

*Empire, Italy, and Florence**William Caferro*

In June 1273 Pope Gregory X (1210–76) travelled to Florence to make peace between the Guelf and Ghibellines factions. The reconciliation took place in a public ceremony near the Rubaconte bridge (now Ponte alle Grazie) before a crowd of notables that included Charles of Anjou (1226–85), ruler of Naples and vicar of Tuscany, and Baldwin of Flanders (1217–73), the deposed Latin ruler of Constantinople. Gregory went next to Lyons, where at an ecumenical church council (1274) he confirmed the election of Rudolf of Habsburg (1218–91) as Holy Roman Emperor and arranged religious peace with Byzantium and its emperor Michael Palaeologus (1223–82), who had retaken Constantinople in 1261. The act united the Greek and Roman Churches.

In quick succession, Gregory appeared to solve many of the most divisive issues of the day. Contemporary Italian writers expressed great hope at the turn of events. The Dominican chronicler Salimbene de Adam of Parma (1221–c.1288) credited Gregory with ‘renewing the empire’ and praised him as ‘just, generous and saintly’. The Roman chronicler Saba Malaspina spoke of the start of a ‘golden age’ that would bring peace and prosperity to Italy, especially to the troubled *Regno* (Kingdom) and the south.¹ Dante’s thoughts, however, are unknown. Gregory X and his deeds at Florence and Lyons do not appear in the poet’s work. Gregory’s efforts, if indeed truly realistic, came to little. He had hardly left Florence when the factions repudiated their accord and began quarrelling anew. Rudolf of Habsburg became mired in intramural battles in the north against a rival claimant, Otto II (c.1230–78), King of Bohemia, and failed to take up his Italian inheritance and the imperial crown, which remained vacant until the advent of Henry VII of Luxembourg (c.1275–1313) in Italy forty years later (1310). Charles of Anjou and Michael Palaeologus launched mutual attacks against each other in Albania and Epirus, and Anjou’s own authority in southern Italy was soon undermined by revolt in Sicily (1282). Meanwhile, Palaeologus’ religious accommodation at Lyons was

repudiated at home, and when he died in 1282 he was denied Christian burial by angry Greek prelates.

Italy remained 'a ship without a pilot in a great storm' (*Purg.* VI, 76–7). Dante's adulthood and political career coincided with what historians view as a high point in civic discord and upheaval. The contestants included emperors, popes, the French ruling house, local *signori* (lords), Guelfs, Ghibellines, the *popolo*, members of new emerging social groups, and the *magnati* (see below), namely the traditional elite families. The rivalries were played out against a backdrop of demographic and commercial expansion, and of intellectual ferment that included the rediscovery and reintegration of the works of Aristotle that helped initiate new theories of political organization (see Chapter 21). All these issues are evident in Dante's work and provided the basis for his appeal for peace and justice.

The empire cast a large shadow over Italian politics. Frederick II of Hohenstaufen's (1194–1250) dominion over both Sicily and northern Italy gave de facto meaning to the idea of universal Roman empire. His aggressive policies intensified antagonisms among already bellicose city-states and left a legacy of conflict with popes, who excommunicated him twice and deposed him in 1245. It was during Frederick's reign that the labels Ghibelline and Guelf became firmly fixed as part of the Italian political vocabulary. They derived from a contested German imperial election in the twelfth century and in Italy represented allegiance to the emperor and the Church respectively.

The relationship between the empire and the papacy was a central issue during Dante's lifetime. At its core lay the question of primacy of authority: whether the State or Church possessed plenitude of power, an issue that involved all of Christendom (see Chapter 3). Frederick had reinforced his claim to universal empire by means of Roman law, which he introduced into his kingdom in Sicily through his promulgation of the Constitutions of Melfi in 1231. Papal claims were based on the Donation of Constantine, by which the Roman emperor ceded temporal power to the Church in the fourth century, and on the *translatio imperii* (transfer of empire), according to which Charlemagne in the ninth century received the *imperium* from the Greeks through the intercession of the papacy. Pope Innocent III (b. 1160/61; papacy 1198–1216) gave wide currency to the papal position in two important bulls, *Venerabilem fratrem nostrum* (Our Venerable Brother) and *Per venerabilem* (Through our Venerable Brother), issued in 1202. The former asserted the pope's right to intervene in disputed imperial elections; the second allowed the pontiff the right to settle disputes between the French and English rulers. Innocent's

formulation of papal supremacy remained current in Dante's day and was implicit in Pope Gregory X's affirmation of Rudolf of Habsburg at Lyon in 1274. It was restated by Pope Boniface VIII (b. c.1235; papacy 1294–1303) in 1303 and by Pope Clement V (b. c.1264; papacy 1305–14) in the Promise at Lausanne (October 1310), just prior to Henry VII's descent into Italy.

The ideological struggle between the papacy and the empire was also a territorial one. Northern and central Italy were divided between those lands subject to imperial jurisdiction and those subject to papal jurisdiction. The former, the so-called kingdom of Italy included Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia Romagna, Liguria, and Tuscany; the latter, the papal state, included Lazio, Umbria, and the Marche. The emperor's sovereign rights allowed him the authority to appoint imperial vicars and legitimize lordships. It also gave him the power to validate acquisitions by cities of lands in the countryside, an overlooked but significant prerogative given the hegemonic nature of Italian communes with regard to their rural lands. The papacy extended its influence through appointment of Church officials and rectors in the papal state. Papal patronage had an important financial dimension. The pope's wealth and standing in Christendom and his contacts throughout Europe allowed merchants to gain access to markets and collect debts. A commercial city like Florence gained much in this regard from alliance with the pope.

The empire nevertheless needs to be understood in its broad political context. Like the rest of Europe, the German state experienced demographic growth. It was expanding territorially, moving primarily in the direction of the eastern Slavic frontier. The empire took part in the interplay of international politics that involved England, France, Aragon, Hungary, Poland, Flanders, and Byzantium. But while neighbouring England and France were becoming more centralized states under strong monarchies, the empire remained steadfastly decentralized. It consisted of a series of independent principalities, seven of which held the right to elect the emperor. Dante described the electors in *Monarchia* as 'proclaimers of divine providence' (III, xvi, 14), but in reality they were often corrupt, and the process permeated with graft. Elections were contested and caught up in international dynastic politics. In successive years, Alfonso X, King of Castile (1221–84), and Richard of Cornwall (1209–72), brother of King Henry III of England (1207–72), were respectively elected Holy Roman Emperor in 1256 and in 1257. Cornwall was supported by the Archbishop of Cologne, an elector whose lands had close commercial ties with England. Alfonso X had the backing of the Archbishop of Trier, another elector who was the sworn enemy of the Archbishop of Cologne.

Alfonso also received support from the French king Louis IX (1214–70), who was then at odds with England. Alfonso claimed personal right to the empire through blood ties to the Hohenstaufen clan; his mother was first cousin of Frederick II.

The French were perennial contenders for the imperial crown. They were territorial rivals of the empire in the old middle kingdom of Lotharingia–Burgundy and had competing interests in Hungary and elsewhere. King Philip III of France (b. 1245; reign 1270–85) actively sought the imperial title against Rudolf of Habsburg in 1271, and subsequent French rulers did the same during vacancies in 1291 and 1308. The persistence of French claims is emblematic of its shared heritage with the empire. French kings, like their German counterparts, saw Charlemagne as a founding father and the key figure in the *translatio* by which Roman *imperium* was transferred from the Byzantine east back to the west. In any case, the connection between the German empire and France remained close. Dante's 'lofty Arrigo' (*Par.* XXX, 127), Henry VII of Luxembourg, spoke French and was a vassal of the French King Philip IV (b. 1268; reign 1285–1314). There were current in Italy in Dante's day two prophecies. One, of French origin, popular in Guelf circles, claimed that a French heir to Charlemagne would come forth and bring peace to Italy. The second, of German origin, popular in Ghibelline circles, maintained that Emperor Frederick II, who was still alive, residing at Mount Aetna, would ultimately return to power and revive the empire. German emperors nevertheless remained weak figures. They held small patrimonies at home and were frequently at war with rivals. Indeed, the success of their candidacies depended in part on their inability to dominate the local political scene. Electors chose those who would not challenge their own authority. Adolf of Nassau (b. c. 1255; emperor 1292–98) fought his rival Albert of Austria (b. 1255; emperor 1298–1308), who in turn waged war against the King of Bohemia, as Rudolf of Habsburg had done years earlier.

It is important to stress that European rulers were connected by dynastic ties that also included Italian states. Richard of Cornwall, his brother King Henry III of England, King Louis IX of France, and Charles of Anjou were all married to daughters of Raymond Berenguer V of Toulouse (1198–1245) – 'each a queen' as Dante called the women in *Paradiso* VI, 133. Alfonso X of Castile was the father-in-law of the Italian Marquis of Montferrat, William VII (c. 1240–92), who married his daughter to the Byzantine emperor, Andronicus Palaeologus (1259–1332). Count Amadeus V of Savoy (1249–1323) in Piedmont was cousin of Emperor Henry VII and served as his vicar general when he came to Italy. Amadeus' lands

stretched north of the Alps into France, bordering those of the Counts of Anjou, which in turn stretched south of the Alps into Italy to the town of Cuneo. Savoyards were active in England, helping King Henry III build his royal offices there.

The career of Charles of Valois (1270–1325), younger brother of King Philip IV of France, illustrates well the international nature of politics at the time. In addition to his holdings in France, Charles possessed, through his first marriage, rights to Sicily, and by his second marriage, rights to Constantinople. In 1285 he was invested with the kingdoms of Aragon and Valencia, in 1297 he fought for France against Flanders, and in 1308 he was a candidate for Holy Roman Emperor. His mission on behalf of Pope Boniface VIII to Florence, to ‘pacify’ the city in 1301, led directly to Dante’s exile (*Purg.* XX, 71–5).

Italian states were closely connected to the broader Mediterranean world, which possessed a basic unity, linking Constantinople to Tunis to Barcelona. The kingdom of Aragon competed with Italian commercial cities for privileges in northern Africa. Pisa opposed Aragonese attempts to control Sardinia (1295) and recognized the claims of Alfonso of Castile as Roman emperor. Venice and Genoa fought for commercial rights in Constantinople and maintained colonies in the Greek east. Florentine merchants were active in Achaia; the Cerchi bank served as collector of papal funds in Morea. The war of the Sicilian Vespers (1282–1302) underscored the wide-ranging forces at work. It began with a popular revolt in Palermo, but soon involved most of Europe, north and south. The Byzantine ruler, Michael Palaeologus, accused with the Aragonese King Peter III (1239–85) of conspiring to initiate the war, emerged as an important and conspicuous figure. He cast himself as the ‘new Constantine’, an appellation noted by Italian chroniclers and problematic in terms of contemporary notions of empire. The Byzantines considered themselves Romans (*romaioi*) and heirs of the empire, but they were viewed in the west as Greeks. Palaeologus’ open association with the Roman emperor who founded the city of Constantinople and first brought the empire east further complicated the issue.

The Italian peninsula is in any case best understood as a diverse and heterogeneous entity, with a variety of cultural and ethnic influences. The most important cohesive force was the papacy. The circumstances in the late thirteenth century conspired, however, to hamper consistent policy, which increased the volatility of Italian politics. Between 1254 and 1294 the average tenure of popes was only three-and-a-half years. There were four popes elected after the death of Gregory X in 1276, and the Holy

See remained vacant for two full years just prior to the ill-fated papacy of Celestine V (1215–96), who abdicated less than a month after his election in 1294. The crusading zeal that had helped project pontifical authority in earlier years had lost its lustre owing to the current practice of calling out crusades against internal enemies within Europe. Popes were involved in the same family feuds and rivalries as secular princes. The pontiffs sought to build up their territorial interests as a hedge against external and internal rivals. Pope Nicholas III (b. c.1216; papacy 1277–80), a member of the powerful Orsini clan, appointed his own relatives to key positions in the papal state and the Romagna, for which he earned the contempt of Dante who placed him in Hell with the simoniacs. Boniface VIII, Nicholas' infernal companion, did the same. A member of the less prominent Caetani clan, Boniface waged continual battle with the Colonna family, against whom he called a crusade in 1297. The departure of the papacy from Rome to Avignon (1305) after Boniface's bruising battle with Philip IV of France added another layer of ambiguity and difficulty to pontifical authority in Italy. The 'Babylonian captivity' of the Church (1309–77) damaged the prestige of the papacy, which was widely viewed as being subject to French royal influence. Boniface, who died shortly before the transfer (1303), was subjected by Philip to trial *in absentia* in France (1310–11), and was charged with heresy and demon worship.

The immediate goal of the papacy after the death of Emperor Frederick II in 1250 was to undo Hohenstaufen encirclement. This did not require the defeat of the Hohenstaufens so much as separating Sicily from the rest of the empire. In 1254 Pope Alexander IV (b. 1199 or c.1185; papacy 1254–61) attempted to do so by investing Edmund (1245–96), son of King Henry III of England, with Sicily as a papal fief. But the act proved untenable owing to baronial conflicts in England and the growing strength in Italy of Manfred (1232–66), Frederick II's natural son. Fear of Manfred induced Pope Urban IV (b. c. 1195; papacy 1261–64), a Frenchman, in 1263 to invite Charles of Anjou, the brother of King Louis IX, to Italy to take possession of Sicily. Charles arrived in 1266, the year after Dante's birth. He defeated Manfred at the Battle of Benevento (1266) and followed with a victory over Manfred's cousin Conradin (1252–68) at the Battle of Tagliacozzo (1268).

The advent of Charles had fateful consequences for Italy. After Tagliacozzo, he consolidated his hold on Sicily and maintained nominal lordships in central and northern Italy, including the title of imperial vicar of Tuscany, bestowed on him by the pope. According to his biographer Saba Malaspina, Charles' victories caused his ambition to soar

and, spurred by “accursed hunger for gold” (*Aeneid* III, 57) and desire for world monarchy, he became transformed personally from a ‘bearer of arms of justice’ to the epitome of ‘greed and avarice’.² Anjou sought to extend his influence over the entire eastern Mediterranean, including recovering the Latin Empire in Byzantium and controlling the Holy Roman Empire. He attempted to do the latter by promoting the candidacy to emperor of his nephew King Philip III.

Anjou’s policies polarized Italian politics and stoked Guelf and Ghibelline rivalries. The chronicler Salimbene de Adam, writing in the years 1283–88, saw Ghibelline and Guelf ‘parties and divisions everywhere in Italy’ – ‘in Tuscany and Lombardy, in the Romagna and the March of Ancona, in the March of Treviso’. He found the worst divisions in Tuscany where, paraphrasing the book of Isaiah, he accused both sides of having ‘drunk to the dregs the cup of the wrath of God’.³ To oppose Charles’ Angevin and Guelf hegemony, William VII of Montferrat formed a Ghibelline league consisting of numerous cities extending from Turin to Genoa.

Charles’ ascent, however, gave the Guelf cause the upper hand, providing it with an added military and economic dimension. Charles relied heavily on Guelf and papal bankers to finance his activities in Italy. In return the bankers received important concessions from Anjou in Naples and Sicily and privileges from the papacy in the international marketplace. Florentines took over the financial organization of the Neapolitan kingdom, from which the city also derived much of its grain. Charles exerted his authority in Florence through control of the office of *podestà* (the official in charge of maintaining peace and justice in the city), and through personal representatives, such as the French nobleman Jean Britaud of Nangis (d. 1278), for whom Brunetto Latini (c.1220–93) worked as a notary. Florence and Anjou’s allies joined the Guelf league army (after Benevento in 1266), for which each state provided a *taglia* or share of the overall force. It was therefore the case that the Florentine army of the late thirteenth century was not so much an expression of the city’s own power as an element of broad Guelf military strength. Florence remained a member of the Guelf league long after Charles of Anjou’s death in 1285 and after internal political reforms had changed the nature of the city’s government. The Guelf league meanwhile brought to Florence a succession of mercenary captains, some from local feudatories in Tuscany and the Romagna, and some from France, such as Amerigo of Narbonne (c.1230–98), who was the author of *chansons de geste*, and, like Dante, fought at Campaldino in 1289, where he was wounded in the face. Dante himself participated

directly in Guelf league-related business, travelling in May 1300 to San Gimignano on behalf of Florence to seek an increase of the *taglia* offered by that city. It was as a member of a Guelf league army in 1311–13 that Florence opposed Henry VII when he came to Italy.

For all the use of the terms by contemporaries, the precise meaning of Ghibelline and Guelf is far from clear. They represented in the first instance allegiances to imperial and papal parties respectively. But the simple distinction is inadequate. As we have already seen in the case of Rudolf of Habsburg and Gregory X, emperors and popes were often allied to each other in this period. Conversely, the ties between the papacy and the Angevins wavered during the tenure of different popes. Charles of Anjou's victories had effectively replaced Hohenstaufen domination in Italy with Angevin domination, leaving the pope again encircled. Gregory X's fear of this led him to support Rudolf of Habsburg, from whom he sought the cession of the Romagna to add to the papal state. Gregory's successor Nicholas III pursued a similar policy.

There was a tendency among contemporaries to associate Ghibellines with the nobility and military class, and the Guelfs with more commercial elements. The Dominican rector of Santa Maria Novella, Remigio de' Girolami (d. 1319), implicitly drew on this notion when he described Ghibellines as 'lions' for their bellicose ways, and the Guelfs as 'calves', a meek sacrificial animal.⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), in his *Florentine Histories*, saw the Guelfs and Ghibellines as 'humours' rather than actual parties. He nevertheless, like Salimbene, credited them with 'tearing apart Italy' with their disputes.⁵

Whatever their precise nature, Guelf and Ghibelline represent useful labels, both then and now, to structure the political chaos of late-thirteenth- and early-fourteenth-century Italy. The ruling elite of cities defined themselves according to the terms, and exiled those who took opposing views. The exiles spread the divisions, giving them a supra-communal aspect that one scholar has compared to the modern-day NATO alliance. Guelf exiles of one city would seek refuge with like-minded enemies, thus linking cities together in a chequerboard of conflicting interests. Pisa and Cremona were traditionally Ghibelline, while their neighbours Florence and Milan had Guelf ties. Ghibelline Modena generally opposed Guelf Bologna and Mantua; Ferrara and Padua formed Guelf alliances against Ghibelline Verona. The Guelf–Ghibelline labels often functioned as political markers that had little real connection with the papacy or the empire, and often appeared more as a symptom of factional discords than the cause of them. The labels were in any case easily disposed of by their own proponents for

the sake of political expediency. The Guelf ruler Obizzo II Este of Ferrara (b. c.1247; reign 1247–93) formed an alliance in 1289 with the Ghibelline ruler Alberto della Scala of Verona (b. c.1245; reign 1277–1301) against his Guelf neighbours. This confused the polarities in the region, which became still more muddled when Pope Clement V asserted direct claim over the city of Ferrara in 1308, initiating an infra-Guelf struggle between the papacy and the Este family.

It is nevertheless important to stress that the parties did not encompass all of Italy. They made little headway in Venice, where internal political cohesion was the subject of a self-propagated ‘myth’. The Venetian doge and chronicler Andrea Dandolo (1306–54) demonstrated little real understanding of the rivalry, when he described Guelf and Ghibellines as the names of two brothers from Tuscany. Dandolo nevertheless well understood the destructive power of the parties, seeing in them a diabolical spirit, an opinion shared by the Milanese chronicler Pietro Azario (1312–d. after 1366) who claimed that the terms derived from two actual devils, Gualf and Gibel.⁶

What is undeniably clear from contemporary accounts is that the Guelf–Ghibelline controversy was characteristic of the endemic violence that plagued Italy in the age of Dante. It was fuelled in the first instance by the expansionist policies of states closely packed in a small geographic area and by family feuds that were a basic feature of Italian society. Indeed, Italian city-states may be distinguished from their northern urban counterparts by their enduring interest in territorial conquest and by their social make-up, which included an aristocratic landholding class (*magnati*) that was at once rural and urban, with land in the countryside and involvement in commerce and industry in the city. Italian aristocratic families arranged themselves into corporations, *consorterie*, that functioned as kinship groups of mutual assistance. They possessed their own statutes and councils, which allowed them to act independently of political structures. This encouraged rivalries and vendettas and feuds on a grand scale, fought within cities from towers.

The excesses of the aristocracy were opposed by a rising commercial classes of ‘new’ men or *popolo*. The group is perhaps best understood as a self-appointed counterweight to the elite, against whom they consciously defined themselves and whose penchant for violence in the urban setting they sought to diminish. The *popolo* consisted of those who ‘bought and sold’. It was subdivided into those with substantial wealth (*popolo grasso*) and those with more modest means (*popolo minuto*), excluding the poor and humble. The *popolo*, like the magnates, arranged itself into

corporations, often craft guilds, through which it extended its political power. A Bolognese civil code in 1282 described the *popolo* and *magnati* in language strikingly similar to that used by Remigio de' Girolami for Guelfs and Ghibellines. It compared the latter to wolves, on account of their martial bearing and violent ways, and the former to meek lambs. Machiavelli spoke of a 'natural enmity' existing between the *popolo* and *magnati*, stemming from the desire of the latter to command and the former not to obey them.⁷

The atmosphere of intense rivalry facilitated the rise of strongmen or lords (*signori*), who pledged to restore order. Frederick II's lieutenant Ezzelino da Romano (1194–1259) from the March of Treviso represented the first wave of such men, establishing dominion over the cities of Verona, Vicenza, and Padua. His aggressive policies and autocratic persona, however, gave lords an enduringly bad reputation. The chronicler Rolandino of Padua (1200–76) compared Ezzelino to the devil, and Dante placed him in the seventh circle of Hell alongside Obizzo II Este of Ferrara (*Inf.* XII, 109–12). Obizzo was likewise described – by Riccobaldo of Ferrara (1245–1318) in his *Chronica Parva Ferrariensis* (Little Chronicle of Ferrara) – as the incarnation of evil. Riccobaldo argued, however, that Obizzo's ability to do evil ultimately made him more powerful than God because the Almighty could do only good.

The 'rise of the *signori*' is a well-worn theme in Italian scholarship, highlighted by Jacob Burckhardt and Joseph Addington Symonds, among others. Apart from the personal characteristics of the lords, what distinguished them, as Riccobaldo suggested, was their power. The lords took charge of the political machinery of the states they dominated, sometimes overtly, sometimes behind the scenes, and in this way brought a degree of order. The Este of Ferrara, like Charles of Anjou, controlled the office of *podestà*; Alberto Scotto of Piacenza (1290–1317) served as captain of the people and rector of the merchant guild; the della Scala of Verona were heads of the *mercanzia* (merchant guild). Gherardo da Camino (1240–1306) assumed the more overt title of *capitano generale* (captain general) of Treviso, which afforded him the right to 'to do and act according to his will'.

The lordships were most developed in Lombardy, Piedmont, Treviso, Emilia, and the Marche. The *signori* themselves came from a variety of backgrounds. Cangrande della Scala of Verona (1291–1329), Dante's patron, who dominated Treviso in the early fourteenth century, was from *popolano* origins. His antagonists, the Este family of Ferrara, sprang from the old nobility. The Della Torre and Visconti, who vied for control of

Milan, were *popolo* and *magnati* respectively. Piedmont was dominated by feudal aristocratic houses, including the counts of Savoy in Susa and the Aosta valley and the marques of Montferrat in the upper Po and Varaita valley. The Romagna, the site of continuous warfare (*Inf.* XXVII, 37–8), was home to numerous powerful feudatories, including the Ordelaffi of Forlì, Manfredi of Faenza, and the da Polenta of Rimini. Guido Novello da Polenta (c.1250–1310), Manfred Hohenstaufen's former vicar, assumed the lordship of Ravenna in 1275.

Dante lamented the political status quo, complaining in *Purgatorio* VI, 124–5 that 'the cities of Italy are full of tyrants'. The equation of lord with tyrant must, however, be treated with care. For Symonds in the nineteenth century and much of the Anglo-American scholarship that followed, the term was necessarily pejorative. Lordships were a synonym for oppressive rule, despotism, and the antithesis of freedom, liberty, and republicanism that stood as a distant model for modern western democracies. Recent scholarship has, however, softened the distinction, arguing that the difference between lordships and republics was less than supposed. Both shared similar oligarchic structures and restrictions on individual liberty, and sought the same powers to protect property, prevent lawlessness, and acquire revenue. Medieval republics were hardly modern democracies, and 'tyrannical' lords, such as Gherardo da Camino and Cangrande della Scala, were among the most generous patrons of the day. Dante, who benefitted from the largesse of both, displays an ambiguous attitude toward this class of men. He praised 'good Gherardo' in both *Purgatorio* (XVI, 124–38) and *Convivio* (IV, xiv, 12) and lauded Cangrande's virtues in *Paradiso* (XVI, 70–93). But he described Guido da Montefeltro (1220–94), lord of Urbino, as a 'most noble Latin' in *Convivio* (IV, xxviii, 28) and consigned him to the pit of Hell in the *Commedia* (*Inf.* XXVII).

In any case, the lordships of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century represented a wide range of types of regimes, the details of which scholars have still not entirely illuminated. A few *signori*, such as the Este of Ferrara and the Visconti of Milan, remained in power for the long run. The Guelf and Ghibelline controversy allowed some lordships to grow rapidly into regional entities. But many faded as quickly as they formed. This was the case of William VII of Montferrat, who, in the name of the Ghibelline cause, extended his rule over cities in Piedmont and Lombardy including Como, Vercelli, Alessandria, and Milan. But the constellation fell apart when William died. Similarly, Guido da Montefeltro spread his sway over several communes as leader of the Ghibelline league that opposed papal interests in the Romagna. After victories in 1275 and 1282,

however, Guido abandoned the league, sought reconciliation with the Church and joined the Franciscan order in 1296 (see *Inf.* XXVII). The *signori* were thus largely ephemeral. But they nevertheless represented the wave of the future. By the end of the fourteenth century, Italy saw the establishment of more permanent regimes. From these evolved the principalities associated with the Renaissance era.

The city of Florence remained a republic, if a troubled one. ‘The divided city’ (*Inf.* VI, 61), as Dante called it, was assailed by the same divisive forces operating throughout Italy. It suffered greatly from the Guelf–Ghibelline controversy, which, as contemporaries such as Salimbene de Adam noted, was most fiercely contested in Tuscany. We know much more about the particulars in Florence, however, owing to the numerous extant contemporary accounts, all of which stress the local penchant for violence and civic discord. Brunetto Latini in his *Livres dou Tresor* (Books of Treasure) explained Florence’s bellicosity – which led to his own exile – as the consequence of the city’s founding on land dedicated to Mars, the god of war. The chronicler Ricordano Malaspini said that the Florentines were ‘always fighting battles and war, and when they had no other opponent, they fought among themselves’.⁸

The Guelf–Ghibelline dispute in Florence purportedly originated with the murder of a nobleman, Buondelmonte de’ Buondelmonti on Easter Sunday 1215. Buondelmonti was killed at the base of the statue of Mars by members of the Amidei family (*Inf.* XXVIII, 106–8; *Par.* XVI, 140) who, along with other enemies of the Buondelmonti, formed a Ghibelline party in opposition to the political orientation of the deceased and the city itself, which was Guelf. The Florentine Dino Compagni (c.1255–1324) began his chronicle with the deed, which he saw as initiating continuous civil war that culminated in the White and Black Guelf controversy that ultimately led to the end of Compagni’s political career and Dante’s exile. The Buondelmonti story is, however, instructive of the complicated nature of Florentine factionalism. At the centre of the dispute was family rivalry and vendetta, suggestive of the personal nature of civic unrest and party politics in the city, for which the labels Guelf and Ghibelline are insufficient.

The divisions within Florence were accentuated by the presence of a strong commercial sector associated with the *popolo*. The city had grown in the thirteenth century into an economic colossus, the home of international merchant banks and a vibrant wool cloth industry. It attracted new immigrants – the ‘confusion of people’ that Cacciaguیدا (c.1091–c.1148) complains of in *Paradiso* XVI, 67 – it expanded its town

walls, widened streets, and undertook new building projects, including at Santa Maria Novella in 1280, the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova in 1286, and the cathedral in 1295. Pope Boniface VIII described Florence as a 'fifth element' that ruled the world along with 'earth, water, fire and air'.⁹

The *popolo* played a critical role in Florentine affairs. Politically, they represented an alternative to the party regimes of Guelph and Ghibelline, although they were not entirely distinct from them. The *popolo* expressed its political power through craft guilds and stood in direct opposition to the interests of the *magnati*, who were associated with knighthood and military power and constituted, in the opinion of the *popolo*, a threat to the common good. The influence of the Florentine *popolo* was so strong that it is evident even in Dante, who, despite his overt antipathy toward the class, used its language and even echoed its views in his condemnation of the factions of the day. Indeed, the force of the *popolo* and its deep-seated antagonism toward the *magnati* has led scholars to interpret Florentine society and politics in distinctly Marxist terms. Gaetano Salvemini famously depicted Florentine political struggles as reflecting class conflict between a feudal landed aristocracy (*magnati*) and a rising commercial bourgeoisie (*popolo*). More recent scholarship has, however, viewed the distinction as too simple. The *popolo* and *magnati* were, upon close inspection, difficult to separate from each other. Not all those designated as *magnati* were in fact from the noble class, nor were all those identified as *popolo* from the mercantile class. It may well have been that the term *magnate* was employed to brand opponents not unlike the way the term 'communist' has been used in the modern day.

After Charles of Anjou's victory at Benevento in 1266, Florence moved to a more permanent Guelph orientation. Florence's economic might and nearness to papal lands made the city an important part of Angevin and papal strategy. This fact lay behind Gregory X's efforts to settle the divisions in Florence in 1273 and Pope Nicholas III's subsequent attempt in 1280, when he sent his nephew Cardinal Latino Malabranca (d. 1294) to arrange peace in the city. The financial links, initiated during the advent of Charles of Anjou in Italy, grew stronger with the outbreak of the war of the Sicilian Vespers (1282). Florentine bankers heavily subsidized both Anjou and the papacy. Indeed, Boniface VIII did well to praise the economic potency of Florence, for he was particularly reliant on Florentine bankers to finance his activities, including his ongoing battle with the Colonna family.

It was, nevertheless, the war of the Sicilian Vespers that helped to loosen Angevin political influence in Florence. Shortly after the war

began, the Florentine *popolo* passed reforms (1282) that shifted power to them and their guilds, and away from the magnates. Chief among the reforms was the establishment of a 'priorate' with executive powers, consisting initially of three men and then six, taken from the twelve major guilds (*arti maggiori*). The measures constituted a significant step in transforming Florentine government and broadening participation in it. But they did not succeed in removing the wealthy magnates from power. Dino Compagni complained bitterly about this, and of the corruption of the new regime that was unable to 'protect the weak from the strong'.¹⁰ Ten years later, under the guidance of Giano della Bella (c.1240–c.1305; *Par.* XVI, 130–1), a member of the old nobility with wide support from the *popolo*, Florence passed a more sweeping set of reforms, including the famous Ordinances of Justice in January 1293. Employing egalitarian language of representation and popular sovereignty, the Ordinances further broadened the base of the popular regime. It expanded the number of guilds eligible for the priorate and placed additional restrictions on magnates, who were now required to post surety for good behaviour and were effectively deprived of all political rights. A wholly new office, the Standard Bearer of Justice, was established to enforce sentences against magnates without formal trials. Lists of proscribed magnates were drawn up. They included men with both Guelf and Ghibelline ties, representing much of the Florentine economic elite. The lists reinforce the egalitarian nature of the Ordinances that appear aimed at securing participation for lower-level, non-elite guildsmen in the Florentine government.

Giano della Bella's government lasted from 1293 to 1295, but collapsed in March 1295 under the weight of opposition from the magnates. Giano himself was forced into exile. According to Compagni, Florence 'fell into fresh dangers', including a return to factionalism among powerful families.¹¹ It was at this time that Dante began his political career (1295), two years after the death of Brunetto Latini and the start of the pontificate of Boniface VIII. Dante's political career lasted for seven years. He was elected to the post of prior in 1300 (15 June to 15 August), the fictional year of his journey in the *Commedia*.

Dante's tenure in public office coincided with the outbreak of the great Black and White Guelf dispute that ultimately led to the poet's exile. Ptolemy of Lucca (c.1236–1327), who was a prior of Santa Maria Novella at the time, accused the participants of 'fracturing all of Tuscany' with their violent acts, which he noted were accompanied by earthquakes and divine augurs.¹² The Florentine Black Guelfs were led by Corso Donati (d. 1308); the Whites were led by Vieri dei Cerchi (d. 1313). Both men were

members of prominent aristocratic families with deep roots in the city. The Donati and their followers represented an older, more established elite; the Cerchi and their followers were seen as more *nouveaux riches*. But there was in fact no clear distinction between the sides according to economic and social status or even ideology. The disagreement had the aspect of feud and family rivalry, which in turn may help to explain its intensely destructive nature.

Pope Boniface VIII's attempt to mediate the dispute brought the situation to a head. Following the tradition of popes Gregory and Nicholas, Boniface sent envoys to Florence to make peace between the parties. But Boniface's own circumstances were exceedingly precarious at the time. His authority in Italy was threatened by the Colonna clan and by the Spiritual Franciscans and their leader Jacopone da Todi (1230–1306), who supported the Colonna's challenge to the pope's legitimacy. Boniface also faced international pressure: from France, where his battle over plenitude of power with King Philip IV was intensifying; and from the empire and its presumptive heir Albert of Habsburg, whom Boniface would not recognize until he gained imperial rights to Tuscany. In Florence, Boniface gave his support to the Black Guelfs, whose adherence to the papal cause was more steadfast than the independent-minded Whites. After the failure of several initial attempts, in November 1301 Boniface sent Charles of Valois to Florence as his envoy with the title of *paciarius* or peacemaker. Charles of Valois' mission to the city was the first stop on a broader military expedition to Sicily, to support the flagging Angevin efforts there. Remigio de' Girolami gave a public sermon in Florence welcoming Charles and urging him to use his authority to bring the factions together.

Valois' embassy to Florence on behalf of peace ended in war; his expedition to Sicily for war ended in peace (the Treaty of Caltabellotta, 1302). In Florence, Valois sided with the Blacks, who then attacked their opponents and ransacked the city. They sent the White Guelfs into exile, and Dante, who supported the Whites, was condemned as well. The city passed sentence against Dante in January 1302. A little more than a year later, Pope Boniface – his dispute with Philip IV of France reaching its culmination – would be humiliated by the king's men at Anagni. Pope Clement V moved the papacy from Rome to Avignon, where it remained until 1378.

It was in this context of political turmoil that Dante's political views emerged most fully. Dante repudiated the sovereign city-state that had cast him out in favour of universal empire founded on Rome and sanctioned by God. The precise timing of Dante's conversion to 'Ghibelline' doctrine has been the subject of much scholarly speculation. But the

endeavour seems of dubious merit given the imprecise and shifting nature of Guelf and Ghibelline ideologies. Dante's political views may be more effectively rendered in generic terms: that he supported the party that lost the struggle for control of Florence, then rejected Florence, and with it the primacy of the city-state as a political form.

For Dante, empire represented universal authority, won by the Romans and extending geographically over the whole world. It regulated the civil order and was necessary for the well-being of mankind in both this world and the next one. Its divinely appointed mission was to restrain cupidity, the chief obstacle to justice and mankind's goal of achieving happiness. Dante drew for his notion of imperial jurisdiction on both Augustine and Aristotle. Empire was a remedy for man's defects, which for Augustine was a result of the Fall and for Aristotle was natural to humankind. Dante's construct also relied upon Virgil, who in *Aeneid* I, 278 has Jupiter proclaim that it is to the Romans that 'I have given Empire without end'. In Dante's schema, the Romans were a chosen people, whose status owed to their nobility and was made manifest by divine signs, including the birth and crucifixion of Christ under Roman rule (*Conv.* IV, v; *Mon.* II, x, 110). The empire existed prior in time to the papacy, which had no right to temporal power. In *Paradiso* VI, in the heaven of Mercury, Dante presents Justinian (527–65) as the ideal figure of the emperor and the proper relationship between the empire and the Church. Justinian restored the empire's universal authority, bringing it and its symbol, the imperial eagle, from the 'bounds of Europe' (*Par.* VI, 5) in the Byzantine east, where it had been taken by Constantine, back to the west, uniting both sides. He did so while moving in step with Pope Agapetus (d. 536), who offered spiritual consultation and correction of religious error. Justinian brought divine justice to the earthly realm through the codification of Roman law.

If Justinian was Dante's ideal Roman emperor of the distant past, Henry VII of Luxembourg represented for him a present-day model and an earthly hope for restoration of the proper political order. Henry was by all accounts an impressive man. Compagni described him (like Dante's Justinian) as 'wise', 'just', 'loyal', 'bold', and 'noble' (though noting that he was 'somewhat cross-eyed'¹³). In his epistle to Italian rulers, Dante enthusiastically welcomed Henry as 'Caesar', 'Roman prince', and 'Sun of peace' (*Ep.* V, 1–2, 7). He compared his mission to that of Moses leading the Israelites from slavery and saw in it the start of a new era of consolation and peace. Compagni claimed that Henry's sojourn represented the will of omnipotent God that Henry should 'come strike down and punish the tyrants of Lombardy and Tuscany, until all tyranny was extinguished'.¹⁴

Despite initial support from both Guelf and Ghibelline states and Pope Clement V, Henry's impetus in Italy quickly dissipated. His appointment of imperial vicars, repatriation of exiles, and imposition of taxes led to rebellions against his authority, including in Milan, which had first welcomed him. Florence spearheaded the military opposition against Henry, forming a league with the cities of Lucca, Siena, and Bologna and eventually with Robert, ruler of Naples (1278–1343). Pope Clement withdrew his support of Henry in favour of King Robert. Henry made it to Rome, where he received the imperial crown at the Lateran palace from Cardinal Niccolò da Prato (c.1250–1321) in June 1312. But the act meant little. Henry waged war against his opponents in Tuscany and in 1313 died in the town of Buonconvento, south of Siena, and was buried in Ghibelline Pisa. In the end, Henry VII's intervention in Italy only exacerbated the Guelf–Ghibelline disputes he had intended to pacify.

The continuing conflict stimulated much political literature. Indeed, Dante's appeal to empire is best understood in the context of widespread contemporary calls for peace, expressed both in visual and written media, and in works that have not all received close examination from modern scholars. The late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries were highly productive in terms of medieval political thought and production of political treatises. The writings addressed the rivalry between the papacy and the empire, as well as the conflict between Pope Boniface and Philip IV and the discord among and within Italian cities. The works bear the influence of Aristotle and the scholastic tradition. Ptolemy of Lucca was likely completing Thomas Aquinas' *De Regimine Principum* in Florence at the time of Charles of Valois' advent in the city in 1301. Remigio de' Girolami's two political tracts, *De bono communi* (On the Common Good; 1302) and *De bono pacis* (On the Benefit of Peace; 1304), which grew out of the violence in Florence at that time, employed Aristotle's *Politics* and *Ethics* for the central argument that the good of the whole community must be placed above the advancement of the individual. Meanwhile Giles of Rome (c.1243–1316) used Aristotle in his *De ecclesiastica potestate* (On the Power of the Church; 1302) to help support Pope Boniface's claim to the primacy of spiritual power and right to intervene in secular affairs. John of Paris (c.1255–1306) in turn refuted Giles' assertions, using Aristotle (*De regia potestate et papali* (On Regal and Papal Power; 1302/03) to support King Philip IV's claim that the priesthood was wholly spiritual.

Like Dante, contemporaries argued in favour of the universal nature of empire. Indeed, Manfred Hohenstaufen, just prior to Charles of Anjou's descent into Italy (1265), had penned a manifesto that asserted, as Dante

does in the *Commedia* and *Monarchia*, the primacy of the Roman empire above all nations of the world using Scripture and Roman law to support his thesis. The German chronicler and canon of Cologne, Alexander of Roes (d. after 1288), argued in his *Memoriale de prerogativa romani imperii* (Reminder of the Prerogative of the Roman Empire; 1281) that the foundation of the Roman empire was the result of divine providence. He believed, as did Dante, that the empire was necessary for mankind's salvation, and was divinely sanctioned by the incarnation of Jesus Christ under Roman rule. The *imperium* was then transferred to the Germans by way of Charlemagne and the *translatio*. The Benedictine abbot Engelbert of Admont (c. 1250–1331), a student of philosophy at Padua, drew on Aristotle and Augustine to argue that the empire was necessary for the well-being of the human race and responsible for the establishment of peace and justice in the world. All rulers were subject to the Roman emperor, who stood at the apex of a pyramid that had the city as its base. Engelbert stated this thesis in *De ortu et fine Romani imperii* (The Origin and End of the Roman Empire), which was written (1307–10) at approximately the same time that Dante's hero, Henry VII, descended on Italy.

Some scholars have dismissed Alexander and Engelbert as intellectual lightweights. But what is clear is that the issue of empire was broadly engaged at this time, in the work of a wide range of contemporary writers. They grappled not only with the conflicting claims of universal authority by the Church and state, but with the precise relationship between Rome and the western claim to empire and Byzantium and the eastern claim to empire. Writers sorted through rival German and French imperial claims, which were in turn linked to emerging notions of state sovereignty that would ultimately extinguish the idea of universal empire altogether. Alexander of Roes purposefully sought to establish a German claim to empire against French counterclaims, which had cast Charlemagne as a French ruler, and the *translatio* by consequence as a transfer of the *imperium* from the Greeks to the French. Brunetto Latini offered a pro-French interpretation of Charlemagne and the *translatio* in his *Livres dou Tresor*.

The actions of Pope Gregory X and his deeds at the Council of Lyons – with which we began this chapter – played a significant role in contemporary discussions of empire. The Venetian chronicler Martino da Canal abruptly stopped his narrative in *Estoires* (Histories; begun in 1267) of the 'notable deeds' of his native city when he reached Lyons. He addressed his readers directly about the question of empire: whether the east or west held priority. He decided that the issue was too big to discuss at length without obscuring the purpose of his chronicle, which was intended only

to honour Venice.¹⁵ Marin Sanudo (c.1270–c.1343), writing some fifty years later, treated Lyons as a dramatic high point of his *Istoria del Regno di Roania* (History of the Kingdom of Romania; 1328–33). He credited the council with reuniting the eastern and western parts of the ‘Roman empire’, which had been ‘torn asunder’ by the *translatio*, after which there was ‘no love left between the Greeks and Latins’. Sanudo portrayed the Byzantine emperor Michael Palaeologus as a heroic figure, who, not unlike Dante’s Justinian, united the empire, bringing together east and west, after assuming the proper faith.¹⁶

The east–west dimension of empire is also evident in the writings of Riccobaldo of Ferrara, whose work Dante may have known. Like the poet, Riccobaldo was exiled from his native city, took part in the circle of Cangrande della Scala of Verona, lived for a time in Ravenna, and enthusiastically supported Emperor Henry VII. In *Compilatio chronologica* (Chronological Compilation; 1313) Riccobaldo gave, along with a Dantesque affirmation of the ‘good old days’ and condemnation of contemporary mores, a history of the Roman *imperium*, which, as in *Paradiso* VI, stressed the primacy of empire over the papacy. But unlike *Paradiso* VI, which treats empire as a wholly western phenomenon, Riccobaldo dwells on the divisions between the two sides. Like Martino da Canal, Riccobaldo addressed his audience directly about the issue. He asserted that the western claim to *imperium* was ultimately more ‘worthy’ than the eastern one. He described the west as ‘the tree and root’ of empire, while the east was merely a branch that would shrivel and die without the former.¹⁷ Riccobaldo’s careful delineation of eastern claims to *imperium* is all the more noteworthy because he wrote during the reign of the Byzantine emperor Andronicus Palaeologus (b. 1259; reign 1282–1332), who, unlike his father Michael, had largely receded from western affairs. Byzantium had become more interested in its Hellenic past rather than claims to the Roman empire.

Riccobaldo’s attitude nevertheless emphasizes the complexity of the contemporary understanding of empire, and particularly of the *translatio* and the role played in it by Charlemagne. The issue was not merely one of Church and State: whether Charlemagne crowned himself or the pope did so. It involved also consideration of whether the *imperium* could be divided between east and west, which involved contemplation of the nature of Charlemagne’s relationship with the eastern Empire and the manner in which he received the *imperium*. The importance of this issue has been largely overlooked by modern scholars, who studied empire too narrowly in its western context.

The concern about the nature of the *translatio* is reflected in numerous contemporary treatises produced on the subject. Ptolemy of Lucca wrote two tracts. The first, his earliest surviving work, completed perhaps in 1276–77 was composed on behalf of Pope Nicholas III. The second, believed to have been finished in 1308, was written to reassert papal authority over the empire, on the occasion of Philip IV's attempt to install Charles of Valois as emperor prior to the election of Henry VII in 1308. Ptolemy's treatise served as the basis for Landolfo of Colonna's (c.1250–1331) *De translatione imperii* (On the Transfer of Empire; 1324), which employed similar arguments to support Pope John XXII's (b. 1244; papacy 1316–34) claims to universal power against those of Emperor Ludwig of Bavaria (1282–1347). Landolfo's treatise drew response from no less a figure than Marsilio of Padua (c.1275–c.1342), whose *De translatione imperii* argued the opposite point: that the papacy had no right to involve itself in secular affairs and to interfere with the emperor, and, indeed, played little role in the original *translatio* of the empire to Charlemagne.

The example of Marsilio of Padua takes us beyond Dante's lifetime. It makes clear, however, that the outstanding issues of Dante's day remained unsettled. The battle between the empire and the papacy continued, with Lewis of Bavaria and John XXII cast in the principal roles. Marsilio issued a call for peace and limits to papal authority in his *Defender of the Peace* (1324), which appeared three years after Dante's death. The 'dream' of universal empire was nevertheless rapidly fading. Henry VII had indeed already exposed its limits during his sojourn in Italy. When King Robert of Naples moved against him (1312), the emperor charged Robert with treason and summoned him to an imperial tribunal in Pisa. But Robert refused to go and submitted the case to Pope Clement V, who issued a bull, *Pastoralis cura* (Pastoral Care; 1313), which was in effect the first legal expression of territorial sovereignty. Clement ruled that an emperor could not judge a king, and by implication, that no ruler was subject to another and that public power was territorially confined. By the middle years of the fourteenth century, the empire had effectively lost its claims to universal power. When Emperor Charles IV (b. 1316; reign 1346–78) came to Italy in 1355 and 1363, it was primarily to collect subsidies. What remained, however, was internecine violence and civic discord that continued to afflict the peninsula and the city of Florence.

Notes

- 1 *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, trans. and ed. J. L. Baird, G. Baglivie, and J. R. Kane (Binghamton: MRTS, 1986), pp. 498–9, 503; Saba Malaspina, *Rerum Sicularum, Die Chronik des Saba Malaspina*, ed. W. Koller and A. Nitschke (Hannover: Henschke Buchhandlung, 1999), pp. 239–40.
- 2 Malaspina, *Rerum Sicularum*, p. 241.
- 3 *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, p. 381.
- 4 Quoted by C. T. Davis, 'An early Florentine political theorist', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 105 (1960), 662–76, at 667.
- 5 N. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. L. F. Banfield and H. C. Mansfield (Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 15.
- 6 A. Dandolo, *Chronica*, ed. E. Pastorello (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1938), p. 45.
- 7 Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, p. 105.
- 8 Brunetto Latini, *Li livres dou tresor*, trans. S. Baldwin and P. Barrette (Tempe: ACMRS, 2003), p. 26; R. Malaspini, Storia fiorentina in *Rerum italicarum scriptores*, ed. L. A. Muratori (Milan: Societas Palatina, 1726), vol. VIII, col. 883.
- 9 Quoted in G. Holmes, *Florence, Rome and the Origins of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 36.
- 10 *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, p. 9.
- 11 *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, p. 22.
- 12 Ptolemy of Lucca, Annales in *Rerum italicarum scriptores*, ed. L. A. Muratori (Milan: Societas Palatina, 1727), vol. XI, cols. 1249–1306.
- 13 *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, p. 86.
- 14 *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, pp. 86–7.
- 15 Martino da Canal, *Les Estoires de Venise*, ed. A. Limentani (Florence: Olschki, 1973), pp. 338–55.
- 16 M. Sanudo Torsello, Istoria del Regno di Romania in *Chroniques greco-romanes*, ed. K. Hopf (Berlin: Weidmann, 1873), pp. 135–8.
- 17 Riccobaldo of Ferrara, *Compilatio chronologia*, ed. A. T. Hankey (Rome: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 2000), pp. 127–32.