

## URBAN IDENTITY FORMATION IN MEDIEVAL TUSCANY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** The medieval history of Tuscany has attracted significant scholarly attention due to its unique political, economic, social, and cultural dynamics. This Italian region, nestled between the Apennine mountains, the Patrimony of St. Peter, and the Tyrrhenian Sea, boasts a rich heritage of cities and towns, some of which date back to Etruscan and Roman times. Thirteenth and fourteenth-century archives and memoirs provide valuable insights into the region's evolution.

Tuscany's medieval history is often characterized as the age of city-states, a period marked by substantial population growth, urban development, iconic monuments, economic prosperity, and political autonomy. Florence, for instance, witnessed remarkable population growth, surpassing 100,000 residents in the late thirteenth century. Smaller towns, typically with populations ranging from 1,000 to 15,000, were located within close proximity, connected by an intricate network of roads, canals, and navigable rivers. Some areas, such as the Florence-Empoli-Pistoia triangle in the North, achieved population densities exceeding 150 inhabitants per square kilometer—a rarity in the Middle Ages.

This research explores the multifaceted dynamics of medieval Tuscany, shedding light on the region's urban and rural communities, social structures, economic systems, and religious practices during this transformative era.

**Keywords:** Tuscany, Middle Ages, city-states, urban development, medieval history.

### Introduction

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

These sources show the way ancient *Tuscia*, the region between the Apennine mountains, the Patrimony of St. Peter and the Tyrrhenian Sea, had always been a land rich in towns and cities. There were, in fact, large urban

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

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

Thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Tuscans identified a city by the number of its inhabitants, houses and monuments, shops and workshops, the volume of trade, the political domination of a surrounding area, the existence of a collective recorded memory, as well as the development of shared religious devotions. The ennobling presence of a bishop was, therefore, not enough. Considering these parameters, from the late twelfth century to the first half of the fourteenth Florence, as we have already observed, had approximately 120,000 inhabitants. Siena stood at around 50,000, and reached its maximum population level in the 1320s. Pisa had some 45,000 residents, with a maximum increase at the end of the thirteenth century. Lucca had more or less 30,000 to 35,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the fourteenth century; the town of Prato and the city of Pistoia approximately 15,000, Arezzo 13,000, Volterra 10,000 to 12,000, San Gimignano (which, like Prato, did not keep the title of *civitas* since it had no bishop) from 8,000 to 10,000; Colle di Val d'Elsa (in the same situation) 2,000 during the 1210s and about 6,000 at the beginning of the following century; the *castrum* of San Miniato al

Tedesco, the largest ‘village’ in the middle Arno valley, had around 5,000 residents at the end of the thirteenth century. These data are taken from various sources which have varying levels of reliability for historians. There are, for example, chroniclers, poets and other writers. Records of direct taxation (*Estimi, Catasti, Tavole delle Possessioni*), as well as registers of excise taxes – especially *gabelle* collected at city gates – provide important information. There are also collective agreements and oaths of citizens, some lists of armed men, and, finally, archaeological and urbanistic studies, that give a more precise picture of the urban living spaces. On the other hand, other indicators emphasize the large sizes of the communities. As Giovanni Cherubini notes, in 1338 almost 270,000 hectolitres of wine reached Florence, and in 1334 more or less 70,000 were sold in Lucca

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

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

About the aetiology of Tuscany’s other great cities, Villani recognised Lucca, a Commune that Florence aspired to dominate during 1330s, as an exceptional *civitas*, because it was the first one in *Tuscia* to convert to Christianity, and consequently the Light (*Luce*) of the region. Arezzo, instead, got its name because it was destroyed and then ploughed (*arata*) by the Ostrogothic king Totila at the time of the Barbarian invasions of Italy (fifth century). Pisa was the city where the Romans collected taxes and income from navigators and where they weighed these revenues on two scales (*pese*) which lent their name to the city’s plural form *Pisae*. Pistoia, founded by the heirs of the Roman tyrant Catiline, acquired its name from a great plague (*pistolentia*) which occurred on

the site where the city was reputed to have been founded during the struggle between Romans and Catilinaires. At the end we can note that Villani's attitude toward Siena was entirely negative, since he said it was founded by Charles Martel during a raid against Apulia, when he decided to leave the old (*senes*), sick soldiers and other men who could not bear arms at the site of what was to become the city.

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

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

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

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

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

Over time, the Sieneese specialized in money lending, originally fuelled by the support of an original entrepreneurial class. Especially as steady creditors of the papal *curia*, Sieneese merchants accumulated considerable financial resources that they translated into impressive building projects, that culminated in the

construction of the famous Piazza del Campo and in the ambition to build a large cathedral that remained unfinished because of the crisis of the fourteenth century. The main limitations of the Sienese economy were the relatively low investment in manufacturing, less favoured than, for example, in Florence or even in Prato, because of the absence of an important river crossing the city. The prosperity of Sienese business (as well as that of Pistoia) was primarily entrusted to investments which were exposed to the risks of currency devaluations and the insolvency of debtors.

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

His trade network, well documented by a large collection of business letters still available at the State Archives of his city, spread through many areas of Italy, France, Catalonia and Flanders. It was Datini who invented the bill of exchange (*lettera di cambio*), and he was the first to define the most popular techniques of financial intermediation. As regards the economies of the most relevant towns, at the beginning of the thirteenth century San Gimignano in Valdelsa, originally a *castrum* dependent on the bishop of Volterra, launched a massive cultivation and export of saffron, a plant widely used in cooking and pharmacopoeia. The trade operators of this small citadel brought this product to the Mediterranean ports, accumulating capital profits to reinvest in money lending after the example provided by their colleagues in Siena and Florence. During the Middle Ages, the ancient city of Volterra, which in Roman times was one of the most important centres of *Tuscia*, suffered a process of slow decline resulting from its progressive isolation from the main roads of the region. It is enough to notice that the urban perimeter of the Communal period never reached the extension of the Etruscan one. Volterra always retained the title of *civitas*, tried to develop wool manufacturing and did have some wealthy merchant-entrepreneurs, but the volume of its business was always limited, and its economic role was mainly related to the

exportation of raw materials, especially rock-salt coming from the mines of its territory. The economic growth and the consequent population increase were not without consequences for the Tuscan cities. The percentage of urban population grew excessively. The success of craft activities reduced the agricultural workforce, and a part of the wealth accumulated by merchant-entrepreneurs had to be spent on importing massive quantities of wheat and other cereals from the kingdom of Naples, the Iberian peninsula or Provence. This urban concentration of the population favoured the emergence of a poor working class – almost a kind of proletariat – and, during the second half of the fourteenth century, it led to the outbreak of riots such as that of the Bruco district in Siena (1371) or of the Ciompi (wool workers) in Florence (1378).

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

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

different situation, compared, for example, to that of the Northern German or Southern Italian cities, which were usually unable to control their surrounding countryside from the political standpoint.

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

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

Clashes and long rivalries never obliterated the interdependence among the urban communities of the region. Not surprisingly, therefore, municipalities experienced similar forms of institutional evolution, that is the crisis of the consulate, the advent of the aristocratic rules of the *Podestà*<sup>81</sup>, and, especially from the second half of the thirteenth century, a progressive development of the *Populus* regimes. The latter, in particular, were expressions of the class of leading traders who achieved power after a long struggle against local aristocracies (*Magnati*). Tired of the fights generated by the local factions, the *Populus* acquired supremacy and tried to exclude the Magnates from Communal rules. However, in the long run, the new Popular governments could not guarantee political stability.

A guild-based rule (*Governo delle Arti*, 1282) emerged in Florence. It was headed by a Priory formed by the representatives of the most important trade and manufacturing guilds. The political evolution of the traditionally Ghibelline cities, like Pisa, was different, and the regime of the *Populus* did not give rise to a government led by professional associations. In the Tyrrhenian republic the Popular rule was expressed above all by the figure of the Captain (*Capitano del Popolo*), chief magistrate who had the executive and judiciary powers and shared it, at various levels, with the *Podestà*; since the drafting of laws was a responsibility of the city council (the *Anziani*, thirteenth century). From 1280s to 1355 the Siennese merchants-entrepreneurs ruled the local Commune through the Guelph magistracy of the *Nove*. In some of the smaller and relatively marginal cities like Volterra and Arezzo, bishops and some noble oligarchies kept power for a long time and profoundly affected the activities of the Communal magistracy.

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

Evotions responded to the same need for divine protection over the cities, their inhabitants and their Communal governments. The choice of the transcendent mediators was very important and became a symbol of the local identity. Florence was especially linked to the cult of its patron, saint John the Baptist, whose feast day and holy ceremonials were supported by the public authorities and trade associations: Siena identified its special protector in the Virgin Mary; Pisa relied on its local patron saint Ranieri (c. 1117-1160), and Arezzo celebrated its former bishop saint Donatus (fourth century). Citizens demonstrated their devotions to many other ancient and more recent saints, also in connection with and in obedience to the teachings of the religious orders, namely from the beginning of the thirteenth century and from the advent, in every country, of the Mendicant friars. The acquisition of famous relics, especially from the Middle East and the Holy Land, increased the background of local devotions. We can mention, for example, the thorn from the crown of Christ, brought to Pisa in 1333 and located in a well-known church on the left bank of the Arno (*Santa Maria della Spina*); then the so-called *Volto Santo* (Holy Face of Christ) in the cathedral of Lucca, a wooden crucifix traditionally considered as an *acheiropoietos*, coming from the ancient city of Luni. There was also the Sacred Girdle of the Virgin Mary conserved in the parish church of

Prato; and, finally, the fragment from the relics of the Apostle James the Greater that Atto, bishop of Pistoia (1133-53), obtained as a gift (1144), through the intercession of pope Innocent II, from the archbishop Didacus of Santiago de Compostela. Relics were visible and easily identifiable objects blessing each city, since they were vehicles of privileged access to divine benevolence and to Heavenly protection.

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

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

### **Appendix**

Estimated populations of major cities in Tuscany (13<sup>th</sup> century – c. 1330)

Florence	120,000 inhabitants
Siena	50,000
Pisa	45,000
Lucca	30,000

Pistoia	15,000
Prato	15,000
Arezzo	13,000
Volterra	12,000
San Gimignano	10,000
Colle di Val d'Elsa	6,000
San Miniato al Tedesco	5,000

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

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