GUELFS AND Ghibellines at San Gimignano, c.1260–c.1320: A Political Experiment*

Daniel Waley
Department of History, Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London

In February 1252 the podestà of San Gimignano ordered that a fine of 25 lire should be levied on any person of the place ‘singing songs between Guelfs and Ghibellines, scilicet about Guelfs and Ghibellines, or speaking idle words to each other on the question of Guelfs and Ghibellines’. What songs the Sangimignanesi sang and what otiose words they exchanged are perhaps ‘not beyond all conjecture’, and the podestà’s measure will serve to introduce the background to the institutional developments described in this paper.

‘Who were the Guelfs and Ghibellines?’ is a question of the greatest difficulty which can only be answered with any adequacy at quite inordinate length, and to which historians of medieval Italy have devoted little attention. These perdurable labels made their first appearance in Florence, and in the years around the middle of the thirteenth century their use spread to the rest of Tuscany, whence they permeated the other parts of the Italian peninsula. Their extension was due to the revived imperial interest in Tuscany during the 1240s and the extraordinarily rapid assertion of Florentine authority there in the next decade, after Frederick II’s death. Later the polarizing forces were

* My thanks are due to Dr Giuseppe Piconi, director of the Biblioteca Comunale, San Gimignano, for his unsparing assistance to me when I was working in his library, and to the municipal authorities of the city (particularly the Assessor alla Cultura, Dr Marco Lisi) for their generous invitation to me to be the commune’s guest when studying manuscript material there in 1988. I owe thanks also to Prof. Iole Vichi Imberecatori for most kindly making available to me her typewritten transcript of the Libro Bianco and, for procuring me a photocopy of the transcript, to Dr Donatella Ciampani of the University of Siena. For much aid and encouragement I am indebted also to Prof. Mario Ascheri of the same university.

1 R. Davidsohn, Forschungen zur Geschichte von Florenz, ii: Aus den Stadtbuchern und Urkunden von San Gimignano (13. und 14. Jahrh.) (Berlin: E.S. Mittler, 1900), 85 (quod nulla persona castri et curtis canere debet aliqua cantiones inter Guelfos et Ghibillos scilicet de Guelfis et Ghibellinis et quod nulla verba otiosa unus alteri occasione Guelforum et Ghibellinorum dicat . . .’). In this volume Davidsohn calendared the surviving volumes of San Gimignano Deliberazioni at Florence and San Gimignano. Davidsohn’s calendar has been checked and supplemented in both archives. There are considerable gaps in the series. For the period 1266–1314 all or part of these years are missing: 1269, 1272–73, 1277–78, 1285–87, 1296, 1299, 1301, 1306, 1310–11, 1313.

2 As Sir Thomas Browne thought of ‘What Song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among Women’: Hydriotaphia, c. X.

3 Davidsohn, Forschungen, iv. 29–67.
Manfred’s revival of Hohenstaufen Tuscan ambitions (from 1259) and the culmination of the papal search for a rival and supersessor to the Hohenstaufen in Urban IV’s agreement with Charles of Anjou (1263). Thereafter Guelfism implied support for, or acceptance of, a network which normally involved the Angevin house, the papacy (sometimes a reluctant associate), and Florence. Ghibellinism implied opposition to that alliance and its traditions, with a preference for imperial links or (after 1282) association with the Aragonese, the Angevins’ new rivals in the kingdom of Sicily. Rather than two sets of principles or beliefs, it was a question of alternative diplomatic systems and ‘a loose chain of local factions’. Within each city the two parties were opposed universitates. Authority for one meant powerlessness and often exile and the loss of possessions for the other. Despite frequent attempts to negotiate peace settlements laying down conditions for co-existence, it was common for one party to be ‘in’, the other, literally, ‘out’.

A preliminary look is also required at the town with which this essay is concerned. San Gimignano was a town, a castrum or terra, not a city, for it had no bishop of its own but was situated within the diocese of Volterra. Its population in the later thirteenth century perhaps numbered around 7,000. Its sphere of influence was very small in comparison with the territorial empires already gained by greater neighbours such as Florence and Siena. To the north, east, and south, towards Certaldo, Poggibonsi, and Colle Valdelsa, the contado extended less than 10 km from the town. To the north-west a continually disputed frontier with Volterra involved, at best, a tenuous hold over Gambassi, itself just 10 km away. Within the walls, however, was a prosperous class of landowning merchants. These leading elements in the commune descended from men who had made their first gains from wine, oil, and the special crop of the zone, saffron, the crocus which served as a dye and also for cooking and as a medicament. San Gimignano’s merchants traded not merely in the peninsula but, often in the company of Pisans, in North Africa and the Levant. They were financiers as well as dealers in commodities.

The period after the Hohenstaufen-Sienese victory of Montaperti (1260) saw the Ghibellines in control at San Gimignano, as in most of the rest of Tuscany. In 1264–65, however, the Guelfs returned from exile and a number of peace settlements between individual families were

---

4 J.K. Hyde, Society and Politics in Medieval Italy (London: Macmillan, 1973), 139.
negotiated. The general internal peace of the commune remained precarious, as was that of all the Tuscan communes in these years when the advent of Charles of Anjou's army (1265) had begun to turn the scales against Manfred's neo-imperial domination. The first indication of an attempt to instal a joint Guelf-Ghibelline regime at San Gimignano, involving a formal sharing of the institutions of communal government, dates from 26 April 1266, two months after Manfred's defeat and death at Benevento. On that day the podestà, the Florentine Neri di Piccolino degli Uberti, brother of the Ghibelline leader Farinata, put forward the proposal that the commune's council should be 'made equal, so that there should be the same number of one side as of the other' (ita quod sint tot de una voluntate, quot de altera). Uberti had served many times as San Gimignano's podestà over a period of fifteen years. Clearly this experienced politician had come to feel that Ghibellinism could survive the rising tide of Angevin power in Tuscany only if it succeeded in negotiating local concessions. The acceptance of his proposal marks the inauguration of an exceptional political experiment.

Uberti's pessimistic assessment of the prospects for Tuscan Ghibellinism was borne out by the developments of the next few years, despite the brief episode of the expedition of the young Conradin. In the spring of 1267 San Gimignano's Ghibellines fled the town and on 15 May the commune's officials swore an oath of fealty to the Angevin King Charles of Sicily, binding them to aid him 'against Conradin, grandson of the late Frederick, formerly Roman Emperor, and his people (gentem suam), and against all his other enemies in Tuscany'. In return the commune was granted the right to elect its own podestà and other officials, so long as they were Guelfs, and to deal with its own Ghibelline exiles as it wished, including their readmission on receipt of satisfactory guarantees of their fealty to pope, king, and commune. After participating in the siege of Poggibonsi (July–November 1267), Charles paid a brief visit to San Gimignano and subsequently issued orders that the houses of all the town's Ghibellines should be demolished. Conradin's passage through Tuscany was a brief affair (April–July 1268), though it did see a revival of Ghibellinism at the stronghold of Castelvecchio, a fortified village (villa) of San Gimignano some 6 km to the south-west of the town. The revolt was short-lived

---

7 Davidsohn, *Forschungen*, ii. 130.
8 Pecori, *Storia*, 743.
9 J. Ficker, *Forschungen zur Reichs- und Reichsgeschichte Italiens*, iv (Innsbruck: Verlag der Wagner'schen Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1874), 455–6. The terms are also to be found in *Archivio Comunale di San Gimignano* (all MS sources cited are from this archive unless otherwise stated), Libro Bianco, fols. 79v–80.
10 Davidsohn, *Storia*, iii. 24–5
and meanwhile Conradin marched on to meet his death in the Regno. In Tuscany the military collapse of the Ghibelline cause culminated in the defeat at Colle (17 July 1269).

Charles of Anjou may have gained the impression when he visited San Gimignano that the town’s Guelfs were dragging their feet and were deficient in the zealous anti-Ghibellinism which should have been their party’s raison d’être. If so, he was not misled. The podestà at the time of the oath of fealty to Charles was a Pisan and a clause in the oath providing specifically that he should complete his period of office confirms that his sympathies were Ghibelline. His time in harness with a Florentine Guelf (Stoldo dei Giacoppi) as captain cannot have been an easy one. There were indeed good reasons for the Guelfs’ reluctant and pacificatory stance. For one thing, Ghibellinism at San Gimignano counted a great many adherents. For another, it was by no means easy to keep them in exile or confinati in San Gimignano’s own territory. A particular difficulty was the very small extent of the town’s ‘district’ or jurisdiction. Men sent to forced residence in the ville of Larniano, Racciano, and Montagutolo, or to the other villages whither Ghibellines were banished, were almost within hailing distance of the walls of San Gimignano itself; the distances to these places (as the crow flies) are 4, 2, and 3 km respectively. The institution of banishment or forced residence, possibly useful in the wider territories of Florence and Siena, was totally inappropriate to a miniature commune.

San Gimignano’s Guelfs were constantly in the position of seeking to restrain the Angevins, whose authority ran in Tuscany and of whom they were the reluctant allies. When the podestà ordered all exiled Ghibellines to leave the commune’s territory (June 1270), the council and captains of the local Guelf party entreated him ‘to desist from issuing this order out of love for the commune and the party of Guelfs’. Four months later the Angevin vicar-general in Tuscany, Count Guy de Montfort, renewed the instructions. The Ghibellines who had returned illegally were to leave within twenty-four hours. The council reluctantly agreed that the Ghibelline leaders should be told, apologetically, that obedience would be ‘for their own good’ (pro utilitate communis et Ghebellinorum), but meanwhile a not very dexterous attempt was made to get the order rescinded by offering the Angevin emissary 20 Ib. of the prized local speciality, saffron, with 3 Ib. for his notary. The Sangimignanesi were not in a totally exceptional position, for throughout Tuscany the presence of either Hohenstaufen or Angevin power implied fiscal and military demands as well as
political pressure. In a certain sense, nothing failed like success, and it was not really paradoxical that loyalty to a distant authority was often easier to sustain than enthusiasm for a present and oppressive one. In October 1267 an embarrassing but symptomatic case came before the court of San Gimignano’s captain. A certain Baldo was accused of saying that the pope and King Charles were ‘two demons’ who had ‘destroyed all Christendom’ and that he would rather owe fealty to the devil than to either of them. 16 It is unlikely that Baldo was alone in holding these ultra-Ghibelline opinions.

The Guelfs were thus occupied on two fronts, seeking both to negotiate pacificatory terms with their own Ghibelline party and to appease the dominant Angevin power. The difficulty was to persuade the vicar-general that the foe should not merely be readmitted to the town but made party to a general pacification. In 1270–71, after the failure of the unsubtle saffron ploy, an attempt was made to open negotiations with the Angevin representative at Siena for a straight financial settlement (communis nostri pecunia mediente). Reports had it that the vicar-general might settle for 500 lire, but in the absence of cast-iron assurances the Sangimignanesi wisely dropped their indirect approach and sent representatives to Montfort himself to offer 300 lire in exchange for his ratification of the peace ‘between us and our Ghibelline neighbours (convicinos).’ 17 The commune now questioned the vicar-general’s instructions about the confiscation of the exiles’ property and their readmission (which, he claimed, would require his consent). It asserted that such orders were contrary to the ‘privilege’ granted to San Gimignano by Charles of Anjou. This seems a defensible interpretation of the agreement of May 1267, which had indeed conditionally permitted the commune to readmit its own Ghibellines. 18 In May 1270 the terms of a pacification involving the readmission of the Ghibellines were agreed, but the vicar-general refused to ratify them. 19 Either on account of this refusal or of a failure by one side to give final consent, the pax et ordinamenta are not preserved in the Libro Bianco (the commune’s volume of privileges) and the terms are not known.

Meanwhile the notion of ‘equal shares’, first agreed in 1266 but probably found impracticable over much of the following period, had not disappeared. In a council meeting in 1268 a proposal was made that San Gimignano should have a guard consisting of fifty crossbowmen and fifty archers and that of this body half should be Ghibellines and half Guelfs. 20 Moreover, the negotiations of 1270

16 ibid., ii. 139.
18 ibid., ii. 174–5, 177–8.
19 For the appointment of proctors to swear to the terms (14 May): ibid., ii. 165. For subsequent references to the 1270 pacification, Libro Bianco, fos. 63v, 67
20 Davidsohn, Forschungen, ii. 145
involved a demand from the Ghibellines that in fiscal matters – both taxation and loans – complete equality should prevail (quod fiat coequatio et aquagianza) between them and the Guelfs, and this principle seems to have been accepted. Agreement to the principle of equal treatment did not necessarily imply any institutional change. However, the notion of equality in numbers was to make its reappearance when detailed aspects of the 1270 pacification were agreed. Arrangements for marriage alliances intended to cement Guelf–Ghibelline friendship were made by a body of sixteen, half of them Guelfs, half (non-exiled) Ghibellines. This was an ad hoc measure, perhaps an obvious one. The next move was of a rather different nature and more likely to have lasting institutional consequences. When direct taxation was proposed (May 1270) it was agreed that the body of eight officials concerned with expenditure (all Guelfs) should be reinforced by eight Ghibellines to assist them in the tasks of fiscal assessment and collection. In the event the Ghibellines found the selection of these eight men such a contentious matter that they attempted, though unsuccessfully, to persuade the Guelfs to make the choice for them.

The next two decades saw the formalization and zenith of San Gimignano’s bipartite regime. At times this made the commune something of an anomalous and isolated pocket in Guelf Tuscany. The situation could be a frightening one. In February 1274 news reached the town that the Angevin marshal was nearby at Colle Valdelsa with a small body of horsemen. Rumour had it that a punitive expedition against San Gimignano was the next item on his agenda. A rapid decision was reached to pay the commune’s fiscal arrears, the sum due for the Guelf cavalry force. But the town’s policy was not always a cautious one. On 30 March 1276 the commune issued an order that all Ghibellines who were rebels against King Charles and his allies must at once leave San Gimignano and its territory. The minutes of the council meeting at which the measure was discussed record, however, that the proclamation was made at the request of the Angevin vicar Rinaldo de Poncellis ‘and it is not to be understood by it that any Ghibelline now at San Gimignano should leave or should be unable to remain in the town’. The success of another podesta in withstanding this vicar’s authority was rewarded by adding to his salary an ex gratia payment of 100 florins. When Guy de Montfort again became the royal vicar the Sangimignanesi decided that in view of their defiance they should warn

21 ibid., ii. 157ff.
22 ibid., ii. 161–2 (March 1270).
23 ibid., ii. 166–7. Davidsohn’s calendaring is defective at this point: he omits the decision on 18 January 1271 to choose 16 (8 from each party) to supervise the levying of a direct tax at S. Gimignano and Gambassi (Florence, Arch. di Stato, Carte S. Gimignano, 107. unfoliated).
24 NN 4, fo. 32v.
26 NN 7, fo. 88.
citizens to keep away from the count's lands; anyone travelling there would do so at his own risk.\textsuperscript{27}

The 'fifty-fifty' agreement concerning fiscal institutions was continued and extended in the 1270s. In 1271 a forced loan was levied to raise the quite small sum of 300 lire; twenty-five Guelfs and the same number of Ghibellines were required each to provide 6 lire.\textsuperscript{28} In the following period direct taxation was levied on entirely bipartite lines, each party appointing its own supervisors and assessors and being responsible for raising its own share of the total revenue required. Though the surviving evidence is patchy, some of it bears on each year between 1273 and 1277. In 1274 bodies of sixteen and later twenty-four assessors were named, in each case on the principle of parity between parties. Assessment for each party was to be carried out separatim. The revenue produced was on the same fifty-fifty basis, but it emerged that the Guelfs would yield a higher total; in consequence it was decided, most inequitably, that Guelfs assessed at 50 lire and above should enjoy a diminutio, the others not. This system of 'separate assessment' was clearly continued in 1275 and 1276, but the evidence for the 1277 libra is much more plentiful.\textsuperscript{29} In that year 100,000 lire had to be raised by a direct tax. Every household was classified as 'Guelf' or 'Ghibelline', and the lists for the town (though not the contado) have survived, with the exception of that of Ghibellines in the quarter of S. Matteo. For reasons which are not evident, but presumably derive from preliminary calculations concerning the number of households, the Ghibelline share was to yield about 53.5 per cent of the total. The average assessment per household was slightly higher for the Guelfs, at 82 lire 3s. 2d. as compared with 80 lire 14s. 10d.

In 1274 two notaries drew up lists of all San Gimignano's Guelfs and Ghibellines for the use of tax assessors.\textsuperscript{30} By then the two-party regime – possibly for the first time, despite earlier proposals and some ad hoc and temporary innovations – extended to conciliar as well as fiscal institutions. An addition of forty-one Ghibellines was made, to secure equality in the General Council.\textsuperscript{31} In 1279 this became a council of 120. The Ghibelline element (of sixty de sapientioribus et maioribus huius terre) was elected by twelve Ghibellines themselves chosen by the podestà, who also took part in the choice of the eight Guelfs now added to the existing body of fifty-two. The new council proceeded to add
eight new members (four from each party) to the sixteen already appointed super custodia castrorum. The principle of equal sharing was also applied to the commune’s notaries (one from each party) and even to the appointment of ambassadors to Volterra (unus . . . sit de parte Guelfa et alter de parte Ghibellina). 32 In the town of Gambassi, subject to the joint control of San Gimignano and the bishop of Volterra, tenure of the podesteria was to alternate between Guelfs and Ghibellines, though the man chosen was always to be from San Gimignano and the commune’s choice (alternating with the bishop’s) was to be made by 180 councillors, half of them from each party. 33

The institutionalization of a joint regime was to achieve yet more secure status in the terms of the formal pacification of December 1280. 34 This general peace agreement derived from the Tuscan mission of Cardinal Latino Malabranca, 35 but the people of San Gimignano needed no external urge to persuade them in the direction of internal concord and agreement. If the cardinal can be said to have preached to them, he was preaching to the converted – and the experienced. The terms of the 1280 settlement defined as its aim ‘equality’ between Guelfs and Ghibellines. The intention was that pax, concordia, compositio, equalitas et unitas should come about and be preserved in perpetuity (pious aspiration!) between the two parties. Indeed the word equalitas recurs frequently in the five deeds (15–29 December 1280) which are recorded in the Libro Bianco. 36 More specifically they proclaimed that the pacification would achieve equality concerning all taxes, dues, and charges (in libris, datiis et singulis exactionibus, honeribus et numeribus communis). 37 Two clauses of the agreement give substance to this declaration of intent. The council was henceforth to consist of 104 members, fifty-two of them Guelf and fifty-two Ghibelline, and the commune’s officials were to be elected by that council. Also the commission to investigate the commune’s outstanding debt to the Ghibellines with respect to loans, cavalry service, building works, and all other payments, was to consist of two Guelfs and two Ghibellines. 38 A prototype of the new council, with equal representation, met on 28 December. 39 The election of the council itself turned out to be no easy matter. On 30 December San Gimignano’s Ghibellines gathered in the collegiate church or pieve (usually known today as the Duomo) to elect the councillors for their party. There was a good deal of oratory,

32 NN 10, fos. 16 and v (partially calendared in Davidsohn, Forschungen, ii. 212); ibid., ii. 211–12; NN 10, fo. 32.
33 Pecori, Storia, 107.
34 Libro Bianco, fos. 63–70.
36 Libro Bianco, fos. 63, 64v. 67. 68–9.
37 ibid., fo. 63v (repeated elsewhere).
38 ibid., fos. 63 and elsewhere.
39 ibid., fo. 66v.
speakers interrupted each other, tempers became strained, and accusations of lying flew around. As so often in politics, it proved harder to love friends than enemies. Authority intervened and the podestà’s men made an arrest. The matter ended up in the podestà’s court on 15 January, but its decision is not recorded.40

It is difficult to trace how well the bipartite scheme of 1280 endured in the succeeding decade. The Guelf party continued as an important and flourishing institution, but of the Ghibelline party virtually nothing is recorded. The strict division of offices and councils in equal numbers prevailed at certain times, but the scanty evidence available suggests that at others obedience to the principle may have vanished. In July 1288 the General Council selected four men to scrutinize the commune’s expenses, ‘in accordance with the form of the statute’; two of them were Guelfs, two Ghibellines.41 The consiliarii expensarum were also duly constituted on a fifty-fifty basis at that time, as were the twelve selectors of the Pietra garrison in November 1292.42

It seems likely that the regime of equal shares fell into desuetude soon after 1290. However, the memory of its operation and the survival of strong party loyalties combined to make its revival a continuous possibility. An important series of ordinances promulgated on 29 August 1300 by the podestà and the captains of the Parte Guelfa contain a clause referring to the principle of office-sharing, though it is not clear whether this prevailed at the time. ‘Since offices should be distributed and allocated by party to the Guelfs and Ghibellines (cum officia distribui debeant et concedi per partem guelfis et ghibellinis), and since the party affiliation of those elected to office was in practice often unknown, ‘great danger and scandal could arise, particularly in the case of those chosen or appointed for the protection of the state of the town of San Gimignano (ad custodiam et super custodiam status terre Sancti Gimignanii). Therefore every inhabitant of San Gimignano and its district was to be interrogated on oath by one of the podestà’s notaries, in the presence of all or some of the captains of the Parte Guelfa, as to his Guelf or Ghibelline loyalty (de quo animo guelfo vel ghibellino . . . est sive esse vult). The answers were to be recorded by the notary, ‘the Guelfs in one place and the Ghibellines in another (guelfi per se in uno loco et ghibellini per se in alio).43

The major pacification of September–October 1302, recorded in some detail in the Libro Bianco,44 was envisaged and its clauses were phrased entirely in terms of the party affiliations of the population of the

40 AA 8, fos. 18v–19.
41 NN 15, fos. 5v–6 (calendared in Davidsohn, Forschungen, ii. 229).
42 NN 15, fo. 10 et passim. In July 1292 party affiliations were still taken into account in elections to membership of council (Florence, Arch. di Stato, Carte S. Gimignano, 185, unfoliated: not calendared in Davidsohn, Forschungen).
43 NN 27, fos. 14–15 (summarily mentioned by Pecori, Storia, 123).
44 Libro Bianco, fos. 155–181v.
town and district. The universitates of the Guelf and Ghibelline parties met separately to appoint representatives to give agreement to the terms proposed (16–24 September). Later (11 October) these proctors, on behalf of both parties, swore mutual forgiveness for past injuries (quietaverunt omnem penam et iniuriam . . . et promiserunt . . . unus alteri . . . remissionem, finem et quietationem . . .). More than two thousand people, some two-thirds of them from the town, took oaths to recognize the proctors’ powers of representation. Every one of them participated as either a Guelf or a Ghibelline, and this applied even to the population of the smallest rural ville. More than forty ville are named in the lists, and at twenty of them the number of jurors was below ten (at S. Vittore there was one only, at S. Andrea and at Tollena two, at Sovestro three). Even in these minuscule hamlets each man knew – as he was required to – his affiliation. One man, from the town, protested that he appeared to have been recorded among the Ghibellines and id per errorem, cum sit Guelfus. On the other hand there was a very marked tendency for each hamlet to be associated with one party. If the affiliations have been interpreted correctly (and there is some ambiguity about this aspect of the record), Larniano, with thirty-seven Guelfs and nine Ghibellines, provides a rare instance of a village having divided loyalties. The number of Ghibellines remained strikingly large considering the debility of their cause in Tuscany generally in 1302. In San Gimignano itself there was a roughly equal division. According to my calculations, the Guelfs were well ahead in the town itself (by 771 to 573), whereas there was a Ghibelline majority in the ‘district’ (510 against 331), giving an overall total of 1,102 Guelfs and 1,083 Ghibellines.

Guelf authority was the norm in this period and the situation was reflected in the working of San Gimignano’s institutions. In the ordinances of 1300 mentioned above, the captains of the Guelf party are described as charged with the safety of the town (ad custodiam terre prefate). It seems that the Guelf party’s council acted at times as though it were the council of the commune itself. Thus in 1305 the general council proceeded with the question of the appointment of the next two podestà ‘since the captains of the party of the Church and their council have already agreed from what places they are to come, videlicet from Siena and from Lucca.’ The occasional preference for the title pars ecclesie, as here, over pars Guelfa or pars Guelforum is interesting, though homines Guelfi partis ecclesie (as in the 1302 pacification) was a convenient compromise. Perhaps more significant was the tendency of the Ghibellines to adopt a label presumably aimed at eliminating any

45 ibid., fo. 181.
46 ibid., fo. 175v.
47 The record is not entirely easy to interpret. Fiumi’s figures (154n) and Davidsdohn’s (Forschungen, ii. 254–5) differ slightly from each other’s and mine.
48 NN 30, fos. 34v–5, 37v.
49 Libro Bianco, fo. 155 (and elsewhere).
possible anticlerical element from their ‘image’. In the 1302 pacification they were described as both most devotedly zealous for the Holy Roman Church and humbly and devotedly faithful to the Holy Empire (sacrosancte romane ecclesie devotissimi zelatores ac Sacri Imperii humiles et devoti fideles Ghibelline partis).\(^{50}\)

In 1305 full lists of Guelfs and Ghibellines were again drawn up, on the orders of the captains of the pars ecclesie.\(^{51}\) New pacificatory moves in 1307 – not well documented – included the choice by the council and leading officers of a body, comprising six Guelfs and six Ghibellines, which, with the podestà, was to enjoy ‘full powers’.\(^{52}\) The choice of the six Ghibellines was not entrusted to their own party, and this measure should be seen rather as an arrangement typical of the numerous ad hoc pacifications of the time; nevertheless it embodies the egalitarian bipartite principle. That the two parties continued their formally separate existences is confirmed further by a successful Guelf proposal in a council meeting (1310) that ‘all Ghibellines should owe guard duty in this town and perform it as though they were Guelfs, providing always a good and sufficient Guelf substitute (scambium).’\(^{53}\) The hypocritical phrasing of the suggestion that Ghibellines should serve ‘as though they were Guelfs’, but not in person, is curious.

At this point the lacunae in the evidence concerning this comparatively well-documented commune are again frustrating. The paucity of references to the working of the bipartite principle in the period c.1290–c.1310 suggests, but does not prove, that it tended to fall into desuetude except in special circumstances. In 1311, however, the principle again comes into view, but in a quite different form; the share is no longer an equal one: representation of the Guelf party is twice that of the Ghibellines. The nine officials chosen to supervise expenditure in September 1311 were recorded as comprising six Guelfs and three Ghibellines.\(^{54}\) The same practice was continued in the following year and even put to use, in so far as this could be done, within the town’s four quarters.\(^{55}\) Almost certainly the ‘two to one’ principle was applied also to the membership of the General Council; the numbers normally present at this time suggest rather strongly that this body then consisted of forty Guelfs and twenty Ghibellines.\(^{56}\)

However the locus classicus and clear testimony for the two-thirds/one-third system is the 1314 constitution.\(^{57}\) In these statutes it is proclaimed that membership of the General Council, of the Twenty-

---

\(^{50}\) ibid., fo. 163.
\(^{51}\) Davidsohn, Forschungen, ii. 263.
\(^{52}\) ibid., ii. 268.
\(^{53}\) NN 35, fos. 2v–3.
\(^{54}\) NN 36, fo. 37.
\(^{55}\) NN 37, fo. 16.
\(^{56}\) NN 37, passim.
\(^{57}\) MM 8 (partially summarized, with no clear indication of date, in Pecori, Storia, 112–14, 137–8).
four, the Nine (the commune’s principal office, in conjunction with the podesteria) and of the eight officials concerned with the town’s defences, is to be governed by this principle. So is the appointment of notaries chosen to aid the commune’s judge, the podestà, the judge of appeals, and the chamberlain. The method of choice (by lot) of the Nine is set out carefully in a form which explains how the principle of formal sharing was to work. Since the town was divided into four contrade (Piazza, Castello, S. Matteo, and S. Giovanni), eight bags were required for the names of eligible candidates, i.e. a bag for Guelfs and one for Ghibellines in each quarter. The bags would be unsealed in the General Council and names drawn from them, by quarters, so that of the nine names drawn six would be Guelfs and three Ghibellines.58

Were the statutes of 1314 effective in practice? It seems likely that they were merely pious statements of intent or perhaps restatements of legislation once effective. The Liber Reformationum of 1320 reveals a rather different type of regime. The captains of the parte Guelfa and the Nine were still leading officers, but alongside them was a captain of the Popolo whose duties were defined as keeping the Popolo and commune ‘in unity and unanimity’ and promoting the safety and welfare (statum bonum) of the Popolo of San Gimignano and ‘especially of the town’s Guelf party and its Guelfs’.59 There is no mention in that volume of any party affiliation for councillors or officials, or indeed any mention of a Ghibelline party. The 1314 constitution may merely show that the occasional bipartite realities of the past were slow to disappear from the statute books, even though the realities themselves had disappeared. Among the legislative clauses due for routine consideration by the General Council there still appeared, as late as 1322, one super coequando voces consilii generalis;60 if this is a reference to the equal representation in the council of both parties, as seems likely, it is the last posthumous echo of an enterprising and interesting institution.

Thus a bold experiment in the formal sharing of power, made in difficult circumstances, had only a spasmodic life, though by the restless standards of the age it was not a brief one. San Gimignano may have been unique in achieving some success with it, but the idea of a formalized institutional equality between Guelfs and Ghibellines was not entirely unknown elsewhere. There had been a precedent in the allocation of half the places in the councils of some communes to members of the Popolo or to supporters of a family faction. The notional basis existed also in instances of (unequal) sharing between the

58 MM 8, fos. 23v–7 (brief extract in Pecori, Storia, 671n.).
59 NN 40, fo. 50v et passim (fos. 1–70).
60 NN 44, fo. 2v. Party loyalties did not, of course, cease to matter: in 1328 one Sinibaldo di Minuccio di Riccio, hitherto a Ghibelline, was formally admitted to membership of the Guelf party by its captains and council (Siena, Archivio di Stato, Pergamene del comune di S. Gimignano, 19 June 1328).
parties. In January 1272, for instance, it was decided at Siena that, of a cavalry levy of 200, either fifty or sixty should be provided by the Ghibellines. The idea of independent fiscal machinery for the two parties, so important in San Gimignano’s experiment, seems to have been mooted at Volterra at the time of Cardinal Latino’s peace mission, though it was not put into effect there.

The only known parallel for San Gimignano’s bipartite regime concerns Todi in Umbria and is poorly documented. The great legist Bartolus of Sassoferrato wrote a short tractatus ‘de Guelphis et Gebellinis’, probably around 1355. In it he stated that at Todi there were (or had been, for he uses the past tense in one context, the present in another) equal numbers of Guelfs and Ghibellines in power (in regimine) and that therefore both parties shared authority. ‘In every public function there should be an equal number for each party (et ibidem in quolibet officio publico debebant esse tot de una affectione quot de alia).’ Bartolus’s information is confirmed by the 1275 statutes of Todi, which suggest that the sharing between the parties described by him had a long history. According to these statutes, the election of all the commune’s officers and councillors, as well as the statutarii (reviewers of legislation) was shared equally between the two parties, each set of electors making a choice of half of the body chosen. The electors of the podestà were also equally divided between the two parties.

The way attempted by San Gimignano and Todi, that of formally linking the rival parties in authority, was the very opposite to that normally attempted by pacifiers, who sought rather, with absurd optimism, to place a complete ban on the factions. Siena in 1280 tried to abolish the parties totally; ‘the Guelf and Ghibelline parties which have hitherto existed and prevailed in the city and contado of Siena are hereby broken (rupte et casse) and made void and without force and we abolish them both totally and delete their name and memory from the


62 E. Fiumi, Volterra e S. Gimignano nel medioevo (S. Gimignano: Cooperativa Nuovi Quaderni, 1983), 146.


64 ibid., 131 (see also 144). The translation is that of E. Emerton in his Humanism and Tyranny (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1925), 273.

65 G. Ceci, ‘Todi nel medioevo: Todi: A. Trombettìi, 1897): 163, 205-6. A. Marongiu, ‘Il regime bipartito nel trattato sui Guelfi e Ghibellini’, in Bartolo da Sassoferrato: Studi e Documenti per il VI centenario (Milan: A. Giuffre, 1962), ii. 335-43. Discusses the passage but misses the references in Ceci to the statutes. A scheme for the appointment of a general balia consisting of six Guelfs and six Ghibellines at Orvieto (1346) was abortive because the Ghibellines were driven into exile before the proposed body could meet: Codice diplomatico della città d’Orvieto, ed. L. Fumi (Florence: Deputazione Toscana di Storia Patria, Documenti 8, 1884), 520-1.
city and *contado*. Such a remedy was fated to be ineffective and it was surely wiser to attempt to build something new from existing institutions rather than to declare them non-existent.

Why were the Sangimignanesi allowed by the Angevin-Guelf authorities in Tuscany to persevere with an experiment in active tolerance which ran totally contrary to the proclaimed intentions of those authorities? In part the answer must be that there were many other matters and places to take up their attention. The main pressure for obedience was more likely to be from Florence than from the Angevin officials, but the Florentines had other pressing problems, and San Gimignano, though not peripheral, was not a central strategic point. The Guelfs in San Gimignano itself were aware of the great numerical strength of the town's own Ghibellines and of the difficulties and hardships involved in keeping them out of power. They must also have realized that their own chances of enjoying some independence of Angevin-Guelf pressure — and it was the fiscal and military implications which mattered most — were improved so long as they could fit their own Ghibellines into their domestic political regime. Whatever the explanation, San Gimignano deserves to be remembered for its enlightened and courageous constitutional experiment even more than for its warlike towers.

66 *Il Caleffo Vecchio del comune di Siena*, ed. G. Cecchini, iii (Siena: Accademia per le Arti e per le Lettere, 1940), 1151.