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THE MODEL for my treatment of the urban environment as a subject of art historical inquiry is Wolfgang Braunfels's *Mittelalterliche Stadtbaukunst in der Toskana.* Like Braunfels, I embrace the ideas that officials in charge of the physical fabric of late medieval Italian cities pursued aesthetic as well as practical goals and that the environments they created were intended to serve political interests or, as Braunfels might have put it, represent cultural values. Braunfels himself did not give much significance to the new towns but fortunately a predecessor, Maina Richter, did. Her article, "Die 'Terra murata' im Florentinischen Gebiet," anticipates my work in relating the towns to Florentine territorial policy and her extensive archival research was the point of departure for my own. In his *Arte e urbanistica in Toscana, 1000 – 1315,* Enrico Guidoni defined a new way of looking at town plans to which my own geometric interpretation is indebted. If I have succeeded in advancing the discussion of new towns and medieval urbanism, much of the credit belongs to James Ackerman who both as teacher and colleague has supported this project and encouraged its approach.

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FLORENTINE NEW TOWNS

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INTRODUCTION

SAN GIOVANNI is a big, bustling town at the center of the upper Arno valley. It lies on flat land between the gravel flood plain of the river and the tracks of the state rail line, along a road that, since the thirteenth century, has linked Florence with Rome. This road serves as the spine of a very special system of streets. Unlike the surrounding villages in the Chianti region to the west and in the Apennines to the east, whose precipitous, hillside sites induce an irregular pattern of curving or climbing roadways, San Giovanni is shaped by streets that are straight, run parallel to one another, and intersect cross streets at right angles. Men, not topography, established their form.

The view down any of the principal thoroughfares (Fig. 1) extends the length of the town. Facades line both sides of each street, and only cross streets interrupt the continuous parallel enclosure, introducing accents of light and increased traffic at regular intervals. The prospect down any road was once closed by the defensive wall (this has now been replaced by other structures), which circled the settlement. Movement on any of the principal streets leads to the center of the town, where a large rectangular piazza stretches from one side of the urban complex to the other. In the middle of the piazza, to the west of the main street, stands the town hall. San Giovanni, the church of the town's first convent, dominates the space to the east; the parish church of San Lorenzo and the oratory of the town's miraculous Madonna frame the square to the west. The piazza is the daily meeting place for the townspeople, the site of the weekly market and of holiday celebrations.

The regularity of San Giovanni's plan is the product of the town's