

## GIOVANNI VILLANI: FLORENTINE CHRONICLE

*Giovanni Villani was born sometime before 1277. His career was that of the typical well-to-do Florentine merchant. In 1300 he became a member of the bankers' guild and a shareholder in the Perruzzi company, one of the leading Florentine trading and money-lending firms. For the next few years Villani traveled around Europe in the service of his company. Then in 1307 he returned to Florence, married, and settled down to a life of involvement in city politics. During the last decade of his life Villani's fortunes took a dramatic turn. Imprisoned for debt in 1338, he emerged to find both his standard of living and his political power drastically curtailed. In 1348 he died, presumably of the black death, along with up to half of his fellow citizens.*

*Villani is principally remembered, not as merchant or politician, but as an historian. His chronicle of Florentine history offers a vivid picture of medieval city life. The following excerpts are chosen to illustrate the complexities of Florentine politics and society. The first selection deals with the rise of the Guelf-Ghibelline split in Florence, a division that seriously divided the city in the thirteenth century. The origin of these two parties can be traced back to twelfth-century Germany, where two powerful families, the Welf and the Hohenstaufen, struggled for power. Both had interests in Italy as well as Germany. The Hohenstaufen occupied the imperial throne and thus found themselves in conflict with the papacy, which resented the growth of imperial power in Italy. Thus the popes tended to lean toward the Welf faction.*

*As a result, the Welf-Hohenstaufen controversy took on a particular hue in Italy. It became a division between those who supported the pope and those who supported the emperor. It also gained a slightly different set of labels. When placed in Italian mouths, "Welf" became "Guelf." It may seem a little harder to imagine how "Hohenstaufen" turned into "Ghibelline," but there really is an explanation. Supporters of the Hohenstaufen used the battle-cry "Waiblingen," the name of a Hohenstaufen castle. It was that battle cry that came to be Italianized into "Ghibelline." As the thirteenth century progressed, the papal-imperial rivalry escalated sharply. The last great Hohenstaufen emperor was Frederick II, the wildest, cruelest, most intelligent and least Christian of the lot. By the time he died in 1250, the popes were determined to obliterate Hohenstaufen influence in Italy. Shortly after, they did. Thus the Guelf-Ghibelline battle had an international dimension; yet it also had a more regional one. The alignment of cities on one side or the other reflected their rivalry with one another for power within their own area. Thus predominantly Guelf Florence opposed Ghibelline Siena, its major rival for influence in Tuscany. Below the regional level, the controversy had a local level which reflected the rivalry of powerful families. Thus within Florence Guelf-Ghibelline alignments were often based on considerations more familial than ideological. It is this level that Villani emphasizes.*

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In the year 1215, when Gherardo Orlandi was podestà of Florence, Bondelmonte dei Buondelmonti promised to marry a young woman from the house of Amidei, honorable and noble citizens. Later, as Buondelmonte, a graceful and skillful horseman, was riding through the city, a woman from the house of Donati called to him and criticized the marriage agreement he had made, saying his betrothed was neither beautiful nor fine enough for him. "I've been saving my own daughter for you," she said, and showed the daughter to him. The daughter was very beautiful and immediately with the devil's connivance, Buondelmonte was so smitten that he married her.

The first girl's family met together, smarting from the shame Buondelmonte had placed upon them, and they

were filled with a terrible indignation that would destroy and divide the city of Florence. Many noble houses plotted together to bring shame on Buondelmonte in reprisal for these injuries. As they were discussing whether they should beat or wound him, Mosca dei Lamberti spoke the evil words, "A thing done has a head," that is, they should kill him. And thus it happened, for on Easter morning the Amidei of Santo Stefano assembled in their house, and as Buondelmonte came from the other side of the Arno nobly attired in new, white clothes, riding a white palfrey, when he arrived on this side of the old bridge, precisely at the foot of the pillar where the statue of Mars stood, he was pulled from his horse by Schiatta degli Uberti, assaulted and wounded by Mosca Lamberti and Lambertuccio degli Amidei, and finished off by Oderigo Fifanti. They had with them one of the Counts of Gangalandi.

As a result, the city was thrown into strife and disorder, for Buondelmonte's death was the cause and beginning of the cursed Guelf and Ghibelline parties in Florence. To be sure, there were already divisions among the noble citizens, and these parties already existed because of the quarrels and disputes between church and empire; yet it was because of Buondelmonte's death that all the noble families and other Florentine citizens were divided into factions, some siding with the Buondelmonti, leaders of the Guelf party, and others with the Uberti, leaders of the Ghibellines

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*By the mid-thirteenth century, Guelf-Ghibelline tension was an unfortunate but unavoidable fact of life in Florence. The Guelfs were chased out in 1248, but were soon back and managed to expel Ghibellines in 1251. The latter were readmitted in 1252 but ejected again in 1258, as the following selection describes. Note that the Uberti family was already a prime target of anti-Ghibelline wrath.*

*Villani says that the Ghibellines were expelled in 1258 because they "planned to break up the people of Florence." He refers to the government at the time, the so-called primo popolo or "first government of the people," which ruled Florence from 1250 to 1260. Since Villani simply refers to it as "the people," it is often hard to decide whether he is using the word popolo in a general sense ("the citizens of Florence") or in a more specific sense ("the government of Florence"). It is well to keep the problem in mind when reading.*

*The office of podestà, an important one in medieval Italian cities, became popular in the twelfth century. A professional administrator hired to run the city for a specific time, the podestà was usually from elsewhere and thus presumably above local factional divisions. By the end of the thirteenth century his functions had been limited by the development of other offices, but he still had an important role in enforcement, as we shall see.*

In the year of Christ 1258, when Iacopo Bernardi di Porco was podestà of Florence, at the end of June, the house of Uberti and their Ghibelline followers, encouraged by Manfred, planned to break up the people of Florence because they thought it favored the Guelfs. When their plot was discovered by the people and they were cited to appear before the Signoria, they would not do so but attacked and seriously wounded the staff of the podestà. The people then armed themselves and ran in fury to the house of the Uberti, where the palace of the people and priors is now located. There they killed Schiattuzzo degli Uberti as well as several Uberti followers and retainers. Uberto Caini degli Uberti and Mangia degl' Infangati were taken and, once they had publicly confessed the plot, were beheaded. Others from the house of Uberti, along with other Ghibelline houses, left Florence and went to Siena, which was ruled by Ghibellines and was hostile to Florence. Their palaces and towers, of which there were many, were destroyed and the stones used to build the walls of San Giorgio Oltrarno, which the Florentine people began at that time because of their war with the Sieneese. Then, in September of the same year, the Florentine people arrested the abbot of Valambrosa, a well-born man from the family of the lords of Beccheria of Pavia in Lombardy. They had been told that he was planning treason at the

request of the exiled Ghibellines. Once they had extracted a confession from him through torture and the people had called for his head, they villainously executed him without regard for his rank or sacred orders. In reprisal, the commune and people of Florence were excommunicated and Florentines passing through Lombardy were treated harshly by the abbot's family. And truly, it was said that the man was not guilty, even though his family ties made him an important Ghibelline. Many wise men said that, for this sin and many others committed by the villainous people, God in his divine judgment permitted vengeance to be wreaked upon the people through the battle and defeat at Montaperti, which we will mention later. The Florentine people, which ruled the city at that time, was very proud and was engaged in high and great enterprises, and it was often very rash; yet one thing can be said of their rulers: they were very loyal and true to the commune.

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At the time of the people in Florence, a very handsome and strong lion was presented to the commune and was placed in a cage in the Piazza San Giovanni. Because of the keeper's negligence, the lion escaped and ran through the streets terrifying the city. When it arrived at Orto San Michele, it caught hold of a boy and held him between its paws.

The mother, who had no other children and had been pregnant with this one when the father died, ran shrieking and disheveled up to the lion and snatched the boy from its paws. The lion hurt neither mother nor child, but simply sat quietly and watched the whole affair. It was unclear whether this occurred because of the lion's noble nature or because fortune had preserved the boy's life so that he could pursue a vendetta regarding his dead father. He eventually did so, and was called Orlanduccio of the lion of Calfette.

And note that in the time of the people, and before, and for a long time after, the citizens of Florence lived soberly and on simple food, spending little, and their manners were often coarse and plain. They dressed themselves and their wives in coarse garments. Many wore skins without linings and caps on their heads. All wore leather boots on their feet. Florentine women wore boots without ornament, and the greatest of them settled for a single tight-fitting gown of coarse scarlet cloth fastened with a leather belt in the ancient fashion, and a hooded cloak lined with squirrel, the hood being worn on their heads. The common women wore coarse green cloth of Cambrai cut in the same style, and one hundred lire was a common dowry for wives, two or three hundred being considered excessive in those days. Most young women were twenty or more before they were married. Such were the plain manners of the Florentines, but they were faithful and true to their commune and with their simple life and poverty they did greater and more virtuous things than are done in our time of increased delicacy and luxury.

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*In 1260 the primo popolo came to an end and the Ghibellines received their final taste of power in Florence. The reason for their fall was a catastrophic error that led to the bloody defeat at Montaperti. As Villani, describes it, they were defeated by a combination of enemies: Manfred, the last great Hohenstaufen, who directed the Ghibelline cause from his kingdom in southern Italy; Siena, the Florentine's major rival in Tuscany; the Florentine Ghibellines, who had found shelter in Siena after they were ejected from Florence; and the Florentine Guelfs' own prideful stupidity, which encouraged them to ignore the wiser counsels within their own party and blunder into a deadly trap.*

It happened that in the year of Christ 1260, in the month of May, the people and commune of Florence led their full forces against the city of Siena, bringing the carroccio with them. Note that the carroccio brought by the

people and commune of Florence was a four- wheeled cart painted red, with two great poles sticking up on top from which waved the communal standard, half white and half red, which can be seen even today in San Giovanni. It was drawn by a great pair of oxen covered with red cloth. The oxen were used only for this purpose and belonged to the Ospedale di Pinti. The drover was a freeman of the commune. Our ancestors used this carroccio for triumphs and solemn processions and, when it went out on a military expedition, counts and knights from the area brought it from San Giovanni, accompanied it to the Piazza di Mercato Nuovo, and, having paused a moment by a stone marker (which is still in existence) carved in the form of a carroccio, handed it over to the people, who led it on the expedition. The best, strongest and most virtuous foot- soldiers were detailed to guard it, and the entire army massed around it.

When the campaign was announced, one month before it actually set out, a bell was placed in the arch of the Santa Maria gate at the end of the new market. It was ringing continuously, day and night. They did this arrogantly, to let the enemy know where the campaign was going and give them time to prepare. Some people called it the Martinella, others the asses' bell. When the expedition set out, they removed the bell from the arch, placed it in a wooden tower on a cart, and let its sound guide the army. Through these two displays, the carroccio and the bell, our ancestors the people of old maintained their lordly pride when on campaign.

We will leave this matter and turn to how the Florentines waged war on the Sienese, taking the castles of Vicchio, Mezzano and Casciole, which belonged to the Sienese, and establishing themselves at Siena near the city gate by the monastery of Santa Petronella. Near there, on a hillock which could be seen from the city, they placed a tower where they kept their bell. Then, to show their scorn for the Sienese and to commemorate their victory, they planted there an olive tree which was still alive until our own time.

One day while the siege was in progress, the Florentine exiles in Siena wine and dined Manfred's German troops and, when they were drunk, incited them to ride out against the Florentine army, promising them great gifts and double pay. This was done craftily by wise men following the advice of Farinata degli Uberti, advice which he had given while in Apulia. The Germans, drunk out of their wits, left Siena and vigorously attacked the Florentine camp.

Because they had underrated the enemy forces, the Florentines were caught off guard and were thoroughly unprepared. Thus the Germans, despite their small number, did a great deal of damage to the army and many Florentines, people and knights alike, made a poor show of it, fleeing in fear that their assailants were greater in number than was actually the case. But in the end they reconsidered, took arms, defended themselves, and not one of the Germans who had left Siena escaped alive. Manfred's standard was taken, dragged through the camp, and brought to Florence. When these events had transpired, the army returned to Florence.

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When the Sienese and Florentine exiles saw what a poor showing the Florentines had made against so few German knights, they decided they could win the war with more troops. They immediately provided themselves with twenty thousand gold florins from the company of the Salimbeni, who were merchants at that time. As security, they put up the fortress at Tentennana and other castles belonging to the commune. Then they sent their ambassadors off to Apulia again bearing the money and a message to Manfred that his few German knights, by great vigor and valor, had engaged the entire Florentine army, put much of it to flight, and would have beaten it if the German forces had been bigger. As it turned out, however, because of their small number all lay dead on the field and his standard had been dragged in disgrace through the camp, then in and about Florence.

They said everything possible to arouse Manfred, who already had heard the news and was furious. With the Sieneſe money, which covered half the expenses for three months, and at his own expense as well, Manfred ſent his marſhal Count Giordano to Tuscany with eight hundred German knights. Accompanied by the ambaffadors, they arrived at Siena toward the end of July in the Year of Chriſt 1260 and were greeted feſtively by the Sieneſe.

Their preſence gave the Sieneſe and other Tuſcan Ghibellines a great deal of energy and confidence. The Sieneſe immediately ſent an army againſt the caſtle of Montalcino, which was under Florentine control, and ſent for aid to Piſa and all the other Tuſcan Ghibellines, ſo that with the knights of Siena, the Florentine exiles, the Germans and their allies, there were 1800 knights in Siena, moſt of them German.

The Florentine exiles, through whoſe effort King Manfred had ſent Count Giordano with the eight hundred German knights, decided that they ſtill would have done nothing if they could not draw the Florentines out into the field, ſince the Germans were paid for only three months and one and a half months already had paſſed ſince their arrival. The exiles had no money to hire them for a longer time, nor could they expect more from Manfred. Once their contract was up, the Germans would return to Apulia without having done anything, thus leaving the Tuſcan Ghibellines in danger again.

Concluding that the ſituation could not be rectified without great ſkill and ſtrategy, they turned the matter over to Farinata degli Uberti and Gherardo Ciccia dei Lamberti, who craftily diſpatched two wiſe friars minor with a meſſage for the people of Florence. Theſe friars were firſt expoſed to nine powerful Sieneſe who went to great lengths to convince the friars that the government of Provenzano Salvani, the current ruler of Siena, was odious to them and they would willingly ſurrender the land to the Florentines for a price of ten thouſand gold florins. They further promiſed that, under the pretence of fortifying Montalcino, they would come as far as the river Arbia and then, with a force provided by them and their followers, would turn over to the Florentines the gate of Santo Vito in the Via d'Arezzo.

The friars, having been expoſed to this fraud and deceit, came to Florence with letters and ſeals from the aforeſaid Sieneſe and appeared before the elders of the people. They ſaid they could offer a means of performing great deeds to the honor of the people and commune of Florence, but the matter was ſo ſecret that it had to be revealed under oath only to a few. Then the elders choſe from among themſelves Spedito di Porte San Pietro, a man of great enterpriſe and daring, one of the principal leaders of the people, and with him Gianni Calcagni di Vacchereccia. Once the oath had been taken on an altar, the friars diſcloſed the plot and diſplayed the letters.

Led by deſire rather than prudence, the two elders believed in the plan. They immediately raiſed the ten thouſand gold florins, placed them on deposit, and ſummoned an aſſembly of magnates and people. They argued that, in order to provide for Montalcino, it was neceſſary to diſpatch to Siena a force even greater than the one which had been at Santa Petronella the preceding May.

Count Guido Guerra and the nobles of the great Florentine Guelf houſes, knowing more than the People about warfare and nothing at all about the bogus plan, aware as well that a new German force was at Siena and that the Florentines had made a poor ſhowing at Santa Petronella againſt an aſſault by one hundred Germans, failed to ſee the wiſdom of the propoſed campaign. Seeing that the citizens held various opinions on the propoſal and were hesitant to diſpatch another army, they argued that Montalcino could be provided for at little expense, ſince the town of Orvieto was willing to take on that reſponſibility, and that the Germans had been paid for only a three-month term, half of which was already over. If the Florentines let matters ſtand without launching a campaign, the Germans would ſoon be back in Apulia, leaving the Sieneſe and the Florentine exiles worſe off

than before.

The spokesman for this view was Tegghiaio Aldobrandi degli Adimari, a wise and brave knight of great authority, and his advice was by far the best offered. The aforesaid elder Spedito, a very presumptuous man, gave that advice a rude answer, saying Tegghiaio should check his pants if he was afraid. Tegghiaio replied that, when it came to action, Spedito would not dare to be where Tegghiaio placed himself in the battle.

When he had said this, Cece dei Gherardini arose to repeat what Tegghiaio had said. The elders commanded him to be quiet and set a fine of one hundred pounds for anyone who spoke against their orders. The knight was willing to pay it in order to oppose the campaign, but the elders refused and doubled the fine. He again wished to pay it, so the fine became three hundred pounds. When he still wanted to talk and pay, the penalty became his head, and there the debate ended. Thus through a proud and thoughtless people the worst advice won out, namely that the army should leave immediately.

Once the people of Florence had made their unfortunate decision, they sought aid from their allies, who came with foot- soldiers and knights from Lucca, Prato, Volterra, San Miniato, San Gimignano, and Colle di Valdelsa, all of which were in league with the commune and people of Florence. In Florence there were eight hundred horsemen who were citizens, as well as over five hundred mercenaries.

When the army was assembled, it departed at the end of August. With pomp and circumstance they led forth the carroccio and a bell which they called Martinella, the latter being placed on a cart with a wooden castle on wheels. Almost all the people went bearing the standards of the guilds, and there was not a house or family in Florence from which at least one person and sometimes two or more (according to their power) did not go forth on foot or horseback. And when they found themselves in Sienese territory, at the designated spot on the river Arbia, in the place called Montaperti, with the Perugians and Orvietans who joined them there, they had over three thousand knights and thirty thousand foot-soldiers.

While the Florentines were preparing for their campaign, those in Siena who had devised the plan sought to strengthen it by sending other friars to Florence. They plotted treason with certain powerful Ghibellines who had remained in Florence. These Ghibellines were to join the campaign. Then, once the troops were in battle order, they were to desert the ranks and join their own group, thus throwing the Florentines into confusion. Those in Siena hatched this plot because it seemed to them that they were greatly outnumbered by the Florentines. And so it occurred.

Once the Florentine army was established in the hills of Montaperti, those wise elders who had approved the plan and were now leading the army waited for the Sienese traitors to open the gate for them as promised. Meanwhile, an eminent Ghibelline named Razzante, from the Porta San Pietro section in Florence, got wind of what the Florentine leaders were waiting for. With the consent of other Ghibellines in the army (who had treason on their minds), he fled from the Florentine camp on horseback and went to Siena. His mission was to inform the Florentine exiles there that the city was to be betrayed and that the Florentines were well provided with knights and foot-soldiers. He advised those within not to recommend battle.

When the two plotters Farinata and Gherardo heard his message, they said to him, "You'll kill us if you spread this news around Siena, because you'll frighten them. We want you to say just the opposite. If we don't fight while we have these Germans, we're dead! We'll never get back to Florence. Death and defeat would actually be better for us than to go begging around the world any longer." They preferred to stake their future on a single decisive battle.

Having been set straight by Farinata and Gherardo, Razzante promised to speak as they suggested. With a garland on his head and a very cheerful expression on his face, he and the other two rode on horseback to a meeting at the palace, where all the people of Siena, the Germans and other allies were gathered. There he joyfully announced the great news from the traitors in the Florentine camp. The army, he said, was ill-prepared, poorly-led and disunited. A determined attack would defeat them. When Razzante had delivered his false report, the Sienese all armed, shouting "battle, battle!" The Germans asked and received a promise of double pay, and their group led the assault through the San Vito gate, the very one that was supposed to be given to the Florentines. The other knights and people followed close behind them.

When those in the Florentine army who were waiting for the gate to be surrendered saw that the Germans, other knights, and the people of Siena were all coming out toward them looking very warlike, they were surprised and rather dismayed at this sudden appearance and unforeseen attack. They were even more dismayed when many Ghibellines in their camp, knights and foot-soldiers alike, upon seeing the enemy forces, fled to the opposite side as they had so treacherously planned. Among these were the Pressa, the Abati, and many others. Nevertheless, the Florentines and their allies managed to draw up in battle order.

When the German troops violently collided with the Florentine knights at the point where the standard of the communal cavalry was being carried by Iacopo del Nacca of the house of Pazzi, a man of great valor, the traitor Bocca degli Abati, who was near Iacopo in his troop, struck him with his sword and cut off the hand with which he held the standard, after which he soon died. Seeing their standard fallen and themselves betrayed and strongly attacked by the Germans, the Florentine knights and people were soon routed.

Because the cavalry was the first group to become aware of the treason, only thirty-six of them were among the dead and captured. Most of the slaughter and captivity was sustained by the Florentine foot-soldiers and by the men of Lucca and Orvieto, who shut themselves up in the castle of Montaperti and were all taken. Over 2500 were left dead on the field and more than 1500 were captured, some of the best people in Florence, men from every house, as well as those of Lucca and the other allies. Thus the arrogance of the ungrateful and proud Florentine people was brought low. This was on a Tuesday, the fourth of September, in the year of Christ 1260, and the carroccio and bell called Martinella were left behind along with uncountable booty from the baggage of the Florentines and their allies. Thus ended the old people of Florence, which had exercised such great lordship and won so many victories over its ten-year period.

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When news of the grievous defeat reached Florence along with those who had escaped, there arose among men and women a wail of lament so powerful that it reached up to heaven, for there was no house in Florence, small or great, from which someone had not been killed or captured. ... The Guelf leaders were afraid the exiles would soon arrive from Siena with the Germans, and they knew that rebellious Ghibellines were already returning to the area. Thus the Guelfs, without being banished or chased out, went weeping from Florence along with their families and settled in Lucca. It was Thursday the thirteenth of September, in the year of Christ 1260.

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Just as the Florentine Guelfs left home, so did those of Prato, Pistoia, Volterra, San Miniato, San Gimignano, and many other places in Tuscany, all of which returned to the Ghibelline party. The one exception was Lucca, which remained Guelf for a while and became a refuge for Guelfs from Florence and for other Tuscan exiles. The Florentine Guelfs settled in the quarter around San Friano, and it was Florentines who made the loggia in

front of San Friano.

When the Florentines found themselves in that place, Tegghiaio Aldobrandi saw Spedito, who had insulted him in the council meeting, telling him he should check his pants. Tegghiaio stood up and took five hundred gold florins from his purse. He showed the money to Spedito, who had left Florence a poor man himself, and said to him reproachfully, "See how I've soiled my pants! You've led yourself, me, and all the others to this by your foolhardy and proud leadership." Spedito replied, "Tell me, why did you believe us then?" We have mentioned these petty and vile words as an example to show that no citizen, particularly a Popolano or a man of lesser status, should be too rash or presumptuous when he wields power.

At this time the Pisans, Sienese, Aretines, Count Giordano, and all the other Ghibelline leaders of Tuscany met at Empoli.. .. At this meeting all the neighboring cities, Count Guido, Count Alberto, those of Santafigiore, the Ubaldini and all the nearby barons agreed that, for the good of the Ghibelline party, the city of Florence should be completely demolished and reduced to an open village so that it would never again be renowned, famous or powerful. At that proposal the valiant and wise knight Farinata degli Uberti rose and spoke in opposition. In his speech he recalled two old proverbs: "The ass chews up his turnips as he knows how," and "the lame goat can go if the wolf doesn't meet him." Farinata combined these proverbs, saying, "As the ass knows how, so the lame goat goes; thus he chews up his turnips if the wolf doesn't meet him."

Then he added examples and comparisons to these vulgar proverbs in order to show how foolish it was to talk of this plan, as well as what great danger and damage would result from it. He said, finally, that even if there were no others with him, as long as he had life in his body he would defend Florence with sword in hand. When Count Giordano saw what sort of man Farinata was, noting his authority and great following, he recognized that the Ghibelline party would be torn apart by the plan and he abandoned it. Thus our city of Florence escaped fury, destruction and ruin through the action of a single good citizen; yet the people of Florence were ungrateful toward Farinata and his family, as we shall see later. Nevertheless, even if an ungrateful people fails to recognize his deed, we should nevertheless commend and perpetuate the memory of this noble and virtuous citizen who acted in the manner of Camillus, the good ancient Roman whose story is told by Valerius and Titus Livius.

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*Ghibelline domination lasted only as long as Manfred's ascendancy .In 1265, the papacy found a new ally, Charles of Anjou, brother of the king of France. In the spring of 1265 Charles arrived in Italy with a French army, and in February 1266 he encountered Manfred's army at Benevento. Manfred was killed and his army annihilated.*

*Thus the Guelfs returned to power in Florence, and the Ghibellines again found themselves in exile. By 1272, however, the pope was intervening to bring about a settlement between the two factions.*

In the year 1272, Gregory X.. . was crowned pope. A year after his coronation, the pope left Rome with his court in order to go to Lyons on the Rh(tm)ne River, where he had summoned a general council. On the way, he stopped in Florence with his cardinals, ... and they were honorably received by the Florentines. Because the water was handy, the air pure, and the papal court offered every convenience, the situation in Florence so pleased the pope that he decided to spend the summer there. When he found that such a fine city as Florence was being destroyed because of the parties, the Ghibellines now being in exile, he wished them to return to Florence and make peace with the Guelfs. And so it was done...



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*The 1272 settlement existed entirely on the level of theory. In fact, the Guelfs stayed in power and the Ghibellines stayed in exile. By 1278 another pope found himself pondering not only the unresolved Guelf-Ghibelline split but a series of feuds among Guelfs. The result was a new papal intervention which produced not only reconciliation but a new type of government.*

By that time (1278), since the great Guelfs of Florence were victoriously and honorably resting from their warfare with outside enemies and had fattened up on the goods of the exiled Ghibellines, their pride and envy led them to fight among themselves. Thus were born among the citizens of Florence a series of quarrels and hatreds which resulted in death or wounding. One of the greatest of these was the dissension between the Adimari, a great and powerful family, and the Tosinghi, Donati and Pazzi, all of whom were allied together against the Adimari in such a way that practically the entire city was divided, some holding with one side and some with the other. Because of this strife, the commune and the captains of the Guelf party sent ambassadors to Pope Nicholas III requesting his advice and aid in pacifying the Florentine Guelfs. Otherwise the Guelf party would split and one faction would drive the other out. In the same way, the Ghibelline exiles sent their ambassadors to the pope begging him to put into effect the peace treaty arranged by Pope Gregory X between them and the Florentine Guelfs. For these reasons the pope confirmed the treaty, appointing as legate and mediator Cardinal Latino, a man of great learning and authority, highly valued by the pope. When he received the pope's command the cardinal left the Romagna, where he was employed on church business, and on October 8 in the year of Christ 1278 he arrived in Florence with three hundred knights of the church. He was met with great honor by the Florentines and the clergy in procession, the carroccio and many jousts coming out to meet him.

On the day of Saint Luke the Evangelist, during the aforesaid year and month, the legate installed and blessed the first stone of the new church of Santa Maria Novella, built for the preaching friars of which he was a member. There he dealt with the matter of peace between Guelf and Guelf as well as Guelf and Ghibelline. The first item of business was a truce between the Uberti and the Buondelmonti - it was the third one between them - and it included all but the sons of Rinieri Zingane dei Buondelmonti, who, upon refusing their assent, were excommunicated by the legate and banished by the commune.

The peace was not lost on their account, however, for the legate favorably concluded it the following February when the entire people assembled in the old square in front of the aforementioned church. The square was covered with cloths and great wooden platforms on which were the cardinal, many bishops, prelates, clergy, monks, and the podestà, the captain of the people, all the councilors, and other officers of Florence. The legate delivered a fine sermon with many lovely authorities thoroughly fitting the occasion, for he was a wise and skillful preacher. When he had finished, representatives of the Guelfs and Ghibellines kissed one another on the mouth, thus joyfully making peace among all the citizens. There were 150 on each side. Then and there the legate announced the terms each side must observe, confirming the peace with solemn, duly authorized documents and proper guarantees. From that moment the Ghibellines could and did return to Florence with their families and were absolved from all banishment and condemnation. All the books of banishment and condemnation in the chamber were burned. These Ghibellines also received their possessions back, but to insure the security of the land it was ordained that some of the greater Ghibellines should have to remain within certain boundaries.

When the cardinal had finished with the Guelfs and Ghibellines, he made peace among individual families, starting with the greatest of all, that of the Adimari with the Tosinghi, Donati and Pazzi, arranging several weddings between the families. In similar fashion he settled all the feuds in Florence and throughout the

countryside, some by the will of the parties involved and others by command of the commune, sentence having been pronounced by the cardinal with solid sanctions and guarantees. The cardinal derived a great deal of honor from these peace treaties, almost all of which were maintained, for they allowed the city of Florence to remain in a peaceful, good and tranquil state for some time.

The legate decreed that the city should be governed by fourteen good men drawn both from the Grandi and from the Popolani. There were to be eight Guelfs and six Ghibellines. Their term of office was to be two months, and a means of election was established. They were to assemble in the house of the Badia of Florence, above the gate that goes to Santa Margherita, returning to their own homes to eat and sleep.

These things having been accomplished, Cardinal Latino returned with great honor to his duties in the Romagna...

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*The Guelf-Ghibelline honeymoon lasted for four years. In 1282 the dominant Guelfs excluded the Ghibellines and created a new type of government which was destined to have a long run in Florence, the priors. Note that the government was now based upon the guild system. The guilds which led the way were the Calimala or cloth-merchants' guild, the bankers' guild, and the Lana or wool- manufacturers' guild.*

In the year of Christ 1282, the city of Florence was governed by fourteen good men as the Cardinal Latino had ordained, with eight Guelfs and six Ghibellines. It seemed to the citizens that this government of fourteen was too big and confusing. Thus, in order to unify the many divided souls, but especially because the Guelfs did not like sharing power with the Ghibellines,... for the safety and health of the city the government of fourteen was abolished and a new one created. This one was called "the priors of the guilds." ...This innovation and movement began through the advice of the Calimala guild, which contained the wisest and most powerful citizens in Florence. . . The first priors were Bartolo di Messer Iacopo dei Bardi for the district of Oltrarno and for the Calimala guild; Rosso Bacherelli for the district of San Piero Scheraggio and for the money-changers' guild; and Salvi del Chiaro Girolami for the district of San Brancazio and for the Lana guild.

They began their term in mid-June of the same year and it lasted until mid-August, after which three new priors were supposed to take over every two months, representing the three greater guilds. They were to work, eat and sleep at communal expense in the house of the Badia, where the elders in the time of the First People and then later the fourteen used to meet. They were given six marshals and six messengers to summon the citizens. These priors, along with the captain of the people, had to settle the great and weighty matters of the commune, summoning councils and making regulations.

When two months had passed, the citizens approved of the arrangement and for the next two months appointed six priors, one for each district, adding to the three aforementioned guilds those of the doctors and pharmacists, the Porta Santa Maria guild, and the guild of furriers and leather-workers. Then gradually all the rest of the twelve major guilds were added. They were men of good deeds and reputation, Grandi and Popolani, artisans and merchants. This arrangement endured until the time of the Second People, which we will mention in due course. After that point the Grandi were excluded and a standard-bearer of justice added, and from time to time there were twelve priors as special needs or circumstances dictated, the priors being chosen from all twenty-one guilds, and even from those who were not themselves artisans as long as their ancestors had been such.

The new priors were chosen by the old ones and by the leaders of the twelve major guilds, along with certain

others who elected the priors for each district, casting secret ballots, with him who received the most votes becoming prior. This election took place in the church of San Piero Scheraggio with the captain of the people stationed next to the church in the houses belonging to the Tizzoni.

We have said a great deal about the beginning of this office of the priors because great changes occurred in the city of Florence through it, as we will explain later.

*In the Middle Ages, wealth and power were often expected to guarantee a degree of immunity from normal judicial procedures. (Perhaps this is always the case. The expectation was at any rate more blatant in the Middle Ages.) In 1292 the Florentines attempted to remedy this situation with the Ordinances of Justice, which placed certain legal restrictions on the grandi for the protection of the popolani.*

*The words grande (pl. grandi) and popolano (pl. popolani) are difficult to render in English. It is tempting to translate them "noble" and "commoner," but that is not quite what they mean. In the eyes of the Florentines, the grandi were that handful of people whose wealth and family connections gave them the power to oppress the rest of the population, the popolani. With the Ordinances of Justice, however, the word became a legal designation. Henceforth by branding certain families as grandi the government could neutralize their power by limiting their political rights.*

*The popolani were hardly a homogeneous group, however. Political power was now exercised by a small number of wealthy citizens whom Florentines rather picturesquely termed the popolo grasso, "the fat people." The lower orders of society, the popolo minuto or "little people," simply obeyed. Thus, from the perspective of the popolo minuto the grandi were not the only oppressors around.*

In the same year (1287), the podestà of Florence, Matteo da Fogliano di Reggio, had condemned to death for murder a great warrior and leader named Totto dei Mazinghi da Campi. As he was on his way to execution, Corso dei Donati and his followers tried to rescue him by force, but the podestà ordered that the great bell be sounded. Then all the good people of Florence armed and assembled at the palace, some on horseback and others on foot, crying "justice, justice!" By this means the podestà managed to carry out the sentence, and whereas the aforesaid Totto was originally supposed to be beheaded, he was dragged along the ground and then hanged. Those who had begun the uproar and impeded justice were fined.

In the year of Christ 1292, in the month of February, the city of Florence was great and powerful in every way, its citizens fat and rich. Because of excessive tranquillity which naturally engenders pride and novelty, the citizens were envious and arrogant toward one another. The result was a series of murders, woundings and other outrages, particularly by the nobles who were called Grandi, against the defenseless Popolani. In the city and in the countryside, they committed violence against other people's bodies and goods and took over other people's property.

Thus certain good men, artisans and merchants of Florence who wanted the good life, decided to end this pestilence. .. They promulgated certain very strong and weighty laws against powerful Grandi who perpetrated violence against Popolani, strengthening the common penalties in various ways. They enacted that one member of a Grandi family should be held accountable for all other members, that two witnesses should be sufficient to convict a malefactor, and that the communal accounts should be revised.

These laws they called the Ordinances of Justice. In order to preserve and execute them they ordained that, besides the six priors who governed the city, there should be a standard-bearer of justice from each district,

changing every two months as the priors did. When the great bell tolled, the people were to assemble in the church of San Piero Scheraggio and present the standard of justice, which had not been customary before. They also ordained that no priors should come from the houses of those nobles called Grandi.

The ensign and standard of the people was to be a white field with a red cross. One thousand citizens were elected, the total number being divided among the districts with standard-bearers for each ward and fifty foot-soldiers (each with hauberk and shield marked with a cross) for each standard. At any disorder or summons by the standard-bearer these citizens were to assemble at the house or palace of the priors and act against the Grandi. The number of foot-soldiers later grew to two thousand, then four thousand. A similar order of soldiers for the people, with the same ensign, was ordained for the countryside, and they were called "the leagues of the people."

The first standard-bearer was Baldo dei Ruffoli from the Porte del Duomo. In his time the standard went forth under arms to destroy the goods of a house called Galli of the Porta Santa Maria, because one of them had murdered a Popolano while in France.

This innovation by the people and resulting change in the state was very important to the city of Florence. It later had a substantial effect, both good and bad, upon the commune, as we shall see. This innovation by the people would have been prevented by the Grandi if there had not been so many quarrels and disagreements among them at that time, as in fact had been the case ever since the Guelfs returned to Florence. For there was great war between the Adimari and Tosinghi, between the Bardi and Mozzi, between the Gherardini and Manieri, between the Cavalcanti and Buondelmonti, between certain of the Buondelmonti and the Giandonati, between the Visdomini and Falconieri, between the Bostichi and Foraboschi, between the Foraboschi and Malispini, among the Frescobaldi themselves, and among the Donati themselves, as well as among many other houses.

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*At one point in his chronicle, Villani pauses to present an overview that has fascinated historians ever since. There is no reason to assume that Villani's figures are deadly accurate, but there is equally little reason to believe them wildly inaccurate.*

Since we have described the income and expenditure of the commune of Florence during this period (ca. 1338), it seems fitting to mention other important features of our city so that our successors in later times can be aware of any rise or decline in the condition and power of our city, and so that the wise and worthy citizens who rule in future times can advance its condition and power through the record and example of this chronicle. Careful investigation has established that at that time there were in Florence approximately 25,000 men capable of bearing arms, ages fifteen to seventy, all citizens, of which 1,500 were noble and powerful citizens required as Grandi to post the customary guarantees. There were then around seventy-five fully-equipped knights. We find of course that before the government of the "second people," which is still in power, there were more than 250 knights, but after the people began its rule the Grandi had neither the status nor the authority they formerly enjoyed.

We learn from the taxes collected at the gates that around 5,900,000 gallons of wine entered Florence yearly, and in times of abundance there would be around 1,120,000 gallons more.

The city required approximately 4,000 oxen and calves, 60,000 sheep, 20,000 goats and 30,000 pigs annually.

During the month of July 4,000 loads of melons came through the San Friano gate and were distributed throughout the city.

During this period the following offices in Florence, each of which administered justice and had the right to torture, were held by foreigners: The podestà; the captain and defender of the people and the guilds; the executor of the ordinances of justice; the captain of the guard or conservator of the people, who had more power than the others (though all four of the offices just mentioned could administer punishment); the judge handling civil justice and appeals; the judge in charge of taxes; the official concerned with female ornamentation; the official concerned with the merchants; the official concerned with the Lana guild; the ecclesiastical officials; the court of the bishop of Florence; the court of the bishop of Fiesole; the inquisitor; and other dignitaries of our city which should not be left unmentioned if those who come after us are to be properly informed. Within the walls, Florence was laid out and built up well, with many lovely houses. At that time construction went on continually and techniques were improved in order to make the buildings comfortable and luxurious. Examples of every sort of improvement were imported from abroad. Cathedrals, churches for friars of every order, and magnificent monasteries were built.

Beyond this, there was no citizen, Popolano or Grande, who had not built or was not building a large and rich estate in the countryside, with an expensive mansion and other buildings even better than those in the city. Each one of them was sinning in this respect, and they were considered mad for their inordinate expenditure. It was such a marvelous thing to see that most foreigners unfamiliar with Florence thought, when they came from abroad, that the sumptuous buildings and beautiful palaces occupying a three-mile area around the city were a part of the city itself, in the manner of Rome, to say nothing of the sumptuous palaces, towers, courts and walled gardens farther from the city, which would have been called castles in any other territory. In short, it was determined that, within a six-mile radius of Florence, there were more than twice the number of sumptuous and noble mansions found in Florence itself. And with this we have said enough about the situation in Florence.

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Translation by David Burr [olivi@mail.vt.edu]. See his [home page](#). He indicated that the translations are available for educational use. He intends to expand the number of translations, so keep a note of his home page.

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