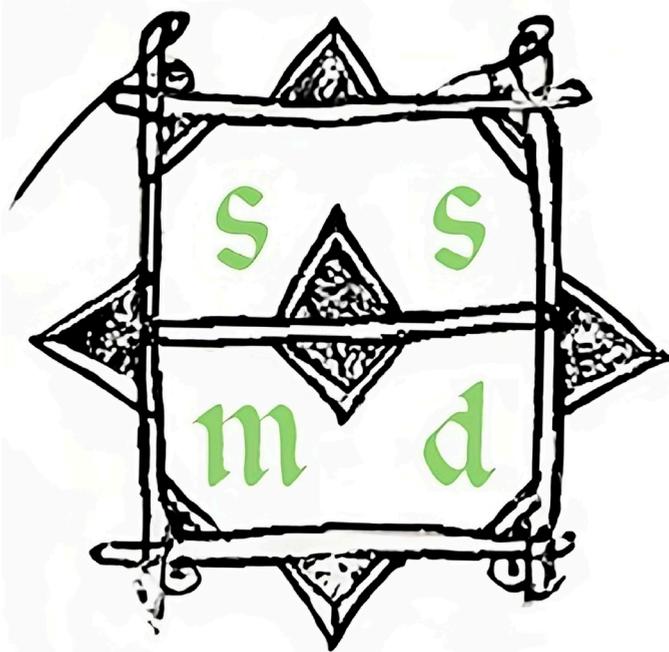


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# **Urban territorialities: an introduction**

di Denise Bezzina

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## ***Urban territorialities: an introduction\****

Denise Bezzina  
Università degli Studi di Genova  
[denise.bezzina@unige.it](mailto:denise.bezzina@unige.it)

The articles collected in this special issue aim at considering urban territoriality from multiple perspectives. The timespan extends from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, a period during which cities across Europe experienced a sweeping physical transformation.

Multiple factors have contributed to these extensive and progressive changes in the urban landscape. Recent research, for example, has stressed how the process that led to the reshaping of the urban fabric was triggered by the massive investments in masonry made by the rising urban elite as early as the beginning of the twelfth century. This is evident not only in Italy, the main focus of this monographic issue, but also in many other cities in continental Europe. One fundamental aspect that needs to be taken into account, therefore, is the material, physical, and therefore, very tangible expression of these changes which went hand in hand with demographic growth, especially from the early decades of the twelfth

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It is here sufficient to make reference to the ERC-funded Advanced Grant project *Petrifying Wealth*. In this respect see the several publications related to the project: *Construir para perdurar; Il paesaggio petrificato*, and *La petrificación de la riqueza*, useful also for the up-to-date bibliography on the topic.

century onward. Cities became the stage of vigorous social interaction, competition for political and ecclesiastical hegemony, new economic relations, and forms of religious devotion, and practices. These interacting elements contributed to the development of a distinctive internal territoriality, which could derive from administrative needs (for example taxation or the administration of justice), or from more casual traditions, and customary and social practices. The urban space thus became fragmented into multiple and often overlapping parcels, to which various segments of urban society exhibited a persistent attachment, or upon which strategies were enacted for the defence of a family's (or a group's) social and political position, or else on which ecclesiastical institutions exercised control, and so on.

From a historiographical perspective, the material and architectural development of cities and urban neighbourhoods has been the subject of a flourishing literature<sup>1</sup>. However, the way the abovementioned (social, political<sup>2</sup>, economic, and religious) elements interacted and interfered in establishing internal territorial divisions, in the development of real or ideal internal boundaries which often trespassed the limits neighbourhoods, and in triggering shifts and transformations associated with urban territoriality, have been less studied<sup>3</sup>. When it comes to north-central Italy, scholarly literature has stressed the importance of territory-based forms of association (the *societates armorum*, which oversaw military recruitment, for example), as catalysts for shifts in political regimes from the late twelfth and early thirteenth century onward<sup>4</sup>. But several issues have so far remained unaddressed and need to be clarified. Ostensibly, the urban landscape, specific architectural choices, and the spatial organization of cities facilitated and influenced social action: city squares and markets, but also baths, churches, gates etc., became loci for establishing social and economic networks, for building and consolidating power, for coordinating social groups, and cultivating political aspirations. So how did these factors interact in determining urban territorial divisions and, vice versa, how did established internal boundaries dictate social action?

In the opening lines of her article, Alma Poloni evokes the paradigm shift brought about by the *spatial turn movement* in the late 1980s which has, in more recent years, contributed to moulding historical research dealing with different contexts across time<sup>5</sup>. Already in the 1970s and especially among British geog-

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<sup>1</sup> The studies that have tackled these aspects from different perspectives are too many to provide here an exhaustive list. It will therefore be sufficient to mention just a few meaningful (older and more recent) titles by way of example, and the bibliography contained therein: GROSSI BIANCHI - POLEGGI, *Una città portuale*; REDÌ, *Pisa com'era; Paesaggi urbani; Case e torri medievali*, and finally, the recently published *La città e le case*, particularly useful for its updated bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> On this aspect, see: ZORZI, *Lo spazio politico*.

<sup>3</sup> Some notable exceptions, which deal mainly with the relationship of the elite with urban space are: VARANINI, *Spazio urbano e dinamica sociale; Choix résidentiels et contrôle*; ROSSETTI, *In «contrata de Vicecomitibus»*; PINI, *Le ripartizioni territoriali*, and CAROCCI - GIANNINI, *Portici, palazzi, torri e fortezze*.

<sup>4</sup> ARTIFONI, *Tensioni sociali e istituzioni*, p. 472.

<sup>5</sup> For the debate on methodology and examples from different contexts see, for instance, *The spatial turn*, and *Locality and Belonging*.

raphers, one could notice, mostly in works dealing with rural areas, a growing tendency for advocating stronger ties with archaeology and social history, and a softening of boundaries between disciplines<sup>6</sup>. If up to that point scholars had considered a given territory mainly by examining its physical and material evolution, from then onward they started to look at changes in the very concept of space. The work of one of the founding fathers of this new approach, cultural geographer Denis Cosgrove (active since the early 1980s and undoubtedly influenced by the debate in Britain), has been particularly influential in shaping research orientations<sup>7</sup>. Drawing inspiration from social history, Cosgrove's main focus was the history of cartography, how this reflected the development of the meaning of landscape, and the role of spatial images and representations in knowledge formation and communication<sup>8</sup>. As Angelo Torre has recently put it, with this new wave of scholarship one could register «un intérêt grandissant pour l'étude du lieu comme étude de processus, plutôt que comme étude ontologique»<sup>9</sup>. Along this line of thought, urban space here is addressed by considering the relationship between the built environment and the social actors who lived and interacted within their walls.

The increased attention towards space as conceptualized by cultural and historical geographers, has thus opened new perspectives for analysing social interaction through history, envisaging an interdisciplinary approach at crossroads between history, archaeology, and geography<sup>10</sup>. If we consider historiography on Italy, as Torre has rightly underscored, one must stress the importance of the pioneering work of several scholars who have dealt with the region of Liguria<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> On this matter see TORRE, *Un «tournant spatial»*, pp. 1132-1136, and by the same author, *La produzione storica*, pp. 444-448.

<sup>7</sup> Starting from his considerations in COSGROVE, *Towards a radical cultural geography* (1983). His subsequent works dealt with specific case studies from the closing century of the Middle Ages to up to contemporary times, such as, for example, his study on culture and cartography in Renaissance Venice (*Id.*, *Mapping new worlds*), and his articles on contemporary Rome (ATKINSON - COSGROVE, *Urban Rhetoric* and ATKINSON - COSGROVE - NOTARO, *Empire in Modern Rome*), as well as more general overviews, such as his works on the concept of landscape (*The Iconography; Cosgrove, Social Formation*) and on the representation of the world (*Id.*, *Geography and Vision*). Of particular relevance is his chapter on *Images of Renaissance cosmography* (2007), which until then had been a rather neglected topic. On Cosgrove's work and relevance for cultural geography and history see also: DELLA DORA, *Obituary* and CLAVAL, *La géographie culturelle*. For an example of this kind of approach in Italian scholarship see for example, VALLERANI, *Paesaggi di belle contrade*.

<sup>8</sup> Particularly evident in COSGROVE, *Apollo's Eye; Id.*, *Geography and Vision* and *The Iconography*.

<sup>9</sup> TORRE, *Un «tournant spatial»*, p. 1128.

<sup>10</sup> For what concerns the Middle Ages, see, for example, the studies collected in: *Constructing and representing territory; Construction de l'espace au Moyen Âge; Rural Space, and Urban Space*.

<sup>11</sup> For the period spanning the Middle Ages to contemporary times, and particularly within initiatives launched during the 1990s at the University of Nottingham, and specifically within the *Landscape history of Liguria field course*, and at the University of Genoa, within the *Seminario permanente di storia locale* founded by Edoardo Grendi. Though more focused on rural areas, these initiatives helped foster the interest in spatial relations drawing from both British

Within this early body of work, the studies by Edoardo Grendi have been undoubtedly ground-breaking. When considering the urban context<sup>12</sup>, one must mention in this sense three main works by the scholar. The first is his study on the *alberghi* (1975), the aristocratic confederacies typical of late medieval Genoa, which are being addressed also in this monographic section. Grendi has defined the *albergo* as an «istituto demotopografico», thus highlighting the relationship between aristocratic kin groups and urban space, and these families' proclivity for controlling and managing squares, *loggie* and churches<sup>13</sup>. Closely related to this theme is his study on youth associations in Genoa between 1466 and 1528 (1992)<sup>14</sup>. Grendi's analysis of the *capitoli* and other references to these associations highlight, inter alia, their connection with the political structures, and territorial dimension as well as the issue of social pre-eminence and alliance. In particular, the scholar has shown how by the end of the fifteenth century, these youth associations (some representative of the nobility and others gathering both *nobiles* and *populares*), which had a distinctively devotional character and coordinated around the main civic churches, had come into competition with the traditional family confederacies<sup>15</sup>. Lastly, Grendi's interest in urban space is evident also in his analysis of meat provisioning in early modern Genoa. Published posthumously in 2004, the essay deals less with the economic aspects of the trade, than with how provisioning was organized at an urban level from a social perspective, highlighting the importance of spatial relations and coordination among the different occupational categories involved (butchers, merchants, cattle breeders)<sup>16</sup>.

Several themes emerge from the above cited works: the relationship between productive activities and urban space, for instance. This has been the focus of a few other studies on communal cities that have considered, for example, the question of zoning in relation to artisans. The aim of these studies was to rebut the generalized idea that workers plying the same trade tended to live in the same neighbourhood. But despite the pioneering work of Antonio Ivan Pini, who first raised the issue, scholarly literature has remained scant<sup>17</sup>. The question of military recruitment and territoriality is likewise addressed by Grendi (even if in a liminal

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environmental history and Italian micro-history. On the matter see, TORRE, *Un «tournant spatial»*, p. 1140.

<sup>12</sup> Other significant studies by the same author have concerned the connection between social action and rural spaces. For a discussion on the relevance of these works see TORRE, *La produzione storica*, pp. 459-463. For the scholar's bibliography see, RAGGIO, *Bibliografia degli scritti*.

<sup>13</sup> GRENDI, *Profilo storico*, pp. 262-266.

<sup>14</sup> That is, the *societates iuvenum*, which were common in late medieval north-central Italian cities, GRENDI, *Le società dei giovani*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 517ff.

<sup>16</sup> GRENDI, *Meat provisioning*. The scholar also advanced some methodological considerations as concerns the meaning and relevance of space and of an interdisciplinary approach in: ID., *Storia della società*, and ID., *Ricerca archeologica e ricerca storica*.

<sup>17</sup> The first to consider this theme was PINI, *La ripartizione topografica*. See also SALVATORI, *La popolazione pisana*, pp. 141ff.

manner to the main arguments) in his work on youth associations<sup>18</sup>. The issue is here tackled briefly by Guglielmotti in her article on late medieval Genoa, but it is still rather understudied when it comes to north-central Italy, despite its importance for understanding political shifts and developments.

Another significant issue, which has been at the core of the few studies that have pondered on urban territoriality, is the relationship between social and political pre-eminence and space<sup>19</sup>. Here the issue is considered in two articles that deal with comparable cases – Genoa and Naples. The article by Bezzina reprises the topic of the Genoese *alberghi*, studied by Grendi, focusing on aspects of the strategies for the control of urban space enacted by the aristocratic confederacies. This is done through an analysis of a few meaningful examples of last wills and testaments in which testators placed particular emphasis on the way key urban (but also rural) property was transmitted in order to safeguard (or in certain cases undermine) the kin group's hold over specific neighbourhoods. The contribution also explores the more day-to-day aspects of the relationship between the organization of space and social interaction, particularly as concerns the issue of clientage and the *alberghi's* territorial control. Rather than providing a comprehensive assessment of the correlation between these confederacies and territoriality, which still needs significant research in order to be properly understood, the aim is to raise questions and problems. One main issue, which has been neglected in scholarship dealing specifically with Genoa, but that is worth considering also for other cases, is the actual importance of urban buildings vis à vis property outside the city. Another important point, which remains to be largely explored is the relationship among *alberghi* and how this influenced (or was dictated by) urban territoriality. Strictly related is the issue of clientage, and more in general of how these (overlapping) territorial divisions influenced interactions among different social segments, a problem which is addressed as well by Guglielmotti in her article on the same city.

If Bezzina's essay deals with a northern Italian commune, Monica Santangelo's article focuses on a key city of the *Regno*. Santangelo explores the network of the *tocchi* and the system of the *seggi*, elite-controlled territorial divisions which the civic nobility was able to shape and mold autonomously from the crown already from the late twelfth century. In this respect, Naples represents an exception in the *Mezzogiorno*, not only because these developments can be largely reconstructed, but also from a demographic and structural perspective. The author considers the way these internal partitions are described in the sources and the relationship between the elite and urban space over a very broad timespan (tenth/eleventh to fifteenth centuries). By doing so, Santangelo underscores a certain continuity both in the terms used to refer to these subdivisions, and in the identity of the aristocracy itself. The elite's behaviour vis-à-vis space is addressed through an analysis of the practice of the *absolutiones*. These concessions/forms of legal guardianship

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<sup>18</sup> GRENDI, *Le società dei giovani*, pp. 511-515.

<sup>19</sup> See note 3.

granted by the nobility to underage youths from both elite or non-elite families in reference to immovables located in the *tocchi*, show the nobility's strategies for control and acquisition of urban property. But through her analysis of these documents Santangelo also raises a very important question: against the backdrop of demographic growth, which was also fostered by migration, what role did the elite play in coordinating migrant elements? More in general one could ask: in what ways did demographic flows influence the organization of urban space and its partitioning? And how did the institutions and the various social segments respond to such changes?

Santangelo's focus on urban territorial subdivisions and the related lexicon can find comparison in Paola Guglielmotti's analysis of the development of Genoa's internal partitions: the larger *compagne*<sup>20</sup>, and the smaller *vicinie*, *parrocchie*, and *conestagie* – the latter originally created for coordinating military recruitment and later associated with the *populares*. Guglielmotti's essay, which is in dialogue with past scholarly literature on the chief Ligurian city, is configured as a preliminary study – a foundation for future research on the topic, as the scholar herself has put it – on urban territoriality. In her article, she examines not only the institutional dimension of these partitions, but she also advances hypotheses on the multifarious social make-up, of the *compagne* and the *conestagie*. Guglielmotti further raises questions on the coexistence and inter-relationship between *nobiles* and *populares*, and on the implications of belonging to multiple territorial segments. By doing so, the author addresses political issues that have so far been neglected when it comes to late medieval Genoa (especially as concerns the fourteenth century), but, more in general, she brings the focus on problems that are relevant for most north-central Italian cities.

These multiple territorial partitions are explored also in Maxime Fulconis' article, which provides a comparative assessment of some north-central Italian centres between the eleventh and early thirteenth centuries. The author however has chosen a different approach: rather than focusing on the role of the institutions or the elites in the development of these territorial divisions, Fulconis takes on the perspective of the city dwellers. The article aims at answering one main question: with which of the overlapping urban subdivisions (*portae*, parishes, neighbourhoods, etc) did they identify? In this sense, the author suggests that during the twelfth century one can notice a shift in the way people identified themselves with respect to the city. If before they tended to express their belonging to broader districts (the *comitatus* or the diocese), with the governments' efforts for the internal reorganization of cities, the inhabitants' identity became more intimately linked to the city and its multiple partitions, that developed either out of pragmatic administrative needs or more spontaneously, so that city dwellers would commonly identify with more than one internal division.

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<sup>20</sup> The six, then eight, and later ten districts into which the city was divided for administrative reasons, see GUGLIELMOTTI, *Problemi di territorialità urbana*.

Margot Ferrand's essay on Avignon provides an interesting case study for comparison with the north-central Italian communes, which are a main focus in this monographic issue. The city is relevant not only because it likewise experienced a communal form of government during the twelfth century, but also due to its peculiar history: up to pope Clement VI's purchase of the city, we can see a succession of different powers that contributed to its spatial reorganization. Despite these political shifts, unlike elsewhere, we cannot observe the development of multiple and overlapping territorial subdivisions. The city's internal partitions continued to gravitate around the parish churches, while the ancient walls of the city remained an important political and economic landmark, even with the expansion of the urban conglomerate and the building of new walls. In this sense therefore, Avignon provides a distinct model that serves to underscore how shifts in regimes did not necessarily imply a change in how urban space was conceived and organized.

Ferrand's article mostly deals with the different powers which operated (political, ecclesiastical, economic) and interacted with the built environment and how their power was expressed at a territorial level. One last contribution, however, provides a clear insight into how space was conceived by the lower social strata by looking at a single but very traumatic event. Alma Poloni's article on the 'spaces' of the revolt of the Ciompi (1378-1382) lets us glean into the social aspects of an incident that has undoubtedly left its mark both on contemporaries who were observing the unfolding of the events, and on historiography, which has mostly been concerned on the political relevance of the revolt. In line with recent developments in the study of urban space, the author has adopted an interdisciplinary approach by making recourse to paradigms proper to sociology and anthropology. Such an approach enables to look at the sources from a different and less rigid perspective. The paper thus offers a fresh take on one of the most debated uprisings of the late Middle Ages by observing how contemporary chronicles – which abound for the specific case and are particularly rich in detail – describe the places in which the rebels met, and therefore those spaces in which the revolt took shape.

This point of view is particularly relevant when considering the north-central Italian communes, a socio-political context which was riven by conflict. Such an approach could therefore be applied to other uprisings, such as those described by fourteenth-century chroniclers, during the long period of crisis. But this perspective may serve to clarify also aspects of the many skirmishes that occurred among competing aristocratic families as key to better understanding the dynamics of the alliances among kin groups, as well as strategies for the control of urban space.

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## TITLE

*Urban territorialities: an introduction*

*Territorialità urbane: un'introduzione*

## ABSTRACT

Gli studi raccolti in questo numero monografico intendono riproporre un tema di ricerca importante, con risultati finora disseminati in una pluralità di sedi, e rimettere a fuoco sotto prospettive inedite aspetti diversi della territorialità urbana nel basso medioevo. I sei saggi offrono sia una panoramica generale, in particolare del contesto cittadino dell'Italia centro-settentrionale, sia singoli casi studio: Napoli e Genova costituiscono due realtà per molti versi paragonabili; il caso fiorentino è invece considerato durante gli anni del tumulto dei Ciompi, mentre quello di Avignone offre numerosi spunti per un confronto con alcuni contesti italiani.

The studies collected in this monographic issue intend to revisit an important research topic, with results hitherto scattered in multiple venues, and to refocus on different aspects of urban territoriality in the late Middle Ages from new perspectives. The six essays offer both a general overview, in particular of north-central Italian cities, and single case studies: Naples and Genoa are two largely comparable realities; the Florentine case is considered during the years of the Ciompi tumult, while that of Avignon provides insights for comparison with some Italian cities.

## KEYWORDS

10<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, urban history, territoriality

Secoli X-XV, storia urbana, territorialità