INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM J. CONNELL

In the century that followed the Black Death of 1348, the republic of Florence became the dominant power in Tuscany, absorbing within its dominion a large number of formerly independent communes and their rural territories, so that the area controlled by Florence nearly tripled in size. The plague itself seems to have contributed to Florentine expansion, for, although the disease roughly halved the population of all of the Tuscan urban centres, Florence, as the region's largest city, still commanded resources that permitted her to capitalise on the new weakness of her neighbours. Florentine growth was accomplished through a steady series of purchases, conquests and alliances (see Map on p. 3) and it was accompanied by important efforts to integrate newly acquired lands into the Florentine state. The century of dramatic territorial expansion had important and lasting consequences for the political and economic history of Florence and Tuscany. It also corresponded with the first flourishing of the cultural phenomenon we know as the Florentine Renaissance.

It used to be thought that the Renaissance was an affair strictly for cities. A distinguished scholarly tradition has long held that the distinctive urban society of late medieval Italy made possible the political and philosophical speculation of humanist scholars as well as the masterpieces of Renaissance artists. As for the countryside, its historians tended to work in demographic or agrarian history, fields that were interested in long-term trends, against which the political changes of a ruling centre like Florence were simply ephemera, of interest only insofar as they affected the surviving documentary evidence.

The first sustained effort to integrate the study of the Florentine territory with the political and institutional history of Renaissance Florence was made by Marvin Becker, who, in the second volume of his *Florence in Transition*, published in 1968, and also in several preliminary articles, argued that the dramatic annexations of the fourteenth

century resulted in a changed consciousness or mentality at Florence, which he termed a 'harsh paideia'.[1] The exigencies of defending and administering a much larger territory resulted in the adoption by the Florentine elite of an aggressive and calculating approach to statecraft, so that the republic shed its communal traditions and emerged as a 'territorial state'. 'Territoriality' had long been common currency among historians of feudalism in northern Europe. Marc Bloch, Jan Dhondt, Jean-François Lemarignier, and Georges Duby ascribed vast social and cultural consequences to the assumption of responsibility over territorial holdings by northern warlords in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. But Becker was the first historian to attribute this sort of aggressive territoriality to an Italian republic. That he did so at a time when a number of historians were lauding Florentine foreign policy in the fourteenth century as pacific and defensive makes his effort all the more notable.

Subsequent research has modified Becker's findings to a certain extent. Thus, it has been shown that there was significant and eloquent opposition by some members of the Florentine ruling class to a policy of territorial expansion.[2] Some of the harshest aspects of Florentine rule, especially the high fiscal exactions Becker criticised, were concentrated during periods of military conflict with foreign powers.[3] This in no way diminishes the general argument, however, that the extension of Florentine control over a significant portion of Tuscany caused changes in the practices and the ways of thinking of a medieval commune as it attempted to satisfy the requirements of a territorial state.[4]

An emphasis on territoriality in the work of Becker, and on the institutional history of Florence in the work of other English and American historians, such as Gene Brucker, Lauro Martines, Anthony Molho, and Nicolai Rubinstein, anticipated in certain respects a new

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[1] M. B. Becker, *Florence in Transition*, II, *Studies in the Rise of the Territorial State* (Baltimore, 1968); Becker, 'Problemi della finanza pubblica fiorentina della seconda metà del Trecento e dei primi del Quattrocento', *Archivio storico italiano*, 123 (1965), pp. 433–66; Becker, 'Economic Change and the Emerging Florentine Territorial State', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 13 (1986), pp. 7–39; Becker, 'The Florentine Territorial State and Civic Humanism in the Early Renaissance', in N. Rubinstein (ed.), *Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence* (London, 1968), pp. 109–39.

[2] G. A. Brucker, *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton, 1977), p. 344.

[3] D. Hay and J. Law, *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance* (London, 1989), pp. 112–19.

[4] L. Martines, *Lawyers and Statecraft in Renaissance Florence* (Princeton, 1968), esp. pp. 220–45; A. Molho, *Florentine Public Finances in the Early Renaissance, 1400–1433* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971); Brucker, *Civic World*, pp. 187–247; A. Brown, 'Florence, Renaissance and Early Modern State', in Brown, *The Medici in Florence: The Exercise and Language of Power* (Florence, 1992), pp. 307–26.
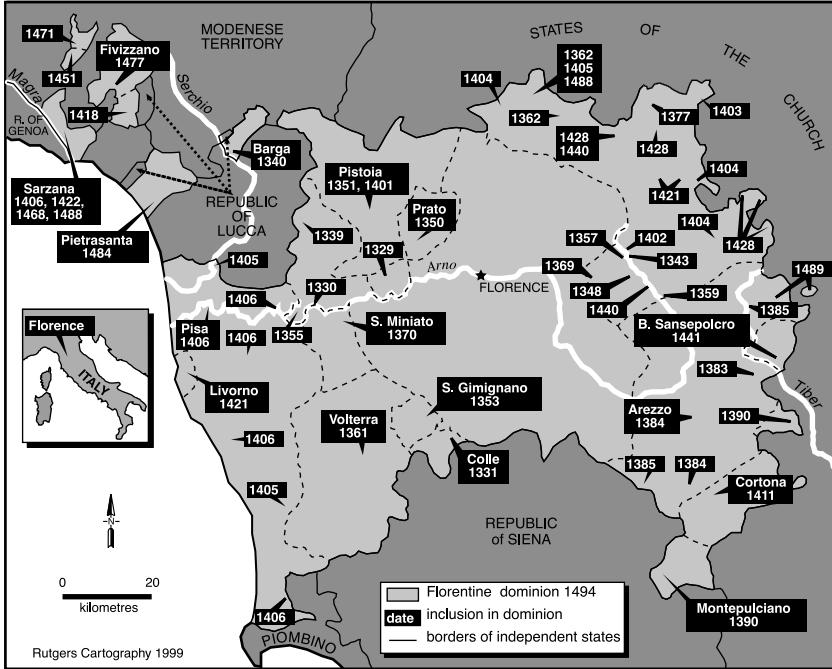
Florentine Tuscany, fourteenth–fifteenth centuries (multiple dates indicate subsequent reacquisition)

interest in political and institutional history that was developed by several Italian scholars in the 1960s and 70s.[5] The blueprint for this approach – which involved an emphasis on regions rather than nation-states – was laid out in notable essays by Giorgio Chittolini and Elena Fasano Guarini.[6] State building in early modern Europe had been discussed for a long time with reference to a few large, geographically

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[5] On the Italian historiography, see J. S. Grubb, *Firstborn of Venice: Vicenza in the Early Renaissance State* (Baltimore, 1988), pp. ix–xvi; J. Kirshner, 'Introduction: The State is "Back In"', in Kirshner (ed.), *The Origins of the State in Italy, 1300–1600* (Chicago, 1995), pp. 1–10.

[6] See especially Giorgio Chittolini, 'Alcune considerazioni sulla storia politico-istituzionale del tardo Medioevo: alle origini degli "stati regionali"', *Annali dell'Istituto Italo-Germanico in Trento*, 2 (1976), pp. 401–19; Chittolini, *La formazione dello stato regionale e le istituzioni del contado: secoli XIV e XV* (Turin, 1979), pp. 3–35; Elena Fasano Guarini, 'Introduzione', in Fasano Guarini (ed.), *Potere e società negli stati regionali italiani del '500 e '600* (Bologna, 1978), pp. 7–47; Fasano Guarini, 'Gli Stati dell'Italia centro-settentrionale tra Quattro e Cinquecento: continuità e trasformazioni', *Società e storia*, 6 (1983), pp. 617–39.

coherent monarchies. It was accepted that the state-building experiences of France, Spain, England and Prussia, however much they diverged, belonged to a common European history of absolutism, comprising the reinforcement of secular rule, the growth of centralised state apparatuses, the formation of enduring administrative elites, and, ultimately, the rise of a feeling of national identity.[7] But it was not nearly so certain whether or how the smaller states of Europe conformed to these patterns. Italian historians of the peninsula's regional states were stimulated in part by a Braudelian interest in the *longue durée* of these states, most of which survived with few changes to their boundaries from the later middle ages down to the Napoleonic period. The success of these smaller states, as measured simply by their endurance, suggested the importance of regional, rather than national factors, in the history of state building. In recent decades, as this scholarship has matured, there has been a great deal of important work on the theory and practice of statecraft in the Italian peninsula in the later middle ages and early modern period.[8] In even the recent work of Italian scholars, there remains an attachment to the regional state as something that functioned as a living system or organism. As Fasano Guarini sees it, geography – albeit a 'geography of power' – is as important as laws and institutions in describing the functioning of the state.[9] It should be noted that in contrast to the 'regional' state of much Italian scholarship, Becker's 'territorial' state was an artificial creation, imposed with violent force by Florence on an unwilling human landscape.

   Spurred by these antecedents and the already rich tradition of Florentine studies, the study of Florentine statecraft in Tuscany has in recent years become one of the most exciting areas of Italian Renaissance scholarship, attracting an energetic international group of scholars who are represented by the essays in this volume. The surviving records concerning Florentine government in Tuscany are probably the richest

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[7] P. Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London, 1974), noting pp. 143–72 on Italy's 'micro-absolutisms'; C. Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, 1975).

[8] See especially Kirshner (ed.), *Origins*; and the larger Italian collection of essays from the same conference, G. Chittolini, A. Molho and P. Schiera (eds.), *Origini dello Stato: processi di formazione statale in Italia fra medioevo ed età moderna* (Bologna, 1994). The influence of the regional approach is strikingly evident in the more recent writings and collaborative efforts of Charles Tilly. See his *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992*, rev. edn (Oxford, 1992); and C. Tilly and W. P. Blockmans (eds.), *Cities and the Rise of States in Europe, A.D. 1000 to 1800* (Boulder,1994).

[9] Fasano Guarini, 'Center and Periphery', in Kirshner (ed.), *Origins*, p. 96; and compare her earlier discussions of historical geography in her *Lo Stato mediceo di Cosimo I* (Florence, 1973), *passim*.

for any territorial state in late medieval and early modern Europe, comprising not just collections of laws and statutes, fiscal records and official correspondence, but also private letters and diaries, account books, notarial acts, criminal records and the deliberations of local councils. In exploring this wealth of documentary evidence, these essays develop new hypotheses about the relations of Florence with her subject territories and they offer new perspectives on one of the earliest and most fascinating of Europe's Renaissance states.

CHAPTER I

THE 'MATERIAL CONSTITUTION' OF THE FLORENTINE DOMINION

ANDREA ZORZI

It was in 1986 that Gian Maria Varanini invited historians, in their study of the Italian territorial states, to look beyond the phase of 'accomplished stability' to a 'prehistory' in which the characteristic practices of these states took shape. Convinced that the modes of governing of the Italian states were not new with the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Varanini argued that these political structures originated in the communal period: in the experience of establishing control over the countryside and in the development of a hierarchy among the north Italian cities.[1] Seen from the perspective of this communal prehistory, the formation by Florence of a territorial dominion was not an inevitable process, but a process open to different possible paths for development. If, therefore, a linear understanding of political development is abandoned, I should prefer to speak of the 'material constitution' of the territorial state. This seems a term well suited to describing the early hierarchy of Tuscan cities and the asymmetries among them that historically preceded the creation of a Florentine dominion.

To anticipate this chapter's conclusion, the Florentine process of expansion took place slowly, and in continual interaction with the territorial expansion of rival states. The ordering of the territory did not follow a unitary scheme, nor was there a progressive refinement of public functions; what took shape, rather, was a system characterised from the beginning by a low degree of integration among its components. The creation of institutions was not in itself the aim of policy. The only true end of the territorial order was to preserve the political, military and economic might of Florence.

The territory that Florence had acquired by the 1420s comprised

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[1] G. M. Varanini, 'Dal comune allo stato regionale', in *La storia: i grandi problemi dal Medioevo all'Età contemporanea*, II, *Il Medioevo*, pt 2, *Popoli e strutture politiche* (Turin, 1986), pp. 706ff. See also G. Chittolini (ed.) *La crisi degli ordinamenti comunali e le origini dello stato del Rinascimento* (Bologna, 1979).

what was really a sub-regional dominion, a small state of about 11,000 km². This was certainly larger than the Sienese dominion in the open marshlands of southern Tuscany (6000 km²) or the Lucchese contado-state (about 1000 km²). But it was clearly diminutive when compared with the Venetian *Terraferma* (30,000 km²) and the Duchy of Milan (27,000 km²), to consider two Italian states that also began as cities. Moreover, the Florentine dominion was not at all comparable in size with the kingdoms of the south, the Papal state, the Savoy state or even with middling territorial principalities of northern Europe.[2]

Even so, the dimensions achieved by Florence constituted an exceptional result when compared with her starting circumstances more than two centuries earlier. When the Florentine commune began to organise its own contado in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there was no indication that the seat of a small diocese, distant from the most important Italian road (the Via Francigena that linked Rome with the north), and deprived of outlets to the sea, would become the capital of a dominion that included the greater share of the Tuscan cities.

If we attempt to chart this expansion over time, surely the thirteenth century was the decisive period in which Florence laid the foundations of her demographic, economic and political hegemony. What took place was a 'primary accumulation' of resources that allowed the Florentine ruling class ultimately to prevail in the difficult military competition that accompanied the redrawing of the Italian political map to the scale of regions rather than cities.[3]

ORDERING THE TERRITORY

In the thirteenth century, the area that Florence would later control was characterised by three fundamental elements: the marginalisation of signorial formations, the density of its urban network, and the important role assumed by certain 'sub-urban' centres, known as *terre* or *borghi*.[4]

[2] Compare G. Chittolini, 'Cities, "City-States", and Regional States in North-Central Italy', in C. Tilly and W. P. Blockmans (eds.), *Cities and the Rise of States in Europe, A.D. 1000 to 1800* (Boulder, 1994), pp. 28–43; and E. Fasano Guarini, '"Etat moderne" et anciens Etats italiens. Eléments d'histoire comparée', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 45 (1998), pp. 15–41.

[3] Cf. G. Pinto, 'L'economia della Toscana nella seconda metà del Duecento', in Pinto, *Toscana medievale: paesaggi e realtà sociali* (Florence, 1993), pp. 13–24; and S. R. Epstein, 'Town and Country: Economy and Institutions in Late Medieval Italy', *Economic History Review*, 46 (1993), pp. 453–77.

[4] A. Zorzi, 'L'organizzazione del territorio in area fiorentina tra XIII e XIV secolo', in G. Chittolini and D. Willoweit (eds.), *L'organizzazione del territorio in Italia e in Germania: secoli XIII–XIV* (Bologna, 1994), pp. 279–349.

The early marginalisation of the signorial presence in Tuscany, thanks
to the weak dynastic efforts of Tuscany's post-Carolingian lordships and
the aggressiveness of Tuscany's very dynamic cities, is a phenomenon
well known to scholars of the central centuries of the middle ages.[5] Not
always, however, has this earlier phenomenon been understood as
preliminary to the later process of forming a territorial dominion. Yet
the vigour and the determination shown by the Florentine commune,
beginning in the first half of the twelfth century, in successfully
challenging the signorial powers present within its diocese-contado
undoubtedly helped make possible later growth.

From the beginning, Florence found herself competing in a geopoli-
tical space crowded with sturdy, war-hardened cities. More than
elsewhere in Italy, Tuscany's cities, rather than its lordships, functioned
as hegemonic poles for the organisation of the territory. Around 1300,
the area of the Arno basin probably arrived at a level of urbanisation
unequalled in Europe, with the result that the urban network func-
tioned as a kind of connective tissue for the region.[6] Each city and town
developed its own experiences of urban government and control, and
these were projected outward onto the surrounding territory. Thus,
Florence was in contact with other cities that were expanding and
redefining their dominions, as was the case of Pisa, which imposed a
complex network of new boundaries on her contado at the end of the
thirteenth century.[7] These examples seem to have been crucial for the
important Florentine decision to separate subject cities from their
contadi.

A very special part was played in Tuscany by the many towns,
known as *terre* or *borghi* to distinguish them from cities (*civitates* or *città*).
These centres were really 'quasi-cities', to use a recently coined term.[8]
The *terre* were governed by political institutions quite advanced for the
time, and they functioned as capital-centres for territories of respectable

[5] See G. Cherubini, 'Qualche considerazione sulle campagne dell'Italia centro-setten-
   trionale tra l'XI e il XV secolo', in Cherubini, *Signori, contadini, borghesi: ricerche sulla
   società italiana del basso Medioevo* (Florence, 1974), pp. 100ff.; and C. Wickham, 'La
   signoria rurale in Toscana', in G. Dilcher and C. Violante (eds.), *Strutture e
   trasformazioni della signoria rurale nei secoli X–XIII* (Bologna, 1996), pp. 343–409.
[6] M. Ginatempo, 'Toscana e Italia centrale', in Ginatempo and L. Sandri, *L'Italia delle
   città: il popolamento urbano tra Medioevo e Rinascimento (secoli XIII–XVI)* (Florence,
   1990), p. 108.
[7] K. Shimizu, *L'amministrazione del contado pisano nel Trecento attraverso un manuale notarile*
   (Pisa, 1975); F. Leverotti, 'L'organizzazione amministrativa del contado pisano dalla
   fine del '200 alla dominazione fiorentina: spunti di ricerca', *Bollettino storico pisano*, 61
   (1992), pp. 40ff.
[8] G. Chittolini, ' "Quasi-città". Borghi e terre in area lombarda nel tardo Medioevo',
   Società e storia, 13 (1990), pp. 3–26.

dimensions: 90 km² at Colle, 107 km² at San Casciano, 131 km² at Prato, 139 km² at San Gimignano, 146 km² at Borgo San Lorenzo, and 160 km² at San Miniato.[9] The importance achieved by certain of these *terre* suggested to Florence that their autonomy should be recognised through the establishment of alliances rather than thoroughgoing subjugation. In the central decades of the fourteenth century, the first phase of the expansion of the dominion was characterised by alliances with intermediate-sized towns such as Prato, Colle, San Gimignano and San Miniato.[10] Indeed, these towns were the first areas to experience the direct ties with Florence that were an important characteristic of the later policy towards subject contadi. In these middling towns, Florentine expansion became the catalyst for a substantial political and institutional resurgence on the local level.[11]

DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURES

If we move on to consider the evolution of demographic structures, an intrinsic Florentine superiority emerges with clarity during the thirteenth century. This was when Florence irrevocably surpassed Pisa. The latter city, which counted no fewer than 30,000 inhabitants in 1228, arrived at just above 50,000 in the first decades of the fourteenth century. Florence, on the other hand, with probably about 15,000–20,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the thirteenth century, quintupled in size over the next one hundred years, showing an extraordinary capacity to attract population and resources and to produce wealth. With more than 100,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Florence was one of the largest cities of the European West. Tuscany as a whole probably had 1 million or 1,100,000 inhabitants in the fourth decade of the fourteenth century, and Florence alone accounted for one-tenth of them. This was more than twice the population of Pisa or Siena (each at about 40,000–50,000 inhabitants), four times that of Lucca (25,000) and five or more times the populations of Arezzo (20,000), Pistoia (18,000) and Prato (10,000–15,000). Thus, even before setting out on her policy of

[9] Zorzi, 'L'organizzazione del territorio in area fiorentina tra XIII e XIV secolo', pp. 284–5.

[10] Cf. A. Zorzi, 'Lo Stato territoriale fiorentino (secoli XIV–XV): aspetti giurisdizionali', *Società e storia*, 13 (1990), pp. 799–825.

[11] See G. Chittolini, 'Ricerche sull'ordinamento territoriale del dominio fiorentino agli inizi del secolo XV', in Chittolini, *La formazione dello stato regionale e le istituzioni del contado. Secoli XIV e XV* (Turin, 1979), pp. 292–352; and Zorzi, 'L'organizzazione del territorio in area fiorentina tra XIII e XIV secolo', pp. 344ff.

territorial expansion, Florence exercised demographic and economic hegemony over the region.[12]

To judge things properly, however, the decisive phase of the formation of the territorial states in Italy took place during the demographic downturn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: between the peak of greatest demographic growth in the first decades of the 1300s and the take-off of a new ascendant curve in the second half of the fifteenth century. This was absolutely the case for Florence. The beginning of expansion beyond the boundaries of her traditional contado occurred in the years immediately after the great famine of 1328–30, which signalled the start of population decline in the region. And the submission pacts of Prato, Colle and San Gimignano were signed just after the devastating epidemic of 1347–8.[13] Recently, Stephan Epstein has shown how during the general demographic decline of Tuscany (which was relatively accentuated compared with other Italian regions), Florence increased her lead over the region's other cities.[14] The comparison with Pisa is striking. Overtaken during the thirteenth century, at the beginning of the fourteenth century Pisa still had half as many inhabitants as Florence. At mid-century, though, Pisa had only one-third as many inhabitants as Florence, one-fifth as many in 1427, and by 1552 the proportion was only one to six.[15] The trend is equally true for other Tuscan centres. The individual rankings of cities in the Tuscan hierarchy remained unchanged, but all remained at a relatively low demographic level. In 1427–30, for instance, when Florence had 37,000 inhabitants, Pisa was reduced to only 7500, Pistoia and Arezzo to 4500, Prato, Volterra and Cortona to 3500, and San Gimignano and San Miniato to 1500.[16] This demographic superiority helps to explain why Florence was able to realise a territorial policy that

[12] Cf. G. Pinto, *La Toscana nel tardo Medioevo: ambiente, economia rurale e società* (Florence, 1982), pp. 75ff.; Ginatempo, 'Toscana e Italia centrale', pp. 106ff.; M. Ginatempo, 'L'Italia delle città tra crisi e trasformazione', in Ginatempo and Sandri, *L'Italia delle città*, pp. 224–5.

[13] C. M. de La Roncière, *Prix et salaires à Florence au XIVe siècle (1280–1380)* (Rome, 1982), pp. 626ff.; Pinto, *La Toscana nel tardo Medioevo*, pp. 75ff.

[14] Cf. S. R. Epstein, 'Stato territoriale ed economia regionale nella Toscana del Quattrocento', in R. Fubini (ed.), *La Toscana al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico: politica economia cultura arte* (Pisa, 1996), III, pp. 871–4. See also, Epstein, 'Cities, Regions and the Late Medieval Crisis: Sicily and Tuscany Compared', *Past and Present*, 130 (1991), pp. 16ff.; and Epstein, 'Town and Country', pp. 459ff.

[15] Cf. E. Cristiani, *Nobiltà e popolo nel Comune di Pisa: dalle origini del podestariato alla signoria dei Donoratico* (Naples, 1962), pp. 167–72; and Epstein, 'Stato territoriale ed economia regionale nella Toscana del Quattrocento', p. 873.

[16] D. Herlihy and C. Klapisch-Zuber, *Les Toscans et leurs familles: une étude du catasto florentin de 1427* (Paris, 1978), pp. 225ff.