History of Florence
Study Guide
1. The origin of Florence

There existed an Etruscan city before the Romans?
Probably not a city, but a village in habited by fishermen • The Arno was a navigable river

• Maybe there existed a proto-Roman settlement in the area of Florence, but the scholars are still arguing about it.

• The history of Florence starts in 59 BC, when the village of Florentia was founded. But why?

1. To give a latifundum to the veterans

2. Because of strategic reasons (Julius Caesar was then fighting against Sulla). Florence was just 6km away from Faesulae.

Fig. 1: The Italian Peninsula, 6th century BC (circa)

Fig. 2: Hypothesis of a pre-Roman Florence
Florence in the Ancient Roman times

- On the foundation of Florence, the debate is still open:
  - The Ancient Romans used to build the cities following the technique of the castrum: 2 streets like a cross, the cardus and the decumanus, plus other minor streets (see fig. 3).
- The city was born lucky: it was in the Apennines valley and was on the consular street Cassia Nuova
- 123: Emperor Adrian built a new street

**Fig. 3: Ancient Roman Florence**

- The Romans then built: the aqueduct, the forum, the thermal baths, a theater and the amphitheater.
- The city was fortified and dedicated to Mars, the first protector of Florence.
  - The city was a square of 1.800 mt per side Its population was, probably, around the 10-15,000 people.

**Fig. 4: The aqueduct of Florentia**

Diocletian

Emperor Diocletian, in 285, placed in Florence the corrector a very important military office. It was the commander of the whole legion that controlled the Tuscia (corresponding circa to modern Tuscany and Northern Lazio)
Where does the name Florentia come from?
There are two hypothesis:
1. The village of Florence was founded in spring, during the ludi florales, games to honor the goddess Flora, from April 30th to May, 3rd
2. The plan on which Florence was founded was plenty of flowers, lilies

Florence after the Fall of the Roman Empire
- 476: The Roman Empire is divided into two parts: West and East

Fig. 5: The Roman Empire after the division
- A continuous stream of barbarian peoples flow to Italy: Are the barbarian invasions
- 406: The Goths besieged Florence, but the Roman general Stilicone defeated them
- 553: Byzantine-Gothic war. The Byzantine army besieges Florence → 570: The Lombards conquer Florence
- VII Century, the church dedicated to St. John (san Giovanni) is built → 791: Charles the Great is in Florence
- IX century: The churches of SS. Apostles and St. Remigio are built.
The Early Middle Ages

- In Tuscany, the Lombards chose Lucca as capital of their kingdom, they believed that Florence was too close to the Apennines, controlled by the Byzantines.
- The ancient Roman routes went into decadence. A new trade route was built: the via Francigena. Florence was out of this route.

St. John the Baptist, protector of Florence

- Before St. John, in Florence proto-martyrs were venerated: Lorenzo, Miniato, Felicita, Reparata and Zanobi.
- The Lombard were the first who venerated St. John and made him as protector of Florence.

Charlemagne in Florence

- Charlemagne, founder of the Holy Roman Empire, was in Florence at least 2 times: 781 and 786.
A legend says that the Charles's horse horseshoe is stamped on the façade of St. Stefano al Ponte.

On SS. Apostles there is an epigraph on which the foundation of the church is attributed to Charles in person.

Florence revived in Carolingian times, since 9th Century.

The Carolingians and Feudalism
9th–10th centuries

- December 800: Charlemagne is coronated Emperor in Rome, by Pope Leo III

1. The Emperor becomes the political leader of all the Christianity

2. The coronation marks the alliance between the Frank monarchy and the Church

It is the birth of the Holy Roman Empire

The Holy Roman Empire

- Presents itself as the continuator, the heir of the Ancient Roman Empire

However, the differences with the Ancient Roman Empire were important. Charlemagne’s empire was:

1. A continental Empire
2. Its economy was mostly based on agriculture, not on trade
   • A rural society
   • Urban depopulation

3. Its religion was entirely based on Christianity
   • Cultural monopoly of the Church (monasteries, scriptoria)
   • High illiteracy

4. Politically, the Holy Roman Empire
   • Was not centrally ordinate
   • The written right was essentially the Roman one
   • The Authority was in the person of the emperor
   • Personal relations were more important than the collective, institutional ones.

After Charlemagne

Charlemagne died in 814. His death provoked a void of power
   • The State was divided between his three sons:
     1. Charles obtained a territory corresponding, more or less, to modern France
     2. Lothair obtained the central part of the empire, Italy included: it was called Lotharingia
     3. Louis inherited Germany.

   • This division brought to a process of territorial disintegration and to the consequent affirmation of feudalism.

The situation of Florence in the late 9th century

   • 9-10th century: It’s the last wave of invasions from Northern Europe. Florence is attacked by Vikings and Magyars (Hungarians)
   • 854. Lothair brought together the two counties of Florence and Fiesole
   • 978: The Marquis Hughes (nobleman, representative of the Emperor in Tuscany) moves his residence from Lucca to Florence
   • Florence becomes in fact the capital of Central Italian imperial region (Tuscany)
Early 11th century: the successor of Hughes, Geoffrey confirms Florence as the capital of his dominion.

**Feudalism in Europe and in Italy**

- The term has two origins:
  1. German: traditional custom, by the leader to be surrounded by faithful people
  2. Roman: *clientes* of the provinces

- Feudalism was born already during Charlemagne’s rule from the necessity of reforming the administration of a new, vast empire.
- In the 9-10th century, because of new waves of invasions and a permanent state of conflict within the borders of the empire, the need of new power structure to grant security grew immensely
  - Encastellation: the birth, outside the cities, of castles. Symbols of power for the local lords and defensive strongholds

- **Feudalism was a pyramidal system, where the Emperor was the point**
- 847: Capitolare of Mersen. Direct personal ties between the lord and the freemen are institutionalized. Three new elements appeared in the feudal system:
  1. A solid one: *honor/beneficium*. Any physical good or estate
  2. A Personal one: *fidelitas*, ritual (*homagium*)
  3. A Juridical one: *immunitas*, power to exercise his authority into a territory

- 1037: *Constituto de feudis*

![Fig. 10: Florence in the 10th Century](image-url)
Florence and the Investiture Controversy

Something about the Controversy

• When?
  11th-12th Century (1056-1122)

• What?
  The biggest conflict between Pope and Emperor in the Middle Ages

• Why?
  We need to make a step backward...

Something about the power of Bishops

• End of the 4th century: Arcadius and Honorius gave the episcopalis audientia the same force of the public tribunals

• 554: Justinian drafts the Prammatica Sanctione: The Bishops become equivalent to the imperial functionaries

• 728: The Lombards give a huge piece of land to the Pope
  • Remember the Constitutum Costantini (the document that proved the political power of the Pope, a fake…)

• In the Carolingian/feudal period the bishops became actual feudal lords: Count-bishops

The fight

• 1056: Henry the 4th is the Emperor

• The Pope, Gregory 7th forms the Collegium (council of all the cardinals)

1075: Gregory 7th issues the Dictatus Papae, a document stating that:

1. The Church was founded by God alone
2. The Papal authority was the only Universal Authority
3. Only the Pope could appoint or remove churchmen

It’s the expression of an actual Theocracy.

• The fight became harsh and the Emperor summoned 24 German and 2 Italian bishops, all faithful to him.
• They deposed Gregory. Gregory answered excommunicating the Emperor.
• The German nobility reacted against Emperor Henry (being excommunicated was a hard condition for the aristocracy)
• 1077: Henry was then forced to go to the Castle of Canossa (property of countess Matilda), where Pope Gregory was staying in those months, and solemnly ask for forgiveness
  • This event is called the humiliation of Canossa
• The Pope retired the excommunication
Henry’s revenge

• 1080: After having settled the internal troubles (rebellious nobles), Henry summoned a council in Bressanone (Northern Italy) and declared Gregory as deposed.
• The Pope excommunicated Henry again
• The Emperor reacted writing a letter to Gregory in which he said:
  “Henry, king not through usurpation but through the holy ordination of God, to Hildebrand, at present not pope but false monk”
  and more:
  “I, Henry, king by the grace of God, with all of my Bishops, say to you, come down, come down, and be damned throughout the ages”

The following events

• 1081: The emperor besieges Rome
• The Pope calls the Normands (who ruled over the South) to defend the Holy City
• The Normands defeat the Germans, but pillage the city
• Hard reaction of the people of Rome
• Gregory 7th forced to flee... will die in Salerno in 1085
• Henry dies in 1106

It's the end of the harsh phase of the struggle.

• Normalization of the relationships
• Matilda was fundamental in settling the fight Tuscany becomes the centre of Matilda’s kingdom
• Her prestige was at the apex when she decides to move to Tuscany, that became the centre of her feudo.

Concordat of Worms, 1122

• It’s the end of the fight between the Empire and the Papacy
• It was signed in the German city of Worms between Pope Callistus 2nd and Emperor Henry 5th
  • The Bishops were appointed by the Pope
  • The political power went back to the Emperor and his local representatives (the feudal aristocracy)
  • The Bishops were appointed by the Pope, but the Emperor, or a functionary should be present
A city of merchants
Florence: 1115–1280

The rise
- Its reputation had greatly enhanced by the role played in the struggle by Matilda...
- Florence had around 2,500 inhabitants in the 8th century, now more than 20,000!
- It is a new town enclosed by walls reconstructed in 1078
- Most of its inhabitants still lived in houses constructed of wood but rising above them were tall stone towers, owned by rich families
- These families spent now as much time in town as they did in their castles in the surrounding countryside (contado)

The case–torri
- The towers were built as defensive strongholds and entered by means of bridges
- Had living quarters on the upper floors, to withdraw in times of trouble
- Wooden balconies supported on beams
- By the time of Matilda's death there were over a hundred of towers in Florence
- The towers were clustered for mutual protection (tower societies)
The city grows again

• The Arno was spanned by the Ponte Vecchio (rebuilt in the 12th century)
• Soon three others will be built:
  • Ponte alla Carraia: around 1220
  • Ponte Rubaconte (later known as Ponte alle Grazie): 1227
  • Ponte Santa Trinita (paid for by the Frescobaldi family): 1252
• The wealthy and powerful city families are evolving a commune to organize its civic and mercantile affairs

The birth of the Comune

It's a consequence of the deep transformations occurred in Europe between 10-11 centuries
• The full medieval city is an expression of:
  1. the economic recovery happened everywhere in Europe since circa the 1000
  2. a new form of juridical and political organization of the society
• Exchanges develop, became differentiated, new activities appear or increase ecc.
• New and permanent markets, new or more powerful centers of attraction:
  • more and better protected
  • profitable geographic position
• Ancient Roman cities, ancient bishopric sees, inside castles or big fortified monasteries
• From a very economic point of view, the comune is a general phenomenon, everywhere the same
• From a juridical/political point of view, the differences in Europe are huge
• In Italy, the comune is a wide and complex organism, the center of a more vast area: contado
  • Therefore, the Italian city is not imaginable without its surrounding country
  • The social elements inside the city are heterogeneous, cittadini and feudatarii
  • The comune is an element of unification and fusion of different social elements
  • The political side is prevalent on the economic one
  • The ancient Roman legacy is fundamental: civitas as aggregation center

The case of Florence

• Rich families, such as the Frescobaldi, now effectively ruled Florence
• The necessity of forming coalitions in order to increase the power Major security in towns surrounded by city walls
• The city is now seen as new vehicle of collective power
• The decline of feudalism in the countryside
• The old aristocracy is now melted into urban nobility. Why?
  • The city is now increasing and expanding and will not tolerate obstacles…
  • The lords who had remained in the countryside, in their castles, will experiment personally this new course

The expansion of the city
• 1107: a small army marched out of Florence to destroy the castle of Monte Gualandi
• 1114: another small army attacked the nearby castle of Monte Cascioli 1135: Monte Buoni was assaulted
• 1146: Quoria was destroyed by the Florentine army Other castles were voluntarily submitted to the commune

The army of the comune
• Infantry and makeshift armies was composed of workers, summoned by the ringing of a bell
• Marched to battle in their ordinary clothes, the weapons were their working tools
• Rich families could afford horses, weapons and armours, were thus qualified as cavalrymen
• Drawn by white oxen, was their Carroccio, a war chariot, with flags of the Commune
• In command were the leading men of the town (consuls) deemed most skilled in military affairs.

The politics of the comune
The CONSULS
• Officially elected by a general meeting of townspeople (parlamentum) assembled in S. Reparata in fact, they invariably came from one of other of the leading families of the town (cives)
• Cives were the ones who lived within the city walls, but continued to own land outside it.
• Or, merchants whose riches enabled them to arrange “good” marriages
• Privileged members of this oligarchy supervised Florence’s system of weights and measures
• Filled the higher offices in the merchant and craft guilds (arti)
• Directed the foreign policy of the town
• Official dependent of the Emperor and his representative (Margravius)
Florence and the Emperor
The fight for independence 1170's-1250

Frederick and the Italian Cities

- Aristocratic, energetic, firm believer in the feudal system Crossed the Alps into Lombardy and ravaged Milan
- Frederick and pope Alexander III (excommunicated)
- The Lombard League: Milan, Venice and many others
- Legnano 1176: the League hardly defeats the emperor

A political turning point

- June 1183: Peace of Constance. The Lombard towns gain a large measure of self-government
  - The Tuscan towns assert similar rights
- *De facto Florence was already ignoring the imperial authority*
- Florence continued to grow and to flourish, but inside the troubles were too many
- Violence and vendettas frequently erupted upon the taking of the offices A solution was necessary...

The podestà and the new city

- A foreigner, preferably with some legal training
- Was to combine the offices of chief of police and governing magistrate
- The town over which the Podestà presided had grown over the past century
- 1170’s Florence had around 30,000 inhabitants, new walls were necessary
- New walls, pierced by gates and watch-towers over an area twice the size of the Roman town, six neighborhoods (sestieri), each with a militia responsible for guarding its own sectio
- beyond the old Roman walls had become crowded with buildings A threat to public health and to the safety of the town (external attack)