The Construction of the Urban Identity in Late Medieval Italy the Case of Tuscany (Thirteenth to Fourteenth Century)

Francesco Salvestrini[1]

Abstract

The history of Tuscany during the Middle Ages has been a topic of great interest for many Italian and foreign scholars since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century. Research on the subject has thrived because of this Italian region's exceptional dynamics and high level of urbanization during the XIIth to XIVth centuries, which are practically unique from the political and the economic standpoints, and because of its social structure and its cultural heritage. The paper tries to explain the reasons for the great demographic, economic and social development of Tuscan cities in the city-states age, comparing the situation of major agglomerations with the one of important towns. The text analyzes the massive increase in urban production, trade and banking at an international level, connected to the control of agricultural resources coming from cities' countryside. Attention is also paid to the civic religion, to the historical culture and to political rules of the most important communities, to show the peculiarities of the region on the eve of the Renaissance.

The history of Tuscany during the Middle Ages has been a topic of great interest for many Italian and foreign scholars since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century[2]. Research on the subject has thrived because of this Italian region's exceptional dynamics, which are practically unique from the political and the economic standpoints, and because of its social structure and its cultural heritage[3]. Moreover, these dynamics are well described in many, particularly thirteenth- and fourteenth-century, archive documents and memorialists' accounts.

---

[1] University of Florence. Email: francesco.salvestrini@unifi.it

[2] Cf. J.C.L. Simonde de Sismondi, Histoire des républiques italiennes du Moyen Age, Zürich-Paris 1807-08 (4 volumes), 1809-18 (16 volumes); J. Burckhardt, Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien, Basel 1860; Quellen und Forschungen zur ältesten Geschichte der Stadt Florenz, Herausgegeben von O. Hartwig, Marburg 1875-80; A. von Reumont, Geschichte Toscana's seit dem Ende des florentinischen Freistaats, Gotha 1876-77; P. Villari, I primi due secoli della storia di Firenze. Ricerche, Firenze 1893-94; G. Salvemini, Magnati e popolani in Firenze, dal 1280 al 1295, Firenze 1899; F. Schneider, Regestum Volaterranum, Regesten der Urkunden von Volterra (778-1303), Roma 1907; Id., Regestum Senense, Regesten der Urkunden von Siena, Roma 1911; Id., Die Reichsverwaltung in Toscana von der Gründung des Langobardenreichs bis zum Ausgang der Staufer, 568-1268, Rom 1914; R. Davidsohn, Geschichte von Florenz, Berlin 1896-1927; N. Ottokar, Il comune di Firenze alla fine del Dugento, Firenze 1926. See also, in this regard, A. Zorzi, "Le fonti normative a Firenze nel tardo Medioevo. Un bilancio delle edizioni e degli studi", in Statuti della Repubblica fiorentina, ed. by R. Caggese, Nuova edizione a cura di G. Pinto, F. Salvestrini, A. Zorzi, Firenze 1999, I, pp. LIII-CI; F. Salvestrini, "Per un commento alle edizioni di Romolo Caggese. I codici statutari, il trattamento dei testi, la critica", ivi, I, pp. IX-LII; Id., "Storiografia giuridica ed erudizione storica nel secolo XIX. Lodovico Zdekauer editore degli Statuti pistoiesi", in Statuti Pistoiesi del secolo XIII. Studi e testi, ed. by R. Nelli, G. Pinto, I, Studi, Pistoia 2002, pp. 15-79.

[3] See the pages dedicated to Tuscan cities in J.K. Hyde, Society and Politics in Medieval Italy. The Evolution of the Civil Life, 1000-1350, London 1973; City States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy, ed. by A. Molho, K. Raaflaub, J. Emlen, Ann Arbor 1991; G. Chittolini, Cities, "city-states", and regional states in North-Central Italy, in Cities and the Rise of States in Europe. A.D. 1000 to 1800, ed. by Ch. Tilly, W.P. Blockmans, Boulder 1994, pp. 28-43; Ph.J. Jones, The Italian City-State, 500-1300. From Commune to Signoria, Oxford 1997; E. Crouzet-Pavan, Enfers et paradis. L'Italie de Dante et de Giotto, Paris 2001; F. Menant, L'Italie des communes (1100-1350), Paris 2005; F. Franceschi, I. Taddei, Le città italiane nel Medioevo, XII-XIV secolo, Bologna 2012.

These sources show the way ancient *Tuscia*, the region between the Apennine mountains, the Patrimony of St. Peter and the Tyrrhenian Sea[4], had always been a land rich in towns and cities[5]. There were, in fact, large urban centres as well as smaller agglomerations, many of Etruscan or Roman origin, whose events throughout the Medieval period, deeply influenced the evolution of both the urban and rural population, the definition and transformation of social classes, the forms of the economy and the dynamics of the religious life[6]. In Italian historiography the twelfth to fourteenth centuries identify the age of the city-states (*età comunale*)[7]. It was during this period that Tuscan cities reached their highest population growth, a level that was not equalled until the contemporary age. It was then that they promoted their major urban planning, endowed themselves with some of their most famous monuments, enjoyed great economic development and experimented advanced forms of political autonomy. Different situations existed at that time. A centre such as Florence, which in the late thirteenth century exceeded 100,000 people, emerged[8]; but there were also many smaller towns of 1,000 to 15,000 residents, which, especially in the Northern part of the region, were located no more than 20-30 kilometres from each other. They were connected by many roads and a dense network of canals and navigable rivers which also touched numerous castles and villages[9]. In some areas (especially the Florence-Empoli-Pistoia triangle in the North) the combination of different settlements gave rise to a density of more than 150 inhabitants per square kilometre, a very high level for the Middle Ages[10].

The first point in defining an identity for Tuscan cities and towns is their conceptual connection with the ancient *civitates*. According to Roman tradition, a *civitas* was a centre that ruled a territorial district and that, at least from the fourth century, hosted the residence of a bishop[11]. However, during the period we are observing, this parameter lost some of its original value[12]. There were, in fact, ancient cities like Luni, Roselle or Sovana, which either no longer existed by the very beginning of the Medieval period, or were reduced to small towns and villages. Some of them were condemned to subordination or to almost total disappearance due to the development of very close and newer centres, as was the case of Fiesole in relation to Florence or Populonia and Massa Marittima[13]. On the other hand, several towns (*castra, oppida*) which had no bishop or did not exist in ancient times, as Prato, San Gimignano, Colle di Val d'Elsa, Borgo San Sepolcro or Montepulciano, had demographic, social and political features, linked to prosperity and a distinct cultural heritage, typical of major centres, to the point that some of them were promoted to diocesan dignity, as was the case for Cortona in 1325[14].

---

[4] Etruria, Tuscia, Toscana. L'identità di una regione attraverso i secoli, II (secoli V-XIV), ed. by G. Garzella, Pisa 1998; Storia della civiltà toscana, I, Comuni e Signorie, ed. by F. Cardini, Firenze 2000; La toscana ai tempi di Arnolfo, ed. by C. Bastianoni, G. Cherubini, G. Pinto, Firenze 2005. See also L'identità urbana in Toscana. Aspetti metodologici e risvolti operativi di una ricerca pluridisciplinare, XVI-XX secolo, ed. by L. Carle, Venezia 1998; Storia della Toscana, 1. Dalle origini al Settecento, ed. by E. Fasano Guarini, G. Petralia, P. Pezzino, Roma-Bari 2004; S. Salvi, L'identità toscana. Popolo, territorio, istituzioni dal primo marchese all'ultimo granduca, Firenze 2006; La costruzione della città comunale italiana (secoli XII-inizio XIV), Pistoia 2009.

[5] G. Cherubini, "Una «terra di città»: la Toscana nel Basso Medioevo", in Id., Scritti toscani. L'urbanesimo medievale e la mezzadria, Firenze 1991, pp. 21-33; Id., Le città italiane dell'età di Dante, Pisa 1991, pp. 7-13; Id., Città comunali di Toscana, Bologna 2003; Id., "Le città della Toscana", in Le città del Mediterraneo all'apogeo dello sviluppo medievale: aspetti economici e sociali, Pistoia 2003, pp. 325-341.

[6] See G. Pinto, La Toscana nel tardo Medioevo. Ambiente, economia rurale, società, Firenze 1982; Id., Toscana medievale. Paesaggi e realtà sociali, Firenze 1993; La Toscana nel secolo XIV. Caratteri di una civiltà regionale, ed. by S. Gensini, Pisa 1988; M. Ginatempo, L. Sandri, L'Italia delle città. Il popolamento urbano tra Medioevo e Rinascimento (secoli XIII-XVI), Firenze 1990, pp. 105-115; I centri minori della Toscana nel Medioevo, a cura di G. Pinto, P. Pirillo, Firenze 2013.

[7] G. Milani, I comuni italiani. Secoli XII-XIV, Roma-Bari 2005; M. Ascheri, Le città-Stato. Le radici del municipalismo e del repubblicanesimo italiani, Bologna 2006; J.-C. Maire Vigueur, E. Faini, Il sistema politico dei comuni italiani (secoli XII-XIV), Milano 2010.

[8] W.R. Day Jr., "The population of Florence before the Black Death: survey and synthesis", Journal of Medieval History, 28, 2002, pp. 93-129; see also G. Fanelli, Firenze, Roma-Bari 1980, repr. 1997.

[9] F. Salvestrini, "Navigazione e trasporti sulle acque interne della Toscana medievale e protomoderna (secoli XIII-XVI)", in La civiltà delle acque tra Medioevo e Rinascimento, ed. by A. Calzona, D. Lamberini, Firenze 2010, I, pp. 197-220.

[10] Pinto, La Toscana nel tardo Medioevo, p. 42; Ginatempo, Sandri, L'Italia, pp. 106-107.

[11] See P. Cammarosano, Storia dell'Italia medievale. Dal VI all'XI secolo, Roma-Bari 2001, pp. 56-60, 67-82.

[12] See M. Ginatempo, "Gerarchie demiche e sistemi urbani nell'Italia bassomedievale: una discussione", Società e Storia, 72, 1996, pp. 347-383.

[13] Vescovo e città nell'Alto Medioevo: quadri generali e realtà toscane, Pistoia 2001.

[14] Ginatempo, Sandri, L'Italia, pp. 105-115; C. Perol, Cortona. Pouvoirs et sociétés aux confins de la Toscane (XVe-XVIe siècle), Rome 2004.

Thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Tuscans identified a city by the number of its inhabitants, houses and monuments, shops and workshops, the volume of trade, the political domination of a surrounding area, the existence of a collective recorded memory, as well as the development of shared religious devotions. The ennobling presence of a bishop was, therefore, not enough. Considering these parameters, from the late twelfth century to the first half of the fourteenth Florence, as we have already observed, had approximately 120,000 inhabitants. Siena stood at around 50,000, and reached its maximum population level in the 1320s. Pisa had some 45,000 residents, with a maximum increase at the end of the thirteenth century. Lucca had more or less 30,000 to 35,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the fourteenth century; the town of Prato and the city of Pistoia approximately 15,000, Arezzo 13,000, Volterra 10,000 to 12,000[15], San Gimignano (which, like Prato, did not keep the title of *civitas* since it had no bishop) from 8,000 to 10,000; Colle di Val d'Elsa (in the same situation) 2,000 during the 1210s and about 6,000 at the beginning of the following century; the *castrum* of San Miniato al Tedesco, the largest 'village' in the middle Arno valley, had around 5,000 residents at the end of the thirteenth century[16]. These data are taken from various sources which have varying levels of reliability for historians. There are, for example, chroniclers, poets and other writers. Records of direct taxation (*Estimi, Catasti, Tavole delle Possessioni*), as well as registers of excise taxes – especially *gabelle* collected at city gates – provide important information. There are also collective agreements and oaths of citizens, some lists of armed men, and, finally, archaeological and urbanistic studies, that give a more precise picture of the urban living spaces. On the other hand, other indicators emphasize the large sizes of the communities. As Giovanni Cherubini notes, in 1338 almost 270,000 hectolitres of wine reached Florence, and in 1334 more or less 70,000 were sold in Lucca[17].

The population increase was partly due to a higher birth rate – the result of better living conditions –, but it was mainly a consequence of the massive immigration from the countryside[18]. The new urban families lived in the *burgi*, namely the areas of expansion of urban centres, that developed along the major roads branching from the main gates in the cities' walls[19]. Comparing demographic data with the size of the agglomerations, we can see that Pisa at the end of the twelfth century covered an area of approximately 185 hectares. Florence in the thirteenth century extended over nearly 450 hectares; Siena, during the same period 165, Lucca 140, and Arezzo about 107[20]. However, it was not only quantitative data that gave substance to the idea of a city[21].

---

[15] Cf. P. Pirillo, "Demografia, città e territori: alcuni esempi toscani ed umbri tra la fine del XII secolo ed i primi del XIV", in Demografia e società nell'Italia medievale, ed. by R. Comba, I. Naso, Cuneo 1994, pp. 293-311: 297; G. Pinto, Campagne e paesaggi toscani del Medioevo, Firenze 2002, pp. 58-62.

[16] On problems related to the reliability of the sources used for processing demographic data see Ginatempo, Sandri, L'Italia, pp. 55-56, 106-108, 148. On the towns, E. Fiumi, Storia economica e sociale di San Gimignano, Firenze 1993², pp. 153-159; Id., Volterra e San Gimignano nel Medioevo, Raccolta di studi ed. by G. Pinto, Reggello 2006² , pp. 127-158; G. Casali, San Gimignano. L'evoluzione della città tra XIV e XVI secolo, Firenze 1998, p. 22; P. Cammarosano, Storia di Colle di Val d'Elsa nel medioevo, 1. Dall'età romanica alla formazione del Comune, Udine 2008, p. 77; Id., Storia di Colle di Val d'Elsa nel medioevo, 2. Colle nell'età di Arnolfo di Cambio, Udine 2009, pp. 50-52; F. Salvestrini, "Il nido dell'aquila. San Miniato al Tedesco dai vicari dell'Impero al vicariato fiorentino del Valdarno Inferiore (secc. XI-XIV)", in Il Valdarno inferiore terra di confine nel Medioevo (Secoli XI-XV), ed. by A. Malvolti, G. Pinto, Firenze 2008, pp. 229-278.

[17] Cherubini, "Le città della Toscana", p. 327.

[18] Strutture familiari, epidemie, migrazioni nell'Italia medievale, ed. by R. Comba, G. Piccinni, G. Pinto, Napoli 1984; D. Balestracci, "Immigrazione e morfologia urbana nell'Italia bassomedievale", in D'une ville à l'autre: structures matérielles et organisation de l'espace dans les villes européennes (XIIIe-XVIe siècles), Rome 1989, pp. 87-106.

[19] See J. Plesner, L'émigration de la campagne à la ville libre de Florence au XIIIe siècle, Copenhagen 1934; F. Sznura, L'espansione urbana di Firenze nel Dugento, Firenze 1975; F. Redi, Pisa com'era: archeologia, urbanistica e strutture materiali (secoli V-XIV), Napoli 1991.

[20] G. Garzella, Pisa com'era: topografia e insediamento dall'impianto tardoantico alla città murata del secolo XII, Napoli 1990; Cherubini, "Le città della Toscana", pp. 327-328. On the areas of the small towns, F. Salvestrini, "Centri minori della Valdelsa e del medio Valdarno inferiore. Demografia, economia, società e vita religiosa (seconda metà del XIII-prima metà del XIV secolo)", in I centri minori della Toscana nel Medioevo, pp. 23-55.

[21] Imago urbis. L'immagine della città nella storia d'Italia, ed. by F. Bocchi, R. Smurra, Roma 2003.

Some of the *oppida* and smaller towns, dating from the ninth to twelfth century, which never exceeded 1,000-1,500 inhabitants, were sometimes identified in documents as 'cities', or at least as large *terre*, because of their roles as rural population centres, their defensive structures and their local markets[22]. Chroniclers, memorialists, poets and preachers, reminding citizens of their past and civic glories, extolled the origins and histories of their hometowns, regardless of their size[23]. Writers described the nobility and antiquity of their native centres to diminish the importance of neighbouring and often enemy cities[24]. The Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani (*c.* 1276-1348) offers an interesting example of this point of view, describing the origins of the names of many Tuscan cities[25]. In fact, in his pages we find some curious etymologies showing an evocative and suggestive paleo-genesis. He presents Florence as a daughter of Rome – the republican city-state and not the Imperial *Urbs* –, founded by the Roman nobleman *Fiorino*, a hero and a martyr in local struggles. Villani also maintains that the city was the heir of the neighbouring town of Fiesole[26]. This ancient citadel was founded after the chaos resulting from the Tower of Babel and from the division of the world into three parts (Asia, Africa and Europe). Thus, it derived its name from its position as the oldest city (*Fia Sola*) in the third part of the world known as *Europìa*. From this point of view Florence was the daughter of the most ancient town in the Western part of the world[27].

About the aetiology of Tuscany's other great cities, Villani recognised Lucca, a Commune that Florence aspired to dominate during 1330s, as an exceptional *civitas*, because it was the first one in *Tuscia* to convert to Christianity, and consequently the Light (*Lucè*) of the region. Arezzo, instead, got its name because it was destroyed and then ploughed (*arata*) by the Ostrogothic king Totila at the time of the Barbarian invasions of Italy (fifth century). Pisa was the city where the Romans collected taxes and income from navigators and where they weighed these revenues on two scales (*pesè*) which lent their name to the city's plural form *Pisae*. Pistoia, founded by the heirs of the Roman tyrant Catiline, acquired its name from a great plague (*pistolentia*) which occurred on the site where the city was reputed to have been founded during the struggle between Romans and Catilinaries. At the end we can note that Villani's attitude toward Siena was entirely negative, since he said it was founded by Charles Martel during a raid against Apulia, when he decided to leave the old (*senes*), sick soldiers and other men who could not bear arms at the site of what was to become the city[28].

These fanciful aetiologies were interesting reworkings of traditions dating from late Antiquity and the early Medieval period, modelled on etymological encyclopaedism[29] and re-proposed, in the light of the exaltation of Florence, by a well-respected merchant-chronicler who, while writing in the vernacular, showed a broad knowledge of classical texts, of the Bible and of local legends. His evocation of even the earliest past was instrumental for celebrating the present. In fact, he looked at the history of his city, but he was no less attentive to the culture and the society of his times.

---

[22] See P. Pirillo, "Comunità da costruire: ideali e realtà nei centri di fondazione della Toscana medievale", in Castelfranco Veneto nel quadro delle nuove fondazioni medievali, ed. by S. Bortolami, G. Cecchetto, Castelfranco Veneto 2001, pp. 165-184: 165-168; F. Salvestrini, "La guerra di Semifonte e la Valdelsa (ca. 1180-1202)", in Semifonte in Val d'Elsa e i centri di nuova fondazione dell'Italia medievale, ed. by P. Pirillo, Firenze 2004, pp. 167-193: 167.

[23] See Ch. Wickham, "The Sense of the Past in Italian Communal Narratives", in The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe, ed. by P. Magdalino, London-Rio Grande 1992, pp. 173-189.

[24] A.I. Galletti, "Mitografie della memoria urbana", in Storiografia e poesia nella cultura medievale, Roma 1999, pp. 299-324; F. Salvestrini, "Descrizioni e 'laudes' a Firenze nel secolo XIV. Giovanni Villani, la 'Florentie urbis et reipublice descriptio', Antonio Pucci, Lapo da Castiglionchio, Coluccio Salutati", in Antica possessione con belli costumi. Due giornate di studio su Lapo da Castiglionchio il Vecchio, ed. by F. Sznura, Firenze 2005, pp. 205-232.

[25] On Giovanni Villani, F. Ragone, Giovanni Villani e i suoi continuatori. La scrittura delle cronache a Firenze nel Trecento, Roma 1998; F. Salvestrini, "Villani Giovanni", in Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle, R.G. Dunphy ed., Leiden-Boston 2010, II, p. 1478.

[26] Giovanni Villani, Nuova Cronica, ed. by G. Porta, Parma 1991, I, 30-37, vol. 1, pp. 47-57; II, 1, pp. 59-62.

[27] Ivi, I, 2-3, vol. 1, pp. 5-11; I, 5-7, vol. 1, pp. 8-17.

[28] See F. Salvestrini, "Giovanni Villani and the Aetiological Myth of Tuscan Cities", in The Medieval Chronicle II, Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle, ed. by E. Kooper, Amsterdam-New York 2002, pp. 199-211.

[29] See L'Enciclopedismo medievale, ed. by M. Picone, Ravenna 1994.

Always in a key of celebration, he informs us, for example, that in Florence 8,000 to 10,000 children – both boys and girls – attended school to learn reading (45% of the school age population); 1,000 to 1,200 boys learned mathematics in six different schools, and 550 to 600 studied grammar and logic in four educational institutions. In this way, he shows that basic education was truly widespread in Medieval Florence, and that it was an important part of the city's identity[30]. Certainly the culture Florentines acquired during the early decades of the fourteenth century was eminently practical[31]; it was an education especially useful for workers, artisans and merchants-entrepreneurs. Dante Alighieri lamented that in his time Florence didn't have a *Studium Generale* (an university did exist briefly from 1321 to 1324), which, in fact, was finally founded only in 1348[32]. More ancient *Studia* existed in Arezzo and Siena[33]. In any case it was not 'higher education' (theology and law), long confined to religious orders' cloisters, that especially connoted Tuscan urban culture during the so-called Communal period[34].

Quite soon, the intellectuals and the ruling classes of Tuscan cities also abandoned (or at least reduced) the use of Latin (beginning of the fourteenth century). Siena, Arezzo, Florence and then other Communes promoted the use of the vernacular not only in literature, but also in writing their own laws. The vernacular was the language spoken by the people. So the statutes and the deliberations of city councils had to be written in the people's and not in the lawyers' language[35]. Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century diaries of merchants, notaries and clerics (*ricordanze*), that is some of the most typical genres of late Medieval and early Renaissance Tuscany, were written in the vernacular[36]. The most important element to connote the peculiarity of Tuscan cities was their Medieval economic development. From the end of the eleventh century to the early decades of the fourteenth the main centres of the region enjoyed a massive increase in production and trade at an international level, connected to the control of agricultural resources coming from their countryside[37]. In all the cities the banking and financial activities, the production of woollen cloths and leather, the activity of blacksmiths, bakers, carpenters, master stonecutters and so on, animated city life and long favoured local social dynamics[38]. Let us give some examples. Urban development emerged earlier in the region's coastal areas. Some ancient cities such as Volterra, Pisa and Lucca, that survived the crisis of the Roman Empire, were able to draw new strength from the Lombard conquest of Tuscany between the sixth and seventh centuries. Lucca, in particular, became the capital of the Duchy of *Tuscia*.

---

[30] Villani, Nuova Cronica, XII, 94, vol. 3, p. 198. See A. Petrucci, L. Miglio, "Alfabetizzazione e organizzazione scolastica nella Toscana del XIV secolo", in La Toscana nel secolo XIV, pp. 465-484.

[31] See G. Francesconi, F. Salvestrini, "La scrittura del confine nell'Italia comunale. Modelli e funzioni", in Frontiers in the Middle Ages, ed. by O. Merisalo, P. Pahta, Louvain-la-Neuve 2006, pp. 197-221.

[32] K. Park, "The readers at the Florentine studio", Rinascimento, 20, 1980, pp. 249-310; Umanesimo e università in Toscana (1300-1600), ed. by S.U. Baldassarri, F. Ricciardelli, E. Spagnesi, Firenze 2012.

[33] L'Università di Siena. 750 anni di storia, Milano 1991; 750 anni degli statuti universitari aretini. Atti del Convegno internazionale su origini, maestri, discipline e ruolo culturale dello "Studium" di Arezzo, ed. by F. Stella, Firenze 2006.

[34] See R. Manselli, "Due biblioteche di 'Studia' minoritici: Santa Croce di Firenze e il Santo di Padova", in Le scuole degli Ordini mendicanti (secoli XIII-XIV), Todi 1978, pp. 353-371; F. Salvestrini, "Religious Orders and Cities in Medieval Tuscany (Tenth to Fourteenth Centuries), in International Medieval Meeting, Lleida (E), June 28-July 1, 2011, forthcoming for Cambridge Scholar Publishing.

[35] L. Azzetta, Ordinamenti, provvisioni e riformagioni del Comune di Firenze volgarizzati da Andrea Lancia (1355-1357), Padova-Venezia 2001; F. Bambi, Una nuova lingua per il diritto. Il lessico volgare di Andrea Lancia nelle provvisioni fiorentine del 1355-57, Milano 2009; D. Balestracci, Il potere e la parola. Guida al costituto volgarizzato di Siena (1309-1310), Siena 2011. On the language see Les langues de l'Italie médiévale, ed. by O. Redon, Turnhout 2002; P. Manni, Il Trecento toscano. La lingua di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio, Bologna 2003.

[36] Ch. Bec, Les marchands écrivains. Affaires et humanisme à Florence, 1375-1434, Paris 1967; F. Pezzarossa, La tradizione fiorentina della memorialistica, in La memoria dei "mercatores", ed. by G.M. Anselmi, F. Pezzarossa, L. Avellini, Bologna 1980, pp. 39-149.

[37] Ch.M. De la Roncière, Florence, centre économique régional au XIVe siècle, Aix-en-Provence 1976; Id., Prix et salaires à Florence au XIVe siècle (1280-1380), Rome 1982; Ph. Jones, Economia e società nell'Italia medievale, Torino 1980; B. Dini, Saggi su una economia-mondo. Firenze e l'Italia fra Mediterraneo ed Europa (secc. XIII-XVI), Pisa 1995; G. Pinto, Città e spazi economici nell'Italia comunale, Bologna 1996, pp. 15-35, 77-96.

[38] See, for example, Il cuoio e le pelli in Toscana: produzione e mercato nel Tardo Medioevo e nell'Età moderna, ed. by S. Gensini, Pisa 1999.

This role and its position on the 'Via Francigena', the long road opened by Lombards to connect Rome to North-East Italy[39], favoured this *civitas* especially from the commercial point of view[40]. During the Communal age, the city's political relevance was reduced, but not its economic role, marked by banking and by the great development of silk production in its factories (12,000 workers at the beginning of the thirteenth century)[41]. The recovery of large-scale communications through the Mediterranean sea, namely starting from the eleventh century, was especially advantageous for the city of Pisa. The commercial development of this centre located on the Tyrrhenian sea was favoured by the famous war its citizens waged – and won – for the liberation of the Balearic Islands from Islamic rule (1115)[42], an operation which led to a brief domination, but credited Pisans as champions of the fight against infidels (even though they did not renounce establishing trade links with the Arab world). Pisans also penetrated the Byzantine Empire, the Middle East and North Africa. The advent of the Crusades allowed Pisan merchants to establish their colonies in the Christian states of the Holy Land, then in Egypt and on the coasts of the Black Sea, generating strong commercial rivalry with the other Italian maritime republics, namely with Genoa; a rivalry that continued until the defeat of Pisans in the battle of Meloria (1284)[43].

Pisa had an essentially maritime identity. For a long time, until at least the beginning of the thirteenth century, the city remained almost extraneous to the Tuscan hinterland. Its focus was the Mediterranean sea, and its ruling class came to extend its political and economic control over Corsica and Sardinia. The bishop of Pisa became archbishop – the first in Tuscany (1092) – just by virtue of jurisdiction over the suffragan dioceses of the two important islands[44]. As long as they were able to maintain their isolation and their supremacy over the Western Mediterranean, Pisans remained prosperous and able to occupy a strip of land along the Tuscan coast. However, from the early thirteenth century the clash with Genoa, the end of the economic outlook produced by the conquest of the Holy Land, and the growing Venetian influence on the Middle East led to a gradual downsizing of the Pisan perspectives that had produced the wealth of the city in the Romanesque period and permitted the construction of the most famous monuments that still exist as a symbols of the Medieval republic, i.e. the cathedral, the baptistery and the famous leaning tower. In any case, Pisa continued to be an important harbour (in connection with the small bay of Porto Pisano) until the end of the fourteenth century, with a significant shipbuilding industry devoted to seafaring and river (the Arno) traffic[45]. Florence and the other inland cities took advantage of Pisa's decline. The thirteenth century, in fact, marked the success of what was to become the capital of Tuscany and also of the nearby city of Siena. The latter, a *civitas* of Roman origin, was initially a small town fighting struggling with a shortage of available water, with almost no contact with the interregional trade, and placed at the head of a small diocese enclosed between the two much larger territories belonging to the more ancient Arezzo and Volterra. The development of Siena began from very early in the thirteenth century, and was mainly due to a vocation for finance and banking[46]. The city took advantage of its location along the Via Francigena (Ernesto Sestan called Siena a «daughter of the Road»)[47] in order to build a series of trade relations with the markets of Central and Northern Europe (the fairs of Champagne and the cities of Flanders).

---

[39] La via Francigena e altre strade della Toscana medievale, ed. by S. Patitucci Uggeri, Firenze 2004.

[40] Lucca e la Tuscia nell'alto Medioevo, Spoleto 1973; Pisa e la Toscana occidentale nel Medioevo, 1, A Cinzio Violante nei suoi 70 anni, ed. by G. Rossetti, Pisa 1991; C. Azzara, "La Toscana in epoca gota e longobarda. Assetti territoriali e prospettive della Ricerca", in Appennino tra antichità e medioevo, ed. by G. Roncaglia, A. Donati, G. Pinto, Città di Castello 2003, pp. 395-401.

[41] F.E. De Roover, The Silk Trade of Lucca during the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries, Chicago 1930; I. Del Punta, Mercanti e banchieri lucchesi nel Duecento, Pisa 2004; T.W. Blomquist, Merchant Families, Banking and Money in Medieval Lucca, Ashgate 2005; I. Del Punta, Lucca e il commercio della seta nel Medioevo, Pisa 2010.

[42] See Liber Maiolichinus de gestis Pisanorum illustribus, poema della guerra balearica secondo il cod. pisano Roncioni aggiuntevi alcune notizie lasciate da M. Amari, ed. by C. Calisse, Roma 1904.

[43] Genova, Pisa e il Mediterraneo fra Due e Trecento. Per il VII centenario della Battaglia della Meloria, Genova 1984; Amalfi, Genova, Pisa e Venezia. Il commercio con Costantinopoli e il Vicino Oriente nel secolo XII, ed. by O. Banti, Pisa 1998; Pisa e il Mediterraneo. Uomini, merci, idee dagli Etruschi ai Medici, ed. by M. Tangheroni, Milano 2003; Per Marco Tangheroni. Studi su Pisa e sul Mediterraneo medievale offerti dai suoi ultimi allievi, ed. by C. Iannella, Pisa 2005.

[44] M. Ronzani, Chiesa e "Civitas" di Pisa nella seconda metà del secolo XI. La situazione interna ed i rapporti con il Papato, l'Impero e la Marca di Tuscia dall'avvento del vescovo Guido all'elevazione di Daiberto a metropolita di Corsica (1060-1092), Pisa 1997.

[45] M. Tangheroni, Politica, commercio, agricoltura a Pisa nel Trecento, Pisa 1973; Id., Medioevo tirrenico. Sardegna, Toscana e Pisa, Pisa 1992. On the local manufacturies, P. Castagneto, L'Arte della Lana a Pisa nel Duecento e nei primi decenni del Trecento. Commercio, industria e istituzioni, Pisa 1996. On river navigation, Salvestrini, "Navigazione".

[46] P. Cammarosano, Siena, Spoleto 2009.

[47] E. Sestan, "Siena avanti Montaperti", in Id., Italia medievale, Napoli 1966, pp. 151-192.

Over time, the Sienese specialized in money lending, originally fuelled by the support of an original entrepreneurial class. Especially as steady creditors of the papal *curia*, Sienese merchants accumulated considerable financial resources that they translated into impressive building projects, that culminated in the construction of the famous Piazza del Campo and in the ambition to build a large cathedral that remained unfinished because the crisis of the fourteenth century[48]. The main limitations of the Sienese economy were the relatively low investment in manufacturing, less favoured than, for example, in Florence or even in Prato[49], because of the absence of an important river crossing the city. The prosperity of Sienese business (as well as that of Pistoia)[50] was primarily entrusted to investments which were exposed to the risks of currency devaluations and the insolvency of debtors[51].

It was the coexistence of many factors that produced the final supremacy of Florence over the Tuscan cities. There was also another important road crossing the region, that is the one connecting Rome to Germany through the centre of the Italian peninsula (Verona, Bologna and Florence), used by the emperors who travelled to the Eternal City to be crowned[52]. This road became more and more relevant from the beginning of the thirteenth century. Florentines, located on it, were bankers such as the Sienese[53]. However, they supplemented this activity, which peaked around 1338-1340s – when it suffered a deep setback due to the failure of the banks of the Buonaccorsi, Bardi and Peruzzi families caused by the 'insolvency' of the kings of France and England[54] – with thriving, large scale wool manufacturing[55]. The Florentine products invaded and almost monopolized the European wool market between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. According to the chronicler Giovanni Villani, around 1340 there were about two hundred workshops in the city, producing from 70,000 to 80,000 pieces of woollen cloths annually[56]. Favoured by the city's location along the Arno river, a source of water essential to the manufactures, and for transporting people and goods[57], Florentine merchants intercepted the highest quality wool in Europe – for example the type purchased from the great monasteries of the British Isles –, developed processing techniques, and then re-exported finished products all over in Europe. The result was a more dynamic and solid economy than those of other major centres of Tuscany[58]. This was the situation of the main cities. Important money lending and marketing activities also existed in Pistoia, Arezzo, Volterra, San Gimignano and San Miniato (thirteenth century). The famous Prato merchant-entrepreneur Francesco di Marco Datini, deserves special attention.

---

[48] E. Carli, Il Duomo di Siena, Siena 1979; L. Bortolotti, Siena, Roma-Bari 1983; D. Balestracci, G. Piccinni, Siena nel Trecento. Assetto urbano e strutture edilizie, Firenze 1977; Banchieri e mercanti di Siena, pref. by C.M. Cipolla, Roma 1987; R. Mucciarelli, I Tolomei banchieri di Siena. La parabola di un casato nel XIII e XIV secolo, Siena 2001.

[49] E. Bruzzi, L'arte della lana in Prato. Monografia storica, Prato 1920.

[50] D. Herlihy, Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia. The Social History of an Italian Town, 1200-1430, New Haven-London 1967; Storia di Pistoia, II, L'Età del libero comune dall'inizio del XII alla metà del XIV secolo, ed. by G. Cherubini, Firenze 1998.

[51] S. Tognetti, "'Fra li compagni palesi et li ladri occulti'. Banchieri senesi del Quattrocento", Nuova Rivista Storica, 88, 2004, pp. 27-101; G. Piccinni, Il Banco dell'ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala e il mercato del denaro nella Siena del Trecento, Pisa 2012.

[52] About Italian roads during this period, S. Patitucci Uggeri, La viabilità di terra e d'acqua nell'Italia medievale, in La viabilità medievale in Italia. Contributo alla carta archeologica medievale, ed. by S. Patitucci Uggeri, Firenze 2002, pp. 1-72. On the history of the city during the Romanesque period see E. Faini, Firenze nell'età romanica (1000-1211). L'espansione urbana, lo sviluppo istituzionale, il rapporto con il territorio, Firenze 2010.

[53] See R. Goldthwaite, G. Mandich, Studi sulla moneta fiorentina (secoli XIII-XVI), Firenze 1994.

[54] A. Sapori, La crisi delle compagnie mercantili dei Bardi e dei Peruzzi, Firenze 1926; E.S. Hunt, The Medieval Super-Companies. A Study of the Peruzzi Company of Florence, Cambridge 1994.

[55] H. Hoshino, L'arte della lana in Firenze nel Basso Medioevo. Il commercio della lana e il mercato dei panni fiorentini nei secoli XIII-XV, Firenze 1980; F. Franceschi, Oltre il "Tumulto". I lavoratori fiorentini dell'Arte della Lana fra Tre e Quattrocento, Firenze 1993; H. Hoshino, Industria tessile e commercio internazionale nella Firenze del tardo Medioevo, ed. by F. Franceschi, S. Tognetti, Firenze 2001.

[56] Villani, Nuova Cronica, XII, 94, vol. 3, p. 199.

[57] F. Salvestrini, Libera città su fiume regale. Firenze e l'Arno dall'Antichità al Quattrocento, Firenze 2005.

[58] G. Cherubini, "La Firenze di Dante e di Giovanni Villani", in Id., Scritti toscani, pp. 35-51; La società fiorentina nel basso Medioevo. Per Elio Conti, ed. by R. Ninci, Roma 1995; A. Astorri, La Mercanzia a Firenze nella prima metà del Trecento. Il potere dei grandi mercanti, Firenze 1998; R.A. Goldthwaite, The Economy of Renaissance Florence, Baltimore 2009; B. Dini, Manifattura, commercio e banca nella Firenze medievale, Firenze 2001. On the financial system, M. Ginatempo, Prima del debito. Finanziamento della spesa pubblica e gestione del deficit nelle grandi città toscane (1250-1350 ca.), Firenze 2000.

His trade network, well documented by a large collection of business letters still available at the State Archives of his city, spread through many areas of Italy, France, Catalonia and Flanders. It was Datini who invented the bill of exchange (*lettera di cambio*), and he was the first to define the most popular techniques of financial intermediation[59]. As regards the economies of the most relevant towns, at the beginning of the thirteenth century San Gimignano in Valdelsa, originally a *castrum* dependent on the bishop of Volterra, launched a massive cultivation and export of saffron, a plant widely used in cooking and pharmacopoeia. The trade operators of this small citadel brought this product to the Mediterranean ports, accumulating capital profits to reinvest in money lending after the example provided by their colleagues in Siena and Florence[60]. During the Middle Ages, the ancient city of Volterra, which in Roman times was one of the most important centres of *Tuscia*, suffered a process of slow decline resulting from its progressive isolation from the main roads of the region. It is enough to notice that the urban perimeter of the Communal period never reached the extension of the Etruscan one[61]. Volterra always retained the title of *civitas*, tried to develop wool manufacturing and did have some wealthy merchant-entrepreneurs, but the volume of its business was always limited, and its economic role was mainly related to the exportation of raw materials, especially rock-salt coming from the mines of its territory[62]. The economic growth and the consequent population increase were not without consequences for the Tuscan cities. The percentage of urban population grew excessively. The success of craft activities reduced the agricultural workforce, and a part of the wealth accumulated by merchant-entrepreneurs had to be spent on importing massive quantities of wheat and other cereals from the kingdom of Naples, the Iberian peninsula or Provence[63]. This urban concentration of the population favoured the emergence of a poor working class – almost a kind of proletariat – and, during the second half of the fourteenth century, it led to the outbreak of riots such as that of the Bruco district in Siena (1371) or of the Ciompi (wool workers) in Florence (1378)[64].

The fourteenth century led to a progressive impoverishment of Tuscany or, at least, to the concentration of wealth, and therefore of the political power, into the hands of a few family oligarchies. In fact all the cities we talked about experienced a dichotomy between the merchants, who were progressively transformed into a class of landowners residing in urban palaces and managing country estates, and a class of poor and beggars, whose livelihoods, for the purpose of protecting public order, were gradually entrusted to religious institutions[65]. It was a slow but inexorable simplification of economic and social backgrounds, that had important repercussions on the local political rule[66]. It is precisely by looking at the government institutions that it is possible to highlight the differences and similarities among the cities of Tuscany, and then the dynamics of their different identities[67].

---

[59] See I. Origo, The Merchant of Prato. Francesco di Marco Datini, London 1957; Francesco di Marco Datini. The Man, the Merchant, ed. by G. Nigro, Firenze 2010; A. Barlucchi, La Mercanzia ad Arezzo nel primo Trecento. Statuti e riforme (1341-1347), Roma 2008.

[60] See "Volterra dagli albori del comune medievale alla rivolta antifrancese del 1799", Rassegna Volterrana, 70, 1994; Ch.M. de la Roncière, "San Gimignano et les terre de Val d'Elsa à l'époque des Statuts , in Gli albori del Comune di San Gimignano e lo statuto del 1314, ed. by M. Brogi, Siena 1995, pp. 39-52; F. Salvestrini, "Manifattura e attività creditizia in Valdelsa fra XIII e XV secolo", in I centri della Valdelsa dal Medioevo ad oggi, ed. by I. Moretti, S. Soldani, Firenze 2007, pp. 119-151.

[61] Medioevo a Volterra. Architettura nell'antica Diocesi tra Duecento e Trecento, ed. by A. Furiesi, Pisa 2003.

[62] G. Volpe, Toscana medievale (Massa Marittima, Volterra, Sarzana), Firenze 1964 (1 ed. 1910s); Fiumi, Volterra e San Gimignano.

[63] G. Pinto, Il Libro del Biadaiolo. Carestia e annona a Firenze dalla metà del '200 al 1348, Firenze 1978; Id., "Approvvigionamento e mercato dei prodotti alimentari nella Firenze del Trecento", in Alimentar la ciudad en la Edad Media, ed. by B. Arízaga Bolumburu, J.Á. Solórzano Telechea, Nájera 2008, pp. 231-251.

[64] V.I. Rutenburg, Popolo e movimenti popolari nell'Italia del '300 e '400, it. transl., Bologna 1971; Il Tumulto dei Ciompi. Un momento di storia fiorentina ed europea, Firenze 1981; Rivolte urbane e rivolte contadine nell'Europa del Trecento. Un confronto, ed. by M. Bourin, G. Cherubini, G. Pinto, Firenze 2008.

[65] See J. Henderson, Piety and Charity in Late Medieval Florence, Oxford 1994; Pinto, Città e spazi economici, pp. 49-63; Id., Il lavoro, la povertà, l'assistenza. Ricerche sulla società medievale, Roma, 2008.

[66] For a general introduction, A. Zorzi, Le signorie cittadine in Italia (secoli XIII-XV), Milano 2010. On Tuscany, La Toscana nel secolo XIV.

[67] See A. Zorzi, "Gli statuti di Firenze del 1322-1325: regimi politici e produzione normativa", in Signori, regimi signorili e statuti nel tardo medioevo, ed. by R. Dondarini, G.M. Varanini, M. Venticelli, Bologna 2003, pp. 123-142; F. Salvestrini, "Gli statuti delle 'quasi città' toscane (secoli XIII-XV)", ivi, pp. 217-242.

Forms of municipal self-government began to emerge during the so-called struggle for the investitures period (last quarter of the eleventh century), when the marchioness Matilda of Tuscany was long engaged, as an ally of pope Gregory VII, in the clash with the emperor Henry IV[68]. The power vacuum determined by the slow decline of the marquisate involved the affirmation of some seigneurial families, in particular counts (*comites*) and their vassals[69]. However, the urban tradition existing in Tuscany meant that some bishops were able to extend their political control over their cities and the suburban areas at the expense of the aristocracy, which, in fact, consolidated its power, in some cases legitimated by feudal investitures, especially in the most outlying and less populated countryside. In any event, during the eleventh century the aristocracy of urban origin and some members of the rural nobility involved in city government created a new class of bishoprics' *fideles*, engaged in the administration and defence of cities. Within a few decades, bishops were sharing their power with this class of armed men, some of them trained as jurists, and increasingly influential exactly because of their connections with the episcopal *curiae*. These families gradually took over the bishops' ability to control the cities' public life and gave rise to the collegial magistracy of the consulate (*consulatus*), a public form of government that varied in size from one city to another[70]. These events marked the emergence of municipal institutions. The local governments clashed in Tuscany, as in Northern Italy, with the universalist claims of the German sovereigns, and accentuated their degree of autonomy from the Empire after the battle of Legnano in 1176, in which the Lombards defeated emperor Frederick I, and after the peace of Constance of 1183, which established the autonomy of the Italian city-states. The original control of bishops over their dioceses gave legitimacy to the political dominion of municipalities over suburban territories, forming an inseparable link between urban and rural areas[71]. It was a very different situation, compared, for example, to that of the Northern German or Southern Italian cities, which were usually unable to control their surrounding countryside from the political standpoint[72].

The consolidation of the urban republican governments favoured conflicts with the rural aristocracy, whose political influence was relegated, between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, to the margins of the region (Apennine area and Maremma). In general the Communal rulers won these long struggles for local supremacy, but the power vacuum left by the crisis of aristocratic dominations gave rise to the ambitions of hegemony on the part of some cities, and the Tuscan countryside became a battleground among the Communal armies[73]. On the other hand, the consular governments experienced internal conflicts due to the struggles among different families and citizens' alliances. It became normal for a political faction excluded from the rule of a city to seek the help of rival republics, to obtain support in order to regain the lost position in its home-country. The urban aristocracies, therefore, created networks of alliances among many city-states and other political organizations ideally connected to the Imperial or the Papal authority. These quickly came to be identified with the Guelph (pro-papacy) and Ghibelline (close to the Hohenstaufen dynasty) parties[74].

---

[68] I ceti dirigenti in Toscana nell'età precomunale, Pisa 1981; A. Puglia, La Marca di Tuscia tra X e XI secolo. Impero, società locale e amministrazione marchionale negli anni 970-1027, Pisa 2003.

[69] Nobiltà e ceti dirigenti in Toscana nei secoli XI-XIII: strutture e concetti, Firenze 1982; S. Collavini, «Honorabilis domus et spetiosissimus comitatus». Gli Aldobrandeschi da "conti" a "principi territoriali" (secoli IX-XIII), Pisa 1998; M.E. Cortese, Signori, castelli, città. L'aristocrazia del territorio fiorentino tra X e XII secolo, Firenze 2007; La lunga storia di una stirpe comitale. I Conti Guidi tra Romagna e Toscana, ed. by F. Canaccini, Firenze 2009. A short summary in Ch. Wickham, "La signoria rurale in Toscana", in Strutture e trasformazioni della signoria rurale nei secoli X-XIII, ed. by G. Dilcher, C. Violante, Bologna 1996, pp. 343-409; F. Salvestrini, "Signori e contadini", in Storia della civiltà toscana, I, Comuni e Signorie, pp. 49-75.

[70] E. Faini, "Il gruppo dirigente fiorentino dell'età consolare", Archivio Storico Italiano, 162, 2004, pp. 199-230.

[71] See G.W. Dameron, Episcopal Power and Florentine Society, 1000-1320, Cambridge Mass. 1991; R. Savigni, Episcopato e società cittadina a Lucca. Da Anselmo II († 1086) a Roberto († 1255), Lucca 1996; M. Pellegrini, Chiesa e città. Uomini, comunità e istituzioni nella società senese del XII e XIII secolo, Roma 2004.

[72] See G. Cherubini, Le città europee del Medioevo, Milano 2009, pp. 5-19, 37, 41-58.

[73] M. Luzzati, "Firenze e l'area toscana", in Storia d'Italia, Torino 1987, VII, 1, pp. 563-828.

[74] See G. Tabacco, Egemonie sociali e strutture del potere nel Medioevo italiano, Torino 1979, pp. 316-330; Federico II e le città italiane, ed. by P. Toubert, A. Paravicini Bagliani, Palermo 1994; Legislazione e prassi istituzionale a Pisa (secoli XI-XIII). Una tradizione normativa esemplare, ed. by G. Rossetti, Napoli 2001; A. Zorzi, La trasformazione di un quadro politico. Ricerche su politica e giustizia a Firenze dal comune allo Stato territoriale, Firenze 2008; F. Canaccini, Ghibellini e ghibellinismo in Toscana da Montaperti a Campaldino (1260-1289), Roma 2010.

        Guelph and Ghibelline factions clashed inside and outside the cities, creating a climate of political uncertainty that citizens often felt was too high a price to pay for keeping their republican regimes[75]. Political and economic issues were strictly connected. Quite early on, the Florentines became the leaders in collecting tithes for the Apostolic *curia*, so they preserved a Guelph rule for a long time. Siena, on the other hand, that also maintained economic and financial relations with the Holy See[76], assumed a predominantly Ghibelline orientation in the thirteenth century[77]. Pisa faced with its own political and economic decline and the rise of nearby Florence, remaining faithful to the Empire and clashed with the city of Dante for the control of the Arno valley[78]. Florence, for its part, did deal with the development of its main rival cities, Siena and Pisa, and with the political influence of the rural aristocracy, extending its dominion throughout its diocesan district (Florence and Fiesole), and then to Prato and Pistoia. The Republic became the centre of a network of alliances among the region's Guelph potentates, that in the fourteenth century became the political basis of the Florentine territorial state[79]. Yet even in this context of ongoing conflicts, interesting forms of cooperation showing the usual interplay between political orientations and economic interests did manage to develop and mature. For example Florence and Pisa, enemy cities and often at war with each other, were both dependent on the river Arno, the main vehicle for transporting goods and people between the coast and the inland areas. Even during some periods of conflict, Pisa always remained the most important harbour serving Florence and its natural outlet to the Mediterranean sea[80].

        Clashes and long rivalries never obliterated the interdependence among the urban communities of the region. Not surprisingly, therefore, municipalities experienced similar forms of institutional evolution, that is the crisis of the consulate, the advent of the aristocratic rules of the *Podestà*[81], and, especially from the second half of the thirteenth century, a progressive development of the *Populus* regimes. The latter, in particular, were expressions of the class of leading traders who achieved power after a long struggle against local aristocracies (*Magnati*). Tired of the fights generated by the local factions, the *Populus* acquired supremacy and tried to exclude the Magnates from Communal rules. However, in the long run, the new Popular governments could not guarantee political stability[82]. A guild-based rule (*Governo delle Arti*, 1282) emerged in Florence. It was headed by a Priory formed by the representatives of the most important trade and manufacturing guilds. The political evolution of the traditionally Ghibelline cities, like Pisa, was different, and the regime of the *Populus* did not give rise to a government led by professional associations. In the Tyrrhenian republic the Popular rule was expressed above all by the figure of the Captain (*Capitano del Popolo*), chief magistrate who had the executive and judiciary powers and shared it, at various levels, with the *Podestà*; since the drafting of laws was a responsibility of the city council (the *Anziani*, thirteenth century). From 1280s to 1355 the Sienese merchants-entrepreneurs ruled the local Commune through the Guelph magistracy of the *Nove*. In some of the smaller and relatively marginal cities like Volterra and Arezzo, bishops and some noble oligarchies kept power for a long time and profoundly affected the activities of the Communal magistracy[83].

---

[75] S. Raveggi, M. Tarassi, D. Medici, P. Parenti, Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso. I detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del Dugento, Firenze 1978; I ceti dirigenti dell'età comunale nei secoli XII e XIII, Pisa 1982; Poteri centrali e autonomie nella Toscana medievale e moderna, ed. by G. Pinto, L. Tanzini, Firenze 2012.

[76] See Y. Renouard, Les relations des papes d'Avignon et des compagnies commerciales et bancaires de 1316 à 1378, Paris 1941.

[77] Fedeltà ghibellina, affari guelfi. Saggi e riletture intorno alla storia di Siena fra Duecento e Trecento, ed. by G. Piccinni, Pisa 2008; Dagli Statuti dei Ghibellini al Constituto in volgare dei Nove con una riflessione sull'età contemporanea, ed. by E. Mecacci, M. Pierini, Siena 2009.

[78] Il Valdarno inferiore terra di confine.

[79] See Florentine Tuscany. Structures and Practices of Power, ed. by W.J. Connell, A. Zorzi, Cambridge 2000.

[80] Salvestrini, "Navigazione"; Id., "Tra 'civiltà' e 'natura'. La presenza del fiume nei contesti urbani, il caso toscano fra Medioevo e prima Età Moderna", in Acque e territorio nel Veneto medievale, ed. by D. Canzian, R. Simonetti, Roma 2012, pp. 133-145.

[81] E. Sestan, "Ricerche intorno ai primi podestà toscani", in Id., Scritti vari, II, Italia comunale e signorile, ed. by M. Berengo, Firenze 1989 (1 ed. 1924); I podestà dell'Italia comunale, I, Reclutamento e circolazione degli ufficiali forestieri (fine XII sec.-metà XIV sec.), ed. by J.-C. Maire Vigueur, Rome 2000.

[82] See Tabacco, Egemonie, pp. 330-363; Magnati e popolani nell'Italia comunale, Pistoia 1997; C. Lansing, The Florentine Magnates. Lineage and Faction in a Medieval Commune, Princeton 1991; A. Poloni, Potere al popolo. Conflitti sociali e lotte politiche nell'Italia comunale del Duecento, Milano 2010.

[83] See W.M. Bowsky, A Medieval Italian Commune. Siena Under the Nine. 1287-1355, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1981; I ceti dirigenti nella Toscana tardo comunale, Firenze 1983; R. Pauler, La Signoria dell'Imperatore: Pisa e l'Impero al tempo di Carlo IV (1354-1369), Pisa 1995; L. Green, Lucca under many masters. A fourteenth-century Italian commune in crisis (1328-1342), Firenze 1995; J.-P. Delumeau, Arezzo. Espace et société, 715-1230. Recherches sur Arezzo et son contado du VIIIe au début du XIIIe siècle, Rome 1996; F. Franceschi, "Arezzo, il destino di una città. Riscontri fra economia, politica e cultura (secoli XI-XV)", in La

The crisis of the fourteenth century struck against this complex and conflict-ridden background, and it was further aggravated by the great plague of 1348-50[84], which was particularly severe in the Tuscan cities (almost 30% of the population died in every urban context)[85]. In such a difficult situation it became easier for Florentines to extend their territorial hegemony. During the second half of the fourteenth century most of the cities and the smaller towns in Northern Tuscany made acts of formal submission to the San Giovanni Republic[86]. By 1450 the city controlled the entire region except for the states of Lucca and Siena. Before closing this brief and necessarily concise presentation, I would like to mention some religious elements of the Tuscan civic identity. All the major and smaller centres supported their political institutions and their cultural and memorialistic heritage with many symbols of divine protection[87]. Until the end of the eleventh century bishops were primarily points of reference for civic devotions. They preserved and promoted the cult of their ancient holy predecessors (i.e. Frediano in Lucca or Zenobius in Florence). A bishop like the Florentine Ildebrandus (1008-24) favoured the allegiance and the memory of the first local martyr Miniatus, recovering his relics in a new monastic church (San Miniato al Monte) which, according to his original intentions, would have become a new cathedral located just out the city walls[88].

During the second half of the eleventh century Florence, and especially a part of its Benedictine monks, became leaders of the Church reformation, namely through the fight of the Vallumbrosan Order against simony, nicolaitism and the corruption of the clergy[89]. From the beginning of the twelfth century, especially in Florence, Pisa, Lucca and Siena, municipal rulers supported and controlled, with the resources of trade associations, the management of religious celebrations, the discipline of holidays and the devotion to the patron saints[90]. An authentic civic religion emerged, and it became one of the most important signs of the urban identity[91]. As an example we can just mention the fact that, according to recent studies, the construction of the Florentine baptistery dates back to the early twelfth century. It was sponsored by the guild of merchants, and was to be inspired by the cathedral of Pisa (in turn influenced by the Islamic art), thanks to the early commercial contacts the two rising Tuscan cities established[92].

---

bellezza del sacro. Sculture medievali policrome, ed. by A.M. Maetzke, Arezzo 2002, pp. 169-189; J.-C. Maire Vigueur, Cavalieri e cittadini: guerra, conflitti e società nell'Italia comunale, Bologna 2004; A. Poloni, Trasformazioni della società e mutamenti delle forme politiche in un comune italiano. Il Popolo a Pisa (1220-1330), Pisa 2004; Ead., Lucca nel Duecento. Uno studio sul cambiamento sociale, Pisa 2009; J.M. Najemi, A History of Florence, Oxford 2006; L. Tanzini, Il governo delle leggi. Norme e pratiche delle istituzioni a Firenze dalla fine del Duecento all'inizio del Quattrocento, Firenze 2007; G. Ciccaglioni, "Tra unificazione e pluralismo. Alcune osservazioni sull'esperienza pastorale e di dominio politico di Guido Tarlati, vescovo e signore di Arezzo (1312-1327)", in Cristianesimo nella Storia, 29, 2008, pp. 345-375: Id., Poteri e spazi politici a Pisa nella prima metà del secolo XIV, Pisa, forthcoming; P. Gualtieri, Il Comune di Firenze tra Due e Trecento. Partecipazione politica e assetto istituzionale, Firenze 2009; S. Diacciati, Popolani e magnati. Società e politica nella Firenze del Duecento, Spoleto 2011.

[84] La Peste Nera: dati di una realtà ed elementi di una interpretazione, Spoleto 1994.

[85] See G. Pinto, Campagne e paesaggi, pp. 34-35.

[86] Egemonia fiorentina ed autonomie locali nella Toscana nord-occidentale del primo Rinascimento. Vita, arte, cultura, Pistoia [1979]; G. Chittolini, La formazione dello stato regionale e le istituzioni del contado. Secoli XIV e XV, Torino 1979, pp. 292-352; Zorzi, La trasformazione.

[87] See Le radici cristiane di Firenze, Firenze, 1994; A. Thompson, Cities of God. The Religion of the Italian Communes, 1125-1325, Philadelphia 2005.

[88] A. Benvenuti, "«Secondo che raccontano le storie»: il mito delle origini cittadine nella Firenze comunale", in Il senso della storia nella cultura medievale italiana (1100-1350), Pistoia 1995, pp. 205-252: 239-240; Ead., "Il Bellum fesulanum e il mito delle origini fiorentine", in Un archivio, una diocesi. Fiesole nel Medioevo e nell'età moderna, ed. by M. Borgioli, Firenze 1996, pp. 36-38; P. Pirillo, "Firenze: il vescovo e la città nell'Alto Medioevo", in Vescovo e città, pp. 179-201: 180-181.

[89] See F. Salvestrini, Disciplina caritatis. Il monachesimo vallombrosano tra medioevo e prima età moderna, Roma 2008; Id., "La prova del fuoco. Vita religiosa e identità cittadina nella tradizione del monachesimo fiorentino (seconda metà del secolo XI)", forthcoming in Studi Medievali, III serie, LVI, 2015, 1.

[90] H.C. Peyer, Stadt und Stadtpatron im mittelalterliche Italien, Zürich 1955; A. Benvenuti, Pastori di popolo. Storie e leggende di vescovi e di città nell'Italia medievale, Firenze 1988; G.W. Dameron, Florence and Its Church in the Age of Dante, Philadelphia 2005.

[91] G. Chittolini, "Civic religion and the countryside in Late Medieval Italy", in City and Countryside in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy. Essays presented to Philip Jones, ed. by T. Dean, Ch. Wickham, London 1990, pp. 68-90.

[92] G. Tigler, Toscana romanica, Milano 2006, pp. 142-143; E. Scampoli, Firenze. Archeologia di una città (sec. I a.C.-XIII d.C.), Firenze 2010, pp. 56-62.

Devotions responded to the same need for divine protection over the cities, their inhabitants and their Communal governments[93]. The choice of the transcendent mediators was very important and became a symbol of the local identity. Florence was especially linked to the cult of its patron, saint John the Baptist[94], whose feast day and holy ceremonials were supported by the public authorities and trade associations[95]. Siena identified its special protector in the Virgin Mary; Pisa relied on its local patron saint Ranieri (*c.* 1117-1160), and Arezzo celebrated its former bishop saint Donatus (fourth century)[96]. Citizens demonstrated their devotions to many other ancient and more recent saints, also in connection with and in obedience to the teachings of the religious orders, namely from the beginning of the thirteenth century and from the advent, in every country, of the Mendicant friars[97]. The acquisition of famous relics, especially from the Middle East and the Holy Land, increased the background of local devotions. We can mention, for example, the thorn from the crown of Christ, brought to Pisa in 1333 and located in a well-known church on the left bank of the Arno (*Santa Maria della Spina*)[98]; then the so-called *Volto Santo* (Holy Face of Christ) in the cathedral of Lucca, a wooden crucifix traditionally considered as an *acheiropoietos*, coming from the ancient city of Luni[99]. There was also the Sacred Girdle of the Virgin Mary conserved in the parish church of Prato[100]; and, finally, the fragment from the relics of the Apostle James the Greater that Atto, bishop of Pistoia (1133-53), obtained as a gift (1144), through the intercession of pope Innocent II, from the archbishop Didacus of Santiago de Compostela[101]. Relics were visible and easily identifiable objects blessing each city, since they were vehicles of privileged access to divine benevolence and to Heavenly protection.

What conclusions can we draw from this presentation? Cities and towns have always marked the history of Tuscany during the Middle Ages. They gave the region its identity generating the Communal civilization. From at least the end of the eleventh century, they were the structures that defined the management of political power and dictated the lines of economic choices. The history of the Tuscan cities was a story of particularism and a quest for independence. Local *Libertas* was strenuously defended against one urban centre's attempts to gain supremacy over another, and it was always reaffirmed against the interference of the supreme Imperial and Papal powers. At the same time, the evolution of major and minor centres was also characterized by frequent interactions, mutual influence and outright imitations from the political and institutional, as well as religious and economic points of view. The peculiar identity of the local urban structures derived from this interesting contradiction, that is the difficult coexistence between common interests and defence of particularism. In the thirteenth century, Pisa, Lucca, Pistoia, Prato, Florence and Siena were among the leaders of the European financial, manufacturing and trade systems[102]. The situation changed during the following period, when the crisis of the *Trecento* and the changing continental perspectives relegated Tuscany to a relatively marginal role. Florence took over a century to create a little state with a regional dimension.

---

[93] See F. Salvestrini, "L'Arno e l'alluvione fiorentina del 1333", in Le calamità ambientali nel tardo Medioevo europeo: realtà, percezioni, reazioni, ed. by M. Matheus, G. Piccinni, G. Pinto, G.M. Varanini, Firenze 2010, pp. 231-256.

[94] See Atti del VII centenario del Duomo di Firenze, ed. by T. Verdon, A. Innocenti, Firenze 2001.

[95] See P. Ventrone, "Feste e rituali civici: città italiane a confronto", in Aspetti e componenti dell'identità urbana in Italia e in Germania (secoli XIV-XVI), ed. by G. Chittolini, P. Johanek, Bologna 2003 pp. 155-191: 163-175.

[96] T. Burckhardt, Siena. Stadt der Jungfrau, Oeten 1958; M.L. Ceccarelli Lemut, G. Garzella, "«Mirabilia Domini in pelago». Cristianizzazione, culti e reliquie a Pisa (secoli III-XIII)", in Dio, il mare e gli uomini, Quaderni di storia religiosa, 2008, pp. 155-183: 170-171; P. Licciardello, Agiografia aretina altomedievale. Testi agiografici e contesti socio-culturali ad Arezzo tra VI e IX secolo, Firenze 2005.

[97] See A. Benvenuti, «In castro poenitentiae». Santità e società femminile nell'Italia medievale, Roma 1990, and the references cited in Salvestrini, "Religious Orders".

[98] B. de Gaiffier, "La légende de la Sainte Épine de Pise", Analecta Bollandiana, 70, 1952, pp. 20-34.

[99] Lucca, Il Volto Santo e la civiltà medioevale, Lucca 1984; La Santa Croce di Lucca. Il Volto santo. Storia, tradizioni, immagini, ed. by M. Zingoni, Empoli 2003.

[100] La Sacra Cintola nel Duomo di Prato, Prato 1995.

[101] L. Gai, "Testimonianze jacobee e riferimenti compostellani nella storia di Pistoia dei secoli XII-XIII", in Pistoia e il Cammino di Santiago. Una dimensione europea nella Toscana medioevale, ed. by L. Gai, Napoli 1987, pp. 119-230.

[102] See F. Melis, Industria e commercio nella Toscana medievale, ed. by B. Dini, Firenze 1989; L. Galoppini, Mercanti toscani a Bruges nel tardo Medioevo, Pisa 2009.

Venice, controlling most of the Adriatic coast and many Middle Eastern ports, occupied a large part of the Northern Italy just during the early decades of the fifteenth century[103]; and, in the same period, the national monarchies of France, England, Aragon and Castile reached and consolidated far more extensive territorial domains. Humanism and the Renaissance identified the last season of greatness for Florence, but the population of the city of Brunelleschi was now only half of what it had been when Florence was the city of Dante. Money accumulated by trade and banking was diverted, in many cases, to purchasing land and commissioning works of art. The reduction and simplification of the economic system favoured first an oligarchic and then a seigneurial form of government; and the idea of the local *Libertas* became above all a subject for humanists' discussions at the court of Medici, the new political leaders of Florence[104]. The Republic became a veiled monarchy, and the ancient freedom of Communal cities an idealized and academic memory[105].

Appendix

Estimated populations of major cities in Tuscany (13th century – *c.* 1330)

Florence	120,000	inhabitants
Siena	50,000	
Pisa	45,000	
Lucca	30,000	
Pistoia	15,000	
Prato	15,000	
Arezzo	13,000	
Volterra	12,000	
San Gimignano	10,000	
Colle di Val d'Elsa	6,000	
San Miniato al Tedesco	5,000	

---

[103] «It was more difficult for the Florentines to create the small domain they have than for the Venetians their great one: because the Florentines are in a country that was full of freedoms, that are very difficult to extinguish because they are won with great effort and conserved with no less pain» (my translation) più è stato difficile a' Fiorentini a fare quello poco dominio che hanno, che a'Viniziani el loro grande: perché e Fiorentini sono in una provincia che era piena di libertà, le quali è difficillimo a estinguere – però si vincono con grandissima fatica e, vinte, si conservano con non minore (Francesco Guicciardini, Ricordi, 29).

[104] M.B. Becker, Florence in Transition, Baltimore 1967-68; Florentine Studies. Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence, ed. by N. Rubinstein, London 1968; G.A. Brucker, Florentine Politics and Society, 1343-1378, Princeton 1962; Id., The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence, Princeton 1977.

[105] See H. Baron, The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance. Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny, Princeton 1955; Id., In search of Florentine Civic Humanism. Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought, Princeton 1988.