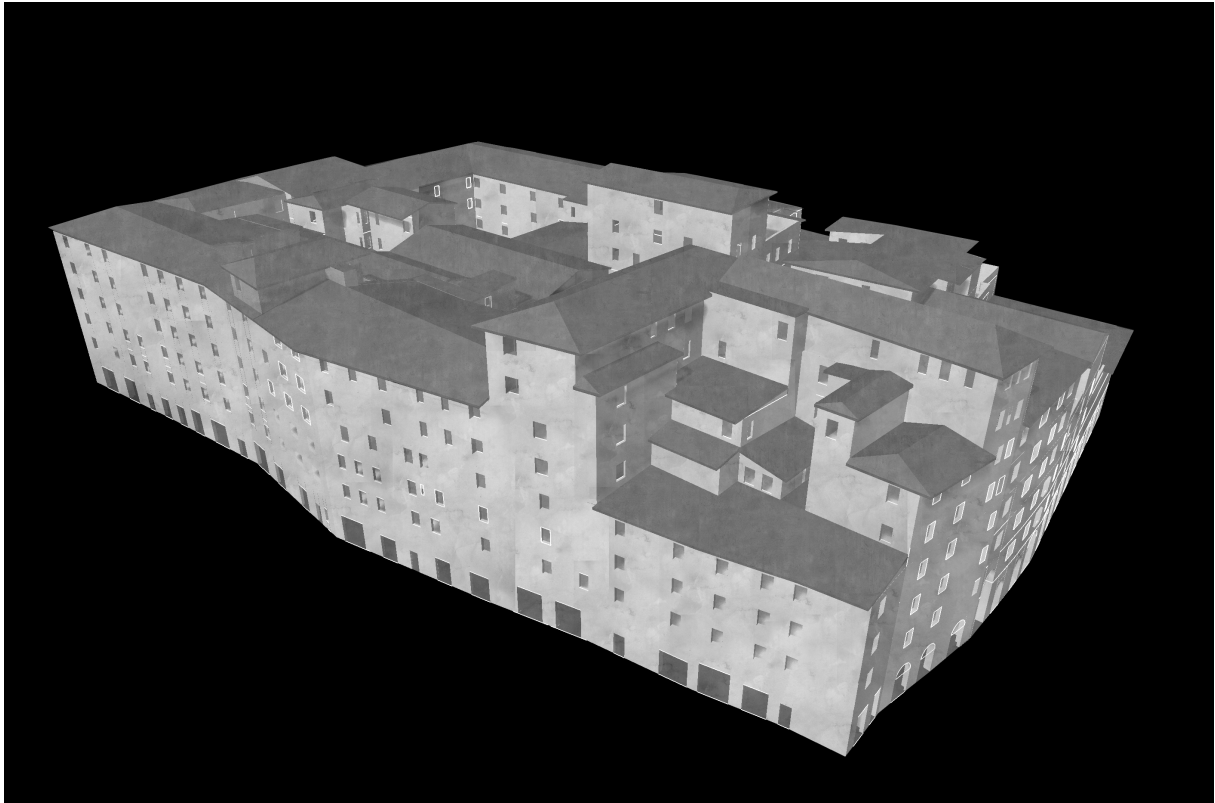


Fig. 4 - 3D digital model of the Florentine ghetto.  
(drawn by Giovanni Piccolino, modelled by Samuele Pecoraro)

