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Florentine politics and the ruling class, 1382-1407

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I spoke with several friends about what I thought and how it seemed to me that the state would necessarily become tyrannical and not republican when the government was conducted outside the Palazzo. . . . The answer given me was that the commune was ruled more at dinners and in studies than in the Palazzo and that many were elected to office but few to the government.—GIOVANNI CAVALCANTI¹

I

These cynical words by Giovanni Cavalcanti, referring to his early experience in the government councils of the Florentine Republic in the 1420's, represent for most modern historians of Florence an accurate characterization of the nature of Florentine political life in the whole period from 1382 to 1434. Although outwardly the regime respected the institutions of communal Florence and republican formalities, real power in the state supposedly resided in the hands of a narrow group of families. Almost without exception, moreover, students of Florentine history have singled out the Albizzi family as the dominant force in this oligarchy.²

Within the last twenty years the work of intellectual historians, particularly Hans Baron, has raised questions about the validity of this by now almost traditional interpretation of Florentine politics.³ Baron

1. *Istorie fiorentine*, ed. Filippo L. Polidori, 2 vols. (Florence, 1838, 1839), I, 30.

2. See, for instance, Gino Capponi, *Storia della repubblica di Firenze*, 2 vols. (Florence, 1930), I, 395; François-Tommy Perrens, *Histoire de Florence depuis ses origines jusqu'à la domination des Médicis*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1877-1883), VI, 4ff.; Francesco C. Pellegrini, *Sulla repubblica fiorentina a tempo di Cosimo il Vecchio* (Pisa, 1880), p. 6; Antonio Rado, *Dalla repubblica fiorentina alla signoria medicea: Maso degli Albizzi e il partito oligarchico in Firenze dal 1382 al 1393* (Florence, 1926); Ferdinand Schevill, *History of Florence* (New York, 1961), pp. 336-46; Gene Brucker, "The Medici in the Fourteenth Century," *Speculum*, 32 (1957), 22-26, but now see below, n. 57; Alberto Tenenti, *Firenze dal comune a Lorenzo il Magnifico, 1350-1494* (Milan, 1970), pp. 35-36. For additional bibliography on this interpretation see Anthony Molho, "Politics and the Ruling Class in Early Renaissance Florence," *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 52 (1960), 402, n. 4.

3. Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1955; 2d ed., 1966). Also see Eugenio Garin, *L'Umanesimo italiano* (Bari, 1958), and "I cancellieri umanisti della Repubblica fiorentina da Coluccio Salutati a Bartolomeo Scala," *Cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano* (Florence, 1961), pp. 3-27.

emphasizes that Florentines were developing a republican civic ethic in the years around 1400. Such a development would seem to imply that political power was fairly well diffused among the citizen body and that the institutions of communal government were healthy. Baron, however, has not demonstrated that there was such a real basis for republican ideas, and for this reason it has been possible to interpret the "civic humanism," described by this author, as primarily propaganda created by a cynical oligarchy designed to justify policies which were in fact motivated by selfish interests.⁴

Marvin Becker's *Florence in Transition* represents an attempt to reconcile civic humanism with the traditional theme of oligarchic government. Becker recognizes 1382 as initiating increased oligarchic control of higher state offices and 1393 as marking the establishment of rule by the "Albizzi and their adherents."⁵ This process for Becker, however, did not create a sense of impotence among other citizens. If the entry of new men to the top magistracies was less, he argues, there were still thousands of public offices to be filled annually and ample room existed for political participation at a lower level. Despite oligarchical dominance in the period after 1382, there remained widespread enthusiasm for Florentine republican institutions, an enthusiasm which on the intellectual plane found expression in "civic humanism."⁶

Like Becker, Anthony Molho accepts "civic humanism" as a genuine reflection of actual political conditions in Florence, but he challenges the thesis of an oligarchical domination of Florence after 1382. Central to his study is an analysis of the composition of the Priorate, the highest executive college in the state, during various decades between the late thirteenth and the early fifteenth century. His general conclusion based on his research is that in the period 1382-1434, "a greater number of men were admitted to high communal office than before, more families received the distinction of being members of the priorate, the proportionate share of each man in these high offices was sig-

4. This is the position taken by Peter Herde, "Politik und Rhetorik in Florenz am Vorabend der Renaissance: die ideologische Rechtfertigung der Florentiner Aussenpolitik durch Coluccio Salutati," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 47 (1965), 194-95; and below, n. 9; Michael Seidlmayer, *Wege und Wandlungen des Humanismus* (Göttingen, 1965), pp. 47-74; and Jerrold Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism: The Union of Eloquence and Wisdom, Petrarch to Valla* (Princeton, N.J., 1968), p. 253.

5. Becker, *Florence in Transition*, 2 vols. (Baltimore, 1967-1968), II, 219-20.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 225 ff.

nificantly lower.”⁷ Whereas the political crises of 1387, 1393, 1396, and 1400 have usually been interpreted as triggered by an aggressive oligarchy anxious to remove obstacles in its path to supreme power or as the product of internecine warfare between political leaders vying for control, Molho interprets these events as essentially results of a conflict between a fairly large ruling group and individuals threatening the collegial principle of government. There were for him no “Albizzi” leaders of the government. Indeed, Maso degli Albizzi’s influence came precisely from the fact that, unlike Benedetto degli Alberti or Donato Acciaiuoli, he did not threaten the collegial form of government.⁸

The recent assessment of this controversy by Peter Herde constitutes a rejection of Molho’s revisionist views.⁹ Herde’s contention is that “civic humanism” was sheer propaganda of a narrow ruling class dominated by Maso degli Albizzi. Dealing only with the years 1382-1402, Herde admits Molho’s conclusion that the number of new families entering the Priorate actually increased after 1382, but he holds that real power was exercised behind the scenes by a small group commanded by Maso degli Albizzi.¹⁰ As evidence of this he analyzes the *Consulte e Pratiche* registers of the period, the records of special meetings convoked by the priors in search of advice on internal and external policy from other members of the government, representatives of other civic institutions, and leading private citizens.¹¹ According to Herde, these records show that the *consulte* were dominated by Maso and his oligarchic friends. Their control over the session allowed Maso and his clique to give clear directives to those legally charged with deciding government policies.¹² Herde’s general con-

7. Molho, “Politics,” p. 419. Molho’s figures are taken from A.S.F., Mano. 226, a seventeenth-century *priorista* listing families holding a seat or seats in the Priorate throughout the history of the institution. His representative decades are 1282-1292; 1293-1302; 1330-1339; 1364-1373; 1393-1402; and 1410-1419. Molho’s argument rests essentially on two sets of statistics: the number of new families entering in sample decades and the average number of seats in a Priorate held by all families by sample decade.

8. Molho, “Politics,” pp. 417-18.

9. Peter Herde, “Politische Verhaltensweisen der Florentiner Oligarchie, 1382-1402,” *Geschichte und Verfassungsgefüge: Frankfurter Festgabe für Walter Schlesinger*, Frankfurter Historische Abhandlungen, V (Wiesbaden, 1973), 156-249.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 171, n. 57.

11. For a bibliography of the place of the *consulte* in the Florentine system of government, see *ibid.*, p. 176, n. 79.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

clusion on Molho's thesis of a causal link between increased distribution of high government posts and civic humanism is that "Without making these comparable, one could on the same grounds prove that Germany between 1933 and 1945 had been a free country because the conception of freedom plays a great role in Hitler's speeches and proclamations as well as in Nazi war songs and many non-party members held positions in the higher bureaucracy."¹³

The following pages consist of two parts: the first contains a series of statistical descriptions of changes taking place in the Florentine ruling class in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries based on a study of the composition of the Priorate, while the second attempts to explain why these changes occurred. My focus will be on the period March 1382–February 1407. The earlier date marks the first election of officials by the new regime established after the collapse of the government of the minor guilds in January of the same year.¹⁴ The terminal date early in 1407 has no particular significance but affords a quarter century for observation of Florentine political life.

II

Composed of eight priors and the standardbearer of justice, elected for two-month terms by lot drawn from purses containing the names of eligible candidates, the Priorate was *de jure* the highest executive college in the state.¹⁵ Confronted from the early 1380's by a series of dangerous crises demanding swift and efficient action, the regime established in 1382 came increasingly to rely on special commissions called *balie*, endowed with full power for a limited time to deal with emergencies.¹⁶ The priors, nevertheless, played a key role in the selection of the membership of these commissions and normally served as

13. *Ibid.*, p. 171, n. 57.

14. The first Priorate elected under the new regime was that for March–April 1382.

15. Molho, "Politics," p. 408. See also, Guido Pampaloni "Gli organi della repubblica fiorentina per le relazioni con l'estero," *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali*, 20 (1953), 262–67. In determining the composition of the Florentine ruling class, Lauro Martines, *Lawyers and Statecraft in Renaissance Florence* (Princeton, N.J., 1968), p. 389, considers eligibility for the Priorate a reliable indication for the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

16. Although utilizing *balie* with frequency, the Florentines were cautious to limit their powers and duration. This is the general conclusion of Molho's "The Florentine Oligarchy and the Balie of the Late Trecento," *Speculum*, 43 (1968), 23–51.

members of the *balie* themselves. That in every major internal political crisis in the years covered by this study the *balie* tended to focus on reforming the mode of election to the Priorate or on the composition of its membership indicates that men of the time considered the Priorate of crucial political importance. Molho reminds us that even after 1434 control over election of the priors was deemed essential for domination of the city.¹⁷ Consequently, it would appear that throughout the period under study the Priorate remained not only constitutionally but also politically the supreme governing body in the Republic and that the basic nature of the ruling group in the city can be accurately determined by a study of the membership of this college.

Both Marvin Becker and Gene Brucker have presented the period 1343-1378 as the most democratic in Florentine history with the exception of the government established in the wake of the Ciompi in July 1378 and ending in January 1381.¹⁸ Between October 1343 and August 1348 no fewer than 136 families had members in the Priorate for the first time. This meant that roughly 52 percent of all those holding the Priorate during these years were "new men."¹⁹ What has not

17. Molho, "Politics," p. 408.

18. Marvin Becker, II, 95, interprets the period after 1343 as immensely more open than that prior to 1342 and sees the plague of 1348 as another factor encouraging access of new men to the ranks of the Priorate. Gene Brucker, *Florentine Politics*, pp. 120-23, points out that the number of new men entering the Priorate decreases after August 1348, but the clear tendency of his book is to ascribe high political mobility to the regime as a whole.

19. Of the 261 members of the Priorate chosen between October 1343 and July 1348, 136 came from the families who had never before held the Priorate or 52.2 percent. Brucker maintains that 175 members or 67.1 percent came from new families (p. 105, n. 1), but does not name his source.

I have followed Molho in using the A.S.F., Mano. 226, whose completeness I have established through a person-by-person comparison of the *priorista* with the official record of entering priors (A.S.F., *Priorista del Palazzo*, for the period March 1382-February 1407. For this twenty-five year period the *priorista* contains only four errors. It omits the name of Betto Giovanni Stefani of Santo Spirito from the priors for March 1401 (Florence, 1400)—he is a new man—and in three cases errors occur in dating: (1) p. 466, Rosso di Piero del Rosso is given as being a prior in 1374, when the correct date is 1384; (2) p. 562, Arrigo ser Piero Mucini was prior in September-October 1403, not 1405; and (3) p. 94, Bartolomeo Tommaso Corbinelli was prior in March 1405 (Flor. 1404), and not 1406 (Flor. 1405).

My treatment of the Florentine Priorate differs in a fundamental respect from that by Molho. Whereas Molho considers the Priorates by decade, my analysis tries to take into account the changes caused by important constitutional crises within the various decades. Especially in the period after 1382 such a distinction seems of more significance than one based on decades. As for Molho's second set of statistics, the average number of offices held by families with members in the Priorate does not appear to be particularly significant. Lost in the "average" is the fact that some families exercised the office four, five, and six times more than others.

been sufficiently emphasized by Becker and Brucker, however, is that after August 1348, a tendency to restrict easy access to the Priorate developed. Between September 1348 and August 1358, there appeared in the Priorate 116 new men, or about 21 percent of the total membership of the body. Subsequently, the number dropped to 86 or 15.6 percent in the decade September 1358–August 1368, and during the next decade rose only slightly to 92 or 16.7 percent between September and the outbreak of the Ciompi in July 1378. While these percentages for the thirty-year period 1348–1378 are well above the 5.7 percent for new families in the Priorate in the 1330's, they are comparable to those for new families in the body between 1300 and 1330. Apparently after the significant influx of new men in the first years of the new regime—an influx representing more than a simple compensation for a decade of extremely restricted entrances in the 1330's—the traditional rhythm of admission of new families to the Priorate resumed.²⁰

If the period March 1382 to July 1387—when as a result of the Alberti affair new purses were made under new rules—is compared for political mobility with the years 1343–1378, the result is quite favorable for the former. While remaining below the percentage achieved between October 1343 and August 1348, the 106 families elected to the Priorate between March 1382 and July 1387 still accounted for 36.5 percent of the total priors chosen in these years. This is approximately double the number for September 1358–August 1378. Although decreasing somewhat between July 1387 and October 1393 (the date of the second Alberti crisis) the number of new families entering the Priorate still amounted to 113 or 33 percent of all priors elected during these years.

Only after October 1393 did the rate of political mobility decrease significantly. Between November 1393 and February 1407 the number of new families in the Priorate totaled 80 or about 11 percent of the priors for the period.²¹ The average, however, conceals the fact

20. *Tratte* records showing a large percentage of new men after 1343 designated in various scrutinies as eligible for the Priorate (Brucker, p. 160, n. 47) do not in themselves show high political mobility as Brucker implies. How many of those listed by Brucker under "new men" in the scrutiny of 1363, for example, were eligible for the first time and how many "new men" had already been in the lists since 1343, twenty years before? I would like to thank John Newell of Duke University for raising the critical question on the extent of decrease in the admission of "new men" to the Priorate after August 1348.

21. Through a year-to-year analysis of new families entering the Priorate in the fourteenth century based on A.S.F., Mano. 226, John Nagemy of Cornell in "The

that the number over these thirteen years was a declining one. If the period is divided at the point where the supplemental electoral reforms of the *balia* of November 1400 went into effect, i.e., January 1401, then between November 1393 and December 1400 new men constituted 14.5 percent of the membership of the Priorate while between January 1401 and February 1407, only 6.7 percent of the priors came from families never before in the Priorate. The rate of political mobility after 1401, therefore, was only slightly higher than it had been in the 1330's, the lowest rate in the fourteenth century.

Another way of examining the extent of the decrease in political mobility in the years 1382-1407 is to determine the changing ratio of posts in the Priorate occupied by leading political families. If a leading political family can be defined as one holding the Priorate during this twenty-five year period four times or more, then 92 Florentine families were involved. The group accordingly commanded the following average of places in the Priorates elected during the twenty-five years concerned: March 1382-June 1387, 2.2 members; July 1387-October 1393, 3.2 members; November 1393-December 1400, 3.9 members; and January 1401-February 1407, 4.4 members. While the decisive period for decrease in the ratio of new men coming into the Priorate was post-1393, the sharpest increase in the number of posts held by leading families came post-1387, with the highest concentration of seats occupied by this group occurring in 1401-1407.

By contrast, in the period 1353-1378, similarly defined "ruling families" (families holding four or more seats in a twenty-five year period) controlled an even greater total of seats. The earlier group, however, contained 40 percent more families. When the average number of seats per Priorate held by an average 92 out of 129 families is considered, the figures are as follows:

September 1353-August 1362, 3.6 out of 9;

September 1362-August 1370, 3.9 out of 9;

September 1370-August 1378 (July-August 1378 term not completed), 3.3 out of 9.

This means that only in 1401 did those defined as the ruling families hold more seats than an equivalent number of families in 1353-1378. Nonetheless, the considerable increase in seats held by this category in 1401-1407 compared with 1353-1378 and the fact that only 92 rather

Guilds in Florentine Politics, 1292-1394" (Diss. Harvard 1972), was the first to demonstrate a significant drop in entrance of "new men" after October 1393.

than 129 families were involved justify viewing the years 1401-1407 as marking an exceptional concentration of power in fewer hands vis-à-vis earlier decades.

The rate of absorption of new men, the size of the group of ruling families, and the percentage of seats they held in the Priorate are not, however, the most significant elements of comparison between the periods 1382-1407 and 1343-1378 (or 1353-1378). Much more striking and more significant for an understanding of what happened to the ruling class after 1382 is what appears to be the enormous decrease in the participation of individuals in the Priorates of the last decades of the fourteenth century and the first part of the next. During the twenty-five years, September 1353-August 1378, it was not exceptional for an individual to be elected five or six times to a seat in the Priorate. No one in the period 1382-1407 was elected more than four times. If only those men holding the Priorate three times or more are considered, the contrast is obvious. In the earlier twenty-five years, 134 men held the office a total of 539 times, i.e., 134 men held 39 percent of all the seats and each averaged four seats. Between March 1382 and February 1407, only 20 men held the office three or more times for a total of only 63 seats, i.e., less than 5 percent of all the seats or just above three seats per person. The source of this difference becomes clear from a study of elections to the Priorate by family. Families holding the Priorate frequently in 1382-1407 were dividing the election between their various branches. No individual member or even individual branch monopolized the seats.²² Because of this division, about as many different individuals were elected to high office in 1401-1407 as before.

The conclusions of the statistical portion of this study are the following:

22. The word "family" here refers to the extended family consisting of various branches. The dispersal of political power within the family based on the *priorista* is very difficult to present statistically. A perusal of the names of individual priors coming from particular families in the period 1382-1407, however, especially from the larger families, suggests that sharing of office was fairly extensive when compared with earlier decades. For instance, the important Albizzi family held nine seats as priors during this period. The names of the priors were as follows: Gentile Vanni, Andrea Franceschino, Andrea Piero Filippo, Michele Vanni Uberto, Bedice Jacopo Antonio, Maso Luca Piero (twice in Priorate), Paolo Piero Filippo, Silvestro Vanni. In the case of the Strozzi, the list of eleven priors reads as follows: Leonardo Giovanni, Nofrio Palla (twice in Priorate), Pazzino Francesco, Marco Uberto, Strozza Carlo, Matteo Niccolò, Pierozzo Blasio, Marco Geri, Francesco Palla, Antonio Leonardo.

1. Compared to the regime established in 1382, the regime of 1343-1378 was not as "open" as some scholars have suggested.

2. Entrance of new men into the Priorate was far higher in the period 1382-1393 than it was at any time after the first five years of the regime of 1343-78. The years 1393-1407, however, witnessed a serious decline in political mobility.

3. Concentration of Priorate seats within a relatively small number of families—we have regarded the 92 families holding this office four times or more in the twenty-five year period as basically constituting this group—increased significantly after 1387. This means that the loss of seats in the years 1387-1393 was suffered not primarily by new men but rather by families previously honored by election to the Priorate. The gains by the ruling families after 1393, however, were largely accomplished by denying new men access to the purses of high office.²³

4. In the regime of 1343-1378 families were normally represented by a few members who monopolized the family's portion of Priorate seats. After 1382 the honors and powers of the Priorate were more democratically distributed between family members.

The following section attempts to provide an explanation for these conclusions and in so doing to characterize the evolution of the Florentine ruling group between 1382 and 1407.

III

The two pivotal constitutional dates in the twenty-five years between 1382 and 1407 were 1387 and 1393. An investigation of what led up to these crises and what their effects were is crucial to understanding the nature of Florentine politics in these years. The regime established with the Ciompi in the summer of 1378 ended in January 1382 when the government proved itself incapable of resisting mob pressure. In the face of imminent anarchy the seven major guilds took

23.	New men: No. of seats/ Priorate	Loss	92 Families holding office 4 or more times in 25-yr. period: No. of seats/Priorate	Gain
March 1382-June 1387	3.3	—	2.2	—
July 1387-Oct. 1393	3.0	0.3	3.2	1.0
Nov. 1393-Dec. 1400	1.3	2.0	3.9	1.7
Jan. 1401-Feb. 1407	.7	2.6	4.4	2.2

the initiative. With their support the Priorate met the challenge, suppressed the mob, and executed its leaders. Nevertheless, the victory of the forces of order led to a shift in the balance of power within the state in favor of the upper classes. A series of street demonstrations decked out with the symbols of the Guelf Party succeeded in cowing the divided minor guilds and in compelling the priors to convoke a *parlamento*, an assembly of the whole body of Florentine citizens. This assembly promptly approved the creation of a *balia* to reform the state.²⁴

Burning for revenge, the horde of exiles of various persuasions created by the civil disturbances over the preceding three-and-one-half years now returned to the city. The great bulk of the Florentines, however, wanted compromise, and the legislation emerging from the *balia* of late January and February was surprisingly conciliatory. All exiles of all factions were permitted to return.²⁵ The two guilds remaining of the three created in July 1378 were abolished and their membership put back as *sottoposti* under the rule of the wool guilds. Yet those among the *sottoposti* seeking entrance to the wool guild itself could be admitted with the approval of the Priorate and the wool guild consuls.²⁶ Moreover, both the silk and the wool guilds were to have one and two consuls respectively on their governing boards taken from those who remained *sottoposti*.²⁷

On February 15 a coalition of extremists, Ciompi, former Guelf exiles and Guelf sympathizers—men like Donato Acciaiuoli and Vanni Castellani—attempted to pack the reform *balia* by forcing the summoning of a *parlamento*, which added new members to the *balia*. The effort, however, was frustrated by the *balia* itself and the priors.²⁸ The work of the *balia* was completed at the end of February and the new order began to function. But on March 10 the extremists on both sides tried to cooperate with one another a second time. Again they forced the calling of a *parlamento* and had a series of petitions approved as

24. Marchiõne di Coppo Stefani, *Cronica fiorentina*, ed. Niccolò Rodolico, R.I.S., Vol. 30, Pt. I (Città di Castello, 1903-1955), 393, dates the *parlamento* incorrectly as held on January 21; see A.S.F., Balie, 17, 5. For the demonstration, see the late fourteenth-century anonymous chronicler, *B.N.F.*, Panc. 158, 140^v col. a. The author of this text, which I discovered in 1968, seems to represent the moderate, major guild political opinion of his day.

25. A.S.F., Baile, 17, 12^v-13; published by Capponi, I, 609-11.

26. Balie, 17, 14^v-15, and Capponi, I, 612-13.

27. Balie, 17, 22^v-23; Capponi, I, 620.

28. Stefani, p. 406, and Panc. 158, 142^v col. a.

law in the midst of a mob atmosphere. One of these, for instance, provided complete reimbursement for those whose houses had been burned in the riots of 1378, and another forbade those who had been branded as Ghibellines prior to 1378 from holding public office.²⁹ This show of force by the extremists, however, caused a general reaction in the city and resulted in the creation of a new *balia* which in a few days time revoked in substance the legislation approved by the *parlamento* of March 10. In the days after March 10 Donato Acciaiuoli and Vanni Castellani, who had supported the agitation of February 15, threw in their lot with the moderates.³⁰

From the beginning, political life under the new regime was different in two very important respects from what it had been prior to 1378. The years of civil strife had proved ruinous to the Guelf Party organization. Discredited for the reckless pursuit of its enemies in 1378, the Party had emerged from three years of minor guild domination economically ruined.³¹ At the same time the war against the Church had forever exploded the myth of an indissoluble tie between Florence and the Church. While Guelfism continued to play a symbolic role in internal Florentine politics, Guelfism as an international movement and the Party as an organization had little effect on the course of political events in the city.

Although troubled by occasional conspiracies, including an abortive uprising of the Ciompi in 1383, the regime during the first years proved acceptable to most citizens. The extent to which the new order attempted to effect a compromise with the preceding regime is reflected dramatically in the number of new families appearing in the lists of priors. The creation of a new set of purses in 1385, the so-called Scrutiny of Union, enabling more citizens to hold high public office, reflects the same effort to achieve a greater degree of social harmony.³² Henceforth no one would be ineligible for the Priorate,

29. Stefani, p. 407, and Panc. 158, 144^v col. a.

30. Stefani, pp. 408-11, and Panc. 158, 144^v col. a.

31. Capponi, I, 623-24, publishes a document indicating that the Guelf Party was unable to continue to function without borrowing. This may have been, of course, a temporary situation; only further research can determine the financial condition of the Party in the last decades of the fourteenth century. Nonetheless, the Party as an institution was a much weaker political force after 1382 than before 1378.

32. *Cronica volgare di anonimo fiorentino dall'anno 1384 a 1409 già attribuita a Piero di Giovanni Minerbeti*, ed. Elina Bellondi, R.S.I., vol. 27, pt. 2 (Città di Castello, 1915), 10-11: "... per pace e concordia e contentamento di tutti i cittadini fu diliberato che qualunque cittadino, di qualunque istato o condizione si fosse, potesse andare a partito di essere all'ufficio senza avere divieto o per Ghibellino o per ammonito; e

the two advisory colleges, i.e., the Twelve and Sixteen, and the Captains of the Guelf Party on the grounds that they were from a Ghibelline family. This legislation implicitly favored the "new men."³³ While the scrutiny did not begin to affect elections until the purses of 1382 were exhausted, it must have figured as an important consideration in the general response to the Alberti scandal two years later.

In April 1387 the name of Filippo Magalotti was drawn for the post of standardbearer of justice for May–June, even though he was not of legal age. His father-in-law, Benedetto degli Alberti, together with a large group of citizens, called on the priors and through pressure induced them to overlook the discrepancy.³⁴ Because of the Alberti's collaboration with the regime of 1378–1382, the clan was deeply hated by former Guelf exiles and their friends, but the angry reaction to Benedetto's audacity went beyond the narrow confines of this group. After describing the opposition to Magalotti's election from the exiles, one contemporary chronicler adds that "the actions of Messer Benedetto very much displeased the citizens because they appeared to them as if he wished to make himself Lord of Florence."³⁵ Popular with the workers and members of the minor guilds, it was easy to suspect that the Alberti were plotting to set up a lordship resting on the support of the lower classes. The fact that Benedetto degli Alberti himself had been drawn for the advisory College of the Sixteen beginning in May only increased suspicion. Even if the Alberti had no immediate plans, the incident raised questions about the wisdom of the reform legisla-

questo vollono i buoni signori cittadini guelfi per loro benignità e dolcezza più che perchè meritato l'avessono, e questa volta più che tutte l'altre." The chronicler in retrospect apparently considered the legislation unwise. Scipio Ammirato, in *Istorie fiorentine di Scipione Ammirato*, ed. F. Ranalli, 6 vols. (Florence, 1846–1849), III, 370, remarks: "Dentro, per quello che trovo annotato in alcuni prioristi, e in uno autore, di cui non apparisce il nome [probably the *Cronica di anonimo*], si fece lo squittinio chiamato dell'unione." The scrutiny was the result of a long debate starting in the Consiglio del Popolo on January 24 (A.S.F., Libri Fabarum, 42, 36). A *provvisione* approved the making of the scrutiny without giving details: A.S.F., Provv. Reg., 74, 91–94 (May 13 and 15, 1385).

33. Brucker, *Florentine Politics*, pp. 116–19.

34. *Cronica di anonimo*, p. 312, sets his age as less than 25 and declares legal age for the office as 26. The Panc. 158, 151^v col. b, makes Magalotti 25 and the legal age 30. The Panc. chronicler characterizes Benedetto Alberti's efforts as "grande prochaccio." Compare *Cronica di anonimo*, p. 32.

35. The Panc., 158, 151^v col. a, uses the terms "arch-Guelfs" and "Guelfs" to describe the former exiles who bitterly opposed the election of Magalotti: "I ghuelfi di Firenze, cioè [il ritornati chessi chiamano arcighulfi nel tutto no' volono che fusse ghenfaloniere di giustizia." But he also adds: "Spiaque molto a' cittadini e modi di messer Benedetto per che pareo loro che volesse essere signiore di Firenze."

tion of 1385, i.e., throwing open the doors of high public office to citizens of dubious background and therefore making it ultimately possible for the Alberti to take over power through legal means.

The danger was considered sufficient to summon a *balia*.³⁶ One of the extraordinary commission's first actions was to exile most of the male members of the Alberti along with other prominent citizens including members of the Rinuccini and Del Bene families. It also cut down the share of offices open to the minor guilds. The *balia* furthermore created a special purse which would contain the names of those "who had the very great confidence of the state." At each extraction for the Priorate, two names would be chosen from the new purse, called the *borsellino*. Rather than see this new device as a means for a narrow oligarchy to control more efficiently election to the Priorate, it is more accurate to interpret the new institution primarily as a response to the Scrutiny of Union of 1385. In view of the Alberti affair, probably most upperclass Florentines considered the *borsellino* a necessary reform in order to blunt the democratic tendencies inherent in the Scrutiny when its purses came to be used.

There was a good deal of pressure from the former Guelf exiles and their sympathizers to make further reforms and lengthen the list of exiles, but this tendency was resisted by the *balia*, whose life ended in mid-May after two weeks. Oddly enough, the employment of the *borsellino* and the reduction of the share of the minor guilds in the highest state offices had little effect on the entrance of new families into the Priorate.³⁷ The prime target of this reform was obviously Florentine families previously elected to the Priorate but now considered politically unreliable.

There is a striking parallel between the immediate causes behind the *balia* of 1387 and those leading to that of 1393. In both cases the action to restrict political participation appears essentially a reaction to a threat to the *status quo*. Just as the earlier *balia* was related to a prior liberalization of requirements for public office and the supposed political ambitions of the Alberti, so that of 1393 had as its antecedents an effort to rehabilitate the Alberti along with those designated as their

36. *Cronica di anonimo*, pp. 32-35, has the best account of the *balia* and its work. The *balia* also made certain "adjustments" in the scrutiny of 1385; *ibid.*, p. 34. Filippo Cionetto Bastari, a prominent pre-1378 moderate, was a leading proponent of the *borsellino*: Brucker, *Florentine Politics*, pp. 151-52, and Herde, "Politische Verhaltensweisen," pp. 172 and 182-83.

37. See above, n. 23.

accomplices of 1387 and a series of laws doubtless motivated by fiscal necessities but also very attractive to the lower classes of the city.

A plot involving one of the Alberti had been discovered on the eve of the First Milanese War in March 1390, but the offender was dealt with lightly.³⁸ In the fall of 1391, with the period of exile imposed in 1387 nearly terminated, a concerted effort was made by the priors to restore political rights to most of the prominent exiles. Cipriano degli Alberti, now the head of the Alberti clan, was excluded from the recall, but his family, along with the Rinuccini, were called back in October, and the Del Bene in November.³⁹ The more conservative of the two legislative councils, the Council of the Commune, nevertheless resisted further recalls.⁴⁰

By August 1392, with the First Milanese War at an end, Giovanni Biliotti, then standardbearer of justice for the term July–August, sensed that the mood of the city was propitious for a recall of Cipriano himself. Not only was Biliotti successful in an endeavor which the year before had been blocked, but he was also able to have a number of proposals enacted altering the Monte, as the public debt was called, with a view to reducing the burden on the communal treasury. He postponed interest payments on the Monte, made steps for reducing the extent of communal indebtedness by paying off the principal, and reduced and postponed the regular payments to the Church for lands confiscated in the War with the Papacy.⁴¹ This compensation to the Church had been a fundamental demand of the returning Guelfs in 1382.

The full truth about the events surrounding the political crisis of October 1393, a year later, will perhaps never be known. On October 9, 1393, three men were arrested and letters were found on their persons relating to a plot to create a rebellion in the city in the name of the “twenty-four arts.” The latter phrase immediately evoked images of the Ciompi and upperclass demagogy. One of those apprehended was an ironworker who had been among the citizens deprived of political rights in 1387 for supposed complicity with the Alberti. Under

38. Panc. 158, 158 col. a.

39. A.S.F., Provv. Reg., 80, 141, 151, and 167^v–171. I am grateful to Professor Brucker for this reference.

40. Panc. 158, 165^v.

41. The nature of the reforms of the Monte are briefly described by Panc. 158, 171 col. a. The legislation itself is found, A.S.F., Provv. Reg., 81, 145^v–162^v. In November of the previous year a similar attempt to reform the system of state finance had been initiated but apparently met with little success: *ibid.*, 80, 171^v–176^v.

torture the three revealed that Cipriano and Alberto degli Alberti were leaders of the conspiracy. This information led to the arrest of the patricians and their examination. Although tortured, both insisted on their innocence. During the night of October 18, nine days after the original discovery of the plot, an apparently separate incident led to the collection of a crowd which quickly grew into an angry mob shouting for the punishment of the Alberti.⁴² The standardbearer of justice at the time was Maso degli Albizzi, bitter enemy of the Alberti, and he was naturally not unopposed to meeting this demand.

A new *balia* charged with reforming the state exiled wide numbers of citizens, ordered the destruction of purses of the dreaded "Scrutiny of Union" pertaining to the Priorate, the Twelve, and the Sixteen, and provided for the careful screening of the names remaining from the scrutinies of 1382 and 1391. Henceforth in the election of the Priorate three rather than two priors would be selected from the *borsellino*. The *balia* also reclassified a number of magnate families as *popolani*, in an apparent attempt to weight the balance more in favor of conservatism, and granted small economic and fiscal concessions to the lower classes, probably to attract their support.⁴³ The overall effect of the *balia* of 1393 was to restrict access to high communal office decisively.

Was there actually an Alberti plot? The chroniclers neither affirm or deny its reality. There is no positive evidence that it was trumped up. On the other hand, given the legislation of 1392 and the restoration of Cipriano degli Alberti, men like Maso degli Albizzi might well have suspected that some sort of plan was being worked out to gain support from the lower classes and to push the Republic toward a *de facto* Alberti tyranny. The time when the Scrutiny of Union would be used in the selection of communal officials had for some positions probably already arrived. On this theory, the conservatives needed to discover a plot in order to frighten the great body of citizens and to halt a dangerous trend. If there was generally any doubt about Alberti guilt, their complicity was confirmed in the minds of many citizens by the popular riot which occurred on October 24 while the *balia* to decide punishment for the Alberti was still meeting. A number of artisans

42. This account is based primarily on Panc. 158, 172^v col. a to 173 col. a. Also see *Cronica di anonimo*, pp. 179-81.

43. Capponi, I, 625-38, publishes fragments of the deliberations of this *balia*. The measures for the poor are found, A.S.F., Balia 19, 28-29^v. The reclassification of magnates is located, *ibid.*, 43 ff. The burning of purses for executive colleges, *ibid.*, 15^v; Capponi, I, 634-36.

crying, "Long live the people and the arts!" rushed into the Piazza della Signoria in an attempt to seize the Banner of the People from the house of the Captain. These men were set on by a large number of "good citizens" and were either killed or driven away. To pacify the population, Donato Acciaiuoli and Rinaldo Gianfigliuzzi paraded through the city, the first carrying the Banner of the People and the other that of the Guelf Party. Again on November 7 an attempt was made to start a riot when a group of artisans charged into the *piazza* shouting "Long live the arts!" It is possible to explain these riots as the product of dormant lower-class hostilities suddenly aroused by the hope of advantage in a moment of crisis for the regime.⁴⁴ On the other hand, one might interpret these popular risings as desperate attempts of Alberti followers to free their leaders by a bold assault on the center of government.

One of the theses of this article is that this contraction in the number of ruling families after 1382 represents a reaction to attempts of patrician elements, especially the Alberti, to enlarge the political class. After 1382 the great body of Florentine citizens were moderate in their politics, but memories of the Ciompi were vivid. There seems to have been a general fear of a preeminent individual who, through popularity with the masses, could set up a popular tyranny. The Alberti in the period 1382-1393 had the best possibilities for such a takeover. In other words, the political activity of the Alberti and the suspicions it aroused, rather than plots by the conservative elements of the city, those favoring narrow political participation, was the major cause of the contraction of the Florentine political class.

The history of the regime between 1393 and 1407, moreover, indicates that the periodic exiling of substantial numbers of citizens and increasing control of election machinery were not masterminded by Maso degli Albizzi and his friends, but rather reflected the continued reaction of the ruling families to threats against the *status quo*.⁴⁵ After

44. *Cronica di anonimo*, p. 179, and Panc. 158, 174^v col. b and 175^v col. b.

45. Herde, "Politische Verhaltensweisen," maintains that the *consulte* discussions prove that Maso and the conservative group dominated Florentine policymaking in 1382-1402. He does this basically by dividing the important speakers (about one hundred in twenty years) into three groups: those belonging to the oligarchic or Albizzean faction, those of moderate persuasion, and those politically unallied (Herde, pp. 179-85). His criteria for establishing party allegiance, however, are open to question. He assumes that members of a clan after 1382 inherited the political views of their forefathers prior to 1378—this despite Gene Brucker's warning in *Florentine Politics and Society, 1343-1378* (Princeton, N.J., 1963), p. 203, that before 1378 few Florentine families were as a whole committed to a particular political stance. See Herde, for in-

1393 as before there was general suspicion of the preeminent individual. The fear that Giangaleazzo, the lord of Milan, was seeking to destroy Florence from within merely added to the sense of danger.⁴⁶ Rinaldo Gianfigliuzzi, one of the most important political figures in the post-1393 regime, made the mistake of promoting a marriage between his son and one of the daughters of Niccolò degli Alberti early in 1394.⁴⁷ So threatened was the regime by this imminent alliance between a strong political figure and the Alberti with their democratic traditions that Gianfigliuzzi was for a short time relegated to political limbo. Within a few months, however, the eloquent Roman lawyer regained his standing by means of scrupulously reporting to the priors the treasonous remarks made in confidence to him by the ancient Florentine Filippo Cionetto Bastari.⁴⁸

Doubtless the clearest indication of the fear of the outstanding man is the case of Donato Acciaiuoli. Donato was the scion of the most eminent family in Florence. One of his brothers was a prince of the Church and another the seneschal of the King of Naples. He was patron of a vast clientele, inside Florence and without, built up by his

stance, on Jacopo, Niccolò di Jacopo, and Ubaldino Guasconi (Herde, p. 180), Pierozzo di Biagio and Matteo di Niccolò Strozzi (p. 180), and Lorenzo Machiavelli (p. 181). Again he makes no allowance in his grouping for altered political views in the same man. Giovanni Biliotti, identified by Brucker as a conservative prior to 1378, is unquestioningly placed by Herde (p. 181) in the Albizzi group regardless of the fact that in 1392, as standardbearer of justice, Biliotti sponsored a number of laws presumably inimical to oligarchical interests (see above in text, p. 256). The banker Nofri di Giovanni Arnolfini is for Herde an adherent of the Albizzi after 1382 because in 1372 he formed a company with four other patrician bankers (p. 181). Brucker cites the partnership (*Florentine Politics*, pp. 126-27) but nowhere in his book do the five partners appear to be Albizzi partisans. In another case, that of Filippo di Cionetto Bastari, Herde, following Brucker's remarks for the pre-1378 period, labels Bastari as a moderate at one point (Herde, p. 182), but at another treats Bastari as a speaker for the oligarchy (p. 172). Consequently, Herde's categorization of the speakers appears largely without foundation.

Furthermore, his assertion that the Albizzi and their henchmen worked out their strategy for *consulte* discussions in advance is not supported by the quotations from the debates he himself provides. Speakers identified as Albizzi partisans seem genuinely to have disagreed in matters of government policy: see, for instance, Herde, pp. 205, nn. 269 and 270; 209, n. 304; and 218, n. 266.

46. A law passed on December 12, 1394, for example, made specific provisions for encouraging potential informers, guaranteeing anonymity and large rewards. The government was particularly disturbed that its enemies were defacing the sides of walls and buildings with posters attacking the regime. There was also concern with politically motivated arsonists: Panc. 158, 178^v col. a. and A.S.F., Reg. Provv., 83, 206. The Duke of Milan was accused of being involved in the great plot of 1400: Panc. 158, 197 col. a.

47. *Cronica di anonimo*, pp. 182-83. Also see, A.S.F., *Consulte e Pratiche*, 30, 112.

48. Panc. 158, 177^r.

control of money and political power. Yet within a few days in January 1396 Donato fell from power and was driven into exile.⁴⁹ For whatever motive, the Florentine patrician had decided to push for a change in the regulations governing election to public office. Part of his plan involved the recall of those convicted of political crimes. His brother Michele was one of the priors for January–February 1396 and was charged with the task of sounding out the other priors on their disposition to accept the plan. A petition had already been prepared for submission to the popular councils. The response of Michele's colleagues, however, was negative, and Donato at the news of their rejection was reported to have sworn to use force to achieve the ends of his petition.

Whether or not he did indeed plan violence, he had at least attempted to alter the *status quo* in the direction of enlarging the ruling class and, given his name and power, Donato's motivation was easily suspect. By contrast, there can be no question that Maso degli Albizzi was a powerful man in governing circles, but the key to his power lay in the fact that he appreciated the limits imposed on individual action by a regime resting on the principle of collegiality.⁵⁰

To prevent sudden political change, the regime after 1393, and especially after the discovery of a large conspiracy in November 1400,⁵¹ narrowed the opportunities for new men to rise to high office and gave the places thereby made available to the more active political families of the regime. At the same time, corresponding to the increasing concentration of power within the hands of key families, occurred a marked diffusion of Priorate seats among the various branches of individual families. This emphasis on widespread family participation was designed in part to prevent preeminence of individuals.

Yet a fuller understanding of the phenomenon requires a brief explanation of demographic, economic, and fiscal factors as well. After a sharp drop caused by the first onslaught of the plague at mid-century, the Florentine population seems to have stabilized by 1380 at about 55,000. This leveling off of the decline occurred despite repeated at-

49. Panc. 158, 181 col. b to 184^v col. a; *Cronica di anonimo*, pp. 200–202; and ser Naddo ser Nepi, *Croniche fiorentine di ser Naddo ser Nepi*, *Delizie degli Eruditi Toscani*, 24 vols. (Florence, 1770–1789), XVI, 153–54.

50. Molho, "Politics," pp. 417–18, very effectively makes this point.

51. The exposure of the large conspiracy necessitated the calling of a new *balia* and the eventual exiling of numerous citizens: Panc. 158, 197 col. a to 198 col. a; *Cronica di anonimo*, pp. 251–55.

tacks of the epidemic in 1383, 1391, and 1400. The *contado* followed much the same pattern toward stabilization. From a population of 250,000 in pre-plague times, the *contado* fell to about 120,000 and remained at this level into the next century.⁵²

Florence's demographic situation in the last half of the fourteenth century paralleled that of most areas of western Europe, and this contraction had severe consequences for Florentine exports. By the last quarter of the century the Florentine economy could at best be described as stagnating.⁵³ Moreover, a major factor affecting Florentine production and consumption was the steadily increasing burden of taxation on the Florentine population, which siphoned off available funds, thereby reducing the possibilities of capital accumulation for business investment. The nature of the tax system was such that the tax burden, while heavy for those already rich, was still heavier for the poorer taxpayers.⁵⁴

The method of taxation, combined with the economic contraction, inevitably had a decided effect on social mobility in the Republic. A man of humble origins like Francesco Datini of Prato could still be-

52. Enrico Fiumi, "Fioritura e decadenza dell'economia fiorentina," *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 116 (1958), 466; and idem, "Sui rapporti economici tra città e contado nell'età comunale," *ibid.*, 108 (1950), 106. In the course of the first decades of the fifteenth century, however, the population again appears to have declined.

53. While not stating the position directly, Fiumi, "Fioritura," *loc. cit.*, 117 (1959), 501, appears to support this opinion. The thesis of a general depression in late-fourteenth-century and early-fifteenth-century Europe is most clearly stated in Robert Lopez and Harry Miskimin, "The Economic Depression of the Renaissance," *Economic History Review*, 2d ser. 14 (1961-1962), 408-26. It must be admitted that the state of the Florentine economy in the last decades of the fourteenth century is far from clearly defined. Gene Brucker, in *Renaissance Florence*, pp. 79-80, sees a revival in economic activity in the 1380's, but urges caution about using isolated production statistics to establish a trend. Also see Marvin Becker, *Florence in Transition*, II, 26-27, and 164. Only further research can determine the question. Of course, if economic life proves to have been vital at the end of the century, then my statistical data on increasing family participation in the Priorate is subject to another interpretation.

54. The trend toward heavier taxes, while characteristic of the whole fourteenth century, took an upturn after 1375, largely because of the great wars with the Church and Milan. Unable to finance its expenditures merely by increasing levies on the *contado* and the incidence of direct taxation, the government resorted to levying forced loans, *prestanze*, theoretically assessed against citizens on the basis of the ability to pay. Consolidated into the Monte, the loans received interest, and credits in the Monte were negotiable. Citizens were allowed to pay only a portion of their levy, but then these payments were considered *ad perdendum*, that is, the taxpayer lost claim on the money. Thus, while for those able to pay the rates of their *prestanze* the Monte offered a form of investment, less fortunate citizens, forced to pay *ad perdendum*, were excluded from such benefits. While Anthony Molho, in *Florentine Public Finances in the Early Renaissance, 1400-1433* (Cambridge, 1971), and Marvin Becker, in *Florence in Transition*, differ markedly in their estimate of the extent of Florentine indebtedness, both agree that the burden of the public debt was enormous.

come very rich, but such cases were exceptional in the late fourteenth century. The economic contraction of itself narrowed the horizons of Florentine businessmen, encouraging caution in investment. The range of economic opportunities diminished, while the established families, pessimistic about the future, were more tenacious in defending their privileged economic position. The resulting decrease in social mobility was only emphasized by the exorbitant demands of the public fisc. Tax collections now seized savings of poorer men which in earlier times might have been used as a springboard for economic advance.

Politically the slowdown in social mobility permitted and encouraged the concentration of power in the hands of fewer families: because of the reduced number of newly rich, there was less pressure to keep the avenues to high political office open to those rising from below. The massive economic and fiscal threats to family patrimony correspondingly created a need for greater cohesion within the membership of leading families. The increasing tie between public policy and family wealth put a high premium on cooperation within the family for the purpose of placing family members in positions of power. Moreover, the rash of political exiling after 1382 was eloquent testimony to the fact that the actions of one or two family members jeopardized the welfare of a whole clan. Guilt by association could mean exile and loss of political rights and, in a time of increasing tax burdens, this political disenfranchisement could lead to punitive taxation. Thus, not only did fear of a popular tyranny lead the regime to diffuse political power among the members of ruling Florentine families, but economic and fiscal factors also encouraged such a tendency.⁵⁵

Before 1378 there were few Florentine families whose membership as a whole actively participated in politics.⁵⁶ Family allegiance on the part of individual politicians was of course a central trait of Florentine political life in earlier decades, but normally only a few members in even the largest clans were deeply committed to holding communal office. If the elections to the Priorate can be considered representative of officeholding in the Republic as a whole, then it would appear that after 1382, as politics came to affect the lives of individuals with increasing frequency and importance, the membership of the diminish-

55. This evidence would appear to militate against the argument of Richard A. Goldthwaite in "The Florentine Palace as Domestic Architecture," *American Historical Review*, 77 (1972), 998, that the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth centuries witnessed the development of the nuclear family.

56. See Brucker, *Florentine Politics*, p. 203.

ing number of families at the center of power demanded more and more of a role in political life. In other words, the membership of the ruling families became as a group more politicized, and family control of individuals increased.

To express it still another way, the medieval Florentine commune was but one corporation, even if the strongest, among many corporate organizations in the city. In the course of the fourteenth century the commune succeeded in absorbing much of the vitality and power hitherto found in these other bodies and, as it did, Florentines came to focus correspondingly greater interest on its operations. By 1400 the disintegration of the pluralistic corporate society was well on its way, but this did not mean the breakdown of families. What occurred was that families whose commitments had earlier been dispersed among a variety of corporate bodies, like the Guef Party or the guilds, now concentrated their attention on communal politics.

In these circumstances political leaders could operate, but only in a restricted sphere. After 1393 the ruling group was in one sense smaller because fewer families were involved, but the concern of individual members of these families in politics greatly intensified. Men like Maso degli Albizzi, Rinaldo Gianfigliuzzi, and others could exercise leadership only because they were willing to act as *primi inter pares*. Those who would not or appeared not to accept the collegial principle of government were driven into exile by the regime of families.⁵⁷

The basic character of Florentine political life after 1382 clearly reflected the nature of the altering composition of the ruling class.

57. Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, pp. 97-101, stresses the dissolution of both corporate and family bonds in the late fourteenth century and the rise of "a new phenomenon, the proliferation of patron-client relationships (p. 97)." These relationships were the new means by which the individual could protect himself in a period when more traditional institutions of support were crumbling (p. 98). Brucker's account of the process here is only a sketch of his position, which he intends to amplify in a book. For this reason it can only be treated for the time being within limits.

My own interpretation of what appears to be a proliferation of patron-client relationships (at least after 1400) is that it is not a function of the weakening of family bonds, but rather a response of those outside the contracting circle of ruling families striving to find defenders within that circle. Admittedly the buildup of patron-client relationships over time could serve to augment the power of individual patrons and consequently to thwart the collegial principle of government. It is possible that this tendency became increasingly important in the period after 1407, but at least in the years covered by this article it does not seem to be the primary force in Florentine politics. I might add that the politics of "consensus" characteristic of Florence between 1382 and 1408 seems difficult to explain in terms of growing and competing networks of patron-client bonds.

Politics between 1343 and 1378 can be described as a struggle between two rather informal parties, the new men and their patrician allies against a group of *popolani* patricians in league with the magnates. Political life after 1382 was by contrast a politics of consensus, characterized by willingness to support government policies which often required sacrifices. A relatively large number of families held the center while factional fringes attempted to pull the center in various directions. The primary goal of this large center group was political stability. Horror of the Ciompi remained still strong, and while the dangers of lower class revolt diminished after 1382, the fear of a patrician tyranny founded on lower-class support was an impelling force for civic unity.

The years 1382–1387 were guided by the desire of the majority of citizens to achieve civic reconciliation and to allow greater participation of citizens in public office in the name of harmony. The Alberti scandal of 1387 moved the center toward the right, but only after 1393 did the restrictive tendency definitely triumph. Still, for those who were within the ruling circle the ideals of equality between families and the cooperation for the common good prevailed.

What linked this evolving political order to civic humanism, as Hans Baron characterizes the conception? Although between 1382 and 1407 Florence gradually came under the rule of an oligarchy, this development, while not planned, resulted from a tightening of family ranks because of threats from the direction of democracy. The political class sought to save the communal regime which the members felt to be under attack. The political atmosphere created by this kind of contraction of the ruling class differs considerably from the one evoked by historians who characterize political developments in these twenty-five years as caused primarily by the progressive conquest of leadership by a small and power-hungry clique. In both cases we have an oligarchy, but in the first instance the oligarchy is a relatively large one, attempting to protect the *status quo* rather than to change it. If Florence was ruled by the kind of political group described in preceding pages, the regime's genuine espousal of the ideals of civic humanism becomes more believable. Political equality between the ruling families, a stress on civic duty, and commitment to political consensus constituted the basic values implicit in the rule of this oligarchy. In civic humanism Florence's ruling class found the theories it required to conceptualize its political order.

Civic humanism, as it developed in the years after 1402, rested on the principle that republican government represented the only government worthy of free men and that all other forms of rule were essentially tyrannical. This conviction was seen as derived from the experience of the human race. The struggle of free men with tyranny was an ongoing one, and the Florentines of the early fifteenth century were direct heirs of the republicans of ancient Greece and Rome. History had proved that only in a political order where every citizen had access to the honors of public office and where men learned both to command and obey did the individual come to full moral and intellectual development. Desiring liberty at home, moreover, the Florentines encouraged liberty abroad wherever possible. Florence was also safest when surrounded by a ring of states enjoying similar republican freedoms.

Professor Herde has maintained that there was little relationship between the discussion of foreign policy in the *consulte* and the official statements of the government justifying Florentine policy. While the official statements of the commune were full of ideological justifications for policy, the *consulte* records apparently show self-interest to be the real motivation behind policy. First of all, it is puzzling why Professor Herde would have undertaken to study the *consulte* only up to 1402, when it is generally recognized that the conception of civic humanism was not formulated until after this date. Prior to this time the Florentine humanists themselves used the terms, "liberty" and "freedom" in a very ambiguous way, unable, it appears, to distinguish clearly a republican interpretation of such words from associations with more traditional meanings.⁵⁸ The *consulte* debates cannot be contrasted with an ideology not yet articulated.

Secondly, Professor Herde's own transcriptions of various statements made in the discussions and summarized briefly in the records show that words like "liberty" and "freedom" figured frequently in the speeches as motives for action.⁵⁹ Because of the succinct nature of

58. See my article, "The *De tyranno* and Coluccio Salutati's View of Politics and Roman History," *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 53 (1969), 457-63.

59. See, for instance, Herder, "Politische Verhaltensweisen," pp. 183, n. 119; 188, n. 168; 190, n. 181; 191, n. 182; 194, n. 206; 196, n. 217; 201, n. 245; 202, n. 251; 205, n. 269; 209, n. 305; 211, nn. 319, 320, and 321. When Herde does recognize a speaker in the *consulte* arguing for a policy on moral grounds, he simply dismisses the case as an example of hypocrisy: see, for instance, pp. 190-91, and 201. He endeavors to explain away the ideological implications of remarks of speakers in the late 1390's (pp. 211-12) by use of sarcasm.

the summaries, the sense in which the terms are used cannot usually be determined, but is it not reasonable to expect that the speakers used these words in much the same confused fashion as did the writers of official statements of Florentine policy? In other words, the kind of moral concerns articulated in the official writings reflect actual considerations raised in the *consulte* debates.

A comparison of humanistic professions of idealistic motives in foreign policy with the rhetoric of Hitler's Germany is singularly inappropriate. To mask his policy Hitler constructed a propaganda employing moral values highly acceptable to the international community of his day. On the other hand, the value system found in civic humanism was new—its system of ideals clearly ran against prevailing beliefs of the century. The very fact of the novelty of the thought constitutes something of a guarantee of the sincerity with which it was articulated. So conscious indeed were the humanists of the newness of their ideas that once the conception was worked out, it was never stated in official documents designed for diffusion abroad. Florence's princely allies would have been repelled by such republican themes. Rather, civic humanism found expression in private tracts and letters.

The collapse of the Visconti power and the capture of Pisa in 1406 brought to an end years of anxiety. The tightly disciplined regime of families had survived with honor and, dazzled by its international successes and convinced of its dedication to the common good of the Republic, the regime discovered for itself a theoretical justification in the political writings of its own thinkers. The populace and official documents still interpreted the destruction of the Alberti in the fall of 1393 as a victory for Guelfism.⁶⁰ But Guelfism, with its welter of medieval associations, was incapable of meeting the need this generation of Florentines felt to conceptualize their political order.⁶¹ More literate and articulate as a group than their fathers, they came to draw on the work of contemporary Florentine scholars, who were developing a doctrine of the absolute superiority of republican government to any other form of constitution and of Florence as the heir to the republican freedom of the ancient city-state. From the pages of the

60. See the letter to Bologna, A.S.F., Signoria, I Cancelleria, Missive 23, 155^v (19 Oct. 1393) and slogans of mob, Panc. 158, 174^v col. b.

61. The waning importance of Guelfism for Florentines as a means of interpreting Florentine politics from the late Trecento is the subject of my "A Note on Guelfism in Late Medieval Florence," *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 53 (1969), 134-45.

humanists, these ideas in the first decades of the fifteenth century passed into the writings of citizen-merchants like Cino Rinuccini and Goro Dati and henceforth clearly inspired the rhetoric of the speakers summoned to *consulte* to advise on matters of public policy.⁶²

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62. Gene Brucker will discuss this new political rhetoric in his forthcoming book on Florentine politics.