

**Church And Commune in Thirteenth Century Pistoia: Grain and the Struggle for
Political Legitimacy in Medieval Tuscany**

GEORGE DAMERON
Saint Michael's College

M. E. Bratchel's *Medieval Lucca and the Evolution of the Renaissance State* (2008) and David Herlihy's *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia: The Social History of an Italian Town, 1200–1430* (1967) may be separated by forty-one years, but they both represent outstanding examples of historical research on medieval Italy. They are both detailed and comprehensive studies of a single city, based on extensive archival research.¹ Whereas the former focuses on political and administrative history and the latter concerns itself primarily with social and economic developments, both studies draw useful comparisons with other city-states and highlight the distinctive qualities of the commune that constitutes their subject. This essay will draw on that same tradition and examine a single city-state. It will return to the subject of Herlihy's classic study, Pistoia, and it will draw some comparisons and contrasts with other communes. However, it will also explore a theme that was common to the history of the ruling regimes of most city-states in northern Italy in the closing decades of the thirteenth century: the fragility of political power, made worse by periodic grain shortages. As the population of Tuscan cities and their surrounding rural districts (*contadi*) continued to increase markedly as the century drew to a close, the ability of the major magistracies of those communes to secure dependable and adequate supplies of grain became ever more necessary. A deficiency in the food supply, as we can see occurred at Pistoia in 1282, can contribute to the triggering of a political crisis.

By the end of 1282 the Tuscan commune of Pistoia had effectively declared a war on its own church. By December of that year the principal magistrates of the city had

¹ M. E. Bratchel, *Medieval Lucca and the Evolution of the Renaissance State* (Oxford, 2008); David Herlihy, *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia: The Social History of an Italian Town, 1200–1430* (New Haven, CT, 1967).

proposed that its citizens no longer pay tithes to the clergy and that they should sever all economic transactions with all members of the clergy.² As early as the spring of that year, the commune had passed a statute to defend any citizen of Pistoia with public funds who might be summoned to appear before a clergyman (*ad petitionem alicuius ecclesiastice persone*), presumably before the episcopal court, to answer for non-payment of the ecclesiastical tithe.³ The collection of this tithe in that year had been the source of tremendous disorder and instability. Indeed, in a session of the Consiglio generale del popolo (General Council of the People), the larger of the two most powerful governing councils of the city, several of the principal magistrates (the Anziani or Elders) blamed the collections of the ecclesiastical tithe for the outbreaks of many riots and disorders.⁴ To deal with the problem, the General Council ordered the twelve Anziani of the commune to meet with the bishop of Pistoia. Although the bishop noted that the commune was violating ecclesiastical liberty with its measures, he pledged to ask his clergy to accept from the laity only what seemed to be appropriate (*conueniens*) as payment. In addition, he also suggested that no one would be prosecuted for failure to pay until after the next harvest.⁵ The offer proved apparently not to be acceptable to the General Council of the People. Giovanni Diologuardi was the first among the members

² The author presented a first draft of this essay at 39th Annual Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University (Kalamazoo, Michigan) on May 8, 2004, and he appreciates the comments he received from those in the audience. The primary source that details the events described here is Ludovico Zdekauer, editor, *Breve et ordinamenta populi Pistorii* (Milan, 1891), pp. 109–116. Like so many other administrative sources of this type, it leaves many gaps in the story and provides only a partial chronology of events.

³ ‘Item ordinatum, statutum et decretum est quod, si contingat aliquam personam civitatis Pistorii vel sui districtus citari vel require coram aliqua ecclesiastica persona ad petitionem alicuius ecclesiastice persone civitatis Pistorii vel districtus occasione aliquarum decimarum, quod per comune Pistorii defendatur, et statuatur sindicus per ipsum comune et expensis dicti comunis Pistorii, ad defendendum talem personam = citatam = vel requisitam occasione decime’ (*Breve*, p. 110).

⁴ In a meeting of the General Council of the People convened by the Captain of the People and the Anziani, several Anziani noted that the tithe collections were causing serious problems: ‘Cum populares personas praecipue circa decimas et in decimis clericorum militia obrimat et submergat, unde rixae et contentiones et scandala oriuntur et parata sint et parentur cotidie de male in peius in civitate Pistorii et districtu . . .’ (*Breve*, p. 111). In 1282 the General Council of the People consisted of 200 members (reduced to 100 by 1300), and it approved proposals brought to it by the Captain of the People. The second most powerful council was the Council of Forty, which advised the Anziani. There were twelve ‘elders’ (eight after 1286), and they were the principal magistrates of the commune (Herlihy, *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia*, pp. 219–221).

⁵ ‘Et postmodum anziani solummodo iterato iverunt ad dominum episcopum hoc mane, et = dominus = episcopus respondit et dixit: ‘quod volebat admonere suum clerum, quod = a = laicis acciperent, quod conueniens esset de decimis, et quod hinc ad reollectam blave, occasione decimarum, nullus laicus traheretur ad causam . . .’ (*Breve*, pp. 113–4).

of the Council to recommend that the tithes in no way should be paid. In addition, he advocated that the *podestà*, the Captain, and the Anziani of the commune should come to the aid of anyone excommunicated or prosecuted for not paying it. He also proposed severing all economic transactions with the clergy if the tithe was not abolished. Not only should the laity of Pistoia refuse to work the lands of churchmen, according to a 1282 ordinance, but they should also desist from selling them bread, shoes, wine, oil, and meat, decline to live in and pay rent for any house owned by them, refuse to grind their grain and even avoid baking their bread. No citizen of Pistoia – under fine of 100 *lire* – should even agree to shave the beard of any cleric. In a very real sense, he was advocating a boycott of all transactions with members of the clergy.⁶ A certain Caccialeone Cacciadrighi advised the communal leadership to meet with the pope and his representatives about this matter. He also recommended that the Anziani should again meet that very day with the bishop of Pistoia and his clergy. The message was clear: if the bishop agreed to what the Anziani, the commune, and the *popolo* of Pistoia wished, the commune would take no action. If he did not, the measures described would take effect. The General Council of the People of Pistoia endorsed the proposed measures initially set forth by Giovanni Diologuardi.⁷ Faced with social unrest the secular leadership of the *popolo* of Pistoia had defied its ecclesiastical leadership and threatened it with a devastating economic boycott if it continued to collect the tithe. Unfortunately, the final conclusion of the clash is unknown. However, there is evidence that the Anziani and the bishop may have reached an agreement in 1282 but that the agreement did not last.⁸

⁶ ‘Et quod nullus laborator laborett terram alicui clerico vel ecclesiastice persone—et nullus fornarius eis vel alicui eorum coquat panem—nullus sutor suat eorum pannos—nullus barberius radat eis barbam—et nullus mercator vel alia persona vendat eis vel alicui eorum pannos . . .’ (*Breve*, pp. 114–15). ‘Boycott’ is associated with Charles C. Boycott (1832–97), ‘land agent for the Earl of Erne, County Mayo, Ireland, who was ostracized by the tenants for refusing to lower rents’ (*The American Heritage Dictionary*, s.v. ‘Boycott’).

⁷ ‘Et quod quicquid reformabitur in presenti consilio, valeat et tenet ab hodie in antea; et quod hodie per totam diem domini anziani iterum vadant ad dominum episcopum et suum clerum: et si fecerit, quod placet anzianis et comuni et populo Pistorii, predicta omnia sint cassa et vana: et si non fecerit, valeant et tenent, ut dictum est’ (*Breve*, pp. 115–16).

⁸ A short and brief summary of the tithe episode is in Quinto Santoli, ‘Il distretto Pistoiese nei secoli XII–XIII’, *Bullettino Storico Pistoiese*, 5 (1903): 140–42. The author speculates convincingly that a pact between the bishop and the commune did exist but did not last. Evidence comes from a document associated with the Consiglio dei 40 (Council of Forty), one of the two most important councils of the

The events described above occurred only a year after Tuscany had experienced a poor harvest (1281) and coincided with a severe and significant grain shortage (1282).⁹ These facts, duly noted by contemporary chronicles but not sufficiently understood by present day historians, constitute the crucial backdrop to the conflict described above. The efforts initiated by the ruling councils and magistrates of Pistoia in 1282 had as much to do with their need to shore up its own fragile legitimacy and to maintain their own political survival during a food shortage as it had to do with any attempt to resist an allegedly oppressive ecclesiastical tithe. The politics of food and the politics of stability were inextricably linked. Previous historians have noted the importance of this legislation, and they have usually interpreted it either as an example of the anticlericalism on the part of the *popolo*, or as the final stage of the conflict between the commune and the bishop of Pistoia over temporal interests – or both. These factors no doubt played some sort of role here. However, the important triggers for this conflict were high grain prices and shortages, as even the bishop observed, and the primary political motivation of the secular leadership was to project an image of itself as a protector of the population at a time of serious economic dislocation. The ecclesiastical tithe in and of itself might not have been the fundamental problem. The issue was that the clergy was collecting it when food (grain) was scarce and the price of wheat was extremely high.

Over a century ago Robert Davidsohn astutely noted that the abolition of the tithe by the commune of Pistoia occurred during a grain shortage. He also insisted that the compulsory tithe stemmed from the eagerness on the part of the secular clergy, the most powerful of which were from magnate lineages, to oppress the people of Pistoia with illegitimate demands and excessive exactions. He interpreted the threat of a boycott of the clergy as a manifestation of anti-magnate measures taken by the Pistoian leadership. Later historians have focused on this incident as one of the final stages of the political and jurisdictional conflict between church and commune. Early in the past century, Gaetano Salvemini and Quinto Sàntoli also approached the incident from an anti-clerical

popolo that advised the Anziani, dated 1284: ‘Quod dominus Episcopus non adiungatur alicui officiali civitatis Pistorii et quod syndicus et officiales procedant in officio suo absque domine Episcopo’ (p. 142).

⁹ Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, *Cronaca Fiorentina*, ed. Niccolò Rodolico, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 30 (Città di Castello, 1903), p. 58; *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, ed. Joseph L. Baird et al. (Binghamton, NY, 1986), p. 521; Enrico Fiumi, ‘Fioritura e decadenza dell’economia fiorentina’, *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 117 (1959): 474. David Herlihy noted that 1282 and 1286 were years of severe famine in Tuscany, and prices were at their highest in Pistoia (*Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia*, p. 123).

perspective, arguing that the threatened boycott against the clergy was a victory for the commune. From their point of view, the clash was simply one of many episodes in the historic struggle between commune and bishop for control of various regions of the countryside. More modern interpretations have for the most part moved away from the anticlerical biases of a century ago, but they have continued to assume that the abolition of the tithe was rooted in a struggle for power between bishop and commune. David Herlihy, in his 1973 study of medieval and Renaissance Pistoia, briefly noted this conflict in passing, identifying it as a clash between church and commune. In 1975 Girolamo Cancellieri, in a book on thirteenth century Pistoia, went in somewhat of a different direction and offered a sympathetic portrayal of the actions of the bishop. Trying to understand the situation from the perspective of the prelate, Cancellieri noted that all bishops were obligated by canon law and ecclesiastical tradition to protect the integrity of the ecclesiastical tithe. Francesco Neri has recently used the passage in the legislation describing the threatened boycott simply to detail the variety of commercial activities taking place in Pistoia at the end of the thirteenth century. Elena Vannucchi has described the tithe episode as most other previous historians: as another example of the continuing struggles between bishop and commune and between commune and magnates in the late 1270s and early 1280s.¹⁰

There can be no doubt that anti-magnate initiatives taken by the commune constituted an important backdrop to the tithe episode. Yet, there is more to this story than public campaigns against magnates and episcopal jurisdiction in the countryside. Most historians in the last century, with the exception of Davidsohn, have overlooked the fact that the controversy over the compulsory tithe and the grain dearth of 1282 were all closely connected. Both occurred at a time in Pistoia when the political victory of the *popolo* was not at all assured. For at least fifteen years before 1282 the power of the *popolo* in Pistoia was tenuous at best. Its rise to power came after over a century and a

¹⁰ Santoli, 'Il distretto Pistoiese nei secoli XII–XIII', pp. 140–42; Girolamo Cancellieri, *Pistoia nel XIII secolo* (Florence, 1975), pp. 185–86; Herlihy, *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia*, p. 244; Francesco Neri, 'Attività manifatturiere, mercato, ed arti', in *Storia di Pistoia*, ed. Giovanni Cherubini (Florence, 1998), II, 121; Elena Vannucchi, 'Chiesa e religiosità', in *Storia di Pistoia*, II, 353; Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze. II: Guelfi e Ghibellini*, trans. Giovanni Battista Klein (Florence, 1977), III, 298–301. For the historiography and a complete bibliography on the 1282 tithe episode, see Neri, p. 121, and Cancellieri, p. 185. In Renzo Nelli's recent edition of essays on the mendicants in Pistoia, *Gli ordini mendicanti a Pistoia, secc. XIII–XV* (Pistoia, 2001), there is no mention of the tithe episode.

half of communal government. The consulate of Pistoia, first documented in 1105, vanished after 1248. A Captain of the People first appeared in 1263, though there is some evidence that the *popolo* assumed power in Pistoia as early as 1236. What is certain is that the commune was in the hands of the *popolo* and the Parte Guelfa by 1267.¹¹ In the late 1270s and early 1280s the cities of Tuscany were at that time still dealing with the consequences of the final defeat of the Ghibelline cause in 1267, and Guelf regimes of the *popolo* in cities like Florence were struggling to establish and shore up their fragile magistracies. These were also the years in which severe grain shortages struck Emilia-Romagna (1277–78) and Tuscany (1281–2), threatening the political survivability and economic viability of the new governments of the *popolo*. Among the most important of those new magistracies created at this time to shore up these regimes, in cities such as Florence in 1282, was the grain magistracy. This was not by chance, as the mission of these new grain magistracies was to systematize and regularize previous *ad hoc* measures to bring grain to urban markets and to assure a dependable supply for the population in both city and countryside.¹²

The 1282 tithe episode at Pistoia may therefore tell us more about the nature of the regime ruling the commune in 1282 than it can about the actions, aims, or policies of the church, the bishopric, and its clergy. The attack on the compulsory tithe had more to do with the need on the part of the Guelf secular leadership to defend its own fragile grip on power at a time of grain dearth than it did with any anti-clerical conflict between bishop and commune. And the starting point for understanding this fact is food. In 1282 the bishop and his clergy posed little if any economic threat or menace to the interests of the citizens of Pistoia or to the ruling elite of the commune. What did however pose a threat to the regime of the Popolo was the shortage of grain. The secular leadership was certainly justified in its concern about the collection of the tithe during a year of famine, and the concession on the part of the bishop to avoid prosecuting anyone for failure to pay until after the next harvest effectively signalled a recognition by the bishop that the collection of the ecclesiastical tithe was placing pressure on local grain supplies after a

¹¹ Herlihy, *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia*, pp. 214–17; Daniel Waley and Trevor Dean, *The Italian City-Republics*, 4th edn (Edinburgh, 2010), p. 229. Herlihy however suggested the *popolo* came to power in the 1250s.

¹² *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, pp. 508–09.

bad harvest. Why was the reaction of the Anziani and the General Council to the compulsory tithe, a threatened boycott, so strong?

We can best understand the legislation on the ecclesiastical tithe when we see it as part of a cluster of statutory initiatives in the 1270s and 1280s designed to preserve and promote the political legitimacy and survivability of the Guelf regime of the *popolo*. Anti-ecclesiastical statutes directed against ‘fictitious’ priests, clerical behavior, and above all, magnates, all appeared in Pistoia and other Tuscan cities in some fashion in the 1270s and 1280s. These were decades when the survivability of the regimes of the *popolo* was still very much in question and when the Guelf leadership needed to expand and solidify its political base. It is not an accident that a part of these strategies was the creation of grain magistracies. No regime could hope to survive with a semblance of legitimacy without the ability to guarantee the access of its urban population to food and to maintain order and stability in the countryside. The grain shortage of 1282 could not have come at a worse time for any new government.

Historians of medieval Tuscany acknowledge the central roles of factionalism and anti-magnate legislation in the development of the popular regimes of north Italian city-states. Nevertheless, they seem to downplay if not ignore another major threat to the fragile regimes of the *popolo* in the 1270s and early 1280s: an insecure food supply, easily disrupted by war and weather. The survival of the city-republics of the *popolo*, the regimes of the prosperous non-noble, anti-imperial, and non-knightly urban residents who rose to power in north Italian cities in the second half of the thirteenth century, was not certain in cities like Pistoia in the early 1280s. Nor was the victory of the *popolo* inevitable. After all, some of the city-states in the north had already slipped into dictatorships (*signorie*). Crucial to the survival of the regimes of the *popolo* was its claim to political legitimacy. Even in oligarchical medieval city-republics like Pistoia, some form of consent by the major political players, some form of acknowledgement that the rule of a governing elite was lawful, some form of obedience to the principal magistrates were absolutely essential to the survival and stability of a new, ‘popular’ regime. In a medieval Italian city-republic, such ‘consent’ could be measured in any number of ways: by the absence of significant military and political challenges, by the existence of an acceptable level of political and social order within the city and out in the countryside, by

the ability of a regime to levy troops and raise taxes without triggering instability, by the willingness of significant numbers of the ruling elite to participate in civic governance and to patronize their city with buildings and works of art, and by the reputation of the principal institutions of the commune as defenders and protectors of the *popolo* and their allies. The social unrest of 1282 mentioned in the *Breve* with regards to the collection of the compulsory ecclesiastical tithe was a threat both to the survivability and legitimacy of the regime, but it offered the political leadership of the commune an opportunity to present itself as a protector of the population. Some background here is helpful.

Throughout the second half of the thirteenth century, the city of Pistoia remained highly factionalized and violence-ridden, divisions that culminated in the Black/White split of 1300. As a result, in David Herlihy's estimation, the *popolo* enjoyed a partial but not a final success at Pistoia. Given the fact that the *popolo* was weak in relation to the powerful magnate families of Pistoia and that policing its mountainous hinterland placed severe strain on its fiscal resources, the *popolo* was never able fully to consolidate its power.¹³ Challenges to its survival remained significant therefore throughout the closing decades of the century. Before 1267 Ghibelline lineages had constituted for several generations a significant segment of the traditional ruling class. Therefore, they looked upon the arrival of the army of Charles of Anjou in 1267 as a foreign occupation and his Pistoian allies as enemy collaborators. Ghibellines remained also highly alarmed about the dangers posed to the sovereignty of Pistoia by the burgeoning alliance between the Guelfs of their own city and the Guelf Party of the large and looming commune to their east, Florence. After acquiring power in 1267, the *popolo* in Pistoia initiated a series of measures directed against their enemies, including the Ghibellines. In 1272 the leaders of the commune required that the magnates, those knights from the traditional elite families who were stigmatized for the disorder they caused, pay compensation for any damage done to property. From 1273 any Ghibelline implicated in a violent incident with a Guelf was to be kept at least 100 miles from the city. By 1277 any semblance of internal public order and stability was rapidly disintegrating as factional splits within the ranks of the Guelfs and the magnates intensified. In April 28, 1277, the General Council of the People was decrying the level of instability in the city, citing the great number of

¹³ Herlihy, *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia*, p. 200.

‘factional disputes and conflicts emerging from a variety of causes.’ Yet, at this time, the commune was able to secure jurisdiction over several rural communities that had been in the possession of the bishop of Pistoia. In 1279 conflict broke out between the commune and the bishop over Lamporecchio and Orbignano. According to Girolamo Cancellieri, this was because the two communities saw the commune as their liberator from the ecclesiastical tithes imposed upon them. In that same year however arbitrators worked out an agreement that effectively transferred several rural communities, including Orbignano and Lamporecchio, to communal authority. A year later, in 1280, perhaps reflecting the calmer nature of the relations between the city and its prelate, the bishop of Pistoia, Guidaloste Vergiolesi, himself of Ghibelline lineage, oversaw a peace pact between Guelfs and Ghibellines in the name of the papal legate, the Cardinal Latino.¹⁴ Yet, in spite of these measures to mend internal rifts, the fissiparous pressures threatening the survival of the regime of the *popolo* in Pistoia remained.

Any benefits of that peace pact were however short-lived. In 1281 and 1282 four major developments set in motion a series of events that called the stability of the government of Pistoia into question. In 1281 the ambitious but ill-fated policies toward the Tuscan communes of the emperor, Rudolf of Hapsburg, emboldened the Ghibellines and alarmed the regimes of the *popolo* throughout Tuscany. The largest Guelf and pro-papal city in Tuscany, Florence, refused obedience to the emperor. The leaders of Pistoia were caught in a bind: should they go with the emperor to preserve peace and avoid antagonizing him and defy the city on the Arno, or should they side with their well-populated neighbor to its east against the imperial vicar and disrupt the just concluded peace pact? Apparently, the imperial vicar at San Miniato agreed not to punish Pistoia for aligning itself with Florence, recognizing that the commune was unable to act independently of its powerful neighbor. In terms of political and economic policy, Pistoia was at this time being inexorably drawn into the political and economic orbit of

¹⁴ Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze*, III, 3–4, 300–01; Cancellieri, *Pistoia*, pp. 137–40, 178, 179 (‘quod cum in Parte guelfa civitatis et inter Magnates et Nobiles dicte partis maxima sit dissidia et discordia diversis ex causis’), 181–83; Giampaolo Francesconi, ‘Il Districtus e la conquista del contado’, in *Storia di Pistoia*, II, 96; Giovanni Cherubini, ‘Apogeo e declino del comune libero’, in *Storia di Pistoia*, II, 52.

the city of Dante.¹⁵ Second, the harvest in 1281 was a disaster, which meant that there were grain shortages in the winter, spring, and early summer of 1282. Third, as the grain dearth worsened, in 1282 and 1283, there were a series of provisions passed against the magnates. Such measures were both symptoms of as well as purported remedies for domestic conflict. Fourth, on March 30, 1282, Sicilians overthrew the rule of Charles of Anjou in the event called the Sicilian Vespers. This blow to the principal patron of the Guelf communes of the north emboldened Ghibellines and threatened to destabilize the Guelf regimes of northern Italy, including the *popolo* in Pistoia, already now challenged by grain shortages.¹⁶ At the same time, economic conditions within the diocese of Pistoia could not have been worse. In the 1280s the countryside was supporting a level of taxation six times that of the city. The price of wheat reached its highest level in the thirteenth century in the 1280s, at least double what it had been in the first quarter of the thirteenth century. The price of land was peaking. Conditions among the rural population at the end of the thirteenth century were declining, according to David Herlihy's study, and most of the population was living in the 'steep, dry, and unpromising slopes between 500 and 1500 meters' (not the most propitious setting for the production of grain for food).¹⁷ It is therefore within this context of a grain dearth, social disorder, high taxes, factional violence threatening from within, of Ghibelline challenges from without, anti-magnate initiatives, and of political uncertainty following the Sicilian Vespers, that the leaders of Pistoia – less than two weeks after the overthrow of Charles and the Angevins in Sicily – defied the bishop of Pistoia over the compulsory tithe and threatened to boycott its clergy.

When the secular leadership defied its bishop in the spring, summer, and winter of 1282 in the midst of this political and economic environment, it was not taking on a powerful antagonist. Indeed, it was confronting an ecclesiastical lordship whose temporal power was on the wane and whose rural communities had passed into the jurisdiction of the commune. In the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, the bishop had

¹⁵ Cancellieri, *Pistoia*, pp. 184–85; Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze*, III, 240, 267–71; William Connell, *La Città dei crocci: fazioni e clientele in uno stato repubblicano del '400* (Florence, 2000), p. 14; Francesconi, 'Il Districtus e la conquista del contado', p. 111.

¹⁶ Giovanni Cherubini, 'Apogeo e decline del comune libero', in *Storia di Pistoia*, II, 352; Davidsohn, *Storia di Firenze*, III, 240, 279–83, 298–305; Cancellieri, *Pistoia*, pp. 183–85; Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, ed. Giovanni Porta, 3 vols (Parma, 1991), I, 510–11.

¹⁷ Herlihy, *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia*, pp. 123–44 (quotation at 144).

acquired most of his holdings in the countryside from imperial donations and wealthy local landowners. They centered on five *castelli*: Lamporecchio, Sambuca, Batoni, Agliana, and Casale. Another one, Orbignano, was also important. By 1180 Pistoia had managed to bring most of its *contado* under its control, a process that had involved occasional conflicts with the bishop over several of his castles. After 1214 the commune and the prelate struggled over Lamporecchio and Orbignano until papal intervention in 1221 brought the disagreement to an end. By 1240 the commune had agreed to purchase other properties and rights in the *contado* to substitute for the loss of episcopal control of those two *castelli*. The final settlement in 1279, apparently connected to an earlier dispute over tithes, ended any disagreements over the disposition of rights and income in both Lamporecchio and Orbignano. Only in Sambuca did the bishop seem to possess any significant properties and rights, but even there (by 1277) the commune claimed ultimate jurisdiction. By 1280 the temporal holdings and rights of the bishopric, therefore, unlike those of its densely populated neighbor to the east (Florence) or Siena to the south, were widely scattered and circumscribed, and the most important of which were now under urban control.¹⁸ In 1281 relations with the secular leadership seemed stable and all major issues between bishop and commune appeared resolved.

As the temporal power of the bishopric was weakening, so conceivably also was the ability of the clergy to collect its tithes. Collecting tithes in the late thirteenth century was an *ad hoc* affair and not a very reliable process. The lower down the ecclesiastical hierarchy one goes, the less likely a member of the clergy was able or even willing to force local residents to pay. Wealthier ecclesiastical lords, like a bishop or cathedral chapter, usually engaged a factor or agent to collect their tithes on their major estates, but we do not know how much or how often those tithes were actually collected. That would depend greatly on the level of seigneurial pressure that the particular ecclesiastical lord

¹⁸ Giampaolo Francesconi, 'Il Districtus e la conquista del contado', in *Storia di Pistoia*, II, 90–96; Vannucchi, 'Chiesa e religiosità', pp. 347–350. The five castles came into the possession of the bishopric in the following years: 1043 (Agliana), 1055 (Sambuca), 1086 (Batoni), 1105 (Casale), and 1196 (Lamporecchio); see Francesconi, p. 93. Conquest of the *contado* was pursued in the twelfth and through first half of the thirteenth century (Francesconi, pp. 93–95). According to Vannucchi, even at Sambuca at the end of the thirteenth century, the authority the bishop had was nominal. Typical of his remaining rights were the rights to *albergaria* at Saturnana (Vannucchi, p. 350). To compare Pistoia and Florence with regards to ecclesiastical rights and holdings, see my *Florence and its Church in the Age of Dante* (Philadelphia, 2005), chapter 3.

was able to exert over the territory under his control. But the lordship of the bishop of Pistoia, as we have seen, was essentially by 1279 confined to one location, Sambuca, and even there it was very limited. Nevertheless, at least for one historian (Cancellieri) tithes were probably an issue of dispute in the conflict between the bishop and commune over Lamporecchio and Orbignano in 1279. It is certainly feasible that tithe collection remained a very serious and sensitive issue among the residents of the *contado* three years later, especially in a year after a bad harvest.

In 1282 it seems that the clash between commune and bishop over the compulsory tithe occurred at a time when the power of the bishopric was in decline, not in ascendance. Perhaps some of those people participating in the riots and disorders mentioned in the deliberation of the General Council of the People, suffering through the worst famine in decades, were seeking to slough off the final vestiges of episcopal lordship in places like Sambuca. If this were the case, it may help explain why the governing elite in Pistoia came so quickly to their defense: it wished to weaken further the temporal power of the secular clergy and to show solidarity with the suffering people of city and countryside. But why, with the temporal interests of major ecclesiastical lords already so circumscribed, would this have been necessary? Furthermore, would the bishopric, the cathedral chapter, the average priest have been powerful enough in their demands for tithes to trigger unrest and disorder in both city and countryside? That seems unlikely, though we should not underestimate the ability of the clergy to pressure those not paying with the threat of excommunication.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the compulsory tithe could not have been the most serious problem here; the real issues for the men and women in the diocese, especially in the countryside, seem more likely in 1282 to have been the excessive communal taxes, the shortage of grain, and the high price of wheat. All three on their own, not to mention the tithe, could have threatened the stability and legitimacy of the regime in 1282. The demonization of the bishop and clergy by the members of the General Council of the People and the Anziani was therefore arguably a means to rally the population of city and *contado* against a common (and weak) foe. It

¹⁹ That the citizens of Pistoia were subject to significant pressure by the clergy (including excommunication) to pay the tithe is apparent from the advice given by Giovanni Diologuardi to the General Council of the People (*Breve*, p. 114). Salimbene alludes to pressure by the clergy on the people of Reggio to pay the compulsory tithe (*The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, p. 515).

served to deflect attention away from the more serious issues over which the secular leaders had little or no control (taxes, factionalism, and food shortages) and focused on a problem that they believed they could handle (abolishing the ecclesiastical tithe).

The secular leadership of Pistoia did not develop this policy toward its clergy in a vacuum. Indeed, it was essentially replicating what the political leaders in Reggio Emilia had done just two years earlier in a similar situation. In October of 1280, faced with a series of destabilizing economic and fiscal problems, including the lingering after-effects of a famine just two years before in 1278, the Captain of the People and twenty-four ‘defenders of the people’ at Reggio passed statutes against the lay collectors of the tithe. The Franciscan friar, Salimbene, told the story: ‘This [conflict between the commune and the clergy] came about because of the matter of tithes which the clerks seemed too overly concerned to collect from the citizenry. And so Lord Deigo [the captain of the people] with twenty-four defenders of the people established statutes against the lay collectors of the tithes.’ The bishop protested and excommunicated the entire secular leadership of the commune. When another twenty-five ‘defenders from the people’ replaced the original twenty-four, according to Salimbene, they established harsh statutes against the clergy. Among those measures were stipulations that no one should pay tithes to the clergy, ‘that no one should give them counsel or help, or show favor to them; that no one should go eat with them or do them any service; that no one should do any business with them, speak to them, or stay in their houses nor in the houses of their subordinates; that no one should eat or drink with them; that no one should grind their grain for them, or cook bread in their ovens’, and so on.²⁰ The popular regime in Pistoia initiated a similar policy precisely two years later. A principal link here between the two cities may have been one Deigo Cancellieri, a native of Pistoia. He was serving in the fall of 1280 as Captain of the People at Reggio when the commune of Reggio was battling its own bishop over tithes and using the boycott as a weapon. According to Salimbene, by November the Captain of the People and the bishop had reached an agreement which stipulated that no one would be compelled to pay the tithe. In 1281 Deigo returned to his native city of Pistoia, just in time for the poor harvest of that year. Another possible

²⁰ David Herlihy noted the similarities between the events in Reggio-Emilia and Pistoia in *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia*, p. 242. For the episode of the conflict over the ecclesiastical tithe at Reggio, see *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, pp. 515–7 (quoted passages from pp. 515–16).

connection linking Reggio with Pistoia was the Captain of the People in Pistoia at the end of 1282: a certain Pietro da Rodeglia. The da Rodeglia were a prominent family from Reggio. In addition, the extensive interchange of personnel between Emilia and Tuscany (especially from the former to the latter) to staff the principal magistracies of the Tuscan communes – so fully demonstrated by Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur and his colleagues – apparently was a channel conveying and exchanging political strategies that proved useful when similar conflicts emerged in several communes. These included the conflicts over the compulsory tithe that occurred during grain shortages in 1280 (Reggio) and 1282 (Pistoia). In 1285 the threat of a boycott against the clergy again proved useful in Florence when secular leaders were pressing for legislation associated with criminal jurisdiction and the clergy.²¹

Political uncertainties following the Sicilian Vespers, a severe grain famine, oppressive urban fiscal policies, intolerable economic conditions in the countryside, a legacy of debilitating factionalism, the presence of a weak and available scapegoat, and the example of policies adopted two years earlier by Reggio Emilia – all these factors came together in the spring of 1282 at Pistoia to set the stage for the abolition of the ecclesiastical tithe and the threat of a strike against the clergy. The background to these measures was ideological and political, but it was also economic: among the most important threats to its survival and legitimacy were the poor harvest of 1281 and the grain shortage of 1282. This particular case study brings to mind three principal observations. First, like Pistoia, the communes of the *popolo* in Tuscany in the 1270s and 1280s were still very fragile and brittle. Second, grain dearths and famines were among the most serious threats to their survivability. No regime could long continue if it could not maintain adequate access to grain reserves for its people. Third, whether it involved anti-magnate legislation or the abolition of the ecclesiastical tithe, cities in Tuscany like

²¹ The Cancellieri were made wealthy by commerce in Pistoia in the thirteenth century. They were Guelf, and they provided one of the first Captains of the People (Herlihy, *Pistoia*, pp. 194, 201). Deigo Cancellieri, native of Pistoia, was Captain of the People at Reggio during the tithe episode there (he was Captain between August 1, 1280 and February 1, 1281). For his return to Pistoia from Reggio and possible involvement in the tithe conflict in Pistoia, see Cancellieri, *Pistoia nel XIII secolo*, pp. 187, 315–21. For Pietro da Rodeglia (Petrus de Rodella), see *Breve*, p. 109. For information on the presence of magistrates (including *podestà*) from Emilia in Tuscany, see *I Podestà dell'Italia comunale*, ed. Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur (Rome, 2000), I, 234–35, 360, 393–94; II, 91–98, 1114. For the threat of a boycott against the clergy in Florence three years after the tithe episode in Pistoia, see Dameron, *Florence and Its Church in the Age of Dante*, pp. 220–21.

Pistoia were communicating with their neighbors to the north and following initiatives of governance that were first developed on the other side of the Apennines (Emilia-Romagna). The survival of the regimes of the *popolo* was therefore not a foregone conclusion, and uppermost in the minds of many of the ruling magistrates in the eighth and ninth decades of the thirteenth century was their need to demonstrate their effectiveness and legitimacy in the face of what must have seemed to have been an endless series of challenges to their stability. As M. E. Bratchel has observed, Pistoia, Lucca, Arezzo, and Pisa were all confronting the challenges of the late thirteenth century commune by embracing a model of governance based on centralization and urban control of the countryside.²²

²² Bratchel, *Medieval Lucca*, p. 58.