THE PALAZZO LANCELLOTTI COURTYARD: USE AND CONCEPT

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Abstract
This study aims at exploring the composition and use of the Roman palace courtyard with specific reference to the seventeenth-century Palazzo Lancellotti ai Coronari. It explores the urban aspects of the courtyard and puts it in relation to contemporary city planning. Serving as residences as well as a means for representation and display, Roman palaces were consciously integrated in the urban structure. Although the courtyard was a semi-private space primarily intended for the palace residents, it may also be interpreted as an expression for grand manner in urban design continuing into the realm of the palace. The activity which took place in the courtyard and the established scheme of movement through the palace simultaneously had an influence on its layout. Further, the Lancellotti courtyard is described here through a study of natural daylight. The inflowing light defines to a great extent its vertical spatial direction which, in turn, is overlaid by the horizontal axiality of the plan.

Introduction
Palaces in Rome were designed as residences, typically for a cardinal and his male family members. During the Renaissance, the demand for a cardinal to be of noble birth had weakened to the benefit of good education and manners. However, most aristocratic families ensured to make at least one of their members a cardinal. Providing evidence of Roman ancestry was nevertheless essential in the aristocracy, especially for those aspiring for the cardinal’s office and whose families were not already established in Rome. The palaces were not only impressive monuments and symbols of social and political status; they served to create the illusion of Roman ancestry. The initiative for constructing Palazzo Lancellotti is considered to be closely associated with Scipione Lancellotti’s appointment to cardinal in 1583, particularly since the family’s Roman ancestry had been questioned at this time. The palace was begun by Francesco da Volterra, probably in the early 1590’s, and the work was completed by Carlo Maderno on Volterra’s death. Partly constructed on remains of earlier buildings, the palace incorporates some of these. Its irregular plan shape is a result of the adaptation to the existing buildings, as well as to the shape of this already densely populated urban site. But even though it to some extent conformed to existing buildings and road structures, Palazzo Lancellotti, like many other palaces, strongly influenced the development of the site.

The palaces may further be defined as a framework for the constant arrival and departure of guests and it was in other words not intended for a quiet and secluded life:

In the papal capital, thronged with ambassadors and courtiers intent on diplomatic commerce, the paying of calls, whether of courtesy or of substance, was a major activity; and this activity took place not at some separate place of business but in apartments within palaces, according to an elaborate etiquette which was itself an important vehicle of diplomacy.

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1 I wish to extend my deepest appreciation to Gunilla Linde Bjur at the Department of Architecture, Chalmers University of Technology in Göteborg, and Börje Magnusson at the Swedish Institute in Rome for their comments on this paper, as they have been an invaluable contribution to my approach to the relation between urban elements.
4 Cavazzini 1999, 28.
7 Cavazzini 1999, 18.
8 Waddy 1999, 3. See also Waddy 1999 for the specific use of different parts of palaces and the established schemes of movement through them.
In most cases the palace apartment was placed on the piano nobile and accommodated the resident’s private living quarters as well as the sala dei palafrenieri and rooms of audience. The disposition of the different rooms of the palace apartment underwent some profound changes in the transition between Renaissance and Baroque, developing from a cluster into a linear sequence. The stairs with their origins in the courtyard were followed by the sala dei palafrenieri and a sequence of rooms, increasingly private in character. Smaller variations were common, but the layout aimed at clarifying the movement through the building and the procedure of diplomatic ceremonies so that both host and guest were confident in their respective responsibilities. The fact that the layout was universal also made it functional. This relation between etiquette and architectural framework was fully developed around 1620.

The Palazzo Lancellotti courtyard

The entrance to the Lancellotti palace is placed on the eastern side of the courtyard (fig. 1). Seen from the courtyard it appears to be centrally located under the loggia but the main portal is asymmetrically placed on the main façade (fig. 2). The foot of the stairs is placed near the entrance, under the loggia in the north-eastern corner. A similar organization of these most important architectural components – entrance, stairs and loggia - in a cluster appears at, among others, the contemporary Palazzo Mattei di Giove designed by Carlo Maderno (fig. 3) as well as earlier palaces in Rome such as Palazzo Altemps and Palazzo Farnese. With this disposition – conventional, like that of the apartment - visitors never had to be unsure about where to proceed. In spite of their somewhat peripheral placement in the courtyard, the stairs are an essential connecting link between the point of arrival and the apartment on the piano nobile. It is likely to assume that the steps, monumentally low and deep, were designed in this way in order to ensure that the visitor proceeding towards the piano nobile was given time to take notice of the impressive architecture and decorations. The main stairs of for example Palazzo Mattei show a similar relation between the height and depth of the steps.

Fig. 1. Palazzo Lancellotti, site plan and ground floor and courtyard plan. From Letarouilly, 1850.
Fig. 3. Palazzo Mattei di Giove, courtyard plan. From Letarouilly, 1850.

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9 Waddy 1990, 4.
10 Waddy 1990, 9.
11 Waddy 1990, 5. The schematic layout typical of a seventeenth-century palace apartment is defined and illustrated graphically. For a profound examination of human movement in relation to the built environment and the architectural organization of space, see Bergström, 1996.
12 Waddy 1990, 8.
The decorated Lancellotti courtyard walls constitute an interior shell, created to be more expressive than – and conceptually diverse from - the more austere and formal palace façades. The walls are at present yellow ochre but previous layers of lighter shades typical of the Baroque are detectable. A cornice concludes the wall surfaces at the roof. Although the placement, regularity and shape of the windows differ somewhat between the courtyard walls, they are related in their architectural expression and detailing. Originally the windows probably lacked shutters, as these were not introduced in Rome until the mid-eighteenth century. The dynamic relationship between the upper and lower rows of columns of the loggia is primarily illustrated by their difference in material and color. The lower row of four grey porphyry columns appears more static than the vigorous red granite counterparts on the upper level of the loggia. All columns have Doric capitals.

The horizontal east-west axially of the Lancellotti courtyard is clearly defined in its plan. At Palazzo Mattei the two entrances to the palace create a different spatial order with an axis between the main entrance and the passage to the garden behind the courtyard and a secondary axis between the foot of the steps and the entrance opposite to it. The perception of the Lancellotti courtyard as a unified space is emphasized by its regular shape as well as the fact that daylight reaches it only from above. This results in a clear vertical direction of the light and thereby of the three-dimensional space, which is also suggested by the following daylight studies presented here. The daylight studies were conducted in June 2003 and March 2004 and show the movement of direct sunlight on the courtyard walls. The awareness of the presence and rhythm of light movement during the day, and to what extent this was consciously incorporated in palace architecture with particular regard to the courtyard, is uncertain. Palace courtyards were normally placed at the physical centre of the buildings and in this way served as sources of daylight for the rooms on all sides of the building. Although large parts of the courtyard and its walls are shaded during most of the day, the space is perceived as fairly bright. The sunlit parts of the walls reflect light and serve as secondary light sources. The conditions for the spread of light through reflection are the best when two adjacent walls are in part sunlit. On cloudy days, the lack of reflecting light gives the courtyard a more solemn expression. The courtyard is, despite its relatively small size and high walls, never perceived as dark.

The courtyard in an urban context
In the mid-sixteenth century, the Vatican made great efforts to strengthen its position and power in response to the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformation. The Reformation had caused the Catholic Church to lose both land and revenue. Rome was now to present itself as the religious and cultural centre of the world, modern and well-ordered, with the pope as its indisputable leader. This included several stages of urban revitalization of Rome. Under Paul III (1534-49) a revision of the street plan of Rome was undertaken, during Pope Sixtus V’s pontificate (1585-90) urban planning was done on an imperial scale.

13 See Lange 1990 for the predominant colour schemes in Rome.
14 Waddy 1990, 22.
15 Krarup 1974, 115.
The concept of grand manner, characterized by monumentality, was used as a means of dramatizing life in the city.\textsuperscript{16} Domenico Fontana’s plan for Sixtus V developed the Renaissance use of wide straight and diagonal streets for establishing a visual interrelationship between important buildings and places. At the same time, the streets became a more pronounced means for unifying the components of the city:

\begin{quote}
The street /…/ will no longer be thought of as the space left over between the buildings, but as a spatial element with its own integrity. Within the Renaissance tradition, the buildings defining this street channel will tend to be viewed as independent entities. What the Baroque adds to this element of urban design is the sense of continuous planes, this by the end of the 16th century, and then, in the next century, of continuous uniform facades.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Quae publice utilia, Gregory VIII’s (1572-85) law on private building from 1574 expressively promoted the establishment of new and wider streets. The Maestri di Strada street controllers were given greater power in order to keep a high standard in the maintenance of streets and to uphold the building regulations. Expropriation, demolition or incorporation of less significant properties into larger buildings and palaces were encouraged for the embellishment of the city.\textsuperscript{18} Once established in the Ponte district, the Lancellotti – particularly through the efforts of Scipione Lancellotti (1527-1598) and with the support of favorable papal building legislation - managed to acquire all the existing buildings on the site chosen for Palazzo Lancellotti.\textsuperscript{19} Rome at this time appears to have developed in smaller stages, “each of which was sponsored by some powerful man or family, and each of which then produced new requirements for urban communications and facilities”.\textsuperscript{20} Since contributing to the adornment of Rome was a significant vehicle of social mobility, individual families already included in or aspiring to establish themselves in the Roman aristocracy were important generators of development.

\textsuperscript{16} For the concept of grand manner in architecture, see Kostof 1999, 209-279.
\textsuperscript{17} Kostof 1999, 215.
\textsuperscript{18} Partner 1976, 166, and Hibbard 1971, 31.
\textsuperscript{19} Cavazzini 1999, 15-16.
\textsuperscript{20} Partner 1976, 167.
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\textsuperscript{24} Cavazzini 1999, 15-16.
\textsuperscript{25} Partner 1976, 167.
Fig. 8. Top, left: Palazzo Lancellotti courtyard. Wall to the south, morning June 2003 (Skånberg).
Fig. 9. Top, middle: Palazzo Lancellotti courtyard. Wall to the east, afternoon June 2003 (Skånberg).
Fig. 10. Top right: Palazzo Lancellotti courtyard. Wall to the north, afternoon June 2003 (Skånberg).
Fig. 11. Centre, left: Palazzo Lancellotti courtyard. Wall to the west, afternoon June 2003 (Skånberg).
Fig. 12. Centre, middle: Palazzo Lancellotti courtyard. Wall to the south, afternoon June 2003 (Skånberg).
Fig. 13. Centre, right: Palazzo Lancellotti courtyard. Wall to the east, morning March 2004 (Skånberg).
Fig. 14. Bottom, left: Palazzo Lancellotti courtyard. Wall to the north, morning March 2004 (Skånberg).
Fig. 15. Bottom, middle: Palazzo Lancellotti courtyard. Wall to the west, morning March 2004 (Skånberg).
Fig. 16. Bottom, right: Palazzo Lancellotti courtyard. Wall to the south, morning March 2004 (Skånberg).
Horse-drawn coaches became an essential means of transport to the aristocracy in the sixteenth century and the number of coaches accompanying a distinguished person was an indicator of his wealth and rank. This too put new requirements on city planning as well as on the design of individual palaces and their courtyards.26 The Lancellotti courtyard is in level with via Lancellotti (previously Via dell’Arco di Parma), as steps at the entrance would have made it impossible for coaches to pass. Coaches entering Palazzo Lancellotti were accommodated in the stables, originally placed between the palace and S. Salvatore in Lauro. Unlike Florence, whose piazzas were created in relation to the main churches, Rome’s piazzas were associated with papal and noble palaces.27 As a rule, a generous amount of space in the form of a piazza or a wide street adjacent to one’s palace where coaches easily could be maneuvered and temporarily accommodated was necessary. Similarly, a passage from the palace connecting it with other important buildings in the city was therefore equally important.

27 Josephson 1968, 47. See also Krarup 1974, 105.
The Palazzo Lancellotti courtyard appears as a space distinctly enclosed within the realm of the palace. But the plan also suggests it to be an endpoint – or starting-point – for a sequence of urban spaces. Piazza Lancellotti to the north of Palazzo Lancellotti was, however, created in the 1750s and Piazza S. Simeone, adjacent to the palace entrance, in 1939.\textsuperscript{28} The main facade of the palace was in other words not originally designed to relate to a large open space but to the narrow Via dell’Arco di Parma. In Bufalini’s plan from 1551 (fig. 21), Via dei Tre Archi can be hinted leading east from the back of S. Salvatore in Lauro church, parallel with the more clearly articulated “Tvre Sangvinia”. The Maggi-Maupin-Losi axonometric from 1625 (fig. 22), Falda’s axonometric from 1676 (fig. 23) and Nolli’s plan from 1748 (fig. 24) all show a seemingly developed and more distinct Via dei Tre Archi leading in what appears to be a straight, uninterrupted line from Palazzo Lancellotti towards Piazza Tor Sanguina at its opposite end. The palace entrance with its decorative portal was intentionally placed monumentally at the end of the Via dei Tre Archi axis. This explains the asymmetric main palace facade with six rows of windows to the right of the entrance and four rows to the left. Conformation to the surroundings was apparently prioritized over the symmetry of the facade. But as the main facade was never visible in its entirety from a distance, the asymmetry was in this way less obvious.\textsuperscript{29} The orientation of the portal motif to the end of an existing street also indicates an awareness of the relation between the individual building and the way it presented itself in the urban context. It further conforms to the Baroque urban planning concept of making streets end in monumental vistas. Domenichino’s decorative work on the main portal therefore marks the end of Via dei Tre Archi, and it indicates the starting-point for the movement through the palace.\textsuperscript{30} Via dei Coronari provided a spacious passage along the southern side of the palace. It had been included in the street revision carried out under Sixtus IV and was a main thoroughfare which facilitated access to the palace.\textsuperscript{31} The lack of an adjacent piazza was in this way compensated for.

\textsuperscript{28} Cavazzini 1999, 16.
\textsuperscript{29} Cavazzini 1999, 20.
\textsuperscript{30} For a thorough description of Domenichino’s work on Palazzo Lancellotti, see Spear 1982a, 86-97.
\textsuperscript{31} For the development of urban space in the Palazzo Lancellotti area, see Pietrangeli 1981, and Delli 1975.
The courtyard as an exhibition hall

The use of the palaces as symbols in the conscious establishment of one’s family image was also reflected in the decoration of the courtyards. Roman portraits and sculpture displayed here enforced the scenographic setting with references to antiquity. Like the palaces, they communicated an acceptance of Roman culture and art and the desire to create a place for one’s family within that tradition. The Palazzo Mattei di Giove courtyard appears more spacious than that of Palazzo Lancellotti, but also less defined, as it is immediately adjacent to a small garden. Its walls are completely filled with decorations from the Mattei collection and serve as the background for freestanding sculptures.\(^\text{32}\) The walls are divided into horizontal and vertical sections which emphasize the symmetrical arrangement of the installations. In this way, groups of portraits are established and framed (fig. 25). In addition to freestanding full-figure marble sculptures, the Lancellotti courtyard too is adorned with decorations attached to all four walls. Many of the original objects have been removed and sold,\(^\text{33}\) but the courtyard was richly decorated in a similar way to Palazzo Mattei. Marks of missing wall decorations are still detectable between the windows.

Decorations belonging to an urban palace were in some instances also allowed to spread into the city. The early sixteenth-century Palazzo Farnese and its adjacent piazza, for example, are often described as constituting an ideal relation between palace and piazza. The two large basins originally placed in the piazza prior to the fountains we see today belonged to the Farnese family collection of antiquities.\(^\text{34}\) At the same time as the basins (which we just as well might expect to find in a palace courtyard or garden) marked the proportional relationship between the building and the open space. Although the severe palace facades give the building an introvert expression, the use of decorations also indicates a conceptual relationship between the city, the courtyard and its decorations (fig. 26).

\(^{32}\) Palazzo Mattei di Giove was designed by Carlo Maderno for Asdrubale Mattei, a mercant and collector of antiquities. For a description of the Mattei art collection, see Guerrini 1982.

\(^{33}\) Cavazzini 1999, 30.

\(^{34}\) Josephson 1968, 54-55, and Josephson 1967, 39-43.
Fig. 24. Above: Palazzo Lancellotti. Plan of Rome by Giambattista Nolli, 1748. From Ehrle, 1932.
Fig. 25. Below: Palazzo Mattei di Giove courtyard. Part of elevation of wall to the east. From Letarouilly 1850.
The courtyard as a node between private and public
To the beginning of the established sequence of rooms belonging to the apartment we could add the courtyard, being the first space within the realm of the palace that the visitor would enter and spatially intimately connected with the apartment. Waddy identifies the stairs and loggia as public spaces whereas the apartment is “private territory, controlled by its resident”.35 Even though the courtyard is an exterior space, it was included in the scheme of movement through the palace. A point of arrival and departure for visitors, it was a node in the passage between the private and public spheres. A visitor’s coach would enter the courtyard, stopping under the loggia where the guest would be met by the gentlemen of the host:

The horse-drawn coach – its quality a mark of the distinction of its passenger – entered through the portal of the palace to the loggia of the courtyard, where the guest and his attendants would descend the coach and progress toward their encounter with the host.36

The fact that the Roman palaces were built around a courtyard suggests a desire to create a semi-private sphere separate from public life and not completely belonging to the interior. The courtyard, compared with the urban realm outside the enclosing palace, in this way provided privacy and a point for visitors to descend their coaches with dignity and sheltered from rain by the loggia. The hosts themselves did not always descend the stairs to greet their visitors but would on occasion follow a visitor of high rank to his coach on his departure.37 From their spatial organization, we have seen that the courtyards characteristically appear to be passages rather than spaces for lingering (as opposed to, for example, the private garden), except during shorter periods of time for the waiting entourage of a guest.

35 Waddy 1990, 7.
36 Waddy 1999, 23.
37 Waddy 1990, 5-6.
Preliminary conclusions

A space for frequent passage, the urban seventeenth-century courtyard was functional as a particular type of exhibition hall. The concentration of art objects to the walls provided free passage for the movement of coaches and people. Art objects placed on and along the walls for embellishment were clearly visible from the palace entrance as well as from the windows of the palace. Their prominence was emphasized by the formal spatial organization of the courtyard and palace. At Palazzo Lancellotti they occupy the courtyard to its full height. The palace building also takes possession of the verticality of the space in that the courtyard functions as a source of light for the palace rooms. One possibility could be that particularly impressive decorations were intentionally placed where they most likely would be highlighted by daylight and in this way brought to the observer’s attention. However, it is at present difficult to draw any conclusion as to the original composition of the Lancellotti decorations. A division of the courtyard walls with cornices like that of Palazzo Mattei is not detectable here. But it is probable that the complete set of original decorations were placed in horizontal and vertical rows, filling the gaps between the remaining ones. It seems unlikely that daylight could have been decisive to the distribution of decorations in general; even at the lightest period of the year only limited parts of the wall surfaces are exposed to direct light. Rather, the striving for symmetry appears to have been a more reliable guideline.

The palace was a tribute to its owner as well as to the city of Rome. Streets and piazzas gained an increasing prominence in the early Baroque, and were employed as a means to highlight important buildings. The search for scenic effects, which characterized architecture and urban design at this time, also seems to have had an influence on the perception and use of the Roman palace courtyard. Given the physical closeness between courtyards and important elements such as streets and piazzas, it is likely to assume that there was an ambition to address these elements in the courtyard design. At the same time, it was an introductory point for the formal scheme of movement through the palace. The courtyards of palaces such as that of Palazzo Lancellotti, regardless of their size and prominence, are therefore definable as physical and conceptual nodes between private and public.

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