IV. The Failure of Oligarchs, Despots, and Magnates the End of the Casual Regimen, 1340–1343

Published by

Becker, Marvin.
Florence in Transition: Volume One: The Decline of the Commune.
Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019.
Project MUSE. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/book.67860.

THE FAILURE OF OLIGARCHS, DESPOTS, AND MAGNATES: THE END OF THE CASUAL REGIMEN, 1340–1343

IV

The two legislative councils, that of the People and that of the Commune, displayed the staunchest economic conservatism. Consistently they opposed the principle of direct taxation and the assessment of special levies on the corporate guilds, the *Parte Guelfa,* and the Tuscan church. They were even reluctant to authorize the election of magistrates charged with enforcing existing fiscal regulations and challenged the very notion of direct levies on the countryside. They voted down modest levies by the signory on rural real estate and capital. Only after the measure was reintroduced grossly modified and subject to repeated compromise could it hope to win the necessary two-thirds majority.[1]

The members of the communal councils appeared bent upon embracing a variety of contradictory fiscal policies. They insisted, for example, that the citizenry be reimbursed for its forced loans and then proceed to block the necessary provisions drawn up to that end. Councilors expressed anxiety if returns from indirect levies were not employed to reduce the

[1] Rates of rural imposts had been much reduced since the late *dugento.* In fact there had been a pervasive shift away from direct taxation. As we have seen, by 1315 the guild patriciate translated their political victory into a tributary triumph when they abolished the *estimo* on the city. Cf. R. Davidsohn, *Forschungen zur Geschichte,* III, n. 1270; B. Barbadoro, *op. cit.,* p. 529. Moreover, by the 1330's direct taxes on rural property had dropped by as much as 50 per cent from its peak in the late *dugento.* The justly famous statistics presented in Book XI, Chapter 92, of Giovanni Villani's chronicle indicate that the *estimo* on the *contado* accounted for only 10 per cent of all communal revenue. Only in the next year (1339) these imposts were cut almost 35 per cent in response to worsening economic conditions. In an age of vastly expanded communal budgets, the percentage decline of revenues from direct taxes in relationship to the total budget is even more striking. On the general theme of indirect taxes in Tuscany and the increased reliance upon the gabelle, see D. Herlihy, *Pisa in the Early Renaissance* (New Haven: 1958), pp. 69–88; E. Fiumi, "L'Imposta diretta nei comuni medioevali della Toscana," *Studi in onore di Armando Sapori* (Milan: 1957), I, 329–39; E. Cristiani, *Nobiltà e Popolo nel comune di Pisa* (Naples: 1962), pp. 185 ff.; G. Volpe, "Pisa, Firenze, Impero al principio del 1300 e gli inizi della signoria civile a Pisa," *Studi storici,* XI (1902), 177 ff.

communal indebtedness and at the same time sought to rescind these imposts. Speakers were magnanimous with advice—let the government live within its means by collecting all outstanding obligations—then the councils would vote legislation to garner the optimum of revenue from communal properties. But any effort to raise the rentals on these properties was certain to evoke a torrent of opposition. Councilors would object to concluding a peace with their vile neighbor Pisa but were equally loath to vote war taxes or even approve the hire of the necessary troops and captains.[2]

As long as Florence basked in radiant prosperity a consensus existed between signory and councils: the former would demand little and the latter give less. The regimen must be casual and involve an absolute minimum of citizen sacrifice. Judging from the treasury records, the rule of the oligarchs was so lackadaisical as to border on a kind of patriarchal permissiveness—almost an anarchy. Imposts on the *contado,* assessments on rural parishes, levies for castle guard and cart service, remained unpaid for a decade or more. Roads and bridges were in disrepair, syndics and rectors of corporate bodies failed to appear before revenue tribunals, and the activities of the judiciary were quixotic if not downright capricious. Heavy fines were imposed, only to have the sentence canceled upon payment of the merest pittance.[3] Indeed, few of the patriciate had reason to complain; nor was this happy condition to be duplicated over the next generations.[4]

[2] For opposition in the communal councils to the payment of the Captain of the Lombard League, see *LF,* XVII, f. 175 (Dec. 9, 1334). For expressions of disaffection for proposals designed to raise revenue for the hire of troops or even the election of revenue officials, see *ibid.,* XIX, f. 36 (Oct. 22, 1340); f. 88 (Oct. 23, 1340), f. 95 (Nov. 11, 1340); f. 116r (Jan. 10, 1341). For antithetical opinions on the subject of forced loans, see *ibid.,* XVI, Part I, fols. 33, 51–57. Throughout the decade of the thirties disconsolate citizens were petitioning for reimbursement on that series of *prestanze* imposed on merchants, guilds, and private individuals by Charles of Calabria. Cf. *Ibid.,* f. 33r; *P,* XXVI, f. 157.

Later in the century we observe persistent discontent among advisers to the signory with any imposts or *prestanze* except those which weighed heaviest on the poorer classes. If an unpopular tribute measure were proposed, the signory was instructed by its advisers to look towards the "union of the citizenry." Cf. *CP,* I, Part 1, fols. 22–23 (July 30, 1351); *ibid.,* f. 78 (Oct. 20, 1354). By the decade of the sixties these same advisers were verbalizing the stern doctrine that either the signory should make peace or look to the provision of revenue. This was no easy task, since the communal councils were reluctant to approve direct levies of any kind. Cf. *Ibid.,* IV, f. 94r; *ibid.,* V, f. 116r.

[3] For the lax, easy regimen of the *contado,* see especially *CA,* CCXXII, Parts 2 and 4. Dispensation was regularly granted for all matter of violation of communal statutes, from illegally occupying public properties, to harboring the most dangerous of outlaws. Cf. particularly *ibid.,* Part 2, f. 8; Part 3, fols. 29, 32r–42.

[4] Well might the Florentines have emulated Gladstone's budgetary speech hailing his countrymen on the "intoxicating augmentation of their wealth and power."

Signory and councils demonstrated a startling capacity to co-operate in heated pursuit of a do-nothing policy. Unfortunately, circumstances and events conspired to undermine the last pleasant and restful tenure the Florentine oligarchs were to enjoy for the balance of the century. There were portents of the disasters soon to follow. Business profits during the 1330's were not especially impressive; the two largest banking houses in Florence, the Bardi and Peruzzi, did not show substantial gains. In fact, the latter suffered a sizable decrease in capital. When Edward III of England defaulted on his debts to the houses of Bardi and Peruzzi, obligations of as much as 800,000 florins were repudiated.[5] Such a grand sum was equal to more than twice the commune's annual revenue from all taxes. Moreover, by the end of the thirties there was a desperate shortage of capital in the city.[6] Beginning in 1338 and until late 1346 a wave of bankruptcies inundated the great and the petty entrepreneurs. At almost each session of the communal councils, disgruntled creditors presented petitions for collection of their claims, and the signory was obligated to appoint syndics to manage the assets of the hard-pressed firms and to make settlement with the creditors. Soon some three hundred manufacturers, bankers, and businessmen were declared bankrupt. The once sanguine Giovanni Villani despaired; never in the annals of the commune, he morosely intoned, was there evidence of a disaster of such magnitude. He felt they could be understood only as a judgment of Divine Providence. Unhappily this tragedy was compounded by those most deadly and omnipresent medieval antagonists—plague and famine. Both were to strike in the fateful year 1340.[7]

Meanwhile the commune was confronted with a myriad of problems related to the protracted war over Lucca. If money was to be obtained for the hire of troops it would be necessary to boost the already inflated interest rates on short-term war loans. The dearth of capital likewise made *prestanze* more difficult to collect; further, the number of individuals or companies willing to advance money on the surety of future tax levies was alarmingly small. Communal income from indirect taxation had long been assigned for the payment of interest on outstanding government loans. By the end of 1338 all gabelles and other treasury income (*entrata*) had been pledged to the creditors of the republic for the next six years.

[5] A. Sapori, *La crisi delle compagnie*, pp. 105 ff.; R. Davidsohn, *Geschichte von Florenz*, IV, Part 2, p. 208.
[6] A. Sapori, *op. cit.*, p. 113, and *Studi di storia economica*, I, 109.
[7] He lamented, "No lord or tyrant or commune can have faith in *potenza umana*," so terrible were the evils besetting the polis. *Cronica*, XI, 77. Cf. also XI, 78, 95, 118.

The effect of such an ill-advised policy was only too apparent: the *camera* was stripped of all her staple sources of income.[8]

Even at the height of Florentine prosperity (1336–38) the total income of the *camera* had been barely sufficient to meet the ever-mounting budget. Earlier the armies of Florence had been drawn in part from her domains; campaigns of short duration were frequently waged within sight of her ramparts. In the late thirties mercenaries and alliance systems entailed exorbitant outlays, causing the public debt to increase over 100 per cent in less than a decade. Well in excess of the total annual revenue of the commune, it soon equaled two years' revenue and then three. Villani tells us that the basic outlay for troops averaged 140,000 florins for the years between 1336 and 1338. As a bitter afterthought he adds that this figure does not include the pay for the numerous mercenaries engaged to fight the disastrous campaigns in Lombardy.[9] Nor did it take into account the heavy expenditure for castle guard, weapon maintenance, the repair of fortifications, or those hardy budgetary perennials, subsidies to the Guelf allies, the Pope, and the Angevin King of Naples.

The medieval system of gabelles or indirect levies was totally inadequate to sustain both the commune's extensive treaty commitments and staggering military disbursements. Furthermore, income from these gabelles began to decline alarmingly in 1338–39. If we rely upon gabelle yields to construct a general picture of the Florentine economy, the year 1338 marks the terminus of a lengthy era of buoyant expansion. Yet the economy remained viable and after 1343–44 even demonstrated an astounding measure of resiliency.

Starting in 1338 and lasting well into the year 1343 the dearth of communal income from the gabelles became more severe. Revenue from the single most important source, the customs toll, had reached 90,200 florins by 1336–38; when it was put up for sale for the next biennium on December 30, 1337, it brought only 83,500 florins. Even more discouraging, the publicans who farmed it were compelled to default on their commitment to the treasury, acknowledging in their petition for relief from the unpaid balance that returns fell far short of that figure. For sale again in

[8] G. Villani, XI, 90; A Sapori, "La gabella delle porte di Firenze," *Miscellanea in onore di Roberto Cessi* (Rome: 1958), I, 321–48; E. Fiumi, "Fioritura e decadenza dell'economia fiorentina," *Archivio Storico Italiano,* 354–55.

[9] Income from the gabelles on wine and salt, as well as the customs toll and the *estimo* were pledged for the hire of troops. Cf. G. Villani, XI, 91–92. Cf. also G. Villani, XI, 50; Stefani, rub. 520. These outlays were but modest portents of things to come. By 1341 the *camera* was spending 30,000 florins a month for the conduct of the war against Pisa. Cf. G. Villani, XII, 130; A. Sapori, *La crisi,* p. 114.

1339, it yielded even less—only 76,000 florins. So disappointed were the communal councils at this paltry sum that twice they voted against confirmation of the sale of this gabelle to the tax farmers. Only after the signory presented the measure a third time did the council finally approve. Meanwhile, buyers twice petitioned the councils for a reduction in the contracted price of the levy. By April of 1339, despite these reductions, the buyers were already well in arrears on their payments to the *camera*. As we shall see, this toll struck its nadir in 1342 and then began its ascent.[10]

The city's second most lucrative gabelle was the tax on the sale of wine, averaging 58,000 florins during the prosperous biennium 1336–38. It dropped only slightly in the following year, but by December of 1342 it had declined more than one-third in value. Petitions from vintners describe graphically the plight of this guild, reduced to pauperage because of the wars, famines, and pestilence that had prevented proper cultivation and transport of their product. Now they tearfully petitioned the signory for redress—or at least temporary remission from their economic plight.[11]

The returns from the gabelle on contracts, imposed on notarized documents from land transfers to contracts of business partnerships, display an even more dramatic fluctuation during these critical years. In the biennium 1336–38 the treasury had collected 20,000 florins annually but within four years was garnering only one-third of this amount. The impost on salt stood at 14,450 florins per year for 1336–38; by 1342 it reached only 4,679 florins. The buyers of the meat gabelle in the city were forced repeatedly to default on payments to the treasury, and finally the tax was drastically reduced by action of the signory. The levy on the slaughter of cattle in the countryside declined some 50 per cent over these years. It was becoming increasingly difficult for the signory to find buyers for the gabelles on flour mills, fulling mills, Arno fisheries, and oil presses. Comparable patterns of steep decline were also recorded by the many other communal gabelles; judging from the behavior of these crucial indicators of communal well-being, we can conclude that the years between 1338 and 1342 were indeed bleak ones for the Florentine *camera* as well as for the business community.[12]

[10] *CapP,* XII, f. 272r (Dec. 30, 1337); *LF,* XVIII, f. 89 (Jan. 19, 1339).

[11] *CapP,* XII, f. 282r (Feb. 3, 1338); *CCE,* VI, fols. 51, 53r; VIII, fols. 3r, 34; IX, f. 39r; X, f. 97; *Balie,* II, fols. 78 ff.

[12] For returns on the salt gabelle, see G. Villani, XI, 92; *CCE,* I bis; VI, f. 44. It is interesting to note that in 1334 tbis tax yielded the commune just under 13,000 florins; its peak, then, was in the biennium 1336–38. Cf. *P,* XXVI, f. 44r, for the 1334 figure. For returns on the gabelle on contracts, see G. Villani, XI, 92; *CCE,* I bis; *Capitoli,* XVIII, f.

The decline in public revenues is but one of many indices that help determine the locus of the darkest moments of communal depression. Chronic warfare had left its bloody mark on the countryside; soon marauding companies invaded and the carnage and horror intensified. The plaintive cry was raised by rural communes and parishes to scale down their tax liability. During the reign of Charles of Calabria (1325–28) this liability was reckoned at 250,000 lire. Less than a decade later it stood at 200,000 lire and in the fateful interval 1338–39 was reduced to 150,000 lire. Rustics alleged that small landholders were losing their farms to Florentine laymen and clergy bent upon enlarging their agrarian patrimony at the expense of the *contadini.* The situation for the men of the *contado,* lamented the syndics, had become intolerable; many peasants had abandoned their lands and emigrated to the city. If a decline of 40 per cent in the tax liability of the *contado* over a period of 12 years is indicative of the rural prosperity, the late thirties were a nadir in rural well-being. The multiplication of dolorous pleas by the *contadini* for relief and even charity is the bitterest commentary upon the ravages of warfare and the attendant dislocation of the poor.[13]

Because the signory found it extremely difficult to farm out Florentine taxes to citizen buyers, special governmental commissions were established to supervise their daily collection. So many purchasers of the gabelles had defaulted and so few were willing to venture fresh capital in what appeared with every passing day a riskier enterprise, that the signory was left with no alternative. The treasury could therefore no longer expect to enjoy the money advanced by the tax farmers in the fiscal year before the gabelles fell due.

The crisis deepened when minor guilds and minor guildsmen announced that they were unable either to honor their tax commitments to the *camera* or underwrite new *prestanze.* Instead, they tearfully exhorted the signory to be merciful and reduce their indebtedness. Syndics of towns in the Florentine domain railed against evil times, decried the scourge of war and the failure of crops, and pleaded for a prorogation of taxes. From tiny communities like Laterina to the large-walled town of Arezzo flowed a relentless stream of petitions for a redress of grievances; again it was the

28. For figures on the impost on cattle in the *contado,* see G. Villani, XI, 92; *Balie,* II, fols. 182–83. For instances of default and bankruptcy by purchasers of communal gabelles from 1338 through 1343 see *CCE,* I bis, fols. 157r–158r, 187r, 219, 316; *Balie,* II, fols. 25–26.

[13] G. Villani, XI, 92; *CapP,* XII, f. 211r; B. Barbadoro, *op. cit.,* p. 201. For added material on rural rates, see *LF,* XVII, f. 195 (Jan. 28, 1340).

damages wrought by war and the dislocation of the times which prompted them. Vintners announced to the signory that the sale of their precious commodity had fallen so low that the communal tax would have to be cut by one-third or one-half. Butchers and grocers made dire prophecies for the future if the signory did not intervene and see that communal imposts were drastically curtailed.[14]

By 1341 it had become apparent that unless the fiscal structure of the republic were altered radically, the commune would soon be confronted with bankruptcy. In fact by January of 1341 the government announced to the communal councils that revenues from indirect taxes were no longer adequate to finance military ventures. The treasury regularly suspended payment of interest on the mounting communal debt. By 1342 this debt had climbed to the alarming figure of 800,000 florins. With rates inching above 15 per cent, the outlay for interest payments alone would be a crippling 120,000.[15]

Although confronted with seemingly insoluble economic problems, the regime was unwilling to jettison her costly schemes for gaining that valuable prize—Lucca. Mastino della Scala, Lord of Verona and ruler of Lucca, had accepted a Florentine bid of 250,000 florins for title to the city, but nearby Pisa felt threatened. In order to possess the prize, the Florentines must war against Pisa. Moreover, Florentines were certain the roads to the north across the Apeninnes, so essential to their commerce, would be threatened should Lucca fall to Pisa. Equally disturbing, the ports of the west Italian littoral would be closed to Florentine shipping.

Once it had agreed to the stipulation of Mastino, the republic found its debt increased by another quarter of a million florins. Unhappily for the cherished ambitions of the city, the Pisans now allied with the powerful Visconti of Milan in a supreme effort to deprive Florence of Lucca. A new and even costlier conflict ensued. Florentine revenues, meanwhile, had been further depleted. The total for September–October of 1340 was

[14] For petitions of Laterina and Arezzo, see *Balie,* II, fols. 82, 175–176. On pleas of vintners and other *minori,* see *DP,* III, f. 9r; *Balie,* II, fols. 3–4. See also the request for government assistance by the men of the great *Calimala* guild in late January of 1342. They complained bitterly because protracted hostilities had made it impossible for them to import certain raw materials necessary for cloth finishing. Cf. *P,* XXXI, f. 64 (Jan. 31, 1342).

[15] It was becoming necessary to borrow at usurious rates, sometimes as high as 20 per cent. Cf. *Balie,* II, fols. 3–4 (Oct. 2, 1342). The problems of the treasury were further compounded since buyers for communal imposts (tax farmers) made offers that were "neither just nor suitable." The treasury, therefore, could not avail itself of the anticipated annual revenue, but was obligated to subsist on daily collections. Cf. *P,* XXXI, f. 31r (Nov. 20, 1341).

only 70,000 lire; one had to go back to the slack period of January–February, 1327, to discover a comparable low. Only one September–October interval in communal history had shown lower treasury receipts, that of 1317. The 70,000 lire were a full 60 per cent below the average registered for those two active months of early fall.[16]

The cash receipts of the treasury were soon reduced to a trifling sum, and in 1342 the commune was obligated to declare a moratorium on all public debts. The effect of this step was to freeze a substantial portion of the assets of the great banking houses that had invested so heavily in *prestanze*. To add to their woes, the King of France took severe reprisals against their branches in his territories. News of the calamities suffered by the private and public sectors of the economy was bruited abroad, and foreign depositors, both lay and ecclesiastical, demanded immediate restitution. Giovanni Villani's "two columns of Florentine prosperity," the Bardi and Peruzzi, tottered. Land, that great medium of exchange and storehouse of worth in the medieval economy, rapidly lost value. Always crucial to the Florentine entrepreneurial system, in which loans backed by real estate could be made at lower interest rates, the drop in land values served both to deflate the economy and boost interest rates. The Acciaiuoli, Antellesi, Bardi, Buonaccorsi, Castellani, Cocchi, Corsini, Peruzzi, Uzzano, and others were forced to sell extensive property in the city and *contado* at a severe loss.[17]

I

Only in times of prosperity had the signory been able to steer a relaxed course between the Scylla of the council's intransigence and the Charybdis of minimal communal fiscal needs. Since the signory alone could propose legislation, the initiative, however limited, was theirs. As we have seen, its members were also the principal creditors of the commune. They were more experienced in political and economic matters than communal councilors and more selectively chosen for their posts; was it not fair to expect from them a greater awareness of communal problems? Unlike the communal councils, the signory could meet in closed session, directing discussion toward the framing of legislation alone rather than toward the plaudits of an audience.

Until the onset of crisis the rapport between council and signory was

[16] *Diplomatico,* Adespote (Dec. 8, 1340).

[17] A. Sapori, *La crisi delle compagnie,* pp. 128 ff.; G. Villani, XI, 88, 98. Perhaps the best indicator of deteriorating economic conditions is the sharp fall in the value of the florin. Cf. *P,* CCXVI, f. 163; *CCE,* I bis, f. 33r. It tumbled from an exchange rate of three lire,, eighteen soldi, to three lire, five soldi, ten denari.

marred only by occasional bickering. The former might refuse to authorize payment to an ambassador or reject a provision concerning the election of a *Podestà* or a Captain of the People. If the council opposed long-term appointments of officials for the hire of troops, for example, the signory, after much skirmishing and maneuvering, might cut its request for a tenure of six months down to a month or two. The councils might become obstreperous or irresponsible: in time of famine they were known to refuse to confirm requests for loans to make grain purchases or hire officials to dispense bread. Seldom would they willingly assent to bestow power on a communal magistrate for any reason. Regularly they expressed concern lest the signory use revenues earmarked for warfare for any other purpose; under no circumstances were they to be diverted to provide interest to communal creditors, and yet the terms of the *prestanze* had to be met.[18]

In essentials, however, there was accord between signory and councils, with the former trying to operate within the not too spacious framework of the existing revenue system. When additional monies had to be found, a tax on bread or grain, which weighed heaviest on the city's poor, was enacted with full approval of the councils. If this proved inadequate the rate of the salt levy might be augmented or the fees of the pawnbrokers' cartel for plying their "reprehensible trade" might be collected biannually instead of annually. When the *camera* was especially hard-pressed, a forced loan might be exacted from the *scioperati*. If a *prestanza* was decreed, the signory would specify the communal gabelles to be pledged for its restitution. Further, the signory would permit the communal councils to serve as courts of law where criminal charges against certain high-born Florentines might be dismissed by their vote. The signory made only the most modest efforts to enforce the rule of law, limiting itself to an occasional provision overwhelmingly approved by the councils, treating such questions as the right to bear arms or the size and shape of particular weapons.[19]

[18] *LF,* XVI, Part 1, fols. 34, 98. Further, there were strenuous objections to the payment of excessive interest upon what were in fact short-term war loans. *Ibid.,* XVII, f. 14r. Dissatisfaction was intensified since the *camera* was unable to make interest payments on *prestanze* imposed as far back as 1326 for the war against Castruccio. *P,* XXVI, f. 157.

[19] The signory continued to display its habitual preferences for those durable elements of the gentle paideia—government by exhortation and admonition. *Ibid.,* XXV, f. 90r; *LF,* XVI, Part 2, f. 67r; XIV, f. 41. For additional instances of grants of judicial dispensation during this period, see *GA,* CCXXII, Part 3, fols. 5r, 50, 56. A Donati, one of the leading magnates, was fined 2,000 lire for assaulting a *popolano;* he paid 10 lire for dispensation from the verdict. A noble from the house of Pazzi paid 125 lire for dispensation from an identical charge. *Ibid.,* f. 18. A *popolano* condemned for assault against a Rossi magnate had his plea for dispensation rejected.

In 1338 the harmony between these two bodies gave way to the cacophony of a new era. The signory had displayed talent for little beyond an *ad hoc* concept of government. When crisis ensued, the communal councils again demonstrated an alarming but predictable inability to respond to the new and unaccustomed leadership provided by the signory. They continued to vote down the approval of magistrates, delay furnishing stipends for ambassadors, opt for shorter terms for key officials of the republic, and piously exhort the *camera* to live within its means at a time when the treasury balance was pitiful. When the signory proposed that a foreign judge be hired to put some semblance of order into the present disarray of public holdings and properties, the Council of the Commune pre-emptorily vetoed the measure. Even more vexing was the Council's tactic of voting down the appointment of special officials to collect communal imposts on the countryside. Measures to garner revenue from the subject domains were similarly weakened.[20]

By June of 1340 the gap between signory and councils was well on the way to assuming the monumental and discouraging proportions of an abyss. Over the next months the councils acted to reject virtually every crucial revenue measure proposed by the signory. On June 8 a *prestanza* was vetoed in the Council of the Commune; the next month the same *prestanza* much reduced was again proffered and this time managed to garner sufficient votes for passage. Soon after, the councils, with their customary intransigence, hindered the enactment of measures to collect added revenue from communal property. September saw them refusing to authorize payment for the troops of the republic. In the following month two crucial proposals were offered. One concerned the establishment of a special commission for directing communal finances, and the other dealt with the extension of the prerogatives of the Captain of War. The first finally passed the Council of the Commune, much modified, after being rejected several times. The second was enacted only after the signory reassured the Council that the Captain was to have no more horses, troops, salary, or power than his predecessor.[21]

[20] Perhaps a document of Mar. 7, 1330, epitomizes both the sentiments of communal councilors and those charged with maneuvering proposals through these irritable communal legislative bodies. The signory called upon the councils to approve the appointment of "fourteen good men" authorized to raise revenue. The enabling act containing this proposal stated that these *boni viri* were to raise revenue "cum minori incommodo" to the citizens. Cf. *LF,* XIV, f. 54r. For other instances disclosing disaffection in the councils as well as attempts to placate, see *CapP,* XII, fols. 173, 218; *LF,* XIV, fols. 42, 51–54r, 106r; XV, f. 79; XVI, Part 1, fols. 27–33, 51–57; Part 2, fols. 61, 82r.

[21] *Ibid.,* XIX, fols. 29, 43, 63, 88, 113–113r; XVII, f. 47r. Among those to speak against the signory's proposals at this time were the very influential *popolani grassi,* Angelo Alberti and Niccolo Guicciardini.

The last part of the year was spent in an effort to extricate the *camera* from its financial bind. In December the signory initiated the intricate procedures that culminated in a bill authorizing the *estimo*. A provision requesting approval for this levy on city land and capital was presented to the Council of the People on January 30, 1341, and managed to eke through. The following day witnessed its defeat at the hands of the Council of the Commune. Again on January 12 this crucial piece of legislation was introduced, and again the Council of the Commune saw fit to vote it down. Finally, on January 13, 1341, it was approved, but only after it had been completely emasculated in the signory. The amended version contained the following statement: "Cum hac detractione, nulla exactio fieri possit vel debeat ad ipsum extimum nisi etiam reformatus fuit per consilium comunis Florentie." ("With this detraction, no tax can be or should be made on the basis of this *estimo* unless it has also been reformed by the Council of the Commune.") [22]

Thus could the Council of the Commune, with its extensive magnate representation, determine whether or not there was to be a levy on urban real estate and capital. Never over these years did the signory seek to win the Council's approval for the *estimo*. Perhaps there was a tinge of vindictiveness in the signory's announcement that creditors could hardly expect to receive interest because income from indirect taxes had to be committed to the conduct of the war. The *camera* reverted to the dubious practice of exacting forced loans, knowing full well that restitution must be banished to the realm of some fiscal Utopia.[23] Capital was short and therefore prorogations and reductions of individual *prestanze* were chronic. The *camera* attempted to float voluntary loans, asserting that income from unpledged gabelles would be used for amortization and payment of interest. Indeed, what unpledged gabelles? communal creditors may well have asked. Surely such fiscal rhetoric could have deceived no one.

II

The intractability of the councils and the failure of the signory to provide leadership had culminated in an impasse. Such a stalemate was intolerable, for Florence was confronted with a Pisa revived by support

[22] *Ibid.*, XVIII, fols. 74–76r; XIX, fols. 118–121r, 192r.
[23] Restitution on *prestanze* was suspended, and yet collection and even imposition of additional forced loans continued. *Ibid.*, XXI, fols. 46r, 52.

from a new ally, the Visconti of Milan. From March of 1341 until September of 1343 communal politics was toward ever-greater centralization of authority. The relaxed regimen of the oligarchy was undone by the crisis. The communal councils had failed to respond to the belated efforts of the signory, choosing to stand as mute guardians of a long tradition of ineffectual government. The signory tried to rule alone and then resorted to the time-honored remedy of despotism.

The signory made free use of the *balia* to deal with the councils. If an extraordinary commission with sweeping fiscal powers were appointed by the signory, there would be less need to have recourse to the councils. In March of 1341 just such a *balia* was proposed. The councils vetoed it on March 21st, 22nd, twice on the 24th, and on the 26th, 27th, and 28th—despite repeated exhortations for its enactment by such patrician luminaries as the knight Salvestro di Baroncelli, partner in the Peruzzi company, and several others. After these failures, the signory was compelled to prorogue again the collection of *prestanze* and even cut the assessment to the individual citizen by a third. Large blocks of communal property were placed on the market, but the returns were not impressive. The signory was obliged to announce to her erstwhile Guelf allies, the papacy and the Angevin King of Naples, that she could no longer make any contribution to the anti-Ghibelline war chest.[24]

In early autumn both the resistance of the communal councils and the communal armies had been crushed. Florentine forces were humiliated by the Pisans, and although Florence still held title to Lucca, her position was untenable. In July of the following year she relinquished her elusive prize to Pisa. Two councils acceded to the signory's request for government by *balia*. This time it was agreed that the *balie* were to hold almost dictatorial powers.

Concentrated in the hands of the newest and most powerful of all Florentine *balie,* The Twenty, was the full *imperium* over the conduct of foreign policy as well as absolute control over the public fisc. The framers of the provision establishing The Twenty were well aware that an act concentrating inordinate *auctoritas* in any citizen body was a violation of the spirit if not the letter of communal law. Therefore it was expressly stated that the founding of this *balia* was valid, prior statutory prohibitions notwithstanding. Over the next years the council continued to function, but it limited itself to discussing the night watch or the maintenance of bridges and roads instead of vetoing communal tax

[24] *Missive,* V, fols. 94–98.

measures. Upon occasion they harassed rulers with demands that certain rectors be syndicated, but the initiative had passed from their hands.[25]

To understand the inability of the councils to respond to the demands imposed by history on the beleaguered polis of late 1339 to early 1340, one must recognize the compelling force of communal culture which produced this failure. Communal society was pluralistic, without a true center of political gravity, and the various social orders, corporate bodies, religious confraternities, pious foundations, the *Parte Guelfa,* and a host of other groups were bent upon retaining their ancient liberties and immunities. Thus the term, "obstructionist," implies a more intense and immediate response to that bedazzling array of ancient loyalties—caste, clan, guild, neighborhood—instead of to that most abstract sometimes imperceptible entity—the commune. Obstructionism can then be understood as a defense of these sacred medieval liberties largely responsible for giving identity to the individual and color and tone to society.

It is necessary to appreciate another, less-explored aspect of the Florentien psyche—its apprehensiveness in the face of any threat to the time-honored codes of behavior. Whenever the signory installed a series of special magistrates, they were criticized in both the council hall and in the pages of the communal chronicles. If one were to read only the chronicles or the minutes of council meetings, one would conclude that these magistrates were created by the signory to persecute a law-abiding and humble citizenry. Were they not a device whereby a self-seeking signory was able to perpetuate itself in power by rewarding its partisans and punishing its foes? Under the guise of ministering to the "good of the commonwealth" (*bene del comune*), such appointments always produced a "dolorous outcome" (*dolorosa uscita*). Let the future generations know, laments Villani, that from such magistrates is born only a "tirannica signoria." The word "tyranny" is employed here in its medieval sense: men can never be free when they are governed by "ufficiali arbitrari" who do "cose arbitrarie," for *libertà* is possible only under the rule of reason. Magistrates are tyrants because they act "senza ordine di ragione. . . ."[26]

If one consults the records of the Florentine tribunals a somewhat different perspective emerges. The activities of the magistrates appear neither elegantly evil nor spectacular, as Giovanni Villani ominously suggests. On the contrary, their behavior day in day out over their tenure is

[25] The last *prestanza* to be strenuously challenged was proffered by the signory to the communal councils in May of 1341. Cf. *LF,* XVIII, f. 55r. For the enabling act establishing the rule of the "Venti," see *P,* XXXI, fols. 7–9, 31; *LF,* XXI, f. 25r.
[26] G. Villani, XI, 74.

strikingly pedestrian. They apprehended dice players or imprisoned rowdies for performing dangerous athletic feats or playing violent games in the crowded, narrow streets of the city. They seized Florentines bearing long knives and concealing daggers and imposed cruel fines upon them. They tried to bring to justice citizens who had failed to pay the salt tax or the wine gabelle or who took advantage of their ancient right to attack bailiffs of the Florentine courts. Perhaps the principal concern of the "tyrannous magistrates" involved the maintenance of some semblance of law and order in the more remote territories of Tuscany. They might tyrannize over a magnate who had deprived a peasant woman of certain small land holdings or prevented a *contadino* from collecting his shares of the wheat harvest. Or they might prosecute nobles who harbored banished kinsmen or outlaw friends in the farther reaches of the *contado*. At the same time that Giovanni Villani marshaled evidence to discredit the magistrate, he was compelled to pay tribute to his effectiveness, for when a magistrate prosecuted a clan who had aided and abetted their exiled consorts, the many *popolani* and *grandi* engaging in this familiar practice became frightened and urged their consorts to flee Florentine territory.[27]

Well-born and affluent citizens betrayed a consuming suspicion if not relentless hatred for public officials who sought to enforce communal law. Nevertheless these citizens were passionate, almost religious, in their advocacy of the peaceful and well-ordered polis. Certainly the walls of the many town halls of Tuscany with their frescoes vividly portraying the glories of *buon governo* bespoke this communal paideia. In such a well-ordered universe no man would strive to rise above his neighbor; all would be "companions" and none covet the evil role of "signore" (lord). Only too dramatically would recent history furnish even the most politically unsophisticated onlooker with painful evidence of civic tragedy. Such tragedy had been unleashed by an overproud and ambitious magnate, or a politically adroit lower guildsman, or even by a high-minded but intolerant patrician. Civil war had been the consequence of Corso Donati's desire to play the grand "signore" and not the "companion."[28]

[27] For instances of the drab character of the law-enforcement efforts of such despicable and menacing magistrates, see *CCE,* I bis, fols. 154–58, 170r–82, 207r–13. Cf. also G. Villani, XI, 39.

[28] Especially objectionable to the chronicler Dino Compagni was the *superbia* of Corso. The crowd hailed him as he passed through the city streets shouting, "Long live the Baron!" The scandalized chronicler opined that "it seemed as if the city belonged to him." It is hardly surprising that the author was to cast his fascinating villain in the likeness of Catiline, although he was even "more pitiless than the Roman traitor." Cf. also D. Velluti, *op. cit.,* p. 33. The chronicler, Stefani, was to use the word "companion" to describe those who were willing to share public office with marked humility. *Cronica,* rub. 588.

The butcher Dino Pecora had played demagogue, and the consequences were blood feud, vendetta, and even civil war. But the most persuasive example was the sorrowful fate that befell the noble Giano della Bella and his ambitious popular signory. Villani etches the lesson into the sensitive, somewhat overwrought, political mind of his fellow citizens:

> And note that this is a great example to those citizens which are to come, to beware of desiring to be lords over their fellow citizens or too ambitious; but to be content with the common citizenship. For the very men which had aided him to rise, through envy betrayed him and plotted to abase him; and it has been seen and experienced truly in Florence in ancient and modern times, that whosoever has become leader of the people and of the masses has been cast down; forasmuch as the ungrateful people never give men their due reward. From this event arose great disturbance and change amongst the people and in the city of Florence. . . .[29]

The communal paideia was, then, deeply antipathetic to any manifestation of political individualism or, as a corollary, to the stringent enforcement of law.

In September of 1337, the law-abiding Villani criticized the magistracy of the Captain of the Custody and, by implication, of the signory for arraigning several magnates from the Della Tosa family on a charge of treason. He contended that the magnates were acting in the interests of the republic when they initiated diplomatic negotiations with Mastino della Scala, lord of Verona. This they may have done, but as private agents, since the court records contend that these negotiations were in fact disturbing the "societatum amicitiam et concordiam" between Florence and her new ally, Venice. We shall not be able to decide the matter of Della Tosa guilt or innocence, but certainly Villani was always ready to interpret the motives of the Florentine magistracy in the worst possible light.

An even more striking instance was his reaction to the new official, the Captain of the Guard and Conservator of Peace. When this officer sentenced a scion of the magnate Buondelmonti clan to be decapitated for serving a foreign power hostile to the Arno republic, the chronicler could not claim that the magnate was innocent. Instead he lectured upon the dangers of tyranny and concluded that Buondelmonti should not have been condemned since he committed no offense against any particular Florentine citizen. To this feeble defense was appended one of his favorite political aphorisms, intended as a warning to those who ruled the city:

[29] G. Villani, VIII, 8. For the justly renowned portrait of Dino Pecora, see Dino Compagni, I, 18.

Whoever offends one must threaten many. Shortly thereafter, in discussing a murder committed by a Tuscan feudatory, he produced a variety of technicalities and legal niceties to prove that the magistrates did not have jurisdiction. It is not the truth or falsity of Villani's claims but his hypersensitivity to any effort to enforce the law that strikes us. The actions of magistrates cause him to moralize about the dangers of spawning a tyrant; engaged in the most routine juridical procedure the magistrate threatens the *libertà* of the city.[30]

Chroniclers, literary men, and poets never tired of lauding the Scipio who went voluntarily into exile to spare his countrymen political embarrassment. Any citizen seeking to aggrandize himself threatens "la più cara cose che sia, libertà."[31] The polis will be enslaved if magistrates are encouraged to enforce the law. The chronicler and politician Dino Compagni was witness to just such an occurrence. He claims that the enemies of the patrician reformer Giano della Bella "stirred him up to do justice" against the lawyers and petty tradesmen engaging in monopolistic practices, thus turning public opinion against him as a reformer whose justice was no longer tempered with mercy and understanding. Giano's attempt

[30] *Villani had condemned the first of these special magistrates, Iacopo Gabbrielli, of Gubbio, because he had seized a certain Rosso Gherarduccio Buondelmonti, who had been sentenced for serving the Tolomei of Siena and not for an offense perpetrated against a Florentine citizen. The charge against this magnate, however, was quite specific: in* 1333 *he and a band of armed men had invaded and occupied Florentine territories. Upon conviction, the communal councils had acted in favor of a petition upon his behalf. Cf. G. Villani, XI,* 39; *LF, XVI, Part* 2, *f.* 4 *(Dec.* 12, 1334). *What bad occurred in November of the following year was that the despised magistrate had dared to enforce an old verdict of the Florentine courts against this scion of a noble house. For a record of proceedings against the Della Tosa, convicted of treasonous negotiations with the "tyrant" Mastino, see GA, CXXIII, f.* 48 *(Sept.* 20, 1337). *Donato Velluti in his Cronica, pp.* 183–87, *quite properly emphasizes the mundane character of the judicial role performed by these officials as they protect and administer the contado. Later documents stress the efforts of these men to collect back imposts, prosecute tax delinquents, and recover usurped communal properties. CCE, CLVII* (1373). *One of the striking characteristics of chroniclers of the first part of the trecento is the extreme view they took of communal magistrates. Never were the latter seen as members of a burgeoning communal bureaucracy but always cast in the role of hero or villain. By the late trecento, however, their actions were no longer the stuff of chronicles - yet their function was much the same. This change is symptomatic of a general acceptance by the individual citizen of the coercive power of the republic.*

[31] *Matteo Villani tells us that Niccolo Acciaiuoli was feared by his fellow citizens since he seemed to exercise an inordinate influence over the polis. Being a just and a wise man, he promised to exile himself from the city "like the good Scipio Africanus." Cronica, X,* 23. *Cf. also G. Boccaccio, Le Lettere, ed. F. Corazzini (Florence:* 1877), *p.* 72. *A leading humanist of this generation, Zanobi da Strada, composed a heroic poem about the illustrious figure of Scipio. Cf. P. Guidotti, "Un amico de! Petrarca de! Boccaccio, Zanobi da Strada," Archivio Storico Italiano, LXXXVIII* (1930), 249–93. *For a thorough analysis of the theme of "liberta," see N. Rubinstein, "Florence and the Despots," op. cit.,* 21–28.

"to do justice" was considered the first step in a drive to found a tyranny.[32]

Thus it was the sacred duty of the "bonus civis" to decry the absence of justice in the polis while at the same time launching the severest strictures against any regime that created machinery to implement the law. Was not such a signory but a veiled tyranny? The politically enfranchised Florentine of this period was profoundly oligarchical stressing above all loyalty to the rule of a cohesive coterie. The threat to this coterie and to his beloved native city always came from those who attempted to leave the patrician ranks and offer leadership. Most dangerous were demagogues like Giano della Bella or Andrea Strozzi, who turned to the lower orders in an effort to effect reform.[33]

Opposition to enforcement of law by the law-abiding elements was but one of many paradoxes that contributed to the political obstructionism of the thirties and forties. Still another was citizen reluctance to vote taxes. Matteo Villani, continuator of his brother's chronicle and himself highly expert in matters of communal finance, having been in charge of administering the funded public debt (*Monte*) for over a decade tells us that affluent Florentines simply did not believe that the imposition of taxes on urban real estate and capital was justifiable no matter how pressing the treasury's need.[34] Later, debates before the signory by financial advisers to the government suggest that such imposts were believed to be confiscatory and any regime imposing them overtly tyrannous. Not only was the commune expected to finance its many activities, from the waging of war to the cleaning of streets, with returns from indirect taxation—clearly an impossibility from the 1320's on, as the scope of the public sector widened—but it had somehow to sustain patrician confidence in the

[32] Dino Compagni, I, 14. On the statesman's *superbia,* see G. Villani, 8: [Giano] was presumptuous and desired to avenge his wrongs; and this he did sometimes against the Abati, his neighbors, with the arm of the commune, and perhaps for the said sins, he was by his own laws, wrongfully and without guilt judged by the unjust." For a beguiling use of the word "superbia," see the provision directed against the haughtiest of Tuscan nobles, the Ubaldini. Cf. *P,* XII, f. 206 (April 30, 1306): "Ad reprimendam superbiam Ubaldinorum provisum est quod fiant due terre, una videlicet in Mucello, alia vero ultra alpes, et homines qui in dictis terris habitaverint sint franchi ab omni vinculo sevitutis et fidelitatis. . . ."

[33] Dino Compagni reveals that during Giano della Bella's tenure, communal magistrates condemned magnates, not out of respect for the imperatives of justice but because they feared the wrath of *il popolo minuto.* Another contemporary chronicler, Paolino Pieri, observes, a bit sententiously, that it would have been better had Giano been able to achieve his objectives "per senno e non con rumore." Quoted by N. Ottokar in *Il Comune di Firenze,* p. 274. Cf. Stefani, rub. 555, 590, 594, 801.

[34] *Cronica,* IV, 83; VIII, 71. Cf. also Antonio Pucci, "Centiloquio," Canto XCL, in *Delizie degli Eruditi Toscani,* ed. I. di San Luigi (Florence: 1785), VI, 185–86.

public credit. For it was the patriciate that would have to make the loans to render the treasury solvent. Never, then, was the signory to give offense to the patriciate—and this meant there could be no revision of the tax system. Later, Matteo praises a signory for its competence in raising money "senza gravezza e offesa de' cittadini." Actually, the government had lost courage and converted an *estimo* into a *prestanza*—a property tax into an interest-bearing loan. Moreover, it had initiated the practice of permitting wealthy individuals to pay the tax assessments for the poor and convert these payments into interest-bearing loans. This led to a lucrative and brisk traffic purchasing the *prestanze* of less affluent citizens Subsequent governments were to initiate still other tributary devices such as converting a tax into a loan if the assessment was paid in full.[35]

There was always a conviction among the affluent that direct levies were confiscatory. City lands as well as capital were considered immune from impost. They were somehow quintessential elements of the persona, bestowing identity and status on the individual and his family. Numerous passages might be cited from the writing of *trecento* diarists and keepers of family memorials, each replete with uninspired counsels on the importance of money. They felt money to be the best, the truest, perhaps the only friend a man can ever hope to have. It was more important than kin, and without it one would be certain of being despised. If, then, the penniless had little identity and less happiness in the world of the polis, was one not justified in evading all tax burdens? Did not communal imposts eat into the patrimony and threaten the clan with extinction? Indeed, one should move from a ward of the city in which his wealth was known, to another in which it is not, solely for the purpose of tax evasion. Impress your neighbors with the modesty of your income. Bring produce from your farms in the countryside to your home at night so that prying neighbors will not know the extent of your prosperity.

Yet these diarists, keepers of family memorials, and chroniclers whose dreary catalogues of burgher maxims revealed the extent to which gen-

[35] The earliest instance of this practice appears to have occurred in 1355. Moreover, it was vigorously argued by two *maggiori,* Simone Antella and Luigi Aldo Brandini, that the *camera* should act effectively to sustain interest rates so that the government might be able to borrow without difficulty. *CP,* II, fols. 62r–63 (Apr. 1, 1355). When the republic was much in need of additional income, advisers to the signory advocated a non-interest bearing loan rather than any direct impost. *CP,* XI, 134 (Jan. 11, 1370). Meanwhile intense opposition continued against levying taxes on the greater guilds or upon wool and other commodities necessary for manufacture. Cf. *CP,* I, Part 1, f. 22 (July 3, 1351); XI, f. 56r (Sept. 22, 1372). There were of course certain Florentines, especially lower guildsmen, who not only favored the reduction of interest rates to government creditors but even sponsored the reimposition of direct taxation on urban real estate. Cf. the remarks of the tanner, Salvestro Lapi, *ibid.,* I, Part 2, f. 118r, and N. Rodolico, *I Ciompi* (Florence: 1945), pp. 193 ff.

erous impulse was silted by dark prudential anxieties, displayed the most startling inconsistencies. They were the very citizens who ceded the government thousands of florins of public credits between 1345 and 1348 "in the name of love for the city and to its glory."[36]

Unwilling to vote taxes, they could still be generous. If their memorials, diaries, and letters were filled with advice to the self-seeking, the ambitious, and even the rapacious, still they did not lose their pride in and love for the polis. The same diarist who conceived ingenious stratagems for avoiding taxes willingly sacrificed much of his patrimony and more of his time in the public cause. Arts and letters desperately seek inspiring historical examples of great civic passions, such as those of a Cato, a Scipio, or any one of a hundred who peopled the Italo-Roman pantheon. These exemplars of inspired public unselfishness were contrasted with the paltry mercenary present. It is precisely this hunger for heroes that inspired Dante, Boccaccio, and Giovanni Villani.

Extreme emotions begot their counters, and for many citizens it would be possible to draw up a dialectical catalogue that reads thusly: One of the principal pleasures in life is revenge, for indeed nothing is more delicious. / There is no joy greater than that of forgiving one's enemy. Or: Friendship is natural to men. / Put not your trust in any man. Perhaps the most widely entertained sentiment of educated Florentines was the medieval Aristotle postulate that man is by nature a political animal. Yet few generations of educated men demonstrated a capacity to understand man's proclivity for antisocial behavior. Surely Dante is spokesman for just such a generation of men; so, too, were Boccaccio, the artist Orcagna, and a score of others.[37]

[36] *Monte,* S. Giovanni (1347), fols. 863, 912.

[37] For a telling example of this ambiguity, see M. Meiss, *op. cit.,* pp. 74 ff., where he discusses Orcagna's involvement with the actuality of suffering, death, and evil in his Santa Croce cycle. Prudently, the art historian observes that Orcagna also painted an idyllic scene of the "vita contemplativa," which banishes both the idea of evil and the fear of death. The great fresco in the Campo Santo at Pisa presents a combination of idyllic scenes and horrors. Too frequently in Boccaccio scholarship, as V. Branca has incisively commented in his *Boccaccio Medievale,* there has been a tendency to forget that the gruesome description of the plague and its attendant catalogue of human nastiness is modeled very closely on that of an early medieval depiction of a sixth-century Roman pestilence. Of course Dante's capacity to sustain the vision of man's penchant for political good as well as evil is too familiar to require exegesis. Perhaps something of this ability to sustain a moral pluralism can be inferred from the contradictory advice furnished by Paolo di Messer Pace da Certaldo in his *Il libro di buoni costumi,* ed. S. Morpurgo (Florence: 1921), Nos. 119, 276. "Mai non fare né fa'fare vendetta, però che le vendette disortano l'anima e'l chorpo e l'avere. Se se' ingiuriato, aiutati chola ragione, e vincierai ongni superbo." "Abi a mente che cinque sono l'alegreze del mondo principali, e chosi sono cinque i dolori principali e maggiori che l'uomo può avere in questo mondo vivende. La prima alegreza si è fare sua vendetta: il dolore si é esere efeso da uno suo nimicho."

III

The purpose of establishing this thesis-antithesis relationship is to stress again that the Tuscan paideia permitted an effective solution to these contradictions: the doctrine of moderation. From Brunetto Latini, in the mid-thirteenth century, through Francesco da Barberino, in the mid-fourteenth, poets and literary men proclaimed moderation in all things: Talk not too much nor be overly silent; govern your manners according to the counsel of reason, always taking into account the circumstances and the audience to which you speak. In the *Convivio* Dante urges men to refrain from outbursts of hilarity but always to demonstrate moderate souls by laughing with a dignified severity, moving the features but slightly. Are we not the progeny of "nostri padri Romani"? asks Matteo Villani somewhat redundantly. The syllogism runs on: The Romans were "gravi," therefore we, too, must comport ourselves with "tranquillity of soul," shunning indiscreet counsel and "movimento furioso." Such extremes are worthy only of "gente barbara." Ever must we be mindful of "gli antichi moderati e virtudiosi," showing solemnity and caution in both speech and actions.[38] This wisdom was given its most compelling pictorial expression in Giotto's senatorial apostles.

Moderate norms were little suited to intervals of crisis. In the face of mounting disasters, Giovanni Villani did not moderate his political expectations but took refuge in the abstract formulas of the temperate communal paideia. The signory of 1340 should act as befits a "buono reggimento di commune": each order must be granted a share in the government—the nobility, the middling folk, and petty artisans and shopkeepers.[39] This abstract Aristotelian remedy was in no way compatible with the particulars of Giovanni's political opinions. By 1340 he had become suspicious of the nobles, skeptical of the political sagacity of the

[38] Cf. *Convivio,* III, 8; *Monarchia,* II, 5, and Dante's *Canzoniere,* XII. Matteo Villani, IV, 69; III, *Proem;* X, 3, 10, 42. On the theme of nobility and restraint in the religious art of the late Middle Ages, see A. Nicholson, *Cimabue: A Critical Study* (Princeton: 1932), pp. 28 ff. "Virtus" coincides with "mediocritas." Cf. E. Battisti, *Cimabue* (Milan: 1963), p. 28.

[39] *Cronica,* XI, 118. The meetings of the advisory councils to the signory, held over the second half of the fourteenth century, reveal the commonplaceness of Villani's opinions. Certainly Cicero's remarks on the desirability of a mixed government would carry substantial authority. There were, however, very practical considerations in the minds of such chroniclers as Matteo Villani and Stefani: Without giving some voice to the *mezzani* "li grossi pesci e bestie [great *popolani*] rompono le reti." Cf. Stefani, rub. 575, 685; M. Villani, III, 58; F. Sacchetti, *Novelle,* Nos. XL, CLXV.

middling folk, and contemptuous beyond measure of the petty artisans and shopkeepers whenever they were called to the signory. In fact, it is precisely these three orders he later blamed for gross political ineptitude. Had the government actually been democratized in 1340, Giovanni would probably have been its theoretical champion and its principal opponent and detractor, for at times his sense of justice gives way to moral outrage. Then he is vituperative toward the old patriciate and the *novi cives.* Upon occasion his political nihilism is relieved only by the Christian hope that aristocrat and parvenu will, in God's time, receive their terrible reward. The chronicle that sounded the magnificence and grandeur of Florence in the early *trecento* eventually assumed the quickened cadence of outrage.

Still Villani remained deeply interested in civic life; the only recipe he can provide the distraught citizen, however, is an abstract blend of temperate counsel and commonplace political sentiment. Even these are undermined by the onset of new tribulations; the juxtaposition is awesome—famine, death, change.[40] Villani fell victim to economic disaster, political upheaval, and finally the Black Death. As partner in a bankrupt firm, he was to be incarcerated in the *Stinche* (the so aptly named communal prison) and suffer ostracism in 1343. Moreover, his very faith in the legitimacy of the Florentine entrepreneurial ethic was shattered and so, too, was his confidence in human *potenze.* Nothing established by a "signore" or a "tiranno" or even a "comune" can endure. Indeed, expending civic energy is vain and useless; only God can bestow victory or defeat according to the presence or absence of sin.[41]

Although not all Florentines were prepared to embrace an embittered Christian piety even temporarily, the frantic, almost tortured character

[40] G. Villani, XI, 58, 77, 95. Many of the early tribulations of the Florentines, such as their succumbing to a despot, were seen by the chronicler as a "grande sentenzia" of God because of the denizens' cursed proclivity for factionalism. Cf. *Cronica,* X, 10. The failure to defeat Castruccio was attributed to civic discord; the Florentines had abandoned the guides of the senses and of reason. At this point, however, the maladies of society transcended the evils of factionalism and civic discord.

[41] Until the late 1330's the perennial villains of Villani's chronicle had been the magnates, who were seen as conspiring to undermine the herculean civic efforts of the men of the greater guilds. The magnates remained culpable in his eyes, but now the whole city was regarded as engaging in "mad undertakings" (*folle imprese*). No one in power was concerned with the common good, and for the first time in his lengthy narrative the chronicler consistently categorizes Florentine policies and programs as "folle." *Cronica,* XI, 130, 131. The disease of Florentine capitalists—the appetite for sudden gain—is insatiable and has its analogue in the body politic—the insatiable desire for conquest. Villani opines that even if Florence had defeated Pisa in 1341 and acquired much land, this lust would not have been appeased. *Cronica,* XI, 134.

of Florentine politics over the next years suggests that Villani's attitude was not an isolated one. Opposition in the communal councils had atrophied by mid-1341, the membership of these once-contentious, energetic bodies lapsed into political quietism. With surprising docility they had agreed to the formation of the *balia of* The Twenty. The councils failed to recover the initiative. Never for the balance of the century did they resume their role.

One element in Florentine civic culture that encouraged this lassitude was noted by the lawyer, politician, and diarist Donato Velluti, who in his domestic chronicle lauded the life that is conducted without giving offense to anyone.[42] This young Florentine, only lately returned from his studies in Bologna, had less reason to despair than Villani. His fortune was not threatened by the impending crisis, nor had he known the polis in better days. Despite modest lineage he won a high place in each of the regimes of the early forties, and his steady rise over the years was a masterpiece of contrived inoffensiveness. Treasuring "the ties of love, lineage, and neighborhood," never was he to permit his pragmatic equilibrium to be disturbed by ideals or indeed abstraction of any kind. Over the first part of his career he was confident that the burgher ethic could be united with knightly concepts of honor. Himself both cautious and moderate by temperament, he would have shunned the extremes of either code. The excessive courtesy of the noble would have attracted him as little as the bourgeois avarice. Better to leave the fulfillment of grand passions to God; let the *bonus civis* seek to be a "pleasing and practical man." In all things, then, the young lawyer showed himself to be a man of peace not easily disturbed. Proudly he renounced the vendetta and the blood feud, priding himself most upon those moments in his career when he employed his good offices to reconcile contending branches of the warring Medici family or restore rebellious patricians to the ample and forgiving bosom of the commonwealth.

Velluti describes in some detail his support of and co-operation with the *balia* of the early forties. In a sentimental aside he recollects how proud his father was to see him launched on the *cursus honorum*. When Walter of Brienne became lord of the city, young Velluti's career took a spectacular leap: he was among the first accorded the prestigious post of prior. After that he was awarded a critical post in the *camera;* in addition he was designated "avvocato," counselor, and ambassador for the ruler. But

[42] D. Velluti, *Cronica,* p. 33, for the use of the term "bello servitore." Passages are also cited from the chronicle of D. Compagni.

very soon, he tells us, his disenchantment was complete; when his friends and kinsmen came to him to request favors, he discovered himself to be without the necessary influence and therefore in a contemptible position before his compatriots. "Thence seeing that, and that I would be humiliated before my countrymen [*indisgrazia a cittadini*], sweetly [*dolcemente*] I commenced to loosen myself from [Brienne], in part and not altogether. . . ." No longer did Velluti ask boons from the despot; gradually he even ceased going to the lord's palace. Still, politics was a temperate game played by prudent men in a prickly milieu, and Velluti continued to be present when mass was chanted on feast days for Brienne.[43]

Velluti's reaction to crisis was to display concern for the style of politics rather than for its content. When his brother, Lamberto, returned to Florence from Palermo in October of 1342 after making his fortune, Velluti advised him to dismiss his servants and to dress in simple taste, even foregoing fancy trappings for his horses: it would not be suitable to be ostentatious in a country ruled by a "tirano" at a time when so many great guildsmen were suffering economic privation.[44] This was the extent of Velluti's expression of what was proper in those melancholy times. Velluti himself continued to serve the despot, loaned him money, took office in the aristocratic regime that ousted the tyrant, and subsequently continued his service under a popular signory. Later in the century Giovanni Morelli voiced the same apolitical sentiments in his book of advice to his children: Live "netto" (neatly); oppose neither in word nor deed those who rule the commune. The same tone is exhibited in virtually every other private and intimate book of political wisdom: "No matter what the provocation [the writer tells his progeny] you must remain at peace, and never arouse the enmity of anyone. You must be a man of the middle [*di mezzo*]."[45]

IV

In July of 1341 opposition in the communal councils ceased and The Twenty commenced their rule. The response to the disasters in the countinghouse and on the battlefield had been to create a dictatorship of the creditor class. The Twenty and their confreres were in fact the very individuals who over the last years had moved in and out of the signory

[43] D. Velluti, *op. cit.*, p. 162.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 144.
[45] G. Morelli, *Ricordi*, p. 196; M. Villani, VIII, 71.

with monotonous regularity. Now these creditors were accorded carte blanche to formulate and implement public policy. Hitherto they had either practiced the easy laissez-faire of the halcyon days of the early thirties or engaged in frustrating but rather mild contests with the obdurate communal councils. What distinguished them as a group from the so numerous lesser Florentine officeholders were the enormous public credits they owned. For the past two decades or so they had been the principal contributors to the numerous *prestanze* imposed. In a word, it had been the lavish contributions of these men that permitted Florence to underwrite her costly foreign burdens. Tax revenues had been inadequate to honor the far-flung commitments; the men of the signory—now The Twenty—personally assumed the fiscal burden. That they had done so at 15 per cent or better was a tribute to their business acumen; now they had an opportunity to demonstrate their political adroitness as well.

The personnel of The Twenty are worth a more detailed examination. Neri di Boccuccio de Manno Vettori was a partner in the international trading company of the Biliotti and himself a large-scale subscriber to government loans. Vannes Manetti Bandini was a partner in the banking house of Acciaiuoli and sat in The Twenty with Jacopo Donato Acciaiuoli. Messer Salvestro Baroncelli was an associate in the Peruzzi company and served on this *balia* with his principal, Pacino Tommaso Peruzzi. Although the most prominent of the Bardi were in exile at this time, this ubiquitous clan was well represented by Lorino di Buonaiuto Lorini and Taldo Valori, both partners in the great banking house. An Aldobrandini, an associate of the Buonaccorsi company, also held substantial government credits.[46]

A Rondinelli was an associate of the firm of Barone Capelli, a principal investor in the banking houses of the Acciaiuoli and Peruzzi. We can observe here a commonplace economic phenomenon: great companies loaned to each other, assigning outstanding government credits as collateral. There was, then, a twofold reason for maintaining solvency: first, it was essential if communal loans were to be amortized or interest payments made, and second, if the insolvency of the *camera* became chronic, security for business loans would be of little account.

[46] For the names of *I Venti*, see *P*, XXXI, fols. 7–9 (July 28, 1341). To these should be added Caroccio di Lapo Alberti, Barduccio Bardi, Messer Simone Peruzzi (honorific knight), and Maso Antella, each of whom held influential positions in the signory from the summer of 1341 to the winter of 1341–42. On the outstanding government credits of *I Venti*, see *Monte* (1347), S. Spirito, fols. 763–67r; S. Giovanni, fols. 93r, 427, 442–43, 840–44, 925; S. Croce, f. 817; S. Maria Novella, fols. 268 ff.

Of course the omnipresent banking house of the Strozzi held a post in The Twenty. This clan with its enormous holdings of government credits stands as a prime example of an entrepreneurial house that readily made capital available on the security of communal loans. Another large-scale holder of public credits was the Uzzano Trading Company, and they, too, were represented by one of the partners; so was the banking house of the Corsini. Finally, there were the very affluent Albizzi and Ricci. The one surprising exception was Giovanni Conte de' Medici: by no standards could he or his family be judged prominent government creditors. Possibly he was included in The Twenty because his kinsmen were popular with the middling and lower citizenry. The *balia* would thus have greater claim to the loyalty, if not the affection, of the overwhelming majority of disfranchised denizens of the polis.

The regime of The Twenty staked its future on a single battle with the Pisans, and when the Florentine armies were routed in October of 1341 the government commenced to pursue contradictory and in the end self-defeating policies. It was alternately to threaten and cajole its ancient Guelf allies—the papacy and the King of Naples—until it had incurred the suspicion of the former and the enmity of the latter. It even entered into negotiations with the dreaded chief of the Italian Ghibellines, Lewis the Bavarian. This maneuver succeeded only in terrifying friends and alienating potential allies. Such intrigue availed the republic nothing: early in January of 1342 the once-proud Twenty were compelled to admit that despite bold promises the commune was in a more desperate position than she had been less than a year ago. Florence did not have the economic resources or the diplomatic leverage to honor its commitments, foreign or domestic.[47]

The most likely escape from the dilemma appeared to be the selection of a titular lord for the city—"titular" in that it was hoped he would be the creature of those who had so maladroitly directed Florentine policy in 1341–42. His first responsibility would be to protect the failing companies from the precipitous claims of their anxious creditors. Secondly, he was to shore up the tottering public credit structure to enable the assets of companies that had invested so heavily in government loans to remain

[47] As early as the fall of 1340, Florence had advised her allies that she would be unable to fulfill her treaty commitments "because of grave and intolerable expenses." *Missive,* V, fols. 2–5 (Oct. 14, 1340). At the same time, the communal councils took the untoward step of refusing to pay expenses for an embassy to Avignon. Cf. *LF,* XIX, f. 82. So precarious was the condition of the public fisc that the usual annual bequests to the Franciscans and Benedictines of the city were not made. *Ibid.,* XX, f. 56r (May 24, 1341); XIX, f. 198 (June 6, 1341).

liquid. This would in turn require the drastic reduction of all military outlays, which in siphoning off all communal revenue from direct taxation served further to inflate the public debt. Only if peace were assured could communal income be used to pay the republic's creditors. Lastly, the new lord of the city was confronted with that hearty perennial—the problem of the revision of the tax structure.

Just a few months after The Twenty had assumed control new *prestanze* were decreed. Over the brief period October 1341, to June of 1342, these loans amounted to the very imposing figure of better than a quarter of a million florins. This dreary use of the antique financial nostrum suggests something of the intellectual and financial bankruptcy of the ruling elite. Early in 1342 the treasury proclaimed the consequences of this threadbare policy by announcing that restitution to holders of government credits were for the present suspended.[48] Therefore it was very much in the interest of the creditor class to support a revision of the tax system. Still, neither The Twenty nor any other body of citizens—the major guilds could have initiated legislation through petition—was willing to assume the onus of sponsoring such unpopular legislation. Since any such revision was considered a potential political albatross, a foreign lord could prove a most practical remedy; if he undertook the reform of the state in the interests of the creditor class, responsibility and even blame for citizen inconvenience and sacrifice must perforce be his. Hopefully, the despot would accept the sober advice and perhaps even discriminating guidance of The Twenty and their cohorts.

We have already noted that Walter of Brienne had served the Florentines with distinction some sixteen years before. In May of 1326 he had been received with great honor by the citizenry when he rode into the city escorted by a dazzling company of 400 knights, to act as vicar for the then-despot, Charles, Duke of Calabria. During his short tenure the French nobleman comported himself exceedingly well, even winning the acclaim of that arch critic of despots, Giovanni Villani. Grudgingly, the chronicler acknowledged that Brienne "knew how to exercise authority

[48] In January of that year the signory virtually proclaimed that the prized city of Lucca was indefensible when it acted to cede the town to King Robert of Naples. *Ibid.*, XXI, f. 46 (Jan. 10, 1342). Cf. also *ibid.*, XIX, f. 116r, recording that on the same date it was announced that all revenues from certain taxes and forced loans must be devoted exclusively for the hire of troops. Shortly thereafter the buyers of the commune's single most important gabelle—the customs toll—announced that they would be unable to make payment into the *camera*. *P*, XXXI, fols. 89–95 (Apr. 8, 1342); *ibid.*, CCXVI, f. 182; *LF*, XXI, f. 46r; *P*, XXXI, f. 82r.

wisely and was a wise lord of pleasing mien."[49] There were bags containing the names of candidates eligible for the priorate; among his first acts Brienne voided all imborsations and decreed new elections for June of 1326. According to Villani, he put in priors "at his own pleasure." If indeed he did act at his own pleasure, his principal adviser was one of the Acciaiuoli. Moreover, while serving as vicar Brienne took up official residence in the palace of the great banking family, the Mozzi. Furthermore, during his brief tenure the Del Bene, Peruzzi, and Strozzi spoke in favor of the Duke of Calabria's proposals for the beleaguered city and its hard-pressed patriciate. Surely neither Brienne nor his master were unmindful of the claims of the republic's first families.[50]

Early in the year 1342 the French nobleman was at Avignon paying his respects to the recently elected Pope. On March 15, among his last acts, the old Pope, Benedict XII, granted Brienne a letter of absolution in "articulo mortis." Late the following month the Pope, whom the Florentines had so disappointed, was dead, and on May 7 Clement VI ascended the chair of St. Peter. Villani narrates that at precisely that moment a group of Florentine merchants, established at Avignon, offered Brienne command of the dispirited Florentine army, and he accepted.

Of course the offer could only be made in the name of The Twenty, and they well knew Brienne's impeccable credentials. He had displayed extreme solicitude for the plight of the bankers and industrialists. Among his many other qualifications were his close ties with both the new and old Popes, his kinship with King Robert of Naples, and his high military standing as a marshal of the armies of the monarch of France. In a word, Brienne epitomized the ideals of the Guelf alliance system—ties with Naples, France, and the Holy See—and Florence was in dire need of preferential treatment by her old allies. Among the principal creditors of the hard-pressed Acciaiuoli, Bardi, Peruzzi *et al.* were the numerous prelates from Avignon and the barons of the Kingdom of Naples. Edward III's default on his enormous loans in 1339 made friendship with France all the more attractive since the two great northern nations had just gone to war.

Brienne arrived in Florence in the last days of May and was unable to thwart Pisan power. Within a month Lucca was irrevocably lost. The Twenty along with their many adherents now encouraged Brienne to

[49] *Cronica,* IX, 351.
[50] For the vicariate of Brienne, see *LF,* XIII, Part 1, fols. 4r–14.

assume ever greater authority. It was an Acciaiuoli who was to serve as prior under Brienne. Salvestro Baroncelli, partner in the Peruzzi company, spoke in the communal councils for the bestowal of dictatorial powers on the French nobleman. So did Salvestro Ricciardi Ricci, brother of Uguccione, member of The Twenty. A Strozzi was witness to the formal document creating the despotism. In the first months the Alberti served Brienne in key posts as well as advancing him needed funds. Another eminent family from The Twenty, the Bordoni, undertook numerous embassies for the Duke, as did several Acciaiuoli, who were counted among his most trusted diplomats. Perhaps the most delicate negotiations of the despot's reign involved drawing up a peace treaty with neighboring Pisa, for to admit defeat and to renounce all claims to Lucca could only rankle the Florentines. Yet such a treaty was crucial to the interests of the communal creditor class if they were to realize either income or principal from their loans. Only after hostilities had been terminated could the bulk of communal revenue be diverted from the payment of mercenaries. Two of the ambassadors to Pisa were men of the Peruzzi clan; their companion on the mission was a Bardi just recalled from political exile. Among the first acts of Brienne was the revocation of the ban imposed upon the Bardi by the signory after the ill-fated rebellion of November, 1340. Further, it was the Bardi who continued to serve as envoys and ambassadors to north Italian princes, the Holy See, and the Kingdom of Naples. Certainly, if any two families assumed responsibility for—and perhaps were the architects of—Brienne foreign policy, it was the Bardi and Peruzzi.[51]

The despot's powers were substantially enhanced when foreign policy matters and fiscal questions were consigned to the disposition of Brienne. Most important, it was acknowledged that the present tax structure with its system of farming out all indirect levies was plainly inadequate. It was further admitted that a reform of the administrative machinery of the Florentine *camera* would be essential. This would have to be accomplished before the back wages of the mercenaries could be paid or hostages reimbursed. Lastly, it was boldly admitted that interest rates on government

[51] For documents indicating the names of the many great magnates and *popolani* who spoke on behalf of Brienne, see *DP,* III, fols. 21r–22r; *LF,* XXII, *passim.* The names of the Peruzzi, Bardi, and others who held critical diplomatic posts under Brienne are listed in *CCE,* I bis, fols. 29, 34r, 84, 130r ff. Most interesting is the presence of the chronicler Donato Velluti among this august company; he undertook key diplomatic missions for Brienne. Cf. *Ibid.,* f. 137r. Others to fulfill the identical function were a Bordoni, Brunelleschi, Corsini. Cf. *Ibid.,* fols. 34r, 200, 206, 352r. For the pardon conferred upon the Bardi as well as their fellow magnates, the Frescobaldi, Nerli, and Rossi, see *Balie,* II, fols. 12–13 (Oct. 26, 1342).

loans had to be reduced; the figure proposed was indeed a modest one—7 per cent a year, approximately half the going rate.[52]

Immediately upon Brienne's arrival in the city a levy had been promulgated on all hearths in the Florentine territory. This hearth tax was calculated to yield the *camera* the not too ample sum of 2,000 lire a day and therefore did not entail substantial citizen sacrifice. Obviously this was a stopgap measure, for it was believed that Brienne would soon create the intricate machinery required for levying a new *estimo.* But to restore solvency to an almost bankrupt commune took time. In the fall of 1342 the balance in the treasury was so meager that the most modest daily outlays imposed a strain. It was at this time that the officers of the *camera* initiated the practice of making only token payments to mercenaries. A mercenary's salary was entered as a debit in the treasury records and the standard gabelle on wages deducted. Then he was required to loan—supposedly as interest—the *camera* part or even all of monies due him; finally, he would be paid the meager balance.[53] In the interim two *prestanze* were decreed, one for 80,000 florins and the other for 90,000 florins. Again this was a stopgap measure, since such *prestanze* could only enlarge the public debt and there was no communal revenue to be earmarked for amortization or the payment of interest.

Less than a month after Brienne had received the full imperium, the awesome task of treasury reform was completed. Hitherto entries had been made willy-nilly into the many ledgers of the several communal treasurers. Sometimes the only rationale discernible in this woolly method was the date of receipt by the treasury, with chronology alone furnishing the key to procedure. Now, in October of 1342 the treasury system was unified by combining the various treasuries to form a single *camera.* There were to be only two principal treasury officers for the commune instead of the numerous corps of former times; they were to secure the public monies in a chest placed under double lock. No disbursement was to be

[52] C. Paoli, *op. cit.,* p. 66. (The citation of the document by Paoli corresponds to its present designation in the *Archivio di Stato* of Florence. In many other instances, however, documents quoted or summarized by him are no longer classified under the citation provided in his study. Therefore, where such a discrepancy exists, I have chosen not to give the reference to his excellent study, but rather to the current source.)

[53] For the collection of the "prestantie noviter inposite in civitate Florentie" by Brienne's treasurer, Strozza Rossi Strozzi, see *CCE,* I, bis, f. 1r (Oct. 17, 1342). Returns from the collection of the hearth tax and a new *prestanze* of 80,000 florins were recorded in the treasury records by Barone Capelli. *CCE,* I bis, f. 4r (Oct. 18, 1342). Again it is worth noting that Donato Velluti was to serve as a judge in the ducal *camera.* Cf. *Ibid.,* f. 256 (Apr. 3, 1343). Early instances of forced *prestanze* by captains of mercenaries are recorded, in *ibid.,* fols. 7–7r (Oct. 22, 1342).

made by these two officers unless a notarized order of the signory was presented by the payee. Every two months these officials were to render a statement of their accounts to the syndic of the commune in the presence of the magistrates of the republic. Serving the treasurers was a staff of accountants, notaries, tax officers, and judges over the gabelles. By January, 1343, there was a compact army of such guardians of the public fisc.[54]

Less than a week after the initiation of the original treasury reform, it was stated in a ducal decree that in the city, country, and district of Florence there are at present many officials who exact money for our commune and expend it. . . ." The document then goes on to complain that such tortuous procedures can only generate "confusion"—and demands further reforms.[55] Especially critical was the condition of finances in subject cities and territories, because of multiple treasury systems and overlapping jurisdictions. Brienne and his advisers undertook comparable renovations of antique and sometimes dissolute practices in the territorial treasury system. The goal was clearly centralization and greater efficiency in communal finance.

V

Because of the desperate condition of the public fisc, the thrust in time of crisis under earlier popular regimes as well as under Brienne was toward increasingly impersonal government. With the mounting demands of large-scale communal creditors for restitution or at least payment of token interest, pressures to strengthen the machinery of government also increased. In November of 1342 Brienne and his advisers began to reorganize the sensitive office of "Ufficiali di Torre." This was the key post charged with the administration and supervision of all "bona et iura communis Florenti[a]e." The operations of this body had been severely hampered by obstructionist communal councils during the lackadaisical thirties. Many communal perquisites (*bona et iura*) had been usurped by the affluent *potentes* of city and *contado,* who were reluctant to pay any but the most nominal of rents; soon the public holdings were indistinguishable from private wealth. To remedy this deplorable and costly confusion Brienne decreed that one record was to be kept and the officials over the tower to inscribe all "public rights and properties in the register."[56] In

[54] *Balie,* II, fols. 58–63 (Oct. 16, 1342).
[55] *Ibid.,* fols. 92–93 (Nov. 24, 1342). For the reorganization of the treasury system of Volterra, see *ibid.,* II, fols. 100–101 (Jan. 26, 1343). Comparable alterations were made for the city of Arezzo. *CCE,* I bis, f. 255r (Apr. 30, 1343).
[56] *Balie,* II, fols. 110–112 (Nov. 30, 1342).

this exacting work they were to be assisted by the ducal vicar and the communal judges. Any appeal from the decision of these men had to be made directly to the despot. In this way the judiciary was deputized "super reinveniendis et recuperandis iuribus communis Florenti[a]e ubicumque existentibus." Several appointments to such crucial posts were made by Brienne and his advisers from the ranks of the affluent *novi cives.* This class of course had fewer ties with the entrenched patriciate and had not been involved in the long-enduring confusion of private and public rights so profitable to the patriciate. They would therefore be more prone to enforce the law with vigor.[57]

Judges and tower officials proceeded almost at once to initiate actions against prominent Florentines holding public properties illegally. The most despised and conscientious of these judges was Simone da Norcia. Villani's contempt for him knew only the bounds of Tuscan invective. However, treasury documents cite him as "iudex super revidendis iuribus communis Florentie," or "iudex super revidendo rationes communis Florentie," or "iudex appellationum et nullitatum rationum, ac etiam sindicus communis Florentie," or simply "iudex rationum."[58] From the beginning of his tenure this Florentine judge condemned the great and the humble with monotonous regularity and unaccustomed fortitude. First, former government officials were constrained to restore supplies that had been misappropriated by army officers. Then Norcia compelled the paymaster of the troops to make restitution to the *camera* for embezzlement. Next he conducted a protracted inquiry into chronic thefts of communal weapons and armor, with an order that restitution immediately be made. Finally, he condemned numerous private citizens for peculation of communal funds and usurpations of public property. With surprising candor a decree of the Duke's stated that it appeared more reasonable to recover the rights and perquisites of the commune rather than to impose new imposts and *prestanze* on the hard-pressed citizenry. Norcia appeared to follow this decree scrupulously when he condemned the prominent patrician Rosso Ricciardi Ricci to the staggering fine of 3,932 florins for misappropriation of public funds and properties.

Here we observe something of the paradox of Brienne's lordship: installed by the patriciate to save the communal fisc and thereby ensure their

[57] For the names of *novi cives* who assisted Brienne in administering the commune, see *CCE,* I bis, fols. 20–364. Fines against the Adimari, Rossi, and other patrician houses are recorded in *ibid.,* fols. 249 ff. For an example of the initiation of a judicial process for the recovery of usurped communal property, see *Diplomatico,* Orsanmichele (May 19, 1343).

[58] C. Paoli, *op. cit.,* pp. 28–29; *CCE,* I bis, f. 27r (Nov. 23, 1342); *ibid.,* f. 191r; G. Villani, XII, 8.

personal fortunes, the dictator inaugurated a regimen that called for sacrifice on the part of that very patriciate. The Ricci had been ardent supporters of the Duke and were among the first to be entangled in the new impersonal machinery of state. Moreover, the Strozzi, Marco and Andrea, were held liable for part of this fine, for they had gone surety for Ricci. The Strozzi, too, had been among Brienne's principal adherents. The Dietsalvi, also prominent among Brienne's champions, were fined the very substantial sum of 1,000 florins for the heretofore pardonable offense of encroaching upon communal property. Still others to feel the cruel impact of ducal justice were magnates of the Adimari and Rossi clans. That the treasurer of the tower officials, Ser Arrigo Fey, was also a much maligned man is hardly surprising. Equally intelligible was the opinion of his contemporaries that this notary was more subtle in his ability to exact tribute than Aristotle in the field of philosophy. The records of the *camera* speak eloquently for the aptitude of this latter-day philosopher of the fisc, since for the first time regular payments were being made by the great patricians who held communal properties.[59]

Early in November of 1342 Brienne appointed non-Tuscan foreign notaries—thus, hopefully, more impartial—to serve as his representatives in distant Florentine territories and were instructed to exact all rents and other communal dues from the inhabitants of the far-flung hinterlands. The process of impersonalization and centralization was accelerated over the next months with comparable appointments in such distant territories as Arezzo, Castiglione, Scarperia, and Volterra. Nor were settlements around Florentine fortifications and outposts neglected; they, too, were introduced to techniques of efficient administration. Even lands only very recently acquired from the Bardi family were compelled to furnish their fair share of revenues.[60]

[59] The jurisdiction of Norcia and Ser Arrigo of course overlap, since both men served as "officials of the towers." *CCE,* I bis, f. 10r (Oct. 28, 1342), f. 73 (Nov. 6, 1342), f. 151 (Feb. 5, 1343), f. 276 (May 14, 1343). Perhaps a telling illustration of the paradoxical character of the French nobleman's lordship can be discerned in his treatment of the Bardi. On the one hand, as we have seen, he conferred a pardon upon those members of this clan who engineered the rebellion of November, 1340; on the other hand he meted out strict justice to one of their number for speaking disparagingly of the Duke's imposing *prestanze* upon the citizenry. For this he was fined the ample sum of 500 florins. Cf. *Ibid.,* f. 5r (Oct. 19, 1342). On Ser Arrigo, see G. Villani, XII, 8. Cesare Paoli (*op. cit.,* p. 25) gives the following contemporary opinion on this notary: "Più era quesso sottile ne le gabelle, che non fo Aristotele ne la filosofia."

[60] *CCE,* I bis, fols. 20r–31r (Nov. 8, 1342–Dec. 2, 1342). It was during this interval that a special official was elected "ad exigendum fictus, pensiones et census comunis Florentie" from the territories dominated for so long by the Bardi—Vernia and Mangona. For other instances of these centralizing tendencies at work, see *Balie,* II, f. 165 (Mar. 30, 1343). By the end of the Duke's tenure this trend had become much accelerated. *CCE,* II bis, f. 336 (July 24, 1343).

Nowhere was this tightening more evident than in the regulation of the Florentine *contado.* Commencing late in December of 1342, communal officials began to rectify abuses long encrusted by custom during earlier regimes: taxes, deliquent since 1331, were finally exacted; condemnations for failure to report the incidence of crimes perpetrated ten and fifteen years ago multiplied; those who went surety for the rectors of rural communes and parishes in arrears for more than a decade in *estimo* payments were forced to make restitution; sentences outstanding since the early thirties were executed against communities guilty of harboring criminals and exiles; obligations for cart service, castle guard, and road work were regularly enforced instead of being regarded as theoretical and tenuous.[61]

Brienne's *contado* policy was almost the exact antithesis of the easy sway that had become the hallmark of oligarchical rule. It is quite possible that during his tenure the overly ambitious program of establishing "a table of possessions" was begun. This "tavola" involved a survey of the tax liability, value, and ownership of all properties in the countryside. Not only would such an undertaking be of enormous value in the complex litigation involving the assets of bankrupt firms, titles, and inheritances, but it would also be singularly useful in determining the correctness of tax assessments. In the month of December, 1342, over thirty "measuratores" were deputized to measure the lands and holdings in the *contado* and district of Florence. Over the ensuing months of Brienne's brief tenure additional surveyors were dispatched throughout the countryside and outer reaches of the republic's domains to continue this arduous labor. Matteo Villani's comments about the impracticality of a later survey (1355) may have bearing upon the earlier effort, which likewise had to be abandoned because it proved too costly and time-consuming.[62]

Despite allegations of chroniclers that Brienne raised tax rates inordinately, the records of the *camera* bear witness to the contrary. If we examine his administration of the countryside we see that the rate for the rural *estimo* was only ten soldi per lira, not substantially different from earlier rates. As a matter of fact, the tax burden on rural domains was

[61] There are even examples of delinquencies of country communities dating as far back as the 1320's which were punished only with the advent of the Duke. Cf. *Ibid.,* f. 192 (Feb. 22, 1343), recording the execution of a condemnation—dating back to the 1320's—of a rural commune for failure to pay the salaries of its officials. The hamlet was required to pay an additional sum for this default. By early April of 1343 fines assessed against rural communities averaged the very substantial figure of five per day. *Ibid.,* fols. 205–58.

[62] *Ibid.,* fols. 33–38 (Dec. 4, 1342–Dec. 13, 1342). For Matteo's remarks as well as a discussion of this innovation, see E. Fiumi, "L'imposta diretta nei comuni medioevali della Toscana," *Studi in onore di Armando Sapori,* 343 ff.

lighter than formerly. Over the ten months and some few days of Brienne's rule, the rural *estimo* returned only 12,708 florins—almost 50 per cent less than its previous average yield. Certainly this drop was due in part to the current economic depression, but neither rates nor quotas were augmented. The same holds true for the rural levy on wine. This, too, remained at the antique rate of ten soldi *pro quolibet congio vini in comitatu et districtu Florenti*[*a*]*e*. The change that did occur was the increasing strictness of administrative procedure. In the month of December alone more than 100 requests were received by a special judge dealing with the rural *estimo*. With monotonous regularity these pleas were denied and inhabitants of the *contado* condemned for failure to pay delinquent taxes.[63]

Rural administration became more impartial and severe. Income from customs tolls collected in country towns was paid directly into the treasury of the republic instead of going first into the local treasury. So, too, were market tolls, gabelles on the slaughter of cattle, even petty charges for the use of certain communal bridges. Similarly, dues on fishing rights and for the privilege of maintaining fulling mills on the banks of Tuscan streams and rivers went directly into the *camera*. Much more significant, however, were the legions of officers dispatched to villages and hamlets to supervise the exaction of *prestanze*. There was also a tendency to make obligations territorial that were once personal. For instance, in 1342 the gabelle on nobles living in the countryside was assessed against the hamlet in which the individual established residence rather than on the particular family. An identical change occurred in the assessment of the *prestanza nobilium comitatus Florentie*.[64] Instead of assessing a loan against a particular family, the amount was obtained in the form of a tax added to the liability of the community.

It was precisely because Brienne did not desire to raise rates that he followed the milder alternative of tightening the existing structure. There was only one prominent exception, involving the imposition of an *estimo*

[63] A strenuous effort was made to establish an equitable balance between urban and rural assessments. The figure for the city was fixed so that the urban dweller would pay an impost almost twice as high as that of his rural counterpart. This was no easy task since both tax registration and methods recording title were exceedingly complex. All of this was rendered still more difficult because patterns of investment were dramatically diverse and places of habitation for purposes of tax assessment extremely vague. At the end of April, 1343, a single official was elected to coordinate both *estimi*. CCE, I bis, f. 255r. Cf. also *ibid.*, fols. 26r–205 for other details concerning this tributary measure. Folio 181 (Feb. 15, 1343) contains the notation of the rate at which this levy was being imposed.

[64] *Ibid.*, f. 175r (Feb. 14, 1343), f. 214 (Mar. 15, 1343).

on the city, and in this case it took months to collect individual taxes since the tax machinery was cumbersome. Early in October citizens were obliged to draw up statements (*portate*) declaring the nature and extent of all real and personal property. Special judges and notaries were recruited to examine these *portate;* months later the first tribute was garnered. (The date of its imposition—July 15, 1343—is of interest. On July 26 revolution erupted and Brienne was soon overthrown. Thus the imposition of this latest tax could have done little to ingratiate the Duke with the citizenry, and perhaps his removal is not unrelated to his last fiscal gambit.[65]) It was many months (five or six) before Brienne could realize sizable income from this *estimo*. There could be no alleviation of the pressing fiscal bind unless the policies of increasingly impersonal government proved successful.

VI

Brienne and his circle were confronted with the challenge of surviving the fiscal crisis by enforcing the law against the patricians who, a few months earlier, had been his most articulate proponents. At first he had appeared bent upon rewarding his adherents. The ban of exile against the Bardi, Frescobaldi, Nerli, and Rossi had been promptly rescinded; the Draconian Ordinances of Justice, imposing harsh penalties on criminous magnates, were allowed to fall into abeyance. Hitherto liable for double the penalty paid by commoners, the Adimari, Bardi, or Pazzi were now subject to penalties equal to those imposed on commoners. Furthermore, magnate Admiri, Bardi, Bordoni, Brunelleschi, Donati, Cavalcanti, and Rossi regularly served Brienne as castellans and in other high *contado* posts.

But in early December of 1342, this comfortable regimen was disrupted when Brienne's judges undertook a systematic investigation of the alleged peculations and other abuses practiced by the former high government bureaucracy. Numerous indictments on charges of malfeasance in office followed. Many of Brienne's most eloquent spokesmen felt the stiff hand of justice. The treasurer of The Twenty was judged guilty of defrauding

[65] On the mechanics of this impost, see *Diplomatico,* Cestello (Oct. 23, 1342), cited by C. Paoli, *op. cit.,* p. 75. Cf. *CCE,* I bis, f. 41r (Dec. 17, 1342) for a notation of the urban *estimo,* which stood at 5 soldi per 100 lire. In connection with the onset of strong disaffection against the Duke's rule, it should also be observed that almost at the same time as the new *estimo* was implemented, Brienne and his advisers saw fit to exact a very onerous *prestanza.* On a single day—July 19, 1343—only a week before the citizen uprising, this forced loan brought 16,702 florins, 16 soldi, 8 denari, into the *camera. Ibid.,* fols. 335–35r.

the commune of monies budgeted for defense and a variety of other frauds. Soon Adimari, Bardi, Bordoni, Ricci, Rucellai, Spini, Tornaquinci, and a host of other first families stood convicted on similar counts and were fined from 1,600 lire to over 6,000 lire. Many of these men were sentenced because they had agreed to go surety for a convicted friend and office holder.[66]

The most thorough inquiry into corruption in high places probably took place sometime in December or January of 1342–43 (the document is undated). The notorious judge Simone da Norcia conducted an investigation into the activities of The Twenty during their brief tenure. The evidence presented against them before his tribunal was specific and compelling. The cautious economic historian Armando Sapori rather recently opted for the truth of the bill of particulars against The Twenty. A judicial commission appointed by a subsequent signory, the popular regime, also judged The Twenty guilty as charged. This time the condemnation was entered in the treasury records on August 27, 1344, and was not reversed. The principal accusation involved the fraudulent imposition of *prestanze* and the usurpation of communal monies. Apparently the inquest held by Norcia was suddenly suspended and the verdict "Absolutio offitii Viginti" entered on the trial record. It would seem that with Norcia's inquiry Brienne and his advisers realized they had overreached themselves. Subsequently members of The Twenty began to make restitution, suggesting their complicity, and key figures such as the Bardi commenced to loan sizable sums to the nearly bankrupt treasury.[67] The despot, however, did not go as far in the direction of impersonal administration of justice as did the popular regime to follow.

There had been previous ambiguity of policy in other areas of Brienne's rule. One of the most cogent reasons for the original patrician support accorded Brienne was the desire of hard-pressed firms for protection from overanxious creditors. Their desires were realized on October 26, 1342, when Taddeo Antella—soon to be appointed ambassador by the despot—was granted immunity from creditors for his company for a period of three years. This decree was immediately extended to all near-bankrupt companies and justified with the bland formula that this has been done for the honor and well-being of the republic and its merchants. In certain

[66] For payments of substantial fines by Adimari, Bardi, Bordoni, Spini, Tornaquinci, see *ibid.*, fols. 175r, 204r–211. For the conviction of the treasurer of The Twenty, see *ibid.*, f. 80r (Dec. 24, 1342). Cf. also *ibid.*, f. 80 (Dec. 23, 1342) for a condemnation of an officer of The Twenty in charge of maintaining weapons of the commune.
[67] *Balie,* II, fols. 143–152; *CCE,* I bis, f. 350.

instances the petitioners advised the lord that they were already in the process of making settlement with their creditors. A moratorium gave companies additional time to liquidate certain of their assets—especially land, which glutted the market at favorable terms.[68]

Naturally such a program found favor among the mercantile patriciate if it did not go beyond the bounds of propriety. During subsequent months many bankrupts of the preceding two decades were restored to good standing within the community merely upon payment of a token sum into the *camera*. This seemingly arbitrary procedure went beyond the pale, reversing without even benefit of legal formality decrees of bankruptcy promulgated long ago by that august guild tribunal, the Court Merchant. Equally disquieting must have been the fact that the beneficiaries of this largesse were in so many instances men of the lower guilds.[69]

If Brienne's moratorium of October 26 was highly acceptable to the mercantile patriciate, its corollary, the decree of November 22, was not. Brienne's support had come from almost bankrupt companies seeking not only relief from anxious creditors but also the establishment of a fiscal policy that would permit the government to honor its outstanding obligations. Antella, Bardi, Strozzi, Uzzano, found themselves with precious capital tied up in frozen government loans. Although no steps had been taken for their amortization, it was hoped that Brienne would release a certain amount of the income (*entrata*) for interest payments. The mercantile patriciate had even indicated that it was willing to accept lower interest rates.

Unfortunately, through the first months of the despot's tenure the only additional monies the treasury could garner derived either from tighter administration (increased returns from communal properties, fines for peculation, etc.) or from the trifling sums that could be extracted from such expedients as increasing the tax on pawnbrokers. Since the inception of his lordship Brienne had regulated the activities of these "manifest usurers" in such a manner as to collect the maximum revenue. Each month these *feneratores* were compelled to pay a fee in the form of fine for plying their trade "hateful as it was in the sight of God and man."[70] However,

[68] *Balie,* II, fols. 11–12. A. Sapori in *La crisi della compagnie mercantili,* pp. 148 ff., presents what surely must stand as a classic study in this particular area of economic history. It should be observed, however, that medieval bankruptcies are more episodic than the author contends; thus certain of the fallen companies soon regrouped their forces and resumed activity again in the economic life of the polis.

[69] Cf. *CCE,* I bis, fols. 143r, 266, 284r ff.

[70] *Ibid.,* fols. 10, 13r (Oct. 25–26, 1342).

these fees totaled only a few hundred lire at best and contributed little to loosen the fiscal bind. There were new revenues from the domains, but the *entrata* was meager—less than a thousand lire in November. Although this represented a slight improvement, income was still inadequate to meet current needs, let alone permit the lord of the city to assume past obligations.[71]

While the cumbersome machinery for the collection of the urban *estimo* was being so laboriously constructed, Brienne did try to live within the limits of the existing budget. He was guided by the fiscal decrees of The Twenty, who had relied upon the forced loan and the hearth tax for additional revenue. In the first months of his tenure Brienne merely prorogued these measures. Such a mild response proved far from adequate, however, since the fiscal position of the *camera* had deteriorated from week to week if not day to day. Income from the gabelles dwindled, and Brienne and his advisers were forced to grant remission of payment to the numerous buyers of these levies. Thus in late November of 1342, when the lord of the city decreed that income from gabelles would no longer be assigned to communal creditors, he was indeed charting a prudent course.

The decree itself merits closer inspection, for it lacks the rhetorical flourishes so common to this variety of unpleasant pronouncement. Without the slightest evasion it states that, considering the absence of funds—especially for salaries of communal officials and the defense of the republic—there was no alternative except the suspension of the assignment of all incoming revenues to creditors. Although a new tax might have been imposed, the yield would not have been immediate because of the months required for installing new tax machinery. It is doubtful that the declaration of late November effected even the slightest change, for creditors were receiving neither interest nor principal. It did assure them that the unpleasant condition would obtain well into the foreseeable future, which was impolitic and must have done little to inspire political confidence among Brienne's former adherents. Perhaps this proclamation, however impolitic, was intended to announce publicly, though obliquely, a cogent reason for the *estimo*. Only when abundant monies from this impost reached the *camera* could communal creditors hope for restitution.

Over the next months Brienne's fiscal program remained moderate; the hearth tax was renewed and two additional *prestanze* (not overly large) were levied. Such moderation was possible after Brienne signed a treaty

[71] This was the case despite the election of special "rationcinatores," according to an ordinance recently made by the Duke. *Ibid.*, fols. 13r–28r (Oct. 26, 1342–Nov. 25, 1342).

with Pisa officially terminating the costly war. This was one of the few acts to win favor for Brienne in the eyes of the embittered Giovanni Villani. The chronicler went so far as to contend that it was "the most honorable" treaty that could have been consummated in those inauspicious times.[72] In point of fact the despot's actions set the tone for succeeding regimes: the old imperialism had proven as expensive as it was bootless. In the autumn of 1342 the city of Florence entered into a protracted interval of near-isolation, thereby avoiding burdensome subsidies to fickle allies and staggering outlays for mercenaries. In the future any regime attempting to navigate the treacherous shoals of internal politics and crippled by a depleted treasury found it easier to curtail territorial expansion than to impose new and unpopular taxes. In the case of Brienne, renouncing imperial ambitions offered the best prospect of averting communal bankruptcy. Sadly for him the peace policy so ardently pursued by subsequent regimes was not popular at first; it was muttered throughout the city that he had been engaged by the republic to wage war and all he had done was make peace.[73]

There are quite complete treasury records for almost all of Brienne's tenure which demonstrate that he and his circle single-mindedly followed the policy of reducing expenditures for mercenaries. Only in the last months, when menaced by internal disaffection, was this course reversed, and even then outlays stood well below previous figures, never totaling more than 10,000 florins a month. Earlier, these totals reached three and sometimes four times this amount. Transactions during Brienne's regime can be calculated with precision, since all soldiers of the republic were required by law to pay a tax of 5 per cent of their salary into the *camera* and treasury records of the period were kept with unaccustomed exactitude. Payments for banners or the repair of helmets or even the salary of the ducal barber were duly recorded.[74]

No matter what economies Brienne might effect through the reduction of mercenary forces or exact bookkeeping, the deterioration of the public fisc could not be reversed. Revenues from all the staples of the Florentine tributary system continued to decline alarmingly. The customs toll, the bulwark of the communal fisc, had reached a high of 90,200 florins in

[72] *Balie,* II, fols. 29–30. For a transcription of this decree, see C. Paoli, *op. cit.,* pp. 181–82.

[73] *Cronica,* XII, 8. When the popular regime which assumed power shortly after the downfall of the Duke signed a peace with Lucca, the chronicler opined that the despot's peace treaty had been more honorable than that of the government.

[74] *CCE,* I bis, fols. 25–27.

1336–38. During the Duke's regime it was collected at a monthly rate that would have yielded an annual revenue of just above 52,000 florins, had his tenure lasted for a full year instead of ten months. The gabelle on salt showed an even more dramatic decline, losing almost two-thirds of its value. Comparable decreases were registered by every other indirect levy in the tributary arsenal. No other interval in Florentine history (for which there is extensive documentation) was the scene of such startling depression in public finance.

Brienne's penny-pinching regime bore little resemblance to the flamboyant, extravagant signory that scandalized the chroniclers Giovanni Villani and Marchionne di Coppo Stefani. But in late December and early January of 1343, ducal officials began to stimulate their moral outrage. Dispensations from past verdicts of the Florentine courts were retailed in odd lots; hundreds of Florentines were the beneficiaries. Much to the consternation of traditional-minded burghers, an outlaw or a political renegade could be restored to honorable citizenship upon payment of a fee into the *camera.* Most provoking to the politically orthodox were the many dispensations sold to the loathed Ghibellines. Some who received the coveted dispensation had fought under the dreaded banner of the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry VII, and others were former allies of such latter-day Ghibelline heretics as Uguccione and Castruccio. Among the more prominent and reprehensible of Florentine families to win the prize were the Amadori, Corbizzi, Falconieri, Falconetti, and Pulci. However, the proceedings leading to dispensation were conducted with scrupulous respect for legalities; both the captains of the Guelf party and the priorate concurred in approving grants to each outlawed clan. Again the motive force behind so many of these remissions was the chronic need for revenue, not another incidence of Brienne's erratic, bizarre behavior as the chroniclers contended.[75]

Brienne continued this stopgap, lackluster program partly because he had no desire to augment the rates of indirect levies. Clearly, by late winter of 1342 his warmest support came from the middle class and the poor of the city—precisely the strata of society that would be most adversely affected by an increase in gabelles. Eventually substantial reductions in such unpopular levies as the gabelles on wine and meat were

[75] The meeting between the Duke, the priors, and the captains of the Guelf party occurred on Dec. 31, 1342. For other instances of collaboration between these august captains and the regime of Brienne, see *Capitoli,* XXII, fols. 11–22. For the work of the captains and Brienne's lieutenants in effecting pardons for these ancient and dishonored families, see *CCE,* I bis, fols. 70–92.

decreed, intensifying the dilemma of the treasury, since returns from the *estimo* did not begin to enter the communal coffers until early spring of 1343. Only then was the full impact of the despot's economic program felt.

From April until July the ducal signory became increasingly severe. First, the dreaded *estimo* was levied, not once but several times. (Incidentally, as a consequence, the state of the treasury balance was much improved.) Second, Brienne's vicars imposed a special *prestanza—impositam pluribus civibus*. This levy, in the form of a short-term loan, was assessed against the patrimony of a handful of leading patricians. There were additional special loans from top echelon houses such as the Antella, Bardi, and Peruzzi—again the very clans who first received ducal favors: the removal of a ban of exile, the reduction of a fine, a moratorium on debts. A neat device was employed whereby a 5 per cent tax was imposed upon the treasury payment when the treasury paid interest on these special new loans. The effect of this stratagem was to reduce interest rates to 2 per cent and to transform these new loans into virtual benevolences. Lastly, numerous charges and obligations were revived from the murky communal past. Some of these entailed ancient civic responsibilities such as the payment of a pound of silver from rural communes once domiciles of Tuscan feudatories. Others involved the resurrection of lapsed traditions such as the payment of the equivalent of a certain number of pounds of wax into the *camera* on the festival of Florence's patron saint, John the Baptist. More lucrative was the tightening supervision over all who rented space in communal markets or kept shop on public bridges and squares. These measures were designed to improve the fiscal position of the treasury, and by late April of 1343 they had some effect.[76]

Trecento chronicles as well as recent historical monographs concur in the jaundiced observation that Brienne's administration was corrupt and his officials a rapacious and grafting lot. Again the documents of the period make such a judgment difficult to sustain. Although we must leave the ultimate honesty of these officials to God and the metahistorian, it would seem that, given the high degree of systematization and centralization of public finance, there would be little official sanction of lax or corrupt administrators. Furthermore, after Brienne's overthrow an ex-

[76] For example, in the interim between April 15, 1343, and May 15, 1343, communal income from indirect levies rose some 200 per cent over the average recorded by each of the preceding 6 months. Moreover, we observe that it is precisely at this time that the Duke's retainers commence to administer communal markets more efficiently and to tend more meticulously to the renting of communal shops.

tensive audit of the management of the communal treasury was undertaken, by a regime profoundly hostile to tyrants in general and Brienne in particular. The judges and notaries—some of the most eminent legal men in the community—concurred after arduous inquiry that under the aegis of the Duke, the *camera* had operated "bene et legaliter" and that "nullum dolum, fraudem, negligentiam, falsitatem seu culpam" had been perpetrated. Surprisingly enough, given the magnitude and vehemence of contemporary criticism of Brienne's fiscal policies, there was even a sizable balance in the *camera.* The *introytus* (income) during his tenure stood at 942,223 lire, 14 soldi, 4 denari.[77] Such a respectable albeit not abundant balance was a tribute to the rigorous fiscal program Brienne had initiated, at least over the last four months of his tenure. Unfortunately such a stern program was fated to antagonize further the very interests that had elevated the French nobleman to power. It does, however, offer some positive testimony to those who would depict his rule as an interval of fiscal chicanery and economic mismanagement. Perhaps just as many were disturbed by the virtues and efficiency of his government as were offended by its ineptitude and corruption.[78]

VII

Centralization of authority proceeded apace over the last months of Brienne's rule. In a single month, May of 1343, there were sixty-two surveyors deputized to undertake a scrupulous listing of "terras et possessiones" in the *contado*. These *magistri et mensuratores* were to make this survey for the purpose of better assessing communal tribute. Simultaneously, scores of notaries and twelve judges (two for each section of the city) were charged with the responsibility of further refining the *estimo* so that the July returns would be even higher. A battery of officers personally appointed by the ruler supervised the operation of measures and balances used by merchants. These officials collected the handsome salary of 160 florins for working only one month, June of 1343. In addition notaries were chosen to enforce statutes requiring payment of gabelles on wine cask seals. More and more power was exercised by the lord of the city, who was now almost universally despised. Virtually every florin collected from Florentine domains was paid directly to the ducal vicar, who in turn

[77] Giovanni Villani's *Cronica* of course furnishes the principal materials for such an interpretation. Among modern commentators, Cesare Paoli has followed this tack most sedulously, while Armando Sapori has expressed the most serious reservations.
[78] *Diplomatico,* Cestello (May 13, 1344).

deposited the money in the treasury. Payments for the use of communal mills and bridge and river tolls were recorded daily by the treasurer instead of being permitted to accumulate for a month or more.[79]

At this juncture, attention should be directed to the legalistic aura surrounding the treasury records. These dry lists reveal that Brienne paid cash for almost everything purchased. Even during his last precarious days a series of disbursements to the house of Peruzzi for the purchase of a few bolts of cloth was duly recorded. Many were the loans that were repaid even in those tense days. Still more telling, Brienne's vicar made restitution for all properties confiscated from private citizens for the purpose of enlarging the ducal palace or extending the city squares or erecting new city gates. Through the end of his tenure, payment was made to the former owners of these properties.[80]

Nowhere is this penchant for legalism more evident than in Brienne's treatment of the lower orders of Florentine society. He initiated policies that struck his contemporaries as the beginnings of a social revolution, but even they were compelled to concede that Brienne had a fine eye for the niceties of the law. Much of this legislation has been considered by modern scholars to have been extremely favorable to the interests of the minor guildsmen as well as to the unorganized masses (*il popolo minuto*). His scandalized contemporaries would heartily have concurred. For the rest of the century, whenever an outraged working class pressed its demands upon a tottering signory, they conjured the menacing spector of the duke to frighten more generous-minded compatriots.

Brienne's policies were ill-founded not because they were illegal or even extralegal but rather because the *minuti* could not be relied upon.[81] During Brienne's term of office he sought outside the framework of the oligarchy to create support for his signory. Almost from the beginning he and his counselors appeared to have sensed that upper-class support must perforce atrophy and that it would be essential to gain the adherence of several groups: the men of the fourteen lower guilds, the skilled masters under the jurisdiction of the seven greater guilds, and the many day laborers employed by the wool manufacturers. Early in his tenure he granted a moratorium to the vintners on all debts owed the commune. Tax concessions were decreed for the benefit of sellers of oil, retail food merchants, vendors of dried meat, and butchers. A cask maker and an

[79] Cf. *CCE*, I bis, fols. 345, 352, 359r, 362.
[80] *Ibid.*, fols. 357r, 363r, 369.
[81] Cf. Stefani, rub. 564, 565, 575, 578.

ironmonger were appointed to the exalted office of prior, and a dealer in used clothing became *gonfaloniere di giustitia* (chief prior and standard bearer of the commune). Never before in the annals of the commune were so many newcomers elevated to such prominent positions. It is worth noting that these *novi cives* were either affluent parvenus matriculated in the major guilds or the most eminent members of the minor guild masters.[82]

The single act that had the most enduring effect upon the socio-economic structure of Florentine guild life occurred November 23, 1342.[83] Sedulously and scrupulously Brienne had courted the great guild masters of the *Arte della Lana.* By early November, he won the unanimous consent of the *lanaiuoli,* who gave him authority to intervene in guild affairs. He was granted the power to reject or accept guild petitions as well as to make key appointments in the guild hierarchy.

On November 23, as a result of this newly won *auctoritas,* the dyers of the city (the most prosperous of all the republic's artisans) requested that they be liberated from the harsh yoke of the *Lana.* It could have been only divine providence that created Brienne's present benign signory, said the petitioning dyers, since if it were not for his lordship they would have been forced to abandon their craft, so onerous had the rule of the wool masters become. Brienne accepted their tearful petition, as he did in so many other instances, but this time his response was much more dramatic: he permitted the dyers of the city to form their own guild. The alarming revolutionary significance of this step was not lost to Florentines of the *trecento.* Heretofore there had been only twenty-one legally accredited *arti* in the city. In accordance with the Florentine constitution only fully matriculated members of one of these twenty-one corporations were judged citizens possessing complete political rights. By acknowledging the claims of the *tintores* not only was a twenty-second guild created but, much more important, the political aspirations of the lower orders in the Florentine artisan and shopkeeper world were acknowledged if not encouraged. From 1342 until 1382 petty craftsmen, small manufacturers,

[82] Cf. *Balie,* II, f. 5 (Oct. 6, 1342); fols. 21–23 (Nov. 5, 1342). Worth recalling is the repeated use by the Duke of *novi cives* in the prestigious posts of diplomatic emissaries. Cf. *CCE,* I bis, f. 20, where Ser Blaxius Neri de Colle is noted as ambassador to Arezzo. At folio 29, we have a certain Ser Magus ser Pepi serving as an ambassador with one of the Bardi. Shortly thereafter, a Panciatichi, newly come from outside Florence, holds the esteemed position of ambassador to Arezzo. Cf. *ibid.,* f. 34r. For the names of other *novi cives* in Brienne's regime, see *ibid.,* fols. 66r, 108r, 112r, 128, 149r–161.
[83] *Balie,* II, fols. 92–93; C. Paoli, *op. cit.,* pp. 82–83.

shopkeepers, and artisans repeatedly sought full political rights, which of course led to agitation for new *arti*.

Fanned by the lord's generosity such agitation not only threatened the hegemony of the patriciate but challenged the absolute economic control exercised by the *arti maggiori* over auxiliary craftsmen such as the dyers and soapers. Although the decree of November 1342 cut only a chink in the armor of *maggiori* domination, it was a precursor of openings to come. The right of the dyers to form their own *arte* was annulled soon after the overthrow of the Duke, but their position in the guild world was altered once and for all. They and their peers were accorded a greater voice in guild affairs and declared eligible for all major offices in both the *arti* and the republic.

The dyers and their confreres the soapers and wool washers had complained that under the cruel tutelage of the *Lana* they were reduced to pauperage. The wool manufacturers never settled their accounts promptly, therefore, lamented the dyers, they and their cohorts had been compelled to wait four and sometimes five years for any compensation. Equally vexing, they might be obliged to accept merchandise instead of cash. There was no recourse, no remedy (even the most mild, such as petition or protest) open to these auxiliary craftsmen. Any request for redress would be judged conspiratorial if not subversive by the patrician-dominated communal courts. So absolute was the authority of the *lanaiuoli* that any complaint had to be filed with the *Lana* consuls. Further, the patrician consuls alone fixed the prices for dying cloth; the *tintores* were therefore compelled to labor at the behest of their lords and masters and to pay a tax for each bolt of cloth. When the dyers petitioned Brienne to liberate them from "the yoke of the aforesaid lanaiuoli," they contended they would then be in a better position "to serve your lordship more *viriliter*." Brienne laid down regulations for this new guild, which was to remain directly under the jurisdiction of an official selected by him, and stated specifically that all actions taken must be with his "consensus." Any measures contrary to his express instructions were to be deemed invalid.

Thus a new guild was established in a manner quite legal and proper. It was the first overt threat to the constitutional hegemony of the *maggiori* over the guild world since the late thirteenth century. It bestowed belated recognition on the most affluent of the craftsmen formerly under *Lana* jurisdiction. Brienne's concern seems to have been to win the allegiance of these highly skilled masters. In addition he used his power to liberalize

conditions in the many trades and crafts associated with Florence's greatest industry. He inaugurated a pervasive lightening of controls and a general relaxation of the hitherto tight guild structure. Although some of this release remained rhetorical, it was nonetheless significant in that it represented an appreciation if not an effective response to long-standing problems.[84] Brienne had weakened the absolute control of the *lanaiuoli* over the auxiliary masters, but the difference between a dyer and a wool manufacturer was one of degree: each still employed labor, possessed capital, and owned machinery. But when the despot sought to tamper with the relationships between *il popolo minuto* (worker) and *maggiori* (great employer), he went too far. The chronicler Stefani tells us that the French nobleman was accustomed to calling *il popolo minuto* "le bon populе" and that the very name "Ciompi" (the association of wool workers to revolt just a generation later, in the summer of 1378) was bestowed on the working class by the followers of Brienne.[85]

There is evidence that Brienne began an intense courtship of the working class in November of 1342. Here again he proved a most proper suitor. First he requested permission from the parent organization, the *Lana,* to appoint a special official with power to regulate the activities of that third of the city's population gainfully employed in the manufacture of wool. Two weeks later he selected an official over the wool carders and shortly thereafter an officer with comparable powers to supervise the cloth shearers. Later he selected another official to oversee the day laborers. Each of his appointees received a salary from the public treasury and not, as formerly, from the *Lana.* Again the jurisdiction of the *arti maggiori* had been further diminished.[86]

Officials and workers were organized into quasi-military companies, issued uniforms, and even furnished with a coat of arms (a shield bearing a lamb). This act, unprecedented in the annals of the city, was so memorable that during the Ciompi revolution of 1378, a generation later, the workers of the city rallied under the same emblem before going into action with sword and torch. The companies were designed to replace the armed

[84] For changes in the preamble to certain decrees of the *Lana* masters expressing greater consideration for the feelings, if not the well-being, of those under this guild's jurisdiction, see N. Rodolico, *Il popolo minuto (1343–1378),* (Bologna: 1899), pp. 36, 141; *Lana,* XLV, fols. 57–81r.

[85] Stefani, rub. 575.

[86] *CCE,* I bis, f. 25 (Nov. 16, 1342). Later in his reign, additional officials were appointed by the Duke to govern the activities of the many thousand *lana* workers. Worth noting is the fact that several of these officials—for example, Ser Andrea Lapi of Pistoia and Ser Bartolo ser Segne—were *novi cives.* Cf. *ibid.,* f. 363r (June 30, 1343).

organizations of the *arti*.[87] It had been largely the responsibility of the major guilds to provide a militia to serve whenever the commune was in danger. The militia was traditionally drawn from the ranks of the *arti maggiori,* and membership was a token of civic esteem. To convert this venerable institution into an army dominated by lowly workers was an outrage to burgher pride.

The insult was compounded at Easter time when Brienne staged a grand tournament. Among processions in the square preceding the jousting were six brigades of *il popolo minuto,* festively attired in unaccustomed splendor for the great holiday. The magnates and *popolani* were disgusted by their presumption, but their contempt turned to awe when the bands of men were announced as "The Powerful Ones." For the next great holiday, June 1—the name day of the City of the Baptist—the Duke ordered a grand carnival with an abundance of food, drink, and music. Again the six brigades marched; again the burghers were scandalized. After the parade *il popolo minuto* swarmed through the narrow streets dancing, singing, and shouting the Duke's praises: "Long live the just *Signore* who punishes the mighty and has no fear of them!"[88]

The chronicler Stefani acidly etched his anguished insight: "He ought to have remembered that [*il popolo minuto*] would not treat him better than Christ, who was in truth a just *Signore.*" The morose narrator concluded that events were simply beyond *"human or divine reason."* The *minuti* were unworthy of so great an honor, and of course *boni cives* must despise Brienne for "magnifying the lowly." When the greater guildsmen were ordered to take part in the celebration for the patron saint, they marched without banners to display their disgust and horror at Brienne's immorality. Was a sacred festival the appropriate time to display the pomp of an earthly lord?[89] After 1343 tournaments fell into such disrepute that they were not again staged on a large scale for almost half a century.

Efforts to win the support of *il popolo minuto* increased during the latter part of Brienne's signory. Whereas earlier regimes had granted

[87] N. Rodolico, *I Ciompi,* p. 142; A. Doren, *Le arti fiorentine* (Florence: 1940), II, 230–31.

[88] G. Villani, VIII, 8; Stefani, rubs, 575, 566; G. Scaramella, *Firenze allo scoppio del tumulto dei Ciompi* (Pisa: 1914), p. 71.

[89] A. Doren, *Die Florentiner Wollentuchindustrie* (Stuttgart: 1901), pp. 237 ff.; Stefani, rub. 575. Related to the despot's efforts to construct a popular base for his signory was his appointment of 600 "pauperes qui fecerunt custodiam nocturnam. . . ." Surely such an assemblage of the dispossessed would not be reassuring to the already scandalized burghers of the city. For a reference to the formation of such a body, see *P,* XXXI, f. 145 (Mar. 26, 1344).

judicial dispensation almost exclusively to *maggiori* and *magnates* and regularly rejected petitions and pleas of *minuti,* Brienne in December of 1343 granted remission, dispensation, and absolution to wool beaters condemned to death by the Foreign Official of the *Lana* for conspiring with other workers against the masters. A plea for leniency was accepted from a *minuto* convicted of sedition because he had harangued a group of workers, addressing them as "slaves of the guilds," and exhorted them to overthrow the government and burn the tax records. Remission was even bestowed upon petty tradesmen who violated the communal ordinances fixing the price of goods and services. Fines assessed against small grain vendors and sellers of dried meats were substantially reduced.[90]

Brienne had altered the style of polities in the polis: the personal, laissez-faire rule that had obtained only for the *maggiori* and magnates now spread to the lower orders. The officer in charge of the *Platea* of *Or San Michele* (the communal grain market) fined a vintner 500 lire for selling wine from casks that did not bear the communal seal; an appeal was made to Brienne and the vintner required to pay only a pittance. A baker selling wares after hours or adulterating flour received the same generous treatment. These pardons, remissions, and dispensations were granted with scrupulous regard for legal niceties. Special entries were even made in the treasury records indicating that these cases were settled after thorough review by a properly constituted tribunal of the republic.[91]

Events of July through September of 1343, following the ouster of the despot, suggested that efforts to curry the favor of the lowly had not been in vain, for at no time in communal history was there such intense class unrest as in the late summer and early fall of 1343. The remnants of the brigades organized by Brienne served as a nucleus for organized protest by *minuti* against the resumption of the undisputed hegemony of the guild masters. Attacks were launched against the palace of the *Arte della Lana* by incensed workers. At least one high-born Florentine led a cantankerous band of several thousand wool workers through the streets of the city shouting: "Long live the worker! Death to the rich! Down with gabelles!"

[90] From the beginning of his tenure, Brienne's grain official, Tommaso da Assisi, reduced fines collected from vendors of grain convicted of a variety of malpractices by as much as 75 per cent. *CGE,* I bis, f. 16r (Oct. 30, 1342). Cf. also *ibid.,* fols. 52r–64. For dispensations granted vintners, see especially fols. 52r–53.

Instances of remission conferred upon *minuti* for convictions on capital charges will be found on fols. 46r, 62r, 187r.

[91] *Ibid.,* fols. 34, 52r–53, 72–79, 333r. Most significant was the dispensation granted *minori* by the Duke's officials for violations of anti-monopoly ordinances. Cf. *ibid.,* f. 120.

Distraught *minuti* stormed the palatial, fortresslike residences of leading *maggiori* crying: "Death to the magistrates and to all rich men!" In response leading *maggiori* prophesied the powerful would soon lay the upstarts low.[92]

With the outburst of revolution, Brienne's attempts to broaden the base of support for his signory were put to the test. The despot had perhaps at best a few hundred troops at his disposal and therefore could not hope to subdue the patricians without popular support. Moreover, when the city grew restive Brienne's own lieutenants proved unreliable. But that some of the city's wool workers and butchers remained loyal indicates that the most class conscious of the republic's middling and lower orders were not impervious to Brienne's blandishments and unaccustomed largesse.

On July 2, 1343, the despot consummated an elaborate alliance with Mastino della Scala of Verona and Taddeo Pepoli, lord of Bologna. Giovanni Villani observed that "The good will of Florence would have been of more utility." Disappointed in Brienne because he failed to repeal the harsh Ordinances of Justice, the *magnati* were disaffected. The *popolani* were incensed, according to Villani, because the Duke had deprived them of property and "had removed privileges in the matter of taxation from the citizenry." Certainly the peasants and small farmers did not abandon their traditionally apolitical stance. Brienne had not conspired with the elements to bring about a poor harvest or been responsible for the rising price of grain.[93]

Several conspiracies evolved. Some of the malcontents clustered around the Bishop of Florence, Agnolo Acciaiuoli. This scion of the great banking house was joined by five of the most prominent Bardi, the two leading Rossi, and several Frescobaldi. The heads of the magnate house of Donati were sought out. Prominent among them were the magnate Cavicciuli and Pazzi. Another group of conspirators joined forces with the magnate Adimari. Of the many commoner families plotting the Duke's overthrow, the Albizzi, Aldobrandini, Bordoni, Medici, and Rucellai were the most eminent.

At nine o'clock on the morning of the day of St. Anne (July 26, 1343) the workers and masters closed their shops. Crowds assembled waving the

[92] Cf. N. Rodolico, *Il popolo minuto,* pp. 48, 69–70, 140; Stefani, rub. 568; G. Villani, XII, 23. For a reference to the attacks against the palace of the *lanaiuoli,* see *Lana,* XLI, f. 117r.
[93] G. Villani, VIII, 13, 16.

banners of the commune and the standards of *il popolo*. Mobs commenced to chant "To death with the Duke and his followers!" while others shouted "Long live the people and the commune of Florence and liberty!"[94] While *il popolo* laid siege to Brienne's palace a solemn reconciliation between magnates and leading *popolani* was effected on the far side of the Arno. In true medieval fashion eternal friendship was sworn, kisses of peace exchanged, and then the patriciate rode into battle.

The Duke and 400 armed men were trapped inside the palace by an incensed mob bent on vendetta. His retainers and mercenaries had only biscuits and vinegar, and water was low. Meanwhile the insurgents were joined by troops from neighboring Siena, San Miniato, and Prato. Insurrection against the ducal vicars erupted in Arezzo, and the Pistoians rose up to eradicate that symbol of Florentine domination, the loathed *Fortezza*. Volterra and other subject cities renounced Brienne's lordship in particular and Florentine hegemony in general. Thus an empire constructed over several generations was decimated. By July 28 the last vestiges of the Seigneur's power had disappeared and a new regime was installed. The new short-lived signory was staffed by personnel almost identical to The Twenty and represented a futile attempt to resurrect the ancient gentle paideia.

VIII

The usually laconic Stefani grew suddenly expansive and opined that in the early summer of 1343 the greater guildsmen of the city were anxious to ally with the magnates, believing these nobles would prove tractable political companions. The experiences of August and September of 1343, avers Stefani, demonstrated that *maggiori* expectations and confidence had been misplaced. Villani contended that the aristocratic coalition that ruled the polis from late July through late September of 1343 had been created by high-born *popolani* who co-opted those magnates who had

[94] Giovanni Villani provides an ample and masterful description of this revolution of St. Anne's Day. Cf. XII, 17; Stefani, rub. 577. An undated document that appears to be a fragment of a provision enacted between September of 1343 and the outbreak of the Black Death states that the signory, considering the liberation of the people and the commune from the "tyrannical yolk of the Duke of Athens on St. Anne's Day," liberated all paupers and debtors who owed less than twenty-five florins from the prisons of the republic. Likewise, those convicted of bearing illegal arms or engaging in games of chance were to be freed. Cf. *LF*, XXVIII, fols. 138–39r.

fought against Brienne and were both law abiding and sober citizens. He stressed this last point: the chosen magnates were among the most upright and responsible of the city's *grandi,* not lawless and obstreperous like so many of their peers. However, examination of the personnel and the policies of this short-lived signory reveals a dimension not conveyed by the chroniclers.

Upon the ouster of Brienne, six citizens were appointed to assume magisterial power. Of their number, Antonio Albizzi had been one of The Twenty as well as a member of special *balie* elected during the thirties to raise money and conduct the ambitious foreign policy. Taddeo Antella had been similarly involved in the formulation of oligarchical policies and later supported the lordship of Brienne in the communal councils. Soon he undertook several diplomatic missions for the despot and was as you will recall the beneficiary of a decree granting his company a moratorium on all debts. Francesco Brunelleschi, also identified with the oligarchical politics of the thirties, likewise served Brienne as ambassador to Volterra and the Romagna. Berto Frescobaldi, scion of the great banking house and ardent supporter of the Bardi in the rebellion of November, 1340, acted as *podestà* and castellan for the former despot. Paolo Bordoni was a brother of one of The Twenty and served as ambassador for the Duke. Only Nepo Spini, last of these magistrates, appears to have been identified neither with the government of the oligarchs nor of the despot.[95]

The Fourteen who exercised the signory differed little in family background or political experience from the Six. Represented were those hardy perennials of the civic and economic wars, the Bardi, Peruzzi, Ricci, and Strozzi. An Adimari who had advocated giving power to Brienne and served as his ambassador, castellan, and vicar was among them, as was a Biliotti who had loaned money to the Duke and served as comptroller of funds for his armies. A Cavalcanti who was a long-time supporter of the oligarchs and had also served as castellan to Brienne was included, as was a Della Tosa who had been a member of the oligarchical *balia* of Eight in July of 1340. One could also cite a Gianfigliazzi, a Medici, a Rossi, and a Tornaquinci whose political odyssey was almost identical. Of the Fourteen, at least twelve were members of the old guard

[95] Stefani, rub. 588. The effect of this disastrous collaboration between magnates and *popolani grassi* was to cause the latter to conclude that "S'io arò per compagnia uno artifice, egli mi sara suggetto, o reverente e farà quello vorrò ed ancora non lo arò per metà, chè se non farà quello vorrò, non saranno tanti, chè mi rompano in mano la faccenda" (*ibid.*). Cf. also G. Villani, XII, 18–19.

who had promoted Brienne to lordship only to jettison him eleven months later.[96]

The aristocratic Fourteen and the Six were nothing but old sheep (or wolves, depending upon the reader's moral suasions) dressed in not very different clothing. Only a few months before these self-same men had staffed and supported The Twenty to no avail. Moreover, their efforts to seek relief from public tragedy and private misfortune through the energetic expedient of despotism proved just as ill-starred. Now they sought to found a regimen perhaps not unfairly characterized as a variety of antigovernment. Little had been learned from past political experience, for these oligarchs still believed that the polis might be governed in late Merovingian style.

The ambition of these magnates and *popolani* was to undermine the active constraints of law. They could render bothersome tribunals ineffectual, and the treasury records stand as a tribute to their success. There were only a handful of convictions—for the bearing of arms, remaining on streets after curfew, creating fire hazards, littering, storing inflammable materials in the piazzas. There were no fines recorded for violations of the "good customs of the commune": offenses such as breaches of the sumptuary laws or practicing prostitution outside of the prescribed sections of the city or failing to close one's shop on a holy day went unpunished. Much more serious, however, was the fact that there were few condemnations for such chronic offenses as assault and battery. The bedrock and capstone of the Florentine legal system, the Ordinances of Justice requiring that lawless magnates and their clans post security for continued good behavior, also stood abrogated. Nor were stiffer fines and penalties exacted from magnates than from commoners. Again the breach between public and private morality widened into a chasm.[97]

[96] Of course Taddeo Antella was a member of that great business family to whom Brienne granted a moratorium upon payment of debts. For the diplomatic posts held by Francesco Brunelleschi as the Duke's ambassador to Volterra as well as to the Romagna, see *CCE,* I bis, fols. 200–8r (Dec. 31, 1342). On the composition of this magistracy of Six, see *I Capitoli del Comune di Firenze,* ed. C. Guasti (Florence: 1893), vol. II, 57.

[97] On the membership of the Fourteen, see *DP,* IV, f. 1 (Aug. 2, 1343). Judging by his limited participation in the important decisions of the councils of the republic and the various *balie,* Filippo Duccio Magolotti had been little active in the crucial affairs of the commune. Many years ago (in 1315), either he or his father (the names were identical) had opposed the signory of King Robert of Naples over Florence. Cf. *LF,* XVI, Part 1, f. 17; Part 2, f. 30; XVII, f. 14. Francesco Medici had been neither overly active in the councils nor collaborated with the Duke. Villani mentions the Medici as leaders of the popular revolt against the aristocratic regime in late September of 1343. Francesco continued to serve the popular regime in the critical post of ambassador. Cf. *LF,* 16, I, f. 9; XVIII, f. 18; G. Villani, XII, 20; *CCE,* IX, f. 40 (Nov. 10, 1344).

In one area alone did the regime demonstrate a passion for activism: it undertook a redistricting of the city to reduce still further the minimal burden of taxation borne by the patriciate. In response to opposition against this measure, which in time of crisis would only undermine the already weakened fiscal position of the *camera,* the magnates in the Santo Spirito section threatened to cut the bridges across the Arno and establish an independent political community. The diarist Donato Velluti, a magistrate of the commission holding hearings on this bill, intimates that this threat was not taken lightly, and the measure was passed.[98]

This most aristocratic of all Florentine communal governments displayed an almost pathological desire to please the upper echelons of society. Former oligarchical regimes had occasionally been willing to challenge the communal councils on the issue of raising revenue. Few were so irresponsible as to reduce the tax burden at so critical a moment. Moreover, with half the representation accorded to magnates, this government was reluctant to submit even the most modest fiscal proposal to the councils. Although it blithely ordered that communal creditors be reimbursed and public debts promptly paid, it provided not a single clue as to the source of monies either to make interest payments or to amortize the burgeoning public debt. There is no record of any proposal entertained by this most patrician of all *trecento* governments to alleviate the deteriorating fisc. There was every reason for alarm: at no time in recent communal history had so little revenue entered the *camera.* The only tax exacted with regularity was the regressive gabelle on the retail sale of foodstuffs—which fell most heavily upon the very poor. The customs toll dropped to a new low, and the gabelle on contracts showed an even more marked decline.[99]

This last oligarchical regimen was a species of antigovernment in that it gratified laissez-faire aspirations of the patriciate under the elegant canopy of easy legality. Magnates and *popolani grassi* formed a coalition to give final and unequivocal form to the anarchical sentiments intoned with such intensity by the communal councils of the 1330's. They scored a triumph: the do-nothing signory had given almost perfect form to the permissive communal paideia.

That the rulers were selected from law-abiding citizenry, as Villani maintained, was meaningless, since the law they abided by was that of

[98] *Cronica,* pp. 164–65; N. Rodolico, *Il popolo minuto,* p. 45; *I Capitoli del Comune,* II, 57.
[99] The pertinent documents are to be found in *CCE,* II (Aug.–Sept. 1343).

patrician dispensation from obligation, scarcely suitable for times of collective crisis and individual despair. Nor did Stefani's comment—that the failure of the regime was a consequence of the deception of the *popolani grassi* by their magnate confreres—hold water, for they had served together for many years on the *balie* of the 1330's and on The Twenty. The tragedy was rather that after a long succession of unremitting disasters they fell back on the easy conclusion that the permissive paideia was still possible. So viable did it seem to them that they were tempted to extend it to its logical limits and permit the commune to wither away, the patriciate to become virtual dictators, the machinery designed to exact aristocratic sacrifice and compliance to be destroyed.