

*The Girolami's Plaque of Saint Zenobius,*  
c.1415 -1420: Approaching a Personal Political  
Advertisement in Quattrocento Florence

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This paper explores the extents to which visual arts were used by fifteenth-century Florentine elites as an instrument of political power, upholding and consolidating an individual family's public imagery. Between 1415 and 1420, the Girolami family ordered a marble plaque to be installed on the façade of their private tower. Known as The Plaque of Saint Zenobius, the lower section of the plaque bears an inscription referring to the Girolami's annual offering to the saint; the upper part presents a pictorial narrative, showing the figure of Saint Zenobius, as well as many ecclesiastical and civic monuments in Florence, including the city's communal palace – the Palazzo della Signoria. In the light of the civil and political importance of the Palazzo della Signoria that has been demonstrated in fourteenth and fifteenth-centuries pictorial and textual representations, the unprecedented juxtaposition of Palazzo della Signoria and Saint Zenobius draws

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our attention to the political significance of the plaque: the communal palace motif in this context underlines the Girolami's active role in Florence's political nucleus. As for the saint's icon, it seems to imply that the family's political authority was claimed to have been derived from the authority of the saint. From this perspective, the relief is more than a devotional tribute of the Girolami, but it can be seen as the family's political statement, providing evidence for the politics and rhetorical potential of visual arts in Quattrocento Florence.

**Keywords: Saint Zenobius of Florence, Medieval and Renaissance  
Florentine Civic Arts, Art and Politics, Fourteenth and  
Fifteenth-centuries Florentine Political History.**

## **Introduction**

Utilising religious images to express political ideology was commonplace in Florence during the Renaissance. According to art historian Maria Monica Donato, the Florentine civic iconography coherently integrated the city's religious icons, its political thought, as well as the urban monuments. For instance, the installations of public sculptures in front of the Palazzo della Signoria (1299-1314)(**Figure 1**)<sup>1</sup>—first Donatello's bronze *David* in the fifteenth century, and then Michelangelo's colossal marble statue in 1504—were closely related with the commune's political message, analogising the Florentine civic identity with the biblical hero David who defeated his dreadful enemy with God's blessing.<sup>2</sup>

The ecclesiastical-cum-civic iconography was adopted not only by the communal government in public commissions, but also by aristocrats in private

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<sup>1</sup> This communal palace was first known as the Palazzo dei Priori, then, in the second half of the fifteenth century, as the Palazzo della Signoria, and finally, as the Palazzo Vecchio after Duke Cosimo I de' Medici moved his residence and court to the Palazzo Pitti in 1549. Since the plaque of Saint Zenobius was commissioned in the fifteenth century, this paper adopts the term Palazzo della Signoria for Florence's seat of government. Leon Satkowski, "The Palazzo Pitti: Planning and Use in the Grand-Ducal Era," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 42, no.4 (1983): 336, n. 333; Giovanni Fanelli, *Le città nella storia d'Italia. Firenze* (Rome: Editore Laterza, 1993), 108; John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575* (Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 478-479; Marilena Mosco, *The Pitti Palace: The Palace and its Art*, ed. Lucinda Collinge (London: Philip Wilson, 1997), 10-12.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Monica Donato, "Hercules and David in the Early Decoration of the Palazzo Vecchio: Manuscript Evidence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 54(1991), 32-47; Sarah Blake McHam, "Public Sculpture in Renaissance Florence," in *Looking at Italian Renaissance Sculpture*, ed. Sarah Blake McHam (N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 155-156; Sarah Black McHam, "Donatello's Bronze 'David' and 'Judith' as Metaphors of Medici Rule in Florence," *The Art Bulletin* 83, no.1 (2001): 32-47; Vittoria Camelliti, "I santi patroni: le immagini della 'devozione civica' a Firenze fra Duecento e primo Cinquecento," in *Dal giglio al David. Arte civica a Firenze fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, ed. Maria Monica Donato and Daniela Parenti (Firenze: Giunti, 2013), 79-85.

artworks.<sup>3</sup> Between 1415 and 1420,<sup>4</sup> a huge marble plaque was publicly displayed on the external wall of the Girolami's private tower (**Figure 2**).<sup>5</sup> The lower part of the plaque bears an inscription paying tribute to Saint Zenobius with two coats of arms of the Girolami at either side. The upper part depicts Saint Zenobius surrounded by Florence's iconic civic and ecclesiastical buildings. According to the inscription, we learnt that the Girolami promised to donate half of the income from renting out the Tower of Saint Zenobius for the offering to Saint Zenobius every year.<sup>6</sup> The money was most likely assigned to

<sup>3</sup> Maria Monica Donato, "Arte civica a Firenze, dal primo popolo al primo umanesimo. La tradizione, i modelli perduti," in *Dal giglio al David: arte civica a Firenze fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, ed. Maria Monica Donato (Firenze: Giunti, 2013), 82-83.

<sup>4</sup> The Florentines used *stile Incarnazione* calendar, in which the new year starts from 25 March, Virgin Mary's Annunciation. For consistency, dates used in this thesis are given in modern style. On the chronology of different calendar systems used in Italy, Cappelli Adriano, *Cronologia cronografia e calendario perpetuo* (Milano: Editore Ulrico Hoepli Milano, 1998), 6-11.

<sup>5</sup> The dimension of the plaque reaches 170 x 110 cm. It was originally hanged on the façade of the tower six metres above the street level. The plaque is now restored in the Museo di Palazzo Vecchio, Firenze. Maria Monica Donato and Daniela Parenti, eds. *Dal giglio al David: arte civica a Firenze fra Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Firenze: Giunti, 2013), catalogue 49, 214-215.

<sup>6</sup> The Italian inscription was written in the Gothic hand:

LA. FAMIGLIA. DE. GIROLAMI. IN PERP.  
ETUO. DONA. E DIPUTA. LERENDITE DI Q.  
UESTA. TORRE. OGNI. ANNO. PERMETÀ. AL  
OFERTA. DI. SANTO ZANOBI. LORO. CON  
SORTO. E. PERMETÀ. ALLA. CAPELA. LO  
RO. DI. SANTO.  
STEFANO. E.  
MANCANDO  
E. DETTI. GIR.  
OLAMI. LASC  
IANO. ALLA CONPA  
GNIA. DI SANTO. ZANOBIO. CHE. DETTA.  
OFER. TA. FACINO. MOVENDOSI. DI QUESTO. L  
UOGO. E CONSERVINO. DETTA CAPELLA.

English translation adopts from Sally J. Cornelison, "A French King and a Magic Ring: The Girolami and a Relic of St. Zenobius in Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly* 55, no.2 (2002): 44. On the Girolami's private devotion to Saint Zenobius, see

maintain their private chapel in the church of Santo Stefano al Ponte,<sup>7</sup> which was also dedicated to the saint, as well as to the fraternity of Saint Zenobius (*Compagnia di San Zanobi*). This inscription has enjoyed considerable scholarly attention, as it not only provides valuable textual reference to the Girolami's devotion to Saint Zenobius, but also testifies to the cult of Saint Zenobius in Quattrocento Florence.<sup>8</sup>

The present study focuses on a less explored aspect of the plaque, that is the narrative scene unfolded in the upper section, in which the figure of Saint Zenobius is depicted standing by the Palazzo della Signoria. Although no textual documents survived to verify the name of the sculptor, the relief itself still serves as an exemplum of the artistic style and the preference in fifteenth-century Florentine. In addition, it may reflect the collective knowledge and memory of this period in the light of Baxandall's cognitive theory.<sup>9</sup> By

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Ferdinando Leopoldo Del Migliore, *Firenze città nobilissima illustrata* (Firenze: Stella. C. L. deà Superiori, 1684), 67; Francesco Antonio Zaccaria, ed. *Raccolta di dissertazioni di storia ecclesiastica*, vol.3 (Roma: Tipografia Ferretti, 1841), 52-53; Francesco Bigazzi, *Iscrizioni e memorie della città di Firenze* (Firenze: Pei Tipt dell'arte della stampa, 1887), 268; Loris Macci and Valeria Orgera, *Architettura e civiltà delle torri: torri e famiglie nella Firenze medievale* (Firenze: Edifir, 1994), 154; Donato and Parenti, *Dal giglio al David: arte civica a Firenze fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 214-215.

<sup>7</sup> Cornelison, "A French King and a Magic Ring: The Girolami and a Relic of St. Zenobius in Renaissance Florence," 443. A tax return of Francesco di Zanobi di Benedetto de' Girolami in 1480 states the family's ownership of this chapel in the Santo Stefano al Ponte. Florence, Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *catasto*, 1480, S. Croce, Gonfalone Carro, 487. Also see Ellen Callmann, "Botticelli's Life of Saint Zenobius," *The Art Bulletin* 66, no.3 (1984): 493, n. 496.

<sup>8</sup> Key references to the saint's cult in Renaissance Florence, Richard C. Trexler, *Public life in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 2-3, 216, 272; Callmann, "Botticelli's Life of Saint Zenobius," 493, n. 496; Bigazzi, *Iscrizioni e memorie della città di Firenze*, 268; Donato and Parenti, *Dal giglio al David: arte civica a Firenze fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*; Cornelison, "A French King and a Magic Ring: The Girolami and a Relic of St. Zenobius in Renaissance Florence," 444.

<sup>9</sup> In his pioneering work, Baxandall proposed that Renaissance artworks reflect a specific cognitive style and interpreting skills shared by contemporary viewers. This is meant that people from different spatial temporal backgrounds might not be able to comprehend the connotation of a fifteenth-century work, since they do not equip with the Renaissance

analysing the civic and political significances of two prominent motifs in the relief, *i.e.* Saint Zenobius and the Palazzo della Signoria, this paper primarily aims to explore their iconographies in the fifteenth-century context. To that end, it looks at the extent to which this plaque may have served as a political advertisement, manifesting the Girolami's political prestige amongst their contemporaries.

Prior to approaching the political significance of the Girolami's plaque, it seems necessary to reconstruct contemporaries' perceptions of two principal motifs adopted in the narrative: Saint Zenobius and the Palazzo della Signoria. The second section of the essay presents the ways in which Saint Zenobius' iconography was shaped by his Florentine identity, as well as his familial association with the Florentine elite family—the Girolami. The third part of the essay turns to the iconography of Palazzo della Signoria in Florence's historical and political contexts between the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. Finally, the fourth section of the essay interprets the significance of amalgamating the Palazzo della Signoria with Saint Zenobius in the light of the Girolami's political authority between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.

### ***Placing Saint Zenobius in Florence***

Of Florence's patron saints, Saint Zenobius of Florence (c.337- 417) stands out as a prominent local patron for his distinctive Florentine identity.<sup>10</sup>He went

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'period eye'. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: a Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Other patrons of Florence include Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. Amanda Lillie, "Place Making: Between Street and Piazza: The Florence of Saint Zenobius," in *Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting* (London: The National Gallery 2014), <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture/place-making/introduction>. On Saint Zenobius' local identity, Fra Clement Mazza, "De vita ss. viri Zenobii episcopi Florentini," in *La vita di san Zanobi*, ed. F. Gio. Maria Tolosani (Firenze: Antonio Cecchi dal Duomo, 1475), 27; Trexler,

down in the Florentine history as the first Florentine citizen who had been appointed as the bishop of his hometown;<sup>11</sup> the founder of the Catholic church in Florence; as well as the protector of Florence for having successfully fought off the invasion of the Goths who besieged Florence in A.D. 405.<sup>12</sup> He was pronounced the patron at first of the Bishop of Florence, then of the communal government.<sup>13</sup> In his *Nuova Cronica*, the Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani recorded a dramatic episode that greatly enhanced the Florentine reverence for the saint: in 1331, the skull and remains of the saint's body were unearthed in the crypt of the church Santa Reparata (demolished in 1294 to yield space for the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, the present Duomo).<sup>14</sup> To celebrate the rediscovery of the saint's relic, an exquisite silver bust reliquary was ordered from Andrea Arditi (**Figure 3**), which was 'in the likeness of the face and head of the said saint,' and would be shown publicly in the procession every year on the feast day of the saint.<sup>15</sup>

The saint's ecclesiastical significance is further suggested by the central chapel of Florence's Duomo, which is dedicated to and named after Saint Zenobius.<sup>16</sup> A bronze shrine containing an urn with the saint's relic can still be

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*Public life in Renaissance Florence*, 2-3, n. 2 & 4.

<sup>11</sup> On the saint's life and ecclesiastical importance in the Florentine religious context, Mazza, "De vita ss. viri Zenobii episcopi Florentini," 5-28; Giuseppe Maria Brocchi, *Vite de Santi e Beati Fiorentini*, vol. 3 (Firenze: Stamparia di Caetano Albizzini, 1742), vol. 1, 60-94.

<sup>12</sup> Lillie, "Place Making: Between Street and Piazza: The Florence of Saint Zenobius,".

<sup>13</sup> Trexler, *Public life in Renaissance Florence*, 2-3, n. 2 & 4.

<sup>14</sup> Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica*, ed. Giuseppe Porta (Parma: Ugo Guanda, 1990), vol. 3, bk. 10, 171.

<sup>15</sup> "Una testa d'argento a similitudine del viso e testa del detto santo.....per poterlo annualmente per la sua festa con grande solennità mostrare al popolo." *Nuova cronica*, vol. 3, bk. 11, 69. Also see Trexler, *Public life in Renaissance Florence*, 61; Sally J. Cornelison, "Tales of Two Bishop Saints: Zenobius and Antoninus in Florentine Renaissance Art and History," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 38, no.3 (2007): 630.

<sup>16</sup> Mazza, "De vita ss. viri Zenobii episcopi Florentini," 28; Del Migliore, *Firenze città nobilissima illustrata*, 68; Marica S. Tacconi, *Cathedral and Civic Ritual in Late Medieval and Renaissance Florence: the Service Books of Santa Maria del Fiore*

seen beneath its high altar (**Figure 4**).<sup>17</sup>This shrine, commissioned from the city's distinctive sculptor, Lorenzo Ghiberti,<sup>18</sup> contains a frontal panel representing the saint's most famous miracle: resurrecting a French widow's son while leading a procession towards the church of San Pier Maggiore on the street of Borgo degli Albizzi (**Figure 5**).<sup>19</sup>In Ghiberti's relief, the protagonists were presented in front of the now destroyed San Pier Maggiore. The architectural features of the church, including the steps leading to the church's four-bay arcaded portico, and the campanile behind the church were carefully depicted. Most likely in an attempt to enhance the saint's link to Florence, Ghiberti added another view of Florence in the upper right corner, that can be identified as the Baptistery.

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 244; George Bent, *Public Painting and Visual Culture in Early Republican Florence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 196, 307, n. 115.

<sup>17</sup> Bloch's research suggested that the chapel had undergone many reconstructions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Ghiberti's shrine was originally elevated on columns. Amy R. Bloch, "The Sculpture of Lorenzo Ghiberti and Ritual Performance," in *Renaissance Florence* (New Jersey: The State University of New Jersey, 2004), ii.

<sup>18</sup> The shrine was ordered by the Opera del Duomo in 1432 and was completed in 1442. On the history of the commission, Gary M. Radke, ed. *The Gates of Paradise: Lorenzo Ghiberti's Renaissance Masterpiece* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2007), 59-60. Amy R. Bloch, "The Evolution of Lorenzo Ghiberti's Approach to the Narrative Relief," in *Depth of Field: Relief Sculpture in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Marika Leino and Donal Cooper (Oxford; Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2007), 143-144.

<sup>19</sup> The location of this miracle was mentioned in Mazza's hagiography of Saint Zenobius: "nel quale S. Zanobio processionalmente alla chiesa di S. Piero maggiore, in quel tempo fuori delle mura fiorentine situata, era andato per fare l'ufficio e celebrare la messa a onore di tal giorno apostolico, facendo la donna suo ritorno da Roma e in quel punto passando el suo figliuolo di quel vita per cagione della debilità in che l'aveva lassato, o per altro ancora sopravvenuto accidente. Intendendo la donna la morte del suo figliuolo essere occorsa nella assenza e fuori della presenza del Santo. O con che grandissime strida non meno della assenza di S. Zanobi, che della morte del suo unico figliuolo scapigliata si lamentava, con fede grandissima dicendo quasi le parole delle suore di Lazaro (.....) e non più che inteso dove, la mesta madre lo esanime suo figliuolo nelle materne braccia raccolto, inverso el disiato calle donde S. Zenobio doveva fare ritorno non con lenti passi prese suo cammino." Mazza, "De vita ss. viri Zenobii episcopi Florentini," chap. 15, 11-12.



Ghiberti was not the only fifteenth-century artist who situated the saint's life within the Florentine urban space. Domenico Veneziano's *predella* panel (c.1442-1448)(**Figure 6**) gives another example of the ways in which the life of Saint Zenobius was framed by Florence's urban monuments. The act of the miracle was depicted in front the San Pier Maggiore, having been accompanied by typical Florentine domestic buildings at either side. The same pictorial approach can be seen in Benozzo Gozzoli's panel of the same subject (1460s)(**Figure 7**), in which the façade of the San Pier Maggiore in the background architecturally enhances the solemnity of the astonishing moment. Another prominent Florentine building with which Saint Zenobius' imagery was frequently associated is the Baptistry. It is believed that in the ninth century, when the saint's relic was transferred to the Santa Reparata, a dead elm next to the Baptistry was revived by a touch of the saint's body.<sup>20</sup> Davide Ghirlandaio's *cassone* panel *The Burial of Saint Zenobius* depicted this miracle (**Figure 8**), showing the greenery of a foliaged tree in front of the procession of the saint's relic passing by the Baptistry. A column with an icon of an elm was now installed at the very locus where this miracle was believed to have taken place (**Figure 9**).<sup>21</sup>

Apart from his ecclesiastical significance, it is suggested that Saint Zenobius became a centrepiece in Florence's civic ritual from the fourteenth century onwards.<sup>22</sup> The city's ruling political party—the Guelph Party—began

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<sup>20</sup> “De vita ss. viri Zenobii episcopi Florentini,” 26-27; Del Migliore, *Firenze città nobilissima illustrata*, 67.

<sup>21</sup> It is suggested that in the ninth century, the saint's relic was reallocated from the church of San Lorenzo (outside the city) to the church of Santa Reparata within the city wall. Mazza, “De vita ss. viri Zenobii episcopi Florentini,” 27; Marica S. Tacconi, “Liturgy and Politics in Renaissance Florence: The Creation of the 1526 Office for St. Zenobius,” in *Music and Culture in the Middle Ages and Beyond: Liturgy, Sources, Symbolism*, eds. Benjamin Brand and David J. Rothenber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 84.

<sup>22</sup> Trexler, *Public life in Renaissance Florence*, 2-3; Bloch, “The Sculpture of Lorenzo Ghiberti ad Ritual Performance in Renaissance Florence,” ii.

making annual offering to Saint Zenobius in 1392.<sup>23</sup> The sacral ritual soon acquired more secular elements emphasising the communal identity. For instance, fifteenth-century records show that the procession celebrating the feast day of Saint Zenobius was led not only by ecclesiastical figures, such as Bishop of Florence, but also by magistrates and officials of the commune.<sup>24</sup> One of the main meeting halls in Florence's communal palace—the Sala dei Gigli in the Palazzo della Signoria—was decorated with the saint's image in the late fifteenth century (**Figure 10**). Sitting on a throne high above the doorway of the hall, the sacred figure of Saint Zenobius enhanced the authority of the public meeting, providing evidence to its civic role in Quattrocento Florence.

The public devotion to Saint Zenobius in Florence was also related to the Girolami, a powerful elite family that was also known as the Bishop's Girolami (*Girolami del Vescovo*). The Girolami claimed their ancestral link to the fifth-century bishop saint, honouring Saint Zenobius of being the private patron of the family.<sup>25</sup> That the Girolami's identity was built around the imagery of Saint Zenobius is suggested by the family's coat of arms, in which the bishop's mitre underlines the family's claimed close connection with the saint (**Figure 11**).

The Girolami played a key role in promoting the devotional ritual to Saint Zenobius in Renaissance Florence.<sup>26</sup> They were collectors and patrons of the

<sup>23</sup> Trexler, *Public life in Renaissance Florence*, 2, n. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Mazza, "De vita ss. viri Zenobii episcopi Florentini," 27. Also see Cornelison, "A French King and a Magic Ring: The Girolami and a Relic of St. Zenobius in Renaissance Florence," 437.

<sup>25</sup> Although the Girolami claim themselves an ancient lineage dating Saint Zenobius' father, Lucianus, the family's history can only be traced to the twelfth century. On the origin of the Girolami family and their political role in Florence during the thirteenth century, see Roberto Ciabani, *I canti: storia di Firenze attraverso i suoi angoli* (Firenze: Cantini, 1984), 241-243; Callmann, "Botticelli's Life of Saint Zenobius," 493; Cornelison, "A French King and a Magic Ring: The Girolami and a Relic of St. Zenobius in Renaissance Florence," 440, n. 422; Donato and Parenti, *Dal giglio al David: arte civica a Firenze fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 214.

<sup>26</sup> Cornelison, "A French King and a Magic Ring: The Girolami and a Relic of St.

saint's relics and sacred objects, possessing prominent reliquaries of the saint including a head reliquary that would be displayed to the public on the saint's feast day, as well as an enchanted ring which was believed to have thaumaturgic power of healing.<sup>27</sup> The Girolami members were also keen to commission works related to Saint Zenobius. For instance, a biography of Saint Zenobius was ordered by Filippo di Zanobi de' Girolami in 1475, in which the author Fra Clemente Mazza recorded significant details of the saint's life and his miracles performed in Florence.<sup>28</sup> After its publication in 1487, this book soon became an almost official textual reference for the iconography of Saint Zenobius. It is also suggested that Botticelli's *spalliere* panels depicting the *Life of Saint Zenobius* were ordered by the Girolami, probably for decorating the meeting hall of a religious group 'The company of the Purification and of Saint Zenobius' (*Compagnia della Purificazione e di San Zanobi*).<sup>29</sup>

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Zenobius in Renaissance Florence," 447.

<sup>27</sup> On the importance of Saint Zenobius' head reliquary in Florence's processions, Trexler, *Public life in Renaissance Florence*, 272; Donato and Parenti, *Dal giglio al David: arte civica a Firenze fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 214-215. The fame of the Girolami's ring of Saint Zenobius even reached France, as in 1482 King Louis XI requested it to be sent to France in an attempt to cure his chronic health issues. This event was well documented and studied, see France Cornelison, "A French King and a Magic Ring: The Girolami and a Relic of St. Zenobius in Renaissance Florence," 448-452.

<sup>28</sup> Fra Clement Mazza's work was probably the most important biography of Saint Zenobius. The first part of Mazza's work addresses the saint's life and miracles before his death. The second and the third parts mentioned miracles happened after his death. Also see Callmann, "Botticelli's Life of Saint Zenobius," 492-493; Cornelison, "A French King and a Magic Ring: The Girolami and a Relic of St. Zenobius in Renaissance Florence," 447; "Tales of Two Bishop Saints: Zenobius and Antoninus in Florentine Renaissance Art and History," 627-656.

<sup>29</sup> In Florence, the fashion for commissioning painted *spalliere* panels for interior decoration began around the 1450s and continued into the first half of the sixteenth century. They were usually installed on walls of the main meeting *sala* or marital bedchamber in the *piano nobile*. The term *spalliere* derives from the Italian word *spalla* (shoulder), indicating that panel would have been installed on wall at eye or shoulder level. On *spalliere* panels *in situ*, see Anne B. Barriault, *Spalliera Paintings of Renaissance Tuscany: Fables of Poets for Patrician Homes* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 1-2, 12; Callmann, "Botticelli's Life of Saint

With regard to the 1415 plaque, its subject of Saint Zenobius testified to the Girolami's devotional practice to the saint during the fifteenth century. Moreover, since the plaque was displayed on the façade of the Girolami's private tower—Tower of Saint Zenobius (**Figure 12**),<sup>30</sup> easily accessible by the public, this suggests that the Florentines most likely were very much aware of and accustomed with the claimed link between the saint and the patron family. The plaque and the way it had been displayed draw our attention to the aspirations of the Girolami's entree to the public sphere in the fifteenth century through self-presentation and the pictorial narrative. In what ways and to what extent does the narrative in the 1415 plaque reflect the Girolami's self-fashioning deserves a further examination.

### ***Interpreting the Palazzo della Signoria in the Florentine Political and Civic Contexts***

In the Girolami's narrative relief (**Figure 2**), the kneeling figure of Saint Zenobius occupies almost half of the pictorial space. His identity can be recognised through the bishop's mitre and pastoral staff. In this narrative, the gaze and the arm of Saint Zenobius lead the viewers towards God hovering over the city, as well as towards a cluster of Florentine monuments. The Palazzo della Signoria is flanked by the Loggia dei Lanzi and the Baptistery. A church spire and a tower protruding from the skyline most likely refer to the Badia Fiorentina and the Palazzo del Podestà. To the right of Saint Zenobius is the parish church of Santo Stefano al Ponte, with its gabled façade accompanied by the campanile presented. A quadrangular

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Zenobius," 492-493; Cornelison, "Tales of Two Bishop Saints: Zenobius and Antoninus in Florentine Renaissance Art and History," 627-656.

<sup>30</sup> The Girolami's tower was destroyed during the WWII in 1944. Cornelison, "A French King and a Magic Ring: The Girolami and a Relic of St. Zenobius in Renaissance Florence," 444-446.

tower behind the church most likely indicates the Girolami family's Tower of Saint Zenobius—the very place where this plaque was installed.

Amongst the urban monuments, the Palazzo della Signoria stands out as the most dominant and eye-catching building in the plaque. The palace is depicted from the north-west perspective, with its distinctive architectural characteristics presented in detail. A low parapet circles the building, enclosing the base of the site, and visually enhancing the building's stability. On the corner of the parapet stands *Marzocco*, the lion emblem of Florence, facing the Piazza della Signoria in front of the palace.<sup>31</sup> Moving upwards through the elevation of the palace, the building block is guarded by a projecting machicolated galleries and battlements. Further, the Tower of Arnolfo includes another set of embattled machicolated gallery, above which a belfry supported by four strong columns is depicted. The palace's height, slightly taller than the figure of Saint Zenobius, dominates the city. In addition, the hands of God and Saint Zenobius stretching towards the palace. This gesture not only implies their blessing, but also highlighting the significance of the Palazzo della Signoria in this narrative.

While the palace's focal point suggests its involvement in the saint's iconography, this composition was problematic. First, the Palazzo della Signoria was constructed long after the saint's death, thus this anachronistic motif cannot be interpreted literally. Secondly, given Mazza's hagiography, none of Saint Zenobius' miracles were performed near Florence's governmental palace. A question then arises as to why does the Florence's seat of government, to which the saint cannot be historically linked, enjoy such a prestigious place in the plaque devoted to Saint Zenobius?

One plausible explanation was the location of the Girolami's Tower of

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<sup>31</sup> On the political interpretation of *Marzocco* on the *ringhiera*, Geraldine A. Johnson, "The Lion on the Piazza: Patrician Politics and Public Statuary in Central Florence," in *Secular Sculpture, 1300-1550*, eds. Thomas Frangenberg and Phillip Linley (Shaun Tyas Press, 2000), 55-56.

Saint Zenobius. Situated on the corner of Via Por Santa Maria and Via Lambertesca,<sup>32</sup> the Tower of Saint Zenobius marked an important assembly point in Florence's public life. Every year on 25th of May, the saint's feast day, a procession venerating Saint Zenobius would begin from this tower, following the Via Por Santa Maria heading north towards its destination in the Duomo.<sup>33</sup> For the worshipers gathering around the tower, the church of Santo Stefano del Ponte would have been at their right, whereas the Palazzo della Signoria and the Baptistry on the left—which seems to correspond to the composition of the plaque. However, this cannot explain the reason why the nearby parish church of Santo Stefano al Ponte appears small and marginalised, whereas the Palazzo della Signoria, which is further away from the site of the Tower of Saint Zenobius, was emphasised. The inclusion of two sections of crenellated city walls on the bottom corners further points to the topographic inaccuracy of the narrative, as none of the buildings included were physically close to the periphery of the city during the fifteenth century.

Since the urban setting around the site of the plaque cannot account for the spatial dominance enjoyed by the Palazzo della Signoria in the narrative, an investigation into the iconography of the communal palace may shed light on the peculiar arrangement in the Girolami's plaque. Built for Florence's second popular government (*Secondo Popolo*) between 1299 and 1314, the Palazzo della Signoria was the city's most important political, administrative, and civic nucleus, whose fortress-like appearance was closely related to Florence's domestic turbulence during the late thirteenth

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<sup>32</sup> Mazza recorded the route of the procession, Mazza, "De vita ss. viri Zenobii episcopi Florentini," 28. Also see Cornelison, "A French King and a Magic Ring: The Girolami and a Relic of St. Zenobius in Renaissance Florence," 444-447.

<sup>33</sup> Cornelison, "A French King and a Magic Ring: The Girolami and a Relic of St. Zenobius in Renaissance Florence," 443-444.

and early fourteenth centuries.<sup>34</sup> Andrea Orcagna's fresco, *The Expulsion of the Duke of Athens* (c.1344-1345)(**Figure 13**) was one of the earliest pictorial representations of the Palazzo della Signoria, which provides valuable evidence for the palace's link to the city's political history.<sup>35</sup> Having been commissioned by the Florentine authority, this mural depicts a dramatic scene in which the despot Walter of Brienne, also known as the Duke of Athens, was expelled from Florence on 26 July 1343, the feast day of Saint Anne.<sup>36</sup> In 1342, the Duke was invited by the Florentine merchants and bankers to solve the city's financial crisis. However, soon after the establishment of his rule, Walter declared himself *signore* of Florence for life, levying harsh taxes and abandoning Florence's communal

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<sup>34</sup> The cornerstone of the palace was laid in December 1299 (modern calendar). On the construction of the palace, Villani, *Nuova cronica*, vol. 2, bk. 9, chap. 26, 45-26; Robert Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1956); *Storia di Firenze*, vol. 3, 585. On the building's later renovations, see Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Palazzo Vecchio, 1298-1532. Government, Architecture, and Imagery in the Civic Palace of the Florentine Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1. Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze*, vol. 7, 520. On the significance of civic palaces in Italian communes: Daniel Waley and Trevor Dean, *The Italian City-Republics*, 1st ed. (Harlow: Longman, 1969), 107-112; Gian Maria Tabarelli, *Palazzi pubblici d'Italia: nascita e trasformazione del palazzo pubblico in Italia fino al XVI secolo* (Busto Arsizio: Bramante, 1978), 11-16; Maureen Miller, "Topographies of Power in the Urban Centres of Medieval Italy. Communes, Bishops and Public Authority," in *Beyond Florence. The Contours of Medieval and Early Modern Italy*, eds. Paula Findlen, Michelle Fontaine, and Duane Osheim (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 181-189; Paul N. Balchin, *Urban Development in Renaissance Italy* (U.K.: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2008), 49-91; Francesca Bocchi, *Per antiche strade: caratteri e aspetti delle città medievali* (Roma: Viella, 2013), 235-248.

<sup>35</sup> Donato, "Arte civica a Firenze, dal primo popolo al primo umanesimo. La tradizione, i modelli perduti," 82-83.

<sup>36</sup> On the financial crisis among Florentine elite families in the 1340s and Walter of Brienne's fiscal reforms in Florence, Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575*, 132-139. On this event's influence on fourteenth-century Florentine republican ideology, see Nicolai Rubinstein, "Florence and the Despots. Some Aspects of Florentine Diplomacy in the Fourteenth Century," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 2 (1952): 21-23. On the analysis of pictorial tradition, Diana Norman, *Siena, Florence, and Padua: Art, Society and Religion 1280-1400* (New Haven, Conn. ; London: Yale University Press in association with the Open University, 1995), vol. 1, 141-142.

traditions and guild-based magistrate. The Florentines therefore decided to overthrow his regime. On the feast day of Saint Anne, armed Florentines gathered in the piazza in front of the Palazzo della Signoria, shouting: ‘Death to the Duke and his followers, and long live the popolo, the commune and liberty.’<sup>37</sup> The Duke was besieged inside the palace until he fled into exile during night of 6 August.

Most likely being related to the Florentines’ successful campaign against the Duke, in Orcagna’s fresco, the image of Palazzo della Signoria played a key role, dividing the picture into two episodes visually and conceptually. To the left of the palace is Saint Anne, enthroned with two angels supporting her cloth of honour, flanked on one side by a group of at least fourteen soldiers wearing protective armour. Two kneeling soldiers hold swords and three more standing behind carry banners with the arms of the Florentine *popolo*, the city, and the commune.<sup>38</sup> On the other side of the saint is the Palazzo della Signoria. Saint Anne’s open arms, with her hands grasping the arms of the militia on one side, and hovering over the Palazzo della Signoria on the other, suggest that both the people and the commune were under her protection.

To the right of the palace, a throne is empty, as Justice has vacated his throne to chase the Duke. The fleeing Duke turns back to look anxiously at

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<sup>37</sup> “Muioia il duca e i suoi seguaci, e viva il popolo e’l comune e libertà.” Villani, *Nuova cronica*, vol. 3, bk. 13, 332. English Translation: Roger J. Crum and David G. Wilkins, “In the Defense of Florentine Republicanism: Saint Anne and Florentine Art, 1343-1575,” in *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society*, eds. Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn (Athens, Georgia, etc.: Univ. of Georgia P., 1990), 133.

<sup>38</sup> The red cross of the *Popolo* commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The vertical bipartite white and red shield symbolised the unification of Florence and Fiesole after the battle of 1125. It was frequently used on the chariot on the battlefield. The red lily (*flos*) on white field of the arms of the commune derives from the city’s Latin name, *Florentia*. On the iconography of the Florentine coats of arms, Donato and Parenti, *Dal giglio al David: arte civica a Firenze fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 74-75, 212.



the angel of Justice holding the staff and chasing him. A broken sword and a banner, and a crumpled flag bearing the Duke's emblem are scattered around him, suggesting that a fight has just ended.<sup>39</sup> His right leg pointing towards the palace betrays his unwillingness to leave. The tyrant's body turning away from the palace symbolically indicates that his despotic oppression had no more influence on the Florentine people. In contrast with the peaceful, submissive and orderly figures to the left, the image of the disgraced tyrant conveys a strong moral lesson, showing the consequences of crimes committed against the Republican commune.<sup>40</sup>

In this fresco, the communal palace's main façade directly engages the enemy, which is comparable to an infantryman confidently standing in the battlefield. The impregnable characteristic of the palace is further underlined by Orcagna's positioning of the kneeling soldiers away from the tyrant and under the protection of Saint Anne, implying that the main defender of Florence was its impregnable castellated city hall. When we examine the fresco in its original site, the political purpose of the Palazzo della Signoria in Orcagna's fresco is significant. This fresco was painted on the wall of the vestibule at the Carceri delle Stinche, the prison in which the Duke incarcerated his political opponents.<sup>41</sup> In this context, the palace may have reflected the contemporaries' shared understanding of the role castellated

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<sup>39</sup> It is also suggested that the book, the balance, and the sword on the ground are emblems of justice. Maria Monica Donato and Daniela Parenti, eds. *Dal giglio al David: arte civica a Firenze fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 212.

<sup>40</sup> According to Donato, civic arts not only celebrated a commune's diplomatic and militant power, but also sought to stigmatise crime in order to promote domestic discipline. Donato, "Arte civica a Firenze, dal primo popolo al primo umanesimo. La tradizione, i modelli perduti," 20.

<sup>41</sup> "Arte civica a Firenze, dal primo popolo al primo umanesimo. La tradizione, i modelli perduti," 212-213. While Florence's legal and civil laws lies beyond the scope of this thesis, Wolfgang's study showed that most inmates in this prison were convicted for failure to pay debts and many would eventually be released. The prison was demolished in 1833. The Theatre Verdi now stands on its site. Marvin E. Wolfgang, "A Florentine Prison: le carceri delle Stinche," *Studies in the Renaissance* 7 (1960): 152.

architecture played in protecting the commune and its citizens: parapets on the ground floor reinforce structures against external assaults, projecting *antiporte* and machicolated galleries intimidate and thus repel enemies, looming towers enable one to keep a large area under surveillance, and, perhaps most importantly, defensive walls block enemies from outside the city. From this perspective, the Palazzo della Signoria was a defensive apparatus, ensuring the political longevity of the Florentine government.

When juxtaposing the Palazzo della Signoria motif in the Girolami's plaque with that in Orcagna's fresco, their resemblance is striking (**Figure 14**).<sup>42</sup> In both cases, the communal palace was presented from the north-western angle, proudly showing its towered configuration to the viewers. The façade diminishes perspective towards the top, amplifying the spatial dominance of the building, which perhaps was deemed to emulate the visual perception of the building from the city's thoroughfare Via Calzaiuoli.<sup>43</sup> Following the iconography established by Orcagna, adopting the Palazzo della Signoria motif in the Girolami's plaque, on the one hand, testifies to the fifteenth-century viewers' understanding of the communal palace as an effective agent of security. On the other hand, its engagement with Saint Zenobius architecturally conveys the Girolami's self-assurance of the powerful family lineage. It can also be argued that the addition of two sections of crenellated city walls to each side in the bottom symbolically protect the saint, the city, and most likely the Girolami.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Donato and Parenti, *Dal giglio al David: arte civica a Firenze fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, catalogue 49.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, "The Lion on the Piazza: Patrician Politics and Public Statuary in Central Florence," 59.

<sup>44</sup> On the political connotation of city walls in northern Italian city-states including Florence since the thirteenth century, Simon Pepper, "Siege Law, Siege Ritual, and the Symbolism of City Walls in Renaissance Europe," in *City Walls: the Urban Enceinte in Global Perspective*, ed. James D. Tracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 583-584; Donato, "Arte civica a Firenze, dal primo popolo al primo umanesimo. La tradizione, i modelli perduti," 82-83.

In addition to the fourteenth-century event of expelling the Duke of Athens, the representation of the Palazzo della Signoria in the Girolami's plaque may also have reflected the Florentines' political circumstance in the early fifteenth century. Between the late 1380s and 1402, the Florentine government faced a series of threats from the Duke of Milan, Gian Galeazzo Visconti, whose troops reached Tuscany in c.1387 after a successful military campaign in Lombardy.<sup>45</sup> The open war between the two states ended in 1402, when the Duke of Milan suddenly died in plague. In the eyes of the Florentines, the death of Visconti was interpreted as a sign of divine intervention in favour of Florence, which considerably boosted Florentine civic pride and their faith in civic liberty.<sup>46</sup>

Leonardo Bruni's open letter *Panegyric to the City of Florence* (*Laudatio Florentinae Urbis*, c.1403-4) provides us with a salient evidence for the Florentine's self-confidence after the fall of the Duke of Milan. Written shortly after Florence had defeated its adversary, the Florentine humanist and chancellor enthusiastically reminded Florentines that 'your founders are

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<sup>45</sup> On Florence's military campaign with Milan, Marvin Becker, *Florence in Transition: Studies in the Rise of the Territorial State*, vol. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), 204; "The Florentine Territorial State and Civic Humanism in the Early Renaissance," in *Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein (London: Faber, 1968), 104-105; Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575*, 192-193; D. M. Bueno de Mesquita, *Giangaleazzo Visconti: Duke of Milan (1351-1402)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1941). On the Duke's territorial expansion to Tuscany between the 1380s and 1390s, Gene Brucker, *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 119-125.

<sup>46</sup> On the development of Florentine civic humanism in relation to its military campaign with Milan, Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1955). Rich scholarship on Baron's civic humanism is available, for example James Hankins, "The 'Baron Thesis' after Forty Years and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni," *Journal of History of Ideas* 56, no.2 (1995): 309-338; Ronald G. Witt, "The Crisis after Forty Years," *The American Historical Review* 101, no.1 (1996): 110-118.

the Roman people the lords and conquerors of the entire world,'<sup>47</sup> describing Florence 'like a guardian and lord' overseeing its subject cities, villages, towns and military fortifications.<sup>48</sup> According to Hankins, Bruni's *Panegyric* was 'essentially an imperialist tract, a celebration of Florence's potentiality to be the centre of world empire.'<sup>49</sup> For Brown, it stressed the Florentines' legitimate right to rule the entire realm which belonged to the Romans as authentic heirs to the Roman people.<sup>50</sup> This text has been adopted by Hans Baron and by his numerous followers as an essential reference of the phenomenon of the Florentine civic humanism, which aimed at promoting Florence's supremacy over rival states.<sup>51</sup>

Bearing in mind the political importance of Bruni's *Panegyric*, it is striking that in his text Bruni seems to adopt the castellated appearance of the Palazzo della Signoria as a key agent of Florence's political and military authority:

In the centre of the city proudly rises up a beautiful fortress of remarkable workmanship. This fine building bespeaks by its very

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<sup>47</sup> Leonardo Bruni, *Laudatio florentine urbis*, ed. Stefano Ugo Baldassarri (Tavarnuzze, Firenze: SISMELE edizioni del Galluzzo, 2000), 11; English translation, see "Panegyric to the City of Florence," in *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society*, eds. Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 144.

<sup>48</sup> "Panegyric to the City of Florence," 142-145, 149-150; *Laudatio florentine urbis*, 11; English translation, see: "Panegyric to the City of Florence," 144.

<sup>49</sup> James Hankins, "The Civic Panegyric of Leonardo Bruni," in *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 146.

<sup>50</sup> Alison Brown, "The Language of Empire," in *Florentine Tuscany: Structures and Practices of Power*, eds. William J. Connell and Andrea Zorzi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>51</sup> On the development of Florentine civic humanism in relation to the city's military campaign against Milan, see Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*. For scholarship on Baron's civic humanism Hankins, "The 'Baron Thesis' after Forty Years and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni," 309-338; Witt, "The Crisis after Forty Years," 110-118.

appearance the purpose for which it was constructed (.....) so in Florence everyone immediately recognizes that this fortress (*arx*) is so immense that it must house the men who are appointed to govern the state. Indeed, it was so magnificently conceived and looms so towerlingly that it dominates all the buildings nearby and its top stands out above those of the private houses.<sup>52</sup>

Subsequently, he claimed that the Palazzo della Signoria ought to be called ‘the fortress of the fortress’ (*arx arcis*) because it was a fortress standing within another fortress, that is within the city of Florence.<sup>53</sup> This text draws attention to a specific civic humanistic thought associating Florence’s political and military success with the castellated appearance of the Palazzo della Signoria. Considering that the Girolami’s plaque was commissioned in c.1415, the ways in which the sculptor carefully articulated the castellated elements of Florence’s seat of government, such as the projecting machicolated galleries, crenellation, and defensive tower-belfry unit, the plaque may be seen as a pictorial counterpart to the civic humanistic texts. In the eyes of the contemporaries, the motif of Palazzo della Signoria in the Girolami’s narrative would most likely accentuate the family’s civic and political authority, which is comparable to that of the whole commune.

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<sup>52</sup> ‘Per media vero edificia superbissima insurgit arx ingenti pulchritudine miroque apparatu, que ipso aspectu facile declarat cuius rei gratia sit constituta. Ut enim in magna classe pretoria navis eiusmodi esse solet ut facile appareat in illa vectari ducem qui ceterorum sit moderaror et princeps, sic huius arcis ea species est ut quivis iudicare possit in ea habitare viros qui gubernatores sint rerum publicarum. Sic enim magnifice instruta est, sic precelsa insurgit, ut omnibus que circa sunt edibous latissimi dominetur appareatque eius plus quam privatum fastigium.’ Bruni, *Laudatio florentine urbis*, rub. 13, 17. English translation adopted from “Panegyric to the City of Florence,” 141.

<sup>53</sup> *Laudatio florentine urbis*, 7. English translation, “Panegyric to the City of Florence,” 141.

## *The Girolami and their Public Imagery*

The Girolami's intention to establish an association between two civic and political icons of Florence—Saint Zenobius and the Palazzo della Signoria—was likely related to their political prominence in the city. The Girolami's active role in Florence's public life from the thirteenth century onwards is well documented. They were members of the Guild of Wool (*Arte della Lana*)—one of the seven major guilds of Florence,<sup>54</sup> who, like many other newly established merchant-banking elites, emphatically articulated their financial and political influences during the second half of the thirteenth century.

Under the rule of the first popular government (*Primo Popolo*, 1250-1260), one of the family members, Chiaro de' Girolami, seated in the government's ruling committee. In 1282, when a new election system was introduced to form the priorate (the highest ruling body) of the guild-based second popular government, Salvi di Chiaro de' Girolami was one of the first three priors elected, representing the Wool Guild and the Saint Pancrazio quarter.<sup>55</sup> Subsequently, Salvi di Chiaro was re-elected six times to the priorate, even twice after the second popular government implemented the anti-elite Ordinances of Justice in 1293.<sup>56</sup> It is worth noting that, one of the most distinctive privileges of being communal magistrates is to live in the Palazzo della Signoria. The Florentine statutes not only state that the palace was the

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<sup>54</sup> Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *Peace and Penance in Late Medieval Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

<sup>55</sup> Dino Compagni, *Cronica Fiorentina*, 3rd ed. (Firenze: G. Barbèra Editore, 1862), 12; Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575*, 79. On the election result of 1282, David Herlihy et al., "Florentine Renaissance Resources, Online Tratte of Office Holders, 1282-1532," (Florentine Renaissance Resources/STG: Brown University, 2002).

<sup>56</sup> The Ordinances of Justice in 1293 prevented noble families from holding public official position, thus reinforcing the power of the *popolo*. Yet this act divided the elite and popolo, heightening the civic division and conflict in Florence. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575*, 81-88. On election record of Salvi di Chiaro, Herlihy et al., "Florentine Renaissance Resources, Online Tratte of Office Holders, 1282-1532."

residence and office of the priors, but also specifying that no one but elected officials could enter the building complex.<sup>57</sup> Having family members with an access into the communal palace is thus a symbol of political authority in Florence, what might give an account of the inclusion of the Palazzo della Signoria motif in the Girolami's plaque.

The family's political power was further upheld by Salvi di Chiaro's brother, Remigio de' Girolami (c.1240-1319), who was a pupil of Saint Thomas Aquinas, and later a prominent Dominican preacher in Florence.<sup>58</sup> Remigio's treatises on civic peace, *De bono comuni* (1302) and *De bono pacis* (1304), fused civic ethics with theological canon, what became the cornerstone of the Florentine political philosophy.<sup>59</sup> Having witnessed the civil war between the White and Black Guelphs in Florence, his writings provide us with valuable evidence for the early thirteenth-century factional conflicts, as well as shedding light on the Girolami's significant role on the city's political history.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> The statute request the priors to *morari* [sic: *morare*], *stare*, *dormire* (live in, remain, sleep) within their residence, forbidding them from leaving the building during their two-month terms of office, cited from Alfredo Lensi, *Palazzo Vecchio* (Milano: Bestetti e Tumminelli, 1929), 12. 'QUOD NULLUS NISI OFFICIALIS DEBEAT IN CAMERA COMUNIS CONVERSARI.' Romolo Caggese, ed. *Statuto del capitano del popolo degli anni 1322-25*, Statuti della Repubblica Fiorentina (Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 1999), bk. 4, rub. 23, 173. Contemporary mentions, see Dino Compagni, "Dino Compagni's Chronicle of Florence," ed. Daniel Ethan Bornstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), bk. 2, chap. 13, 42-13; Bruni, "Panegyric to the City of Florence," 170. Also see Rubinstein, *The Palazzo Vecchio, 1298-1532. Government, Architecture, and Imagery in the Civic Palace of the Florentine Republic*, 14.

<sup>58</sup> Remigio was the lector of Santa Maria Novella in Florence. Charles T. Davis, "An Early Florentine Political Theorist: Fra Remigio de' Girolami," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 104 no.6 (1960): 662.

<sup>59</sup> Nicolai Rubinstein, "Political Theories in the Renaissance," in *The Renaissance: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. André Chastel (London: Methuen, 1982), 185-194; Davis, "An Early Florentine Political Theorist: Fra Remigio de' Girolami," 662-676; Maria Consiglia de Matteis, *La 'teologia politica comunale' di Remigio de' Girolami* (Bologna: Patron editore, 1977), 11-51; Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575*, 55.

<sup>60</sup> Nicolai Rubinstein, "Political Ideas in Sienese Art: the Frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti and Taddeo di Bartolo in the Palazzo Pubblico," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21, no.3 (1958): 184-185; Donato, "Arte civica a Firenze, dal primo popolo al

During the fourteenth century, the Girolami's influence in Florence seems to begin to fade. First, their White Guelph identity was challenged by the Black Guelphs, who had many of White Guelph families been expelled from the city in 1301 and 1302, including Dante Alighieri.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, a fourteenth-century diary revealed the Girolami's dubious affiliation with Florence's political adversary—the Ghibelline Party.<sup>62</sup> In 1357, one of the family members, Giovanni di Lapo de' Girolami was found guilty of being a Ghibelline supporter.<sup>63</sup> Given these political circumstances, it is not surprising that in the course of a century between 1300 and 1399, the Girolami were only elected eleven times to seat in the governmental offices.<sup>64</sup> This number is small compared to their sixteen times services during a much shorter period between 1282 and 1299, when their reputation was not in question. That none of the Girolami was elected to the offices between 1320 and 1359 further confirms the family's political downfall in the mid-fourteenth century.

The Girolami's political status, however, gradually recovered in the last decade of the fourteenth century and seems to reach its heyday in the fifteenth century. Records suggest that between 1400 and 1499, the Girolami were

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primo umanesimo. La tradizione, i modelli perduti," 23; Jansen, *Peace and Penance in Late Medieval Italy*, 67-86.

<sup>61</sup> On the Florentine government under the control of the Black Guelphs in the 1300s, Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575*, 91-94.

<sup>62</sup> The Ghibelline and the Guelph Parties were political rivals: while the Ghibellines supported Holy Roman Empire, the Guelphs were loyal to pope. Having been allied with the pontifices, the Florentine government had seen the Ghibelline as mortal enemy since the thirteenth century. One of the best resources recording Florence's anti-Ghibelline attitude is Dino Compagni's chronicle of Florence written in the early fourteenth century. Compagni, *Cronica Fiorentina*. On the Girolami's Ghibelline identity: "la casa de' Girolami sono tenuti ghibellini." Cited from Cornelison, "A French King and a Magic Ring: The Girolami and a Relic of St. Zenobius in Renaissance Florence," 443-444.

<sup>63</sup> "A French King and a Magic Ring: The Girolami and a Relic of St. Zenobius in Renaissance Florence," 444.

<sup>64</sup> Herlihy et al., "Florentine Renaissance Resources, Online Tratte of Office Holders, 1282-1532."



elected 143 times to communal offices.<sup>65</sup> Between 1415 and 1420, the very period when the plaque of Saint Zenobius was most probably commissioned and installed, Giovanni di Testa de' Girolami alone was elected twelve times, including twice into the priorate.<sup>66</sup> Given the family's restored political influence, it is probably not coincidental that the Girolami associated the city's political symbol—the Palazzo della Signoria—with their family saint in a public locus. On the one hand, linking the communal palace motif with Saint Zenobius would have instantiated the political authority enjoyed by the Girolamo family. On the other hand, in view of the Girolami's unfavourable political circumstances in the fourteenth century, the narrative of the plaque might have been an allegory of the Girolami's political situation, which has been redeemed through Saint Zenobius' intervention. This plaque may thus be thought as evidence of the Girolami's long-lasting political prestige, as well as showing the active role played by visual arts in representing political thought in fifteenth-century Florence.

## ***Conclusion***

This essay has analysed a less-known aspect of the plaque of Saint Zenobius, *i.e.* its political significance for the Girolami family in Quattrocento Florence. Regardless of the credibility of the Girolami family claimed lineage, the essay focused on the pictorial representation of the figure of Saint Zenobius and the Palazzo della Signoria motif in the upper section of the plaque. The main goal of this essay is to explore the extent to which an artwork of ecclesiastical theme can also be viewed as a political manifesto in the eyes of

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<sup>65</sup> Records show that they were elected 34 times between 1500 and 1530. "Florentine Renaissance Resources, Online Tratte of Office Holders, 1282-1532."

<sup>66</sup> Although Giovanni di Testa was away from Florence and did not accept any of this appointment. "Florentine Renaissance Resources, Online Tratte of Office Holders, 1282-1532."

contemporaries.

Unlike other fifteenth-century public artworks of the saint that often associate Saint Zenobius with Florence's ecclesiastical monuments, it is striking that in the Girolami's plaque, the city's seat of government occupies a focal point, with the figures of God and the saint at either side. While incorporating the Palazzo della Signoria motif seems not to follow Saint Zenobius' iconographical tradition, the image of Palazzo della Signoria allegorically expresses the Girolami's civic and political status in Florence. In the Girolami's plaque, the representation of the Palazzo della Signoria imitates Orcagna's fourteenth-century mural, which may have aimed to articulate the Girolami's well-protected lineage. The ways in which the castellated details of the communal palace were presented in detail corresponds to the fifteenth-century civic humanistic approach that associates the sturdy, fortress-like appearance of Florence's communal palace with the Florentine civic pride. The plaque might thus have reflected the Girolami's self-confidence.

It is also worth noting that the period when this plaque was ordered and displayed corresponds with a crucial moment in the history of the Girolami, when their political authority gradually recovered from the unfavourable fourteenth century. Presenting the Palazzo della Signoria with Saint Zenobius may thus function as an instrument of political power, aiming to remind the viewers of the restoration of the family's political standing. The ways this plaque adopted various ecclesiastical, civic and political symbols to legitimise an individual family's public imagery may thus constitute an example of fifteenth-century personal political campaign banner.

## ***Illustrations***



Figure 1. Florence, Palazzo della Signoria, 1299-1314.

Photo Credit: Chao, Ko-ching.



Figure 2. Anonymous Florentine Master, Saint Zenobius with the Palazzo della Signoria, 1415-20, 173 x110 cm, Museo di Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

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40747 - FIRENZE - Busto di S. Zanobi - Arditi Andrea-Duomo - (Stab. D. Anderson - Roma).

Figure 3. Andrea Arditi, Reliquary Bust of Saint Zenobius, after 1331, Florence, Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore.

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Figure 4. Florence, Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, Chapel of Saint Zenobius.

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Figure 5. Lorenzo Ghiberti, Saint Zenobius Resurrects the Son of a French Pilgrim, 1432-1442, bronze relief, Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence.  
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Figure 6. Domenico Veneziano, *A Miracle of Saint Zenobius*, c. 1442–1448.  
© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.





Figure 7. Benozzo Gozzoli, *Saint Zenobius Resuscitating a Dead Child*, 1460s, tempera on wood.

© Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 8. Davide Ghirlandaio, *The Burial of Saint Zenobius*, c.1479, cassone.  
© Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 9. Florence, Column of Saint Zenobius, after 1384.

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Figure 10. Domenico Ghirlandaio, Saint Zenobius with the deacon Saints Eugene and Crescentius, 1482, Sala dei gigli, Museo di Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

Photo Credit: Chao, Ko-ching.



Figure 11. Coat of Arms of the Girolami, in Enrico Ceramelli Papiani, *Raccolta Ceramelli Papiani*, fasc. 2404, fol. 34

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Figure 12. Florence, Tower of Saint Zenobius, twelfth century, destroyed in 1944.

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Figure 13. Andrea Orcagna (attrib.), *The Expulsion of the Duke of Athens*, 1344-45, fresco, 257 x 290 cm, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

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Figure 14. *Palazzo della Signoria Comparison*. Left: Andrea Orcagna (attrib.), *The Expulsion of the Duke of Athens*, detail, 1344-45, fresco, 257 x 290 cm, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Right: Anonymous Florentine Master, *Saint Zenobius with the Palazzo della Signoria*, detail, 1415-20, 173 x 110 cm. © Alinari Archives, Florence.



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## 從吉羅拉米家族的《聖贊諾比亞斯銘碑》(約1415至1420) 論十五世紀佛羅倫斯的私人政治宣傳

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本文探討十五世紀文藝復興初期，義大利佛羅倫斯的菁英統治階層如何利用視覺藝術鞏固私人家族的政治公共形象。在1415到1420年間，佛羅倫斯的吉羅拉米家族(the Girolami)委託了一件大型的戶外大理石淺浮雕，並將其懸掛在家族私人塔樓的外牆。這件淺浮雕被稱為《聖贊諾比亞斯銘碑》，其下方銘文記錄了吉羅拉米家族祭祀聖贊諾比亞斯(Saint Zenobius)的奉獻儀式，上方的浮雕圖像則刻畫了聖贊諾比亞斯聖像、以及佛羅倫斯城市中多處重要的宗教和市民建築，包括佛羅倫斯的政治與市民精神象徵：領主宮 (Palazzo della Signoria)。與其他十四與十五世紀描繪領主宮的視覺圖像及文獻資料相比較後，可以推論此銘碑中史無前例地結合領主宮以及聖贊諾比亞斯這兩個佛羅倫斯的市民和政治符號似乎暗示著其中的政治意涵。極有可能是為了讓當時的觀者能直接聯想到吉羅拉米家族在佛羅倫斯政治場域的活躍角色，才將佛羅倫斯的市政廳納入構圖。再配合上聖贊諾比亞斯的圖像，似乎也傳達出該家族自認能在聖人保佑下，持續在佛羅倫斯興盛昌榮的願景。從這樣的觀點來分析，這件作品不僅反映出吉羅拉米家族的虔誠信仰，更指涉了該家族的政治勢力。這件石碑因此可以被視為一件政治宣傳，讓我們一窺十五世紀文藝復興時期視覺藝術的政治以及修辭力量。

關鍵詞：佛羅倫斯的聖贊諾比亞斯、中世紀及文藝復興佛羅倫斯市民藝術、佛羅倫斯十四及十五世紀政治史、藝術與政治