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Volume 17

KINGS OF THE STREET

Power, Community, and Ritual in Renaissance Florence

by

David Rosenthal

BREPOLS

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To the memory of Bill Kent

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Abbreviations

Archival Sources

AAF Archivio Arcivescovile di Firenze

FC	Filza di cancelleria
LC	Libro di cancelleria
VP	Visite pastorali

ASF Archivio di Stato di Firenze*

Capitoli	Capitoli delle compagnie religiose soppresse da Pietro Leopoldo
CRS	Compagnie religiose soppresse da Pietro Leopoldo
CS	Conventi soppresse (Corporazioni religiose soppresse dal governo francese)
Depos.	Depositeria generale, parte antica
DG	Decima granducale
Guard.	Guardaroba medicea
MDP	Mediceo del principato
Mss	Manoscritti
Otto	Otto di guardia e balia, principato
Parte	Capitani di Parte, numeri neri
Parte, nb	Capitani di Parte, numeri bianchi
Statuti	Statuti delle communità autonime e soggette

* All archival references are to the Archivio di Stato di Firenze unless otherwise stated.

BLF Biblioteca Laurenziana di Firenze

BNCF Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze

1525 census	MS Nuovi acquisti, 987 (unpag.)
1629 list	Fondo Principale, II. IV. 330, fols 333–35 (partially published in Bigazzi, Iscrizione, pp. 13–17)
Doccia	Conventi Soppresse, A. 5. 1876 ('Memorie del Convento', San Michele alla Doccia)
FP	Fondo principale
Magl.	MS Magliabecchiana
BRF	Biblioteca Riccardiana di Firenze
Moren.	MS Moreniana
Piccolo diario	Fondo palagi, 70 ('Piccolo diario delle cose della città di Firenze dall'anno 1580 alli 30 Aprile, sino al 1589')
Ricc.	MS Riccardiana

Tintori Istituto Horne, Università di San Onofrio dei Tintori

Published Sources

With the exception of the following frequently cited primary sources, all citations are given as short titles in notes.

1588 list	Lorenzo Lippi, *Il Malmantile Racquisato*, 2 vols (Prato: Luigi Vannini, 1815), II, 13–14n
Arditi	Arditi, Bastiano, *Diario di Firenze e di altre parti della cristianità (1574–1579)* (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1970)
Lapini	Lapini, Agostino, *Diario fiorentino di Agostino Lapini: Dal 252 al 1596* (Florence: Sansoni, 1900)
Ricci	Ricci, Giuliano de', *Cronaca (1532–1606)*, ed. by Giuliana Sapori (Milano: Ricciardi, 1972)

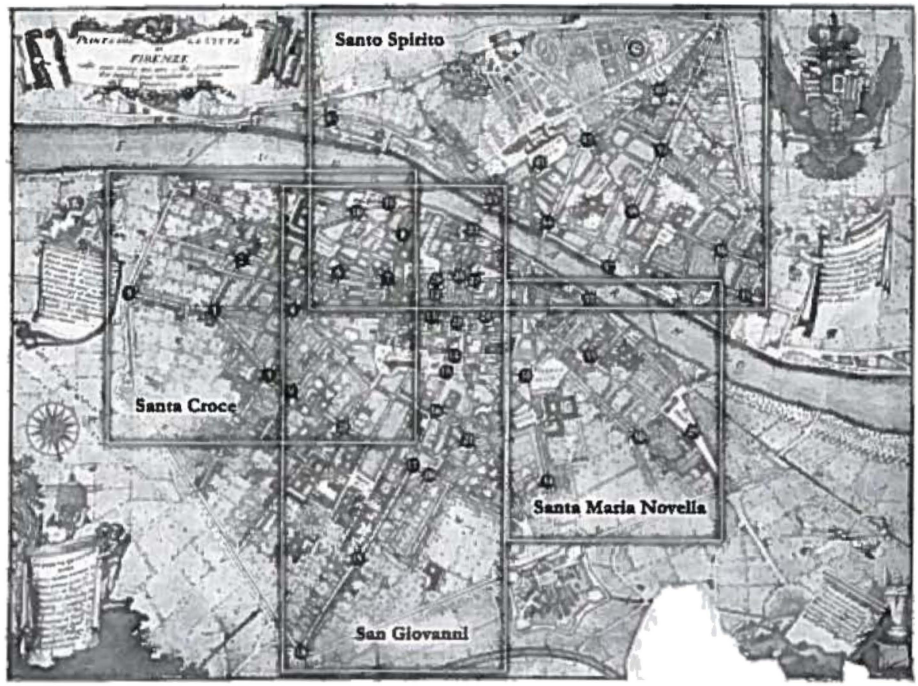
Note on Transcriptions

Original orthography has largely been retained, despite its irregularities and inconsistencies, though square brackets have been used where clarification is required. Modern punctuation has often been introduced for clarity.

All abbreviations have been expanded, except for the contractions in addresses to the grand dukes and to the officials of government magistracies and other bodies:

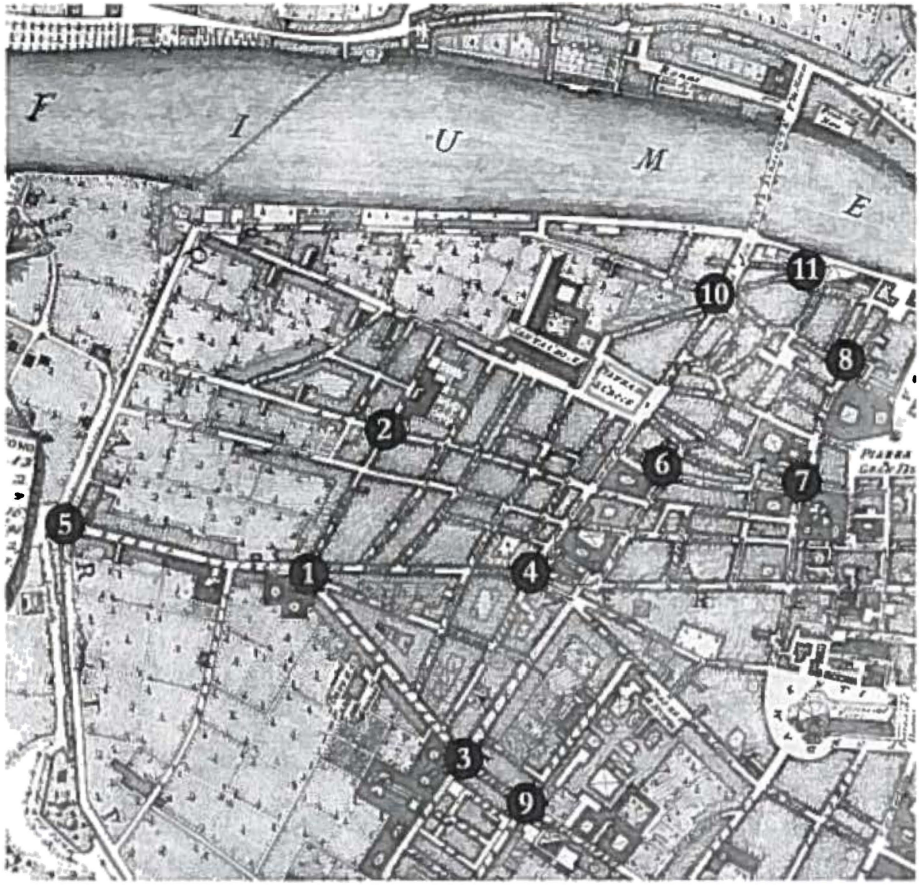
S.A.(S.)	Sua Altezza (Serenissima)
V.A.(S.)	Vostra Altezza (Serenissima)
V.S.	Vostra Signoria

Potenze and their Locations



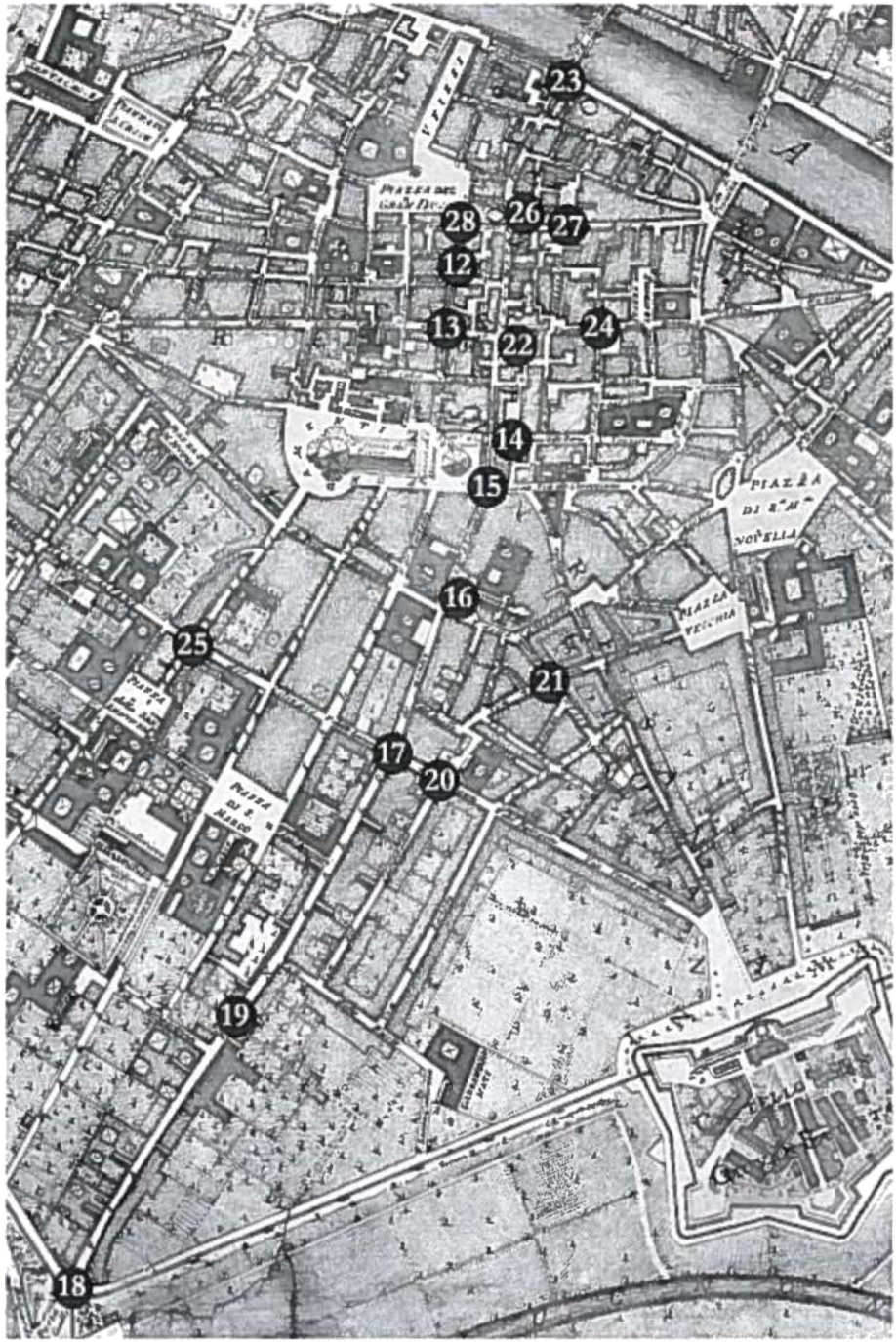
An overview of the *potenze* and their *residenze* in 1610. Bouchard-Ruggieri, Pianta della città di Firenze. (Florence, 1755). Copyright: Harvard Map Collection.

This overview of the *potenze* follows research by the Capitani di Parte in 1610, though in some cases a more precise *residenza* is indicated. Each quarter is detailed in the following pages.



Santa Croce

1 Monarca Città Rossa *Piazza Sant' Ambrogio*
2 Principe della Mela *Canto alla Mela* (v. Ghibellina / v. dei Macci)
3 Signore del Monteloro *Canto a Monteloro* (v. Alfani / Borgo Pinti)
4 Signore delle Rondine *Canto alle Rondine* (v. Pietrapiana / pa. Salvemini)
5 Duca del Piccione *Porta alla Croce*
6 Signoria dello Scodellini *San Simone in Piazza*
7 Marchese della Cornacchia *Canto della Badia di Firenze* (v. Condotta / pa. S. Firenze)
8 Signore della Spiga *Piazza del Grano* (v. dei Neri)
9 Signoria della Catena *Canto alla Catena* (v. Alfani / v. Pergola)
10 Gran Signore de'Tintori *Canto agli Alberti* (Corso Tintori / v. dei Benci)
11 Duca de' Purgatori *Piazza d'Arno* (pa. Mentana)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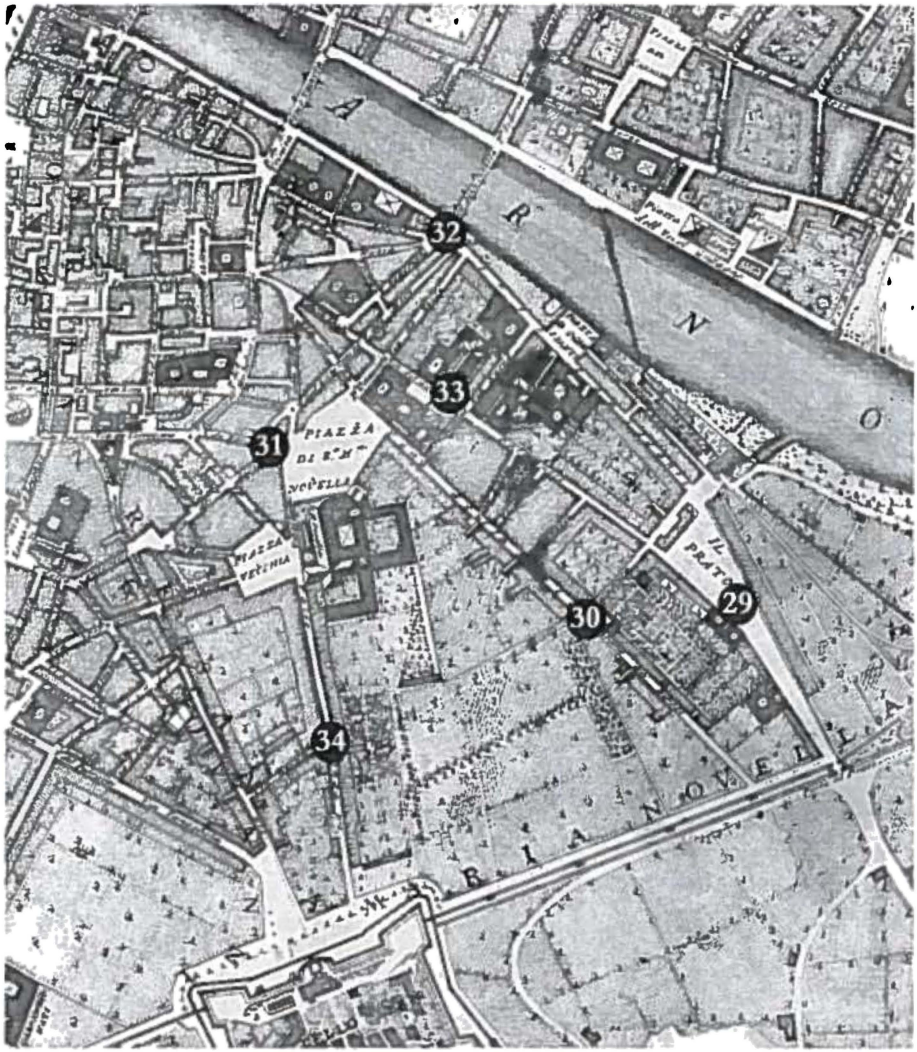
PIAZZA DI S.TA NOVELLA
PIAZZA VECCHIA

San Giovanni

12 Re de' Battilani *Orsanmichele*
13 Re Piccino *Canto del Giglio* (v. Calzaiuoli / v. Speziali)
14 Re della Vacca *fornaio della Vacca* (v. Campidoglio)
15 Signore del Covone *Canto alla Paglia* (pa. S. Giovanni / v. Cavour)
16 Signore della Graticola *Piazza San Lorenzo*
17 Re della Macine *Canto all Macine* (v. Guelfa / v. Ginori)
18 Re del Gallo *Porta San Gallo*
19 Duca di Camporeggi *Via San Gallo* (v. Camporeggio)
20 Duca della Guelfa *S. Bernarba* (v. Guelfa)
21 Re di Biliemme *Cella di Ciardo* (v. Ariento / v. S. Antonino)
22 Signoria della Dovizia *Mercato Vecchio* (Piazza della Repubblica)
23 Duca del Ponte Vecchio (also known as Duca della Biscia) *Ponte Vecchio da Santo Stefano*
24 Duca del Luna *fra Ferravecchi* (v. Strozzi / v. Vecchietti)
25 Re del Tribolo *Canto al Tribolo* (v. dei Servi / v. Alfani)
26 Duca di Caroccio *Mercato Nuovo*
27 Duca del Pecora *Porta Rossa*
28 Duca del Diamante *Canto del Diamante* (v. Calzaiouoli / Porta Rossa)



Santa Maria Novella

29 Imperadore del Prato *il Prato*

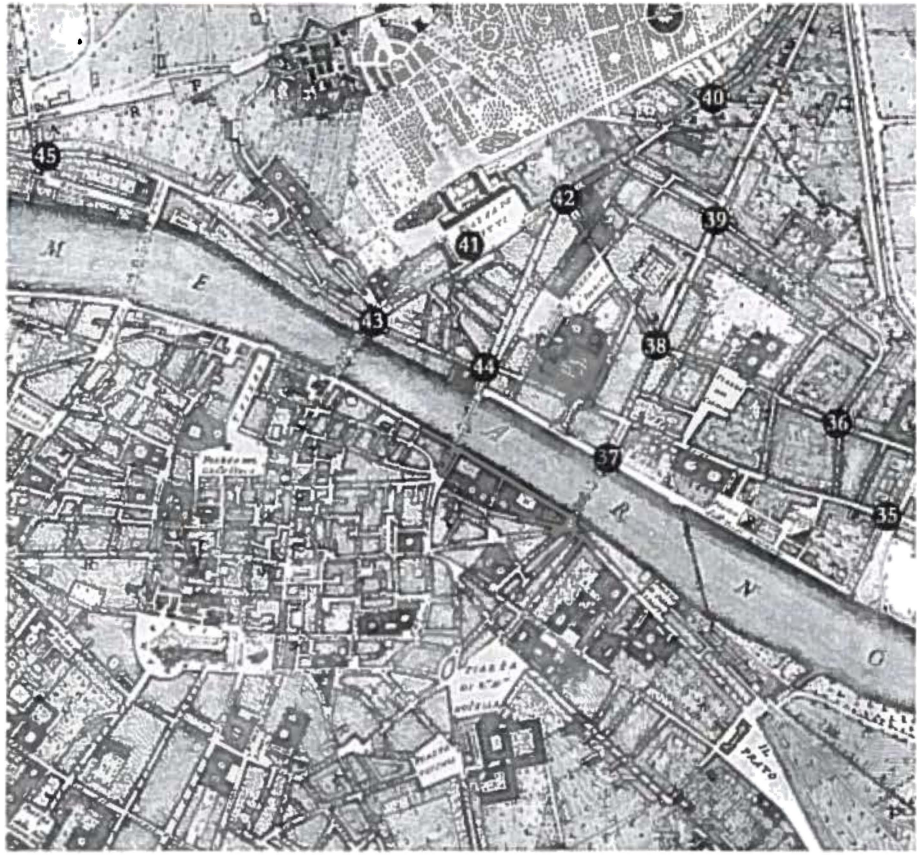
30 Signore di Ponte Nano a Ripoli (v. della Scala towards wall)

31 Duca de' Vagliati *Santa Maria Novella*
(v. dei Bianchi / v. del Giglio)

32 Signore del Corvo *Ponte alla Carraia a Ricasoli*

33 Signore della Spada *S. Pagolo* (v. Palazzuolo)

34 Signore del Ponticelli *Gualfonda* (v. Valfonda)



Santo Spirito

35 Vice Imperio dell'Imperadore *Porta San Frediano*
36 Re della Colomba *Camaldoli* (pa. Tasso)
37 Signore della Spalla *Trave Torta* (Foot of Ponte alla Carraia)
38 Signore della Consuma *Canto alla Cuculia* (v. Serragli / v. S. Monaca)
39 Monarca di Terra Rossa *Convertite* (v. Serragli / v. Campuccio)
40 Re della Gatta *San Piero Gattolini* (v. Romana)
41 Gran Signore e Capitano de' Pitti *Palazzo Pitti*
42 Signore della Sferza *S. Felice in Piazza* (Piazza S. Felice)
43 Signoria della Nespola *Santa Felicità* (Ponte Vecchio)
44 Duca della Nebbia *Canto di via Maggio* (Foot of Ponte S. Trinita)
45 Signoria dell'Olmo *Borgo San Niccolò* (v. S. Niccolo)

Introduction

'His Excellency pisses himself laughing when he looks at these huge letters,' wrote Giovanfrancesco Lottini in May 1545, '[...] so well formed and well written, and with that signature so finely done that you can't tell if it says Pierone or Carlo, and whoever doesn't look carefully is duped.'[1] Lottini, a secretary and humanist at the nascent court of Cosimo de' Medici, second duke of Tuscany, was with his prince in Volterra. At the other end of his letter, in Florence, was the duke's majordomo, Pierfrancesco Riccio. Riccio's task at that moment was to organize an extravagant and unusual public spectacle for the annual feast of the city's spiritual patron, St John the Baptist, to be held a month later.

The character at the centre of all this mirth, Pierone or Big Piero (Piero di Giovanni, as he was less commonly known), was a man who held a minor ceremonial post at the Palazzo.[2] He was, in legal terms, a non-citizen, a man who could not hold communal office, one of the *plebe* in the pejorative language commonly used by citizens and nobles. Pierone's letter was of such interest to Cosimo and Lottini because soon he would be at the heart of the upcoming feast of the Baptist. Pierone had just been elected emperor of the Prato in the parish of Santa Lucia sul Prato, the large and overwhelmingly poor parish at the western edge of the city in which he lived.[3] This made him titular lord of the *potenze* ('powers',

[1] 'S. Ex.a. si scompiscia della rissa in veder quei letteroni così ben piegati et ben scritti et con quella sottoscrittone così ben fatta, che non si cognoscie se dice Pierone o Carlo che chi non guarda sottilmente resta gabbato'; Lottini to Riccio, 15 May 1545. MDP, 1171, fol. 386; partially published by Tosi, 'La festa', p. 84.

[2] Pierone's patronymic is found in Parte, 17, fols 116^{r} (1559); A Pierone *donzello* is listed in that year's list of the confraternity of the 'famigli del palazzo'; Camera del commune, scritture diverse d'amministrazione, 9, fol. 110^{r}.

[3] Pierone is censused as living in via Palazzuolo in 1551; BNCF, FP, II, I, 120, fol. 190^{r}. The familial structure of this household is not detailed in the census, which lists one hearth and eight people, three male and five female.

in the sense of states), brigades of artisans and labourers who had mapped out Florence into a patchwork of kingdoms since the late fifteenth century.

For Cosimo I and his entourage, the joke, clearly enough, was about identity. Emperor Pierone was no emperor, he was a plebeian who could barely write. The comic charge was generated, primarily, from chasmic differences in status: the perceived gap between the real Pierone and his regal mask, and between him and the real princes and emperors of Florence and Europe. Lottini's contrived confusion between Pierone and Carlo — the latter, the name of the Habsburg emperor Charles V, the most powerful man in Europe and the emperor to whom the new Medici dukes were technically vassals — only added piquancy to the comedy of role reversals. It was a status joke Pierone understood very well, or so the receipt of another *potenza* would suggest, the writer accepting a ducal gift for his king, a certain 'Francesco, known as the brain, who said he doesn't know how to write'.[4]

Yet if Pierone's regal pretensions were mocked at court, they were not simply a joke, or rather they were a joke that had to be taken quite seriously. The letter Pierone sent to Cosimo, written in the days after his election, was one supplication among many the *potenze* had given to Riccio and which had then been sent on to the duke. To these, Riccio was told, Cosimo had 'conceded everything they asked'.[5] But, as their demands increased towards the day of San Giovanni to include the right to bear arms, Riccio showed greater caution than he had towards other *potenze* requests. 'I will do nothing without the licence of His Excellency,' he wrote, which turned out to be a judicious act of deference to the prince — for Cosimo would explicitly deny what Pierone, for one, had asked for: in addition to mail and helmets, he wanted huge, two-handed swords so his imperial brigade could 'make a display'.[6]

[4] '[...] e perché detto Francesco detto ciervello dise no[n] sapere ischrivere io Piergiovani di Matteo Belli ischrivano del sopradecto re [h]o fatto la presente di mio prop[ri]a mano'. Belli, a weapon-maker, was writing for the king of the Piccino, in 1577; Depos., 984, ins. 53.

[5] 'Al Re di Camaldoli, et al Viceimp[eradore] della Porta San Friano, ha concesso tutto quello domandavano, come V.S. vedrà, nel fine della loro supplicationi che si rimanda con questa'; MDP, 1171, fol. 380 (Riccio to Lorenzo Pagni, 9 May 1545). None of these 1545 supplications from the *potenze* appear to have survived.

[6] 'Queste potentie et signorie vorrebbono de' corsaletti et celate per honorare le feste. L'imp[eratore] vorrebbe el med[esimo], et delli spadoni a dua mane per far la mostra [...]. Non ne farò nulla senza licentia di S.E'; MDP, 376, fol. 549^{r} (Riccio to Cosimo I, between 16 and 18 May 1545).

* * *

The above vignette opens up several of the key questions that drive this study, which aims to tell the story of the *potenze*, focusing on the period from the start of the Medici duchy in 1532 and the heyday of these brigades through to their disappearance from the public stage in the early 1600s. Immediately one observes two things: firstly, artisans were looking to assert public identities as festive kings; and secondly, a dialogue existed between these men — through the medium of petition, and soon of performance — with the political centre. What, then, were the connections between festive personae, territories and groupings, and the everyday lives, spaces, and solidarities of the men who created them? What was the nature of their festive conversations, especially with the prince? And how was that linked to the social and political relations of the quotidian civic world?

Historians of Florence have been aware of the *potenze* for almost a century and a half, ever since Iodoco del Badia published, in 1876, a number of key petitions dating from the early decades of the Florentine ducy and clear leads to more material in *Le signorie, o le potenze festeggianti del contado fiorentino* — a short book that remains the starting point for scholars today. Despite this, an unusually rich body of sources for the study of artisan festive culture in early modern Europe has, by and large, languished in the archives. Given the enduring fascination with this genre of ritualized behaviour since 1968, when Soviet literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin's famous study of Rabelais and Carnival was first published in English, that fact begs for some kind of explanation, not least because it will allow me to set out the limited historiography on the *potenze* and situate my own approach.[7]

Social historians have for decades been investigating 'carnivalesque' practices — a term Bakhtin introduced — at public festivities, often Carnival proper, in cities across sixteenth-century Europe, practices that were also manifestly present in the case of the Florentine *potenze*. Apart from the burlesquing or inversion of status roles, there was often a ritualized exposure and symbolic redress

[7] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Iswolsky. Much of the previously known detail about the *potenze* has in fact come out of an antiquarian tradition. Apart from Del Badia, there is Pietro Gori's *Le feste fiorentine attravesro i secoli*, of 1926. Roberto Ciabani's volume of 1994 celebrating the *potenze* is in the same antiquarian tradition, and draws mainly upon it, and while not a reliable or critical source, it speaks to the paucity of modern scholarship that Ciabani was the first to bring to light several of the *potenze* petitions of 1577; Ciabani, *Le potenze di Firenze*. I address some of the antiquarian material in the epilogue to this study.

of social grievances. *Potenze* kings, for example, often demanded 'tribute' from the workshops of their employer 'subjects'. In opposition to the Lenten abstinence to come, carnivalesque rituals also commonly involved the representation of and indulgence in material or bodily excesses — and we find *potenze* with names like the Lord of Abundance or Prince of Fertility, and plenty of signs of festive banqueting.[8] The men of the Prato's choice of an apparently corpulent man, Big Piero, as *potenza* emperor in 1545 was, among other things, arguably informed by this ubiquitous trope of carnivalesque corporeality.[9]

While indebted to Bakhtin, historians, interested in specific events and their contexts, have for good reason been sceptical of his interpretation of this 'world turned upside down', a kind of neo-Marxist romanticism that saw Carnival as celebrating the 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order', a subversion from below of an elite's official culture that represented the potentially revolutionary impulses of a subaltern class.[10] The gulf between 'popular' and 'elite/official' cultures that Bakhtin's vision in part rests upon has not held up in the face of sustained scholarship. At the same time, the supposed subversiveness of carnivalesque ritual has also been seen as deeply problematic. It is this latter issue, though, the question of Carnival's radical promise, that continues to focus debate on the subject. On one hand, it has been pointed out that throughout the early modern period tensions between status groups often erupted into violent rebellion (and repression) precisely during Carnival season, such as at Romans in 1580, the subject of a classic study by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, or in the Friuli in 1511, where Edward Muir has examined the factional and status-driven strife that formed the preconditions for a 'festive' bloodletting.[11] On the other hand, it has also been pointed out that most carnivalesque festivities did not witness any uprisings or transformative political effects whatsoever, and historians have often seen those events as having the opposite effect, operating as a 'safety valve' that allowed tensions to be blown off in a way that reaffirmed the everyday hierarchies and power relations of the social order. This theory draws on the work of anthropologists Max Gluckman and Victor Turner, and while historians have tended to jettison

[8] This theme is addressed in Chapter 2.

[9] These common carnival themes are discussed, with extensive examples and bibliographies, in Burke, *Popular Culture*, chap. 7; Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, chap. 3.

[10] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Iswolsky, 109.

[11] Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans*, trans. by Feeney; Muir, *Mad Blood Stirring*. See also Bianco, *1511, la 'crudel zobia grassa'*.

the universalism of their structural-functionalist model (which suggests that ritual inversions are intrinsically conservative), it is a theory that nonetheless tends to frame apparently stable, cyclical festivities in functionalist, and thus quite reductive, terms.[12] They have no discernible political significance except to reproduce the existing status quo, and the question of artisan agency, the ability of individuals or groups to challenge or shape authority, or simply influence the conditions under which they live, seems to melt away, like a carnival king the morning after the party.[13]

This influential strand of carnival theory, whose best known exponent in early modern studies has been Peter Burke, is arguably one of the factors that has militated against any sustained inquiry into the *potenze*, since ducal Florence never saw carnivalesque festivity transform into rebellion, or artisans and labourers stage anything remotely revolutionary. Because of this, the *potenze* have all too easily fallen victim to more specifically Florentine historiographical biases and agendas. Marcello Fantoni's claim twenty years ago, that 'sedimented prejudices' against the duchy had 'left the vast arc of time between the principate of Alessandro (1532) to the death of Gian Gastone (1737) an almost completely unexplored terrain', was a little inflated at the time and is certainly no longer true, yet it is fair to say that social analysis, especially in the Anglophone tradition, remains thin on the ground.[14] The overriding concern has been to chart the political and cultural dimensions of Medici state-building after the defeat of Florence's last republic of 1527–30.[15] Without seeking to diminish the importance of this work, the focus has been on the projection of princely power; the concrete ways in which power relations were conducted have often gone uninterrogated. Thus the *potenze*, who usually surface in the sources at extraordinary festivities sponsored by the prince, are often seen as little more than an extension of Medici cultural politics and princely aspirations

[12] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, esp. chap. 2; Gluckman, *Rituals of Rebellion*.

[13] Burke, *Popular Culture*, pp. 281–86. Muir in effect says something similar, when he compares his countryside uprising to Carnival practices of the city, which he sees as more controlled and temporary, and thus reaffirming existing hierarchies; Muir, *Mad Blood Stirring*, p. 197. Also Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics*, 'Introduction', esp. p. 14.

[14] Fantoni, *La corte del Granduca*, p. 9.

[15] See, for example, Van Veen, *Cosimo I de' Medici*; Eisenbichler, *The Cultural Politics of Cosimo I de' Medici*; Eisenbichler, *The Cultural World of Eleonora di Toledo*; Cox-Rearick, *Bronzino's Chapel of Eleonora*. More widely on the politics of Medici ducal state-building or transition from republic to principate, see Davies, *Culture and Power*, esp. chaps 1–2; Baker, *Fruit of Liberty*.

to *potere assoluto*, over the city as a whole and a politically emasculated nobility in particular. They were simply 'appendages to court ceremonies', as R. Burr Litchfield has put it; or, in Giovanni Ciappelli's study of Florentine Carnival, they became 'groups of *popolani* to whom were conceded a part in the ritual play of the nobility'. For Michel Plaisance, 'all initiative — even for their own merriment — was taken away from the bourgeoisie and the common people, even as the number of *potenze* multiplied'.[16] Richard Trexler, whose pioneering analysis of the few extant republican-era documents inspired this study, dismisses the *potenze* by the time of the principate as essentially ducal servants, emerging from their neighbourhoods 'wearing the trousers of the Medici'.[17] Here, too, the question of agency, certainly artisan agency, in festive time, and by implication beyond it, is closed down, along with the perceived need to probe further into the nature of social relations. Artisan kings mechanically imitate noble or ducal performance, are devoid of strategies of their own; they almost appear, as one Florentine put it in 1577, to celebrate the ruling family's dynastic moments 'without discourse or judgement, though it's nothing to wonder at since it's the natural inclination [of the *plebe*] to praise who afflicts them'.[18]

Yet there is a more complicated and interesting story to tell about the *potenze*, and about class relations and the nature of kingship, in early ducal Florence, one which starts with a bottom-up reading of the sources and which builds on an approach to carnivalesque practices set out by the safety valve notion's many discontents. As Chris Humphrey observed in a review of Carnival studies more than a decade ago, the inadequacy of the revolt/safety valve opposition becomes apparent in the face of a more thoroughly historicizing perspective. The closer one looks at specific cases and their contexts, the less festive personae and behaviours seem severely bracketed off from normal time, and the more interwoven festive and everyday processes become. Thus, rather than begin

[16] Litchfield, *Florence Ducal Capital*, para. 325, and see para. 272; Ciappelli, *Carnevale e Quaresima*, p. 276; Plaisance, *Florence in the Time of the Medici*, trans. by Carew-Reid, p. 124. See also Casini, *I gesti del principe*, pp. 247–50, which, while not so dismissive, sees the potenze principally in terms of Medicean cultural politics.

[17] Trexler, '"The Youth are Coming!"', pp. 338–41. As Daniela Lombardi was first to note, this was in the context of a forced reading of the festival sources of 1577; Lombardi, *Povertà maschile, povertà femminile*, p. 118n. See, in general, Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, pp. 399–418, 510–15. Trexler, for example, misread the sources published by Del Badia to say that the emperor of the Prato was 'appointed' by the Medici during the duchy (at p. 514). The emperors, like all *potenze* kings, were elected, but sought legitimation of their status from the Medici.

[18] Arditi, p. 154.

with functionalist assumptions about what festivals that did not spark rebellions prevented from happening, it is more illuminating to ask what social or political effects and relationships the men involved sought to produce through the deployment of ritual forms.[19] For those involved the festive moment was not so much a world turned upside down as a 'world turned upside down', a loose ensemble of cultural scripts to which all participants, artisans and prince alike, referred themselves, a genre which they inhabited but also manipulated. It is a shift in thinking — to what more recent anthropology has labelled 'practice theory' — that relocates some degree of agency to historical actors.[20]

This is the framework within which I intend to pose the questions set out at the start of this discussion. That the new dukes, like their Medici predecessors, had a political agenda in opening up the civic stage to artisan kings is not in doubt. But this was not a free lunch for the prince. The relationship between the Medici and these brigades was something closer to an alliance, as Trexler himself once described it.[21] As I will establish, Florentine workers, including Pierone himself, creatively appropriated a common vocabulary of kingship and state in order to articulate communities in a public arena, manipulating festive codes to negotiate social demands and relationships, particularly with the prince. And as Cosimo I's unwillingness to allow Pierone's men to carry big swords suggests, the prince never took for granted their smooth incorporation into any Medicean festive program. To be sure, one must be careful not to overstate the case for the agency or self-determination of the politically and economically marginalized. Yet it is equally important to understand that the status quo was never a given, as is implied in the safety-valve model, a static state of affairs that revellers returned to after their day of kingship was over. Instead, any orchestration of power relations requires constant maintenance,

[19] Humphrey, *The Politics of Carnival*, chaps 1–2. Along similar lines, see Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 172ff. Suggestively heading in this direction is the pioneering work of Natalie Davis; see Davis, 'The Reasons for Misrule'. See also Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 98–100.

[20] For 'practice theory', see Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, chap. 3; see also her earlier critique of structuralist anthropology, Bell, *Ritual Practice, Ritual Theory*. For recent discussions of agency, exploring similar themes to those presented here, Dayton, 'Rethinking Agency'; Williamson, *Locating Agency*. Methodologically influential here, in terms of urban studies, is Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, and Chartier, 'Culture as Appropriation' and *Forms and Meanings*.

[21] Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, p. 515. See also Trexler, 'Follow the Flag,' esp. p. 60, his concluding remarks.

and is always a work in progress. If hierarchies were never seriously threatened, my analysis of the interpenetration of festive and quotidian politics will suggest that the men of the *potenze* not only voiced the grievances that arose from their everyday relations but sought to shape the pattern of those relations to their own benefit.

The first section of this study tells that story. Chapter 1 delves into the way artisans organized *potenze*, how these informal brigades were underpinned by, and shaped, male sociabilities, solidarities, and spaces of neighbourhood and work. The information about individual kings and their officials furnished by the ducal treasury, the Depositeria, and above all the archive of the Capitani di Parte Guelfa — which in the duchy was in charge not only of public ceremony but of public space and public works more broadly — is used to draw out the links between the *potenze* and the city's lay devotional confraternities, the better known face of urban associative life.[22] These sources reveal how many *potenze* officials played leadership or mediating roles within the everyday communities that they looked to give shape to and represent on the festive stage. Used together, the two sets of material offer insights not only into the politics of community but also into the criss-crossing networks that characterized artisan Florence in the Cinquecento and which arguably lent cohesion to the civic subculture of the *potenze*.

This analysis sets the scene for Chapter 2. Here, I outline the narrow politics within which the Medici dukes, and their predecessors, starting with Lorenzo de' Medici in the late fifteenth century, patronized the *potenze* as they sought to maintain their supremacy over the other families of the republic, but this is set against the wider drama of deepening status distinctions that in the first instance explains the rise of the worker kings. The dukes looked to present the *potenze* and their patronage of them as one element in the creation of civic peace — as our idea of a status quo might have been framed by contemporaries. Through a close reading of festive and non-festive negotiations, we will see how that Medicean peace had a properly contractual nature.

The second section of this study addresses a different set of issues, those raised by the demise, or rather transformation, of the *potenze*. At the festivities of July 1610 to mark the birth of an heir to Grand Duke Cosimo II, the *potenze* were stripped of their banners. Behind this act lay a combination of factors that

[22] For the Parte Guelfa, an aristocratic club that had always staged chivalric spectacles and until the mid-fifteenth century had an important political role in the republic, see Brown, 'The Guelf Party'. The Parte's expanded role as a ducal magistracy began in 1547, when it absorbed the Ufficiali di Torre, the magistracy responsible for roads, rivers, and fortifications.

had fatally undermined the carnival genre of the sixteenth century. Chapter 3 examines the penetration of the Catholic Reform movement into the parishes of Florence in the decades after the Council of Trent to show that initiatives to 'Christianize' the poor had the effect of delegitimizing key elements of the carnivalesque ritual universe, in particular the sacralization of artisan festive kingship. At the same time — and creating fertile terrain for reformers, who wanted to see festive expenditures transferred to charitable works —the harsher economic climate of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in particular the transformation of the Florentine textile industry, eroded the occupational identities upon which the *potenze* were largely based. Artisan agency was not extinguished in this process but was disciplined in new ways, with reformist imperatives to an extent internalized within their communities. The later parts of Chapter 3 will discuss the survival of the *potenze* after the confiscation of the flags in 1610, but show how they were mainly confined to just one of their traditional activities, taking gifts in pilgrimage to Marian shrines and mendicant convents outside the city, and how they gradually became indistinguishable from their confraternal alter-egos. Here, however, we will also see how, groups of artisan women took up the model of the once hyper-masculine *potenze* in the early seventeenth century and started making their own trips to the same 'holy places' in the Florentine *contado*. My analysis will show that artisan women, who were finding work in the textile industry just as men were experiencing endemic unemployment, seized on the space opened up in public life by reformist ideas and initiatives, despite, and in part because of, their marginalization from official confraternal life.

Chapter 4 looks at the last significant appearance of the *potenze*, or rather a representation of them, on the early modern civic stage, briefly revived in 1619 by Grand Duke Cosimo II for a courtly spectacle that took place on the Arno. This chapter will trace the appearance of unemployed textile workers on the Arno in the seventeenth century as part of the 'public works' projects of the duchy, and show how it informed the performance of 1619, a battle between the kings of the weavers and dyers. Here, as working class Florentines bore the brunt of the city's severe economic problems, we will see how Cosimo II looked to recall the dynamic of exchange between the old artisan kings and the prince in the establishment of a social peace, but that this was now presented as spectacle, generated entirely from within the world of the court.

The social history of ducal Florence still mostly remains to be written, or at least synthesized. While I am confident that the overwhelming majority of the surviving sources directly related to the *potenze* have now been unearthed, I am all too aware of the other archives that could have been more systematically

exploited to deepen and nuance a study with such broad themes — the large and still largely unexplored archives of the Wool and Silk Guilds, the archive of the Otto di Guardia, the city's main criminal magistracy, or the property and rental records of the Decima Granducale, to name but a few. Faced with the choice of a study with a more limited time frame that reached out laterally to take in some of those sources, and one that follows a narrower archival thread across more than a century, I have pursued the latter course. The rise and fall of the *potenze* seemed to demand such an approach, and it has allowed the fashioning of a narrative that aims to infiltrate a number of seemingly familiar histories with fresh material and questions. In other words, it is in a heuristic spirit that I set out what I hope is a compelling story.