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**A WEAK DOMINANCE: WINDS OF REVOLT  
IN FLORENTINE TERRITORY (THE SECOND HALF  
OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY)**

**Abstract**

This article highlights some of the challenges the nascent Florentine territorial state faced in the second half of the fourteenth century, after it was visited with the Great Plague of 1348. When mercenaries began to cross the territory, and the ruling class found itself unable to handle this kind of emergency, the exurban population turned to forms of self-defence. These initiatives resemble the coeval ones undertaken by the Tuchins in Normandy or those in Languedoc and southern Piedmont.

**Keywords:** Italy, Florence, Middle Ages, countryside, *contado*, peasants, mercenaries

I  
INTRODUCTION

It is a known fact that, starting from the mid-fourteenth century, part of the European territory that had just come out of the Great Plague, passed at different times and in different ways into a state of long-lasting wars characterized by the intermittent presence of free companies and mercenary bands. This, in turn, has produced a climate of insecurity, making it necessary to resort to radical measures in defending the population and the territory.

If we expand our perspective to include other regions – from Normandy to Languedoc or to the Canavese area north of Turin – we should not find it difficult to draw analogies to what is illustrated in this article in regard to the Florentine territory. Indeed, faced with the threat posed by the free companies, some communities sought to make themselves autonomous of constituted power, accusing it of being unable to ensure their protection, and engaging in acts of

self-defence that would end up asserting a resolve to achieve independence, a phenomenon known to us as *Tuchinage* (a term borrowed from the revolt staged by the transalpine Tuchins).<sup>1</sup>

Over the course of the decades following 1350, in the face of the threat of the mercenary bands roaming the Italian peninsula, there came into form in the Florentine context, too, a shaky and increasingly uncertain balance among several interests: there was a ruling class that had partly morphed through the ingress of *novi cives* who had filled the cracks left by the plague; then there were the territorial seigneuries that had not yet been subjected to the Florentine Republic; and finally there were the territory's various communities. In many ways the mercenaries were not a novel element in intercity warfare, for it had increasingly been the practice to engage professional soldiers since the closing decades of the thirteenth century. But in the mid-fourteenth century, particularly in the moments of respite in the Hundred Years' War, in which hiatuses the mercenaries were left without a source of income – the situation changed. Now, if necessary, the free companies would act in their own interest, in the absence of instructions from their employers.<sup>2</sup> This was no longer a time in which conflicts took it into account that “life was more useful” (*vita erat magis utilior*),<sup>3</sup> trying whenever possible to protect the population residing in the outlying areas, since as the city expanded

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Alessandro Barbero, ‘Una rivolta antinobiliare nel Piemonte trecentesco: Il Tuchinaggio del Canavese’, in Monique Bourin, Giovanni Cherubini, and Giuliano Pinto (eds.), *Rivolte urbane e rivolte contadine nell’Europa del Trecento: Un confronto* (Firenze, 2008), 153–96, and the works by Vincent Challet cited in the notes that follow.

<sup>2</sup> The mercenary armies would organize into societies proper. Cf. Paolo Grillo, *Cavalieri e popoli in armi: Le istituzioni militari nell’Italia medievale* (Roma and Bari, 2008), 148 ff., with ample reference to previous historiography, from which I only recall Aldo A. Settia, *Comuni in guerra: Armi, ed eserciti nell’Italia delle città* (Bologna, 1993); Paolo Grillo, *Cittadini in armi: Eserciti e guerre nell’Italia comunale* (Soveria Mannelli, 2011); Paolo Grillo (ed.), *Connestabili: Eserciti e guerra nell’Italia del primo Trecento* (Soveria Mannelli, 2018); and the pioneering work of Mario Del Treppo, ‘Gli aspetti organizzativi, economici e sociali di una compagnia di ventura italiana’, *Rivista storica italiana*, 85 (1973), 253–75.

<sup>3</sup> This is what had been argued, albeit with much rhetorical flourish, by a thirteenth-century Florentine chronicler, Sanzalone Iudicis, ‘Gesta Florentinorum ab anno 1125, ad annum 1231’, in *Documenti di storia italiana pubblicati a cura della Regia Deputazione sugli studi di storia patria per le province di Toscana, dell’Umbria e delle Marche*, VI, *Cronache dei secoli XIII e XIV* (Firenze, 1876), 133.

across the territory, these residents (*comitatini*) increasingly became subordinate to it on a legal, institutional, political, and fiscal plane.<sup>4</sup> By that time, many changes were afoot, requiring new answers by those in a decision-making role, as happened to the Florentine ruling class after 1350.

## II THE GREAT COMPANY

The first impact with a large mercenary army occasioned a collective shock proper. In 1353, a free company that had been formed in the Italian peninsula advanced close to the gates of Florence: this was the Great Company led by Konrad Virtinger von Landau (known as *Conte Lando*) and Montreal d'Albarno (*Friere Morreale*).<sup>5</sup> Keeping an appropriate distance from the city walls, the mercenaries started to raid and plunder the environs countryside. For this was the activity they would revert to in their intermissions without employ, apart from kidnapping individuals for ransom, forcing many communities to protect their elites so as to avoid having to pay for their release.<sup>6</sup> The problem had become a cause for widespread concern, so much so as to enter the popular mind, as is evidenced by the flourishing of

<sup>4</sup> The *comitatus* (It. *contado*) over which the city of Florence exercised *iurisdictio* was formed by joining the dioceses of Florence and Fiesole, this dating back to at least 854, when reference was made to a 'territorio florentino et vuesolano'. See Guglielmo Cavallo and Giovanna Nicolaj (eds.), *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores*, 2nd series, Ninth Century, part xci: *Italy LXIII, Reggio Emilia – Firenze* (Zürich, 2012), no. 31, 17 Aug. 854.

<sup>5</sup> The name *friere* was owed to the fact he belonged to the Knights Hospitaller (*Ordo Fratrum Hospitalis Sancti Ioannis Hierosolymitani*). The place-name of Albarno, has been identified as the present-day village of Le Bar-sur-Loup, located in the Alpes-Maritimes department of France.

<sup>6</sup> When English mercenaries, in the pay of Pisa, "restless warriors ... cruel and beastly", arrived in the upper Valdarno area between Florence and Arezzo, part of the population of a hamlet, having been given advance notice, was made to evacuate into a *ricetto*, where they sought shelter, but safety was ensured only for the "well-bred" men and women, the members of the local elite, who risked being captured, with the consequent ransom request to be met by their fellow townspeople. See Filippo Villani, 'Cronica', in Matteo Villani, *Cronica con la continuazione di Filippo Villani*, Giuseppe Porta (ed.), 2 vols. (Parma, 1995), ii, 673–4 and 681–4.

hagiographic tales in which a saint would intervene to free individuals who had fallen prisoner to mercenaries.<sup>7</sup>

A Florentine chronicler who bore witness to these events aptly captured the feelings of his fellow citizens: “To the city dwellers the event seemed astonishing, since they were not accustomed to it, and because it took place during the harvest season”.<sup>8</sup> Therefore they watched the unfolding events in fear and trembling – their fear magnified by their realization that the crop was at risk of destruction because of the impending danger and also because it might be necessary to divert the farm workers from their work in order to deal with the emergency events.

There were too many risks that could not be ignored, for it was clear that it would not have been feasible to resort to force in response: Florence thus found itself compelled to respond to unconscionable demands for money by the free companies, and at a time when its public finances were definitely not in the best shape. The company led by Count Lando and Friere Morreale pledged to stay away from Florentine territory and not to fight the city for three years. In exchange, it received 27,500 florins, a payment that between 1353 and the following year triggered a depreciation in municipal bonds,

<sup>7</sup> On the south of France, see Vincent Challet, ‘Villages en guerre: Les communautés de défense dans le Midi pendant la guerre de Cent Ans’, *Archéologie du Midi médiéval*, xxv (2007), 111–22. On the lower Valdarno, see the miraculous intervention of the Blessed Giovanna da Signa: she freed a local inhabitant who had been taken hostage by John Hawkwood’s White Company, which at the time was in the pay of Pisa. The event has been dated to 1363 and was subsequently depicted in the frescoes devoted to the saint, created between 1441 and 1462. Daniel Russo, ‘Jeanne de Signa, ou l’iconographie au féminin: Étude sur les fresques de l’église de Signa (milieu du XVe siècle)’, in *Mélanges de l’École Française de Rome: Moyen Âge*, xcvi, 1 (1986), 201–18, here: 204.

<sup>8</sup> “parve alla cittadinanza grande fatto, sì perché non erano molti usi a ciò, e sì perché era la stagione della ricolta”, Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, *Cronaca fiorentina*, Niccolò Rodolico (ed.), in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, n.s., xxx, 1 (Città di Castello, 1903), 244–5. Clearly, what gave concern was the spread and frequency of a phenomenon that had had some precedents. Thus, for example, in 1322 a company of mercenaries stationed itself between Florence and Siena, “living by rape and theft, for which reason Siena grew deeply fearful and jealous” (“vivendo di rapto e di ruberia; per la qual cosa in Siena n’ebbe grande paura e gelosia”), Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica*, Giuseppe Porta (ed.), 3 vols. (Parma, 1990–91), ii, lib. x, rub. 183, 374–5. On the Great Company, see Michael Mallet, *Signori e mercenari: La guerra nell’Italia del Rinascimento* (Bologna, 1983), 41.

which wound up being traded at a discount of up to 25 per cent below their par value.<sup>9</sup> Everyone realized that this would not be a one-off event, and from that point on the Florentine countryside fell prey to the free companies – a situation that prompted the formation of an alliance among different Tuscan cities for a joint defence of their territories.<sup>10</sup>

In the Florentine context, the initiatives taken to defend the population from troop crossings and incursions were reduced to enclosing the *villagers*, their household belongings, and their foodstuffs within the best-protected dwellings, thereby leaving unprotected swaths of land that could be quite large but were indefensible, since their settlement's configuration, as in the case of the land subject to sharecropping, consisted of scattered houses and small hamlets lacking any bulwark.<sup>11</sup> This gave rise to a justified sense of insecurity among the people in the *contado*. Furthermore, in such an alarmed atmosphere, a roadway system, seriously enhanced by the communes since the previous century, proved to be a double-edged sword in the areas traversed by the free companies. The only way out was to attempt to detour the companies, for as is commented in a message that Florence sent to the commander of a mercenary band, “a similar brigade can hardly behave so as not to give rise to discord in the countryside”.<sup>12</sup> So the adopted strategy, when it proved impossible to prevent a free company from roving a territory, became to negotiate a route across a sparsely populated area or an area falling outside Florentine control, as would happen in the course of the events shortly to be described.

<sup>9</sup> Bernardino Barbadoro, *Le finanze della Repubblica fiorentina: Imposta diretta e debito pubblico fino all'istituzione del Monte* (Firenze, 1929), and Roberto Barducci, ‘Politica e speculazione finanziaria a Firenze dopo la crisi del primo Trecento (1343–58)’, *Archivio storico italiano*, cxxvii (1979), 177–219.

<sup>10</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze (State Archive of Florence, hereinafter: ASF), Archivi della Repubblica, Provvisioni, registri, 41, 45v, 28 June 1354.

<sup>11</sup> Giuliano Pinto, ‘La guerra e le modificazioni dell’habitat nelle campagne dell’Italia centrale (Toscana e Umbria, secc. XIV e XV)’, in André Bazzana (ed.), *Castrum 3. Guerre, fortification et habitat dans le monde méditerranéen au Moyen Âge* (Roma, 1988), 247–55.

<sup>12</sup> “simile brigata si può male regolare che non generi scandolo a paesani”. The source is a letter that Florence, through its envoy, sent to the mercenary company led by Hanneken von Baumgarten, known in Italy as Anichino di Bongardo (ASF, Archivi della Repubblica, Missive I Cancelleria, 13, 55v, 15 Aug 1365).

In late August 1354, the Great Company passed under the sole command of Count Lando, for his fellow commander, Friere Morreale, had been arrested in Rome and executed by Cola di Rienzo, determined as he was to put an end to his raids. The last words uttered on the gallows, and passed down to us through the chronicle of Anonimo Romano, bespoke the total contempt in which the knight held the “rustic villains” attending the execution – a sentiment we will again come across shortly.<sup>13</sup> In July 1357, Count Lando entered Bolognese territory with an army of some 5,600 armed men, threatening to cross the Apennine Mountains so as to move into Tuscany. At the crossing that was believed to afford the easiest passage for the column of mercenaries (today: the Futa Pass), the city of Florence arrayed some 8,000 men, among whom 3,000 crossbowmen, fortifying the crossing with two and a half kilometres of ditches and stockades.<sup>14</sup> This was enough to get Count Lando to desist from his plan. He had recently been appointed imperial vicar – a further reason why the papal legate should call a crusade against the “damned company” (*maladicta compagnia*).<sup>15</sup> But the threat that Florence faced in 1357 was only put off to a later date: it came back in July of the following year, when the continuing tension between Lando and the city – a tension that until that point had not broken into open conflict – drew in a third, and perhaps unexpected, player, namely, the people inhabiting the *contado*.

### III RESTLESSNESS AND REVOLT

In July 1358, the Great Company set out from Romagna to fight Perugia in the pay of Siena (Fig. 1), to which end it had to cross Tuscany, but this time it was asking the Florentine *contado* for permission to do so.

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<sup>13</sup> Anonimo romano, *Cronica*, ed. Giuseppe Porta (Milano, 1981), 189.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Paolo Pirillo, ‘Una “drôle de guerre”: Firenze e le fortificazioni campali dello Stale (Appennino tosco-emiliano, 1357–1358)’, in Mario Marrocchi (ed.), *Fortilizi e campi di battaglia nel Medioevo attorno a Siena* (conference proceedings) (Siena, 1998), 265–88.

<sup>15</sup> Considering the undoubtable success that Lando had so far achieved in the Italian peninsula, he would end up setting his sights on a much more ambitious project that meant gaining political control over the whole of Tuscany, this thanks to the abundance of German mercenaries he would have been able to recruit in the region.

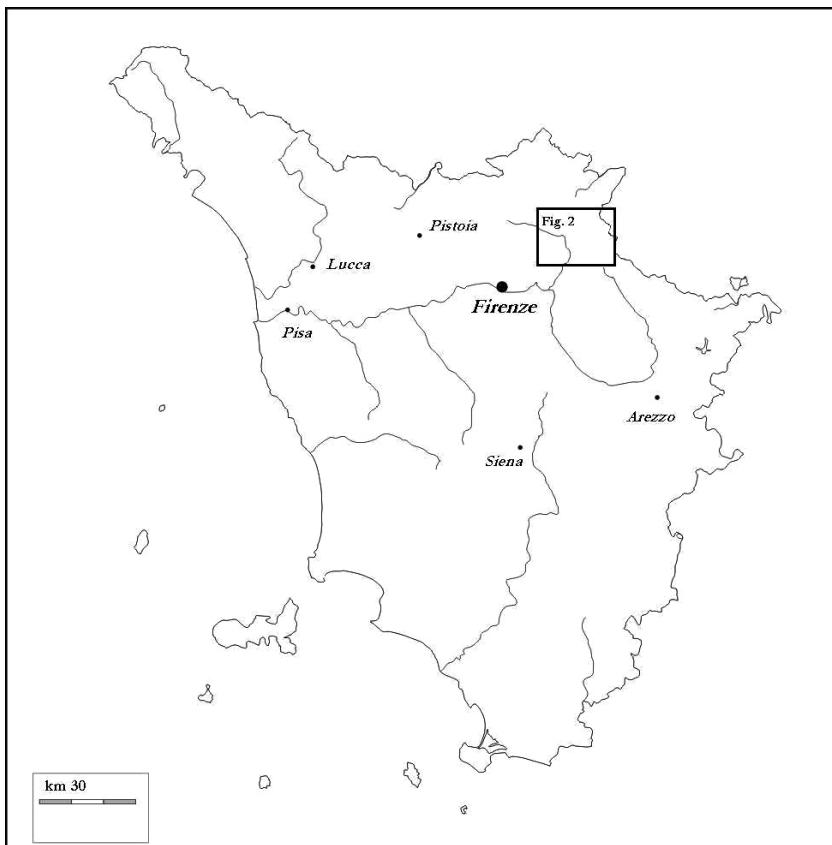


Fig. 1. The Tuscan area the Great Company moved across in 1358

Foreseeing the risks involved, Florence perhaps hoped to still be able to count on the huge sum paid in 1353, but that was not to be. For yet another time, the dangers attendant on the crossing of troops were magnified by the fact that "the harvest, for the most part, was still in the farmyard",<sup>16</sup> raising the stakes not only for the landowners but also for sharecroppers and farmers. An attempt was again made to play the negotiation card. Seeing how serious the situation was shaping up to be, Florence sent to Count Lando a fifth, additional envoy, secretly

<sup>16</sup> "la ricolta, per la maggior parte era ancora sull'aia", Matteo Villani, *Cronica con la continuazione di Filippo Villani*, ii, 220.

entrusted with the task of getting the troops to desist from crossing Florentine territory in exchange for a sum of money set between five and six thousand florins. Somehow an agreement was struck: the city, at its own expense, would supply breadstuff (*panatica*) along the route, while the mercenaries would buy food and the forage they needed for their horses. Florentine envoys would remain hostage throughout the journey, which was to be made in separate groups of no more than 200 units, this in the illusive attempt to contain the foreseeable damage.<sup>17</sup> The most critical element was the itinerary, and Florence chose one that shifted all risk to a sparsely populated area; more importantly, however, the city forced the mercenaries to transit along a sort of corridor within an area that had not yet come under its own control (Fig. 2).<sup>18</sup> The arduous path shown to the mercenaries cut across lands held under six different lordships, four of which (as was being suggested) were located within the area subject to Florentine jurisdiction.<sup>19</sup> Politically, this arrangement was tantamount to an indirect aggression authorized by Florence against those outlying lordships, and more specifically against their population.

The mercenaries did not conduct themselves in the manner that had been agreed to with the Florentine envoys. In fact, the foodstuffs were smuggled in without payment, "in an affront to the peasants in both word and deed".<sup>20</sup> This sparked a reaction among the population, who may have not acted alone. Some of the lords coordinated a response, but it is quite likely that even they lost control of the developing situation, which brought out a degree of self-reliance of

<sup>17</sup> This is an incident I have had occasion to mention in Paolo Pirillo, 'Le Contado et la Ville: Florence (XIIIe–XVe siècles)', in *Campo y ciudad: Mundos en tensión (siglos XII–XV)*, XLIV Semana International de Estudios Medievales, Estella-Lizarra, 18–21 July 2017, Pamplona (Gobierno de Navarra, 2018), 77–93.

<sup>18</sup> Even so, the area was by and large an integral part of the city's historical *contado*.

<sup>19</sup> The six localities, from north to south (Fig. 2), were those held by Count Guido di Simone de' Guidi of Battifolle (Biforco); Giovanni di Alberghettino Manfredi (Marradi and Castiglione); Guido di Ugo de' Guidi of Battifolle (county of Belforte and a half of the Dicomano settlement); the Florentine family of the Bardi, in conflict with the city of Florence (county of Pozzo and a half of the Dicomano settlement); the bishop of Fiesole (the episcopal lordship of Turicchi); and Ugo di Guido de' Guidi of Battifolle (county of San Leolino).

<sup>20</sup> "oltraggiando i paesani e di parole e di fatti", Matteo Villani, *Cronica con la continuazione di Filippo Villani*, ii, 223.

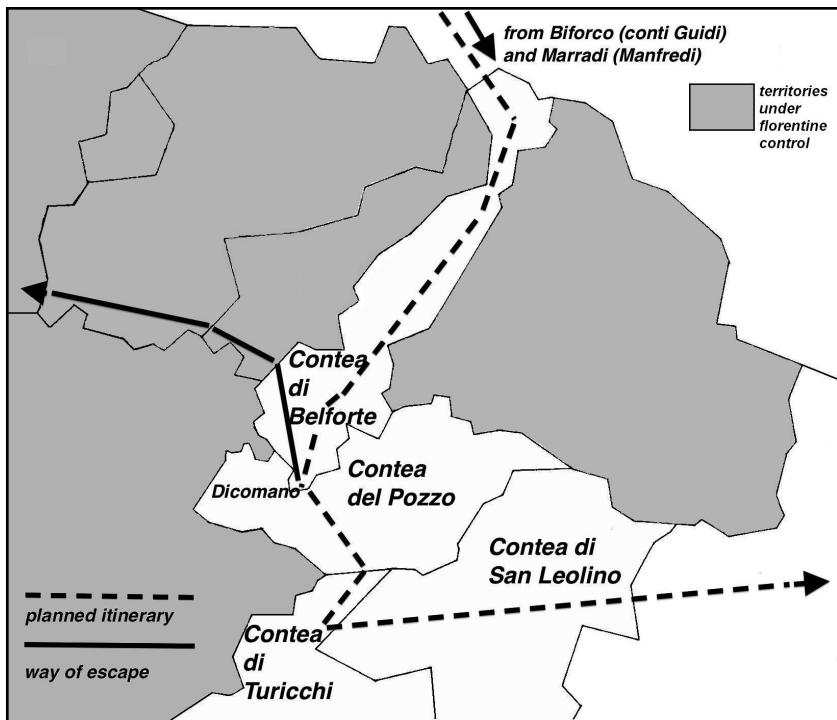


Fig. 2. The route the mercenaries were to take within county that were not under Florentine control, and the route the Grand Company actually took in order to flee

the communities that, all the sudden, could act on their own accord. Thus in the joint action between the *fideles* of the counts of Battifolle and the men of Giovanni di Alberghettino Manfredi, no account was taken of the friction between the two lords, who only five years earlier had been at war. The collective reaction came from the grassroots, for as was observed by the selfsame Florentine chronicler Matteo Villani, in whose work this event took up many pages, no one had ever been concerned with a population made of men who were “barely heeded and to an even lesser degree understood”.<sup>21</sup>

As happens in all cases of guerrilla warfare, the retaliation carried out against Count Lando’s mercenaries could exploit a greater knowledge of the places, and on a moral plane it was also fortified by the deep

<sup>21</sup> “male uditi e peggio intesi”, *ibid.*

resentment that was fuelling the Apennine communities' resolve to "take vengeance for their losses and for the affront taken".<sup>22</sup> The compensation being sought was thus of two kinds – at once material and ideal – and even the women took an active part in the effort. When Count Lando was informed of the plan the valley people had evolved, his response was rather blasé and cavalier, for as a knight he thought he was dealing with "Alpine backwoodsmen and in poor shape"<sup>23</sup> – the same contempt that on the Roman gallows had been shown by his now-deceased companion, Friere Morreale.

The ambush passed into history as the Battle of Le Scalelle (named for the treacherous Apennine pass). It worked as hoped, inflicting serious harm on the mercenaries, and it laid bare a factor which the agreement between Florence and Count Lando had not taken into account, calling everything back into question: it highlighted the city's inability to enforce its own decisions and exercise control over its own population. And in fact in commenting on the event, Matteo Villani, otherwise ready to voice criticism of the Florentine ruling class, came down harshly only on the men in the Apennines who had broken the agreement. He had several reasons for this position. Foremost among these was that the city's authority had been called into question. But he also took particular aim at the assailants for the fierceness with which they went after the mercenaries – men and women who had robbed them of their belongings. The clash was a confrontation between knights and the mountain people, the latter of whom lacked the appropriate cultural models and were therefore unfit to follow the knightly codes of war. This is exemplified by the chronicler's account of Count Lando's surrender, in sharp contrast with the actions of the assailants: "as a man of noble heart and a master of war", Matteo Villani noted, Lando "with his swordsmanship put up a brave defence",<sup>24</sup> and he followed the specific rules for conveying surrender, under which the sword was to be offered hilt first and the barbute was to be removed, but as Villani underscores, this protocol was met with a perfidious blow which a mountain dweller dealt to Lando's head, causing serious injury.

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<sup>22</sup> "rifarsi di loro danni e vendicarsi degli oltraggi ricevuti", *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> "gente alpigiana e male in arnese", *ibid.*, 224.

<sup>24</sup> "come uomo d'alto cuore e maestro di guerre ... colla spada fe' bella difesa", *ibid.*, 225–6.

This was not the first time that Florentines met with the reality of a population in the *contado* which, in response to the raids and violence of armies, decided to act on its own, knowing that the city was not up to the task of protecting its subjects. Something along these lines, for example, happened in the summer of 1351, when the Milanese army moved into the area north of the city, and the local communities organized and initiated, here too, a guerrilla and ambush campaign that even resulted in the killing of enemies and the theft of arms and mounts.<sup>25</sup> Self-defence as a response to insecurity thus also became an opportunity for individuals and entire communities to take in some earnings. Indeed, the judicial inquiries of the time concerning incidents on Florentine territory reveal similar behaviours by men of all ages and social conditions. In a sizable village in the valley of the Elsa River, for example, the inhabitants were charged by a Florentine court with robbing a commander of the Great Company who had been intercepted along the *Via Francigena*, and they were ordered to return the booty.<sup>26</sup>

It was the social order that was being called into question, and it wasn't, after all, so difficult to sense this from the tenor of the account that Matteo Villani offered of the events which came in the wake of the capture of Count Lando. The two *fideles* of Guido dei Guidi di Battifolle who had been entrusted with surrendering the leader of the mercenaries disobeyed the orders they received from their *dominus*, and in exchange for a handsome amount of florins promised by their prisoner, they handed him over to the wife of another lord, Giovanni Manfredi, who went to great pains to enable him to find safe passage to Bologna.<sup>27</sup> In the end, if anyone was to blame, it was the peasants – which was precisely the charge that would be made in *Lamento del Conte Lando* (Count Lando's Lament), written by an anonymous Florentine shortly after the events just depicted: as the author comments, this was a little ballad (*ballatetta*) written "in pique against every peasant" (*in dispetto d'ogni villano*), taking sides with the nobleman against the mountain people who had dared to injure and

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 211.

<sup>26</sup> Paolo Pirillo, 'Dal XIII secolo alla fine del Medioevo: Le componenti e gli attori di una crisi', in Giovanni Cherubini and Franco Cardini (eds.), *Storia di Castelfiorentino* (Pisa, 1995), ii, 41–82, here: 64.

<sup>27</sup> Matteo Villani, *Cronica con la continuazione di Filippo Villani*, ii, 227.

capture him.<sup>28</sup> Another contemporary chronicler, Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, without making the slightest reference to the local lords in Florentine territory, laid all responsibility on the farmers of Romagna and their violent disposition, describing this trait as part of their identity, and clearing of blame the mountain people of the Florentine *contado*, on the ground that their role was confined to that of aiding the former. Apart from the position that Florence took against those who had interfered in its agreement with the commander of the Great Company, what developed in the aftermath of the ambush at Le Scalelle showed that, in the end, the best bet for the local population was to organize in self-defence, lest they should suffer an even greater harm. By completely diverting from the agreed route, the Great Company eventually managed to enter the area controlled by Florence (Fig. 2): even so, and even if, from that point onward, the mercenaries were escorted by Florentine troops, the *fideles* whose loyalty was to Count Guido di Battifolle kept pursuing them even within Florentine territory, forcing the Florentine soldiers to attack the pursuers so as to protect the mercenaries. The Great Company then managed to make it once more across the Apennines toward Romagna, crossing in the opposite direction the stockade that had been put up against it one year before.

These events left a mark, setting off a political crisis that split the city's ruling class into two great factions: on one side were ranged the "many great and powerful citizens", who had traditionally been in favour of an agreement with Count Lando; on the other stood the "merchants and craftsmen of middle rank" who called for open conflict. The crisis was put to rest when the Florentine envoys responsible for the agreement – one of whom was highly suspected of double-cross – managed to quiet everyone down by inviting them to put the entire affair behind them: "do not investigate these facts any more, but give us a warm welcome".<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, across the territory, the weakness revealed by Florence was opening up opportunities for the local lords, enjoying the advantage of military training and capable of organizing a collective response, as

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<sup>28</sup> Isidoro Del Lungo (ed.), 'Lamento del conte Lando dopo la sconfitta della "gran compagnia" in Val di Lamone (25 luglio 1358)', *Archivio storico italiano*, xiii, 139 (1884), 3–19.

<sup>29</sup> "non cercate più di questi fatti, ma dite che noi siamo i ben tornati", Matteo Villani, *Cronica con la continuazione di Filippo Villani*, ii, p. 236.

is likely to have happened in the Scalelle incident.<sup>30</sup> But in the context of the comparatively weak seigneuries typical of the Florentine area, the crisis ended up involving the local lords, thereby undercutting the feudal pact providing for a duty of protection.<sup>31</sup> After all, Florence was not yet capable of exercising any strong power, this in contrast to the Savoys – to make just one example – who in the same period in the Canavese region managed to enforce a policy of balance between the local nobility and the rebellious communities.<sup>32</sup>

In the Florentine case, the crisis affected the ruling class, but it also influenced the self-image of the communities in the *contado*. In the words of a Florentine chronicler, those events were such that “the peasants began to encourage themselves and dare”,<sup>33</sup> getting into the habit of taking matters into their own hands in dealing with an impending war emergency, while rural society, here as elsewhere, was increasingly militarizing, as it was growing impatient with a nonstop state-of-war emergency.<sup>34</sup> In this way, even in Florence an atmosphere had formed that threatened to call the consolidated powers into question. And a few episodes took place that could easily suggest as much.

Thus, in 1352, Florence decided to rebuild the walls of a nearby castle, but contrary to expectations, the decision prompted the local inhabitants to relocate elsewhere, lest they should have to take on the risk of defending the new walls. And even the citizens of Florence began to feel irritated.<sup>35</sup> In 1353, some mercenaries of the Great

<sup>30</sup> And the same goes for Normandy in the latter half of the fourteenth century. Cf. Vincent Challet, ‘Tuchins et brigands des bois: Communautés paysannes et mouvements d'autodéfense en Normandie pendant la guerre de Cent Ans’, in Catherine Bougy and Sophie Poirey (eds.), *Images de la contestation du pouvoir dans le monde normand (Xe–XVIIIe siècle)*, colloque de Cerisy-la-Salle, 29 Sept. to 3 Oct. 2004 (Caen, 2007), 135–46.

<sup>31</sup> Vincent Challet, ‘Un mouvement anti-seigneurial? Seigneurs et paysans dans la révolte des Tuchins’, in Ghislain Brunel and Serge Brunet (eds.), ‘Haro sur le seigneur! Les luttes anti-seigneuriales dans l'Europe médiévale et moderne. Actes des XXIXes Journées Internationales d'Histoire de l'Abbaye de Flaran, 5–6 Oct. 2007 (Toulouse, 2009), 19–31.

<sup>32</sup> Barbero, ‘Una rivolta’, *passim*.

<sup>33</sup> “li uomini del paese cominciarono a prendere cuore e ardire”, Matteo Villani, *Cronica con la continuazione di Filippo Villani*, ii, 219.

<sup>34</sup> Challet, ‘Tuchins’, *passim*.

<sup>35</sup> Paolo Pirillo, *Costruzione di un contado: I Fiorentini e il loro territorio nel Basso Medioevo* (Firenze, 2001), 29 ff.

Company who had stolen bread risked being lynched by the *gente minuta* ('commoners') living close to the walls of Florence, and only through the intervention of Florentine guards did it prove possible to avert the worst outcome.<sup>36</sup>

Not even the areas under seigneurial control were spared. Two years after the episode at Le Scalelle, a group of individuals from four parishes across which the Great Company had moved plotted to attack the castle of Belforte, the nerve centre of the namesake countship (Fig. 2), which was under the rule of count Guido de' Guidi of Battifolle, the lord who had the mercenaries pursued even in Florentine territory. In the criminal action brought in response to this plot there was no mention of extortion or theft, but only of rebellion.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the assailants, along with a "congregatio multarum gentium", intended to take possession of the *castrum*, expelling its count, his sons, and the whole retinue at court, and it is difficult to rule out as a motive the aim of unseating the constituted powers and taking their place. Now, even if that county was part of the Florentine *contado* and fell under the jurisdiction of Florence – the dominant city in Tuscany – its territory was not under the city's control, and yet it was a Florentine court that tried the men who dared to plot against Count Guido of Battifolle, sentencing them to death, despite the fact that the count was still a potential enemy of the Florentine Republic. It was, after all, necessary for Florence to show strength, in way that only two years earlier, precisely in this territory, it had not been able to do. The exemplary punishment delivered to the conspirators had all the makings of a belated show of power exercised for the sake of an effective Florentine *iurisdictio*, even if it meant defending an antagonist like the count of Battifolle.

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<sup>36</sup> Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, 'Cronaca fiorentina', 245.

<sup>37</sup> Eight individuals were charged, identified by a given name and a patronymic: two of them were inhabitants (*habitatores*) of the area, while six lived in parishes close to the castle; all eight were accused of plotting to "in dictum castrum intrare et dictum castrum invadere et occupare et dictum comitem Guidonem et eius filios et familiares expellere", ASF, Atti del Podestà, 1486, 26r-v, 15 June 1360. The document is referenced by Samuel K. Cohn, though he speaks of 'Many unnamed armed men', *id.*, *Creating the Florentine State: Peasants and Rebellion, 1348–1434* (Cambridge, 2008), 144.

#### IV CONCLUSION

As a result of dangerous crises being poorly managed, especially by the dominant Tuscan city, Florence, the inhabitants of the countryside were prompted to act on their own in making up for the all-too-apparent shortfalls in defensive capacity. Even the decision which Florence took to reroute the crossing of mercenaries outside the territory under its own control proved inadequate. This gave rise to resentment, and it didn't prove too difficult for the nobility – or whatever portion of it still held lands within the Florentine *comitatus* or around its boundaries – to exploit this sentiment to their own advantage. What they did not anticipate was that these episodes could spin out of control for them, too. It may be that even in Florentine territory the episodes in question reflected a 'crisis in the growth of the modern state', as has been commented in regard to *Tuchinage*.<sup>38</sup> But it was reasonably clear that the attempts the local communities made to gain autonomy had to be put down despite all considerations to the contrary. And this did not change the attitude taken to a population, particularly in the mountains, that would shortly thereafter become an integral part of Florentine dominion; the feelings were sustained that would for a long time delay the integration of these people.

*trans. Filippo Valente*

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<sup>38</sup> Challet, 'Un mouvement anti-seigneurial?', 31.

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