I present here some early results of research I have undertaken on the various transformations in the way legitimation was imagined and portrayed in communal and seigniorial Italy during the 1330s. The fourth decade of the Trecento appears in effect as a time of delicate, profound transformation of the social and political balance in the cities traditionally governed as communes. Giovanni Tabacco and Giorgio Chittolini have captured the maturing in the central decades of the century of processes of hierarchization of power and emergence of more rigid forms of government. But the changes that took place in the 1330s have not yet been the object of specific attention. In the following pages I would like to initiate a first attempt at reflection, moving from a perspective - that of the emotions, feelings, and moods of the time - which seems to me to offer an invaluable key to reading the sense of a sharp break which many people felt in those years.

My interest was piqued when I noticed a number of temporal coincidences that aroused my curiosity. Based on the installment of the payments, art historians agree by now in dating between 1338 and 1339 the frescoes painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the room in Siena’s Palazzo Pubblico where the governing Council of Nine met. The idea of commissioning a fresco cycle with a broad political significance must have come to maturity in the period immediately preceding this date: let us say, at most, between 1336 and 1337. Giovanni Villani, for his part, devotes four ample chapters in book XII of his chronicle to the “greatness and state of the city of Florence”, in which he describes analytically the receipts and expenditures of the commune from 1336 to 1338, coincident with the period when the fresco commissioned by the Nine in Siena was being conceived and executed. Finally, the vast fresco cycle in the Camposanto in Pisa, which opens with the so-called Triumph of Death, has been authoritatively assigned to the hand of Buonamico Buffalmacco and dated “a little earlier than the three-year period 1338-1340”, more precisely between 1336 and 1338, to a “date just before the time of execution of the frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in Palazzo Pubblico in Siena”.

This chronological coincidence - the juncture between 1336 and 1339 - of three great “monuments” of Tuscan city culture seemed to me too extraordinary not to try to

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1 ‘Grandi mutamenti e pericolosi’. Among those who have helped me in this work, I must mention Enrico Artifoni, Pierangelo Schiera, Patrick Boucheron, Giorgio Chittolini and Paola Ventrone. This research is at the beginning and many are the aspects to develop.


investigate it and to verify if there were meaningful connections among spheres of expression apparently so different and distant from each other in terms of context, form, and content. The prevailing interpretations that have long been offered for each of them are of little help in tracing shared elements. Lorenzetti's frescoes in Siena - as we all know - appeared, and continue to appear even in recent studies, as a *summa* of communal political culture. The list of the riches of Florence by Villani has been understood to be a self-satisfied exaltation of the mercantile ruling class, a sort of encomiastic celebration of the city's greatness. The fresco of *The Triumph of Death* has long been linked to the climate of dismay which spread everywhere after the plague of 1348; reference is recurrent to Boccaccio's *Decameron*, whose brigade of youths seems to be reflected in the group of figures who, unaware of the imminent arrival of death, entertain themselves with noble pastimes in the garden shown in the right corner of Buffalmacco's work.

These interpretations seem to accentuate the apparent extraneousness of the three works to each other. On the contrary, in the frescoes in Siena and Pisa and in book XII of the Florentine chronicle, I sense a common feeling of perturbation, a negative mood, that traverses the three works like an underlying given, as though the Tuscan urban societies of those years had been suddenly afflicted by anxiety about a profound and frightening change in the times.

2. “Dismayed and frightened by said signs and damage.” Giovanni Villani in Florence

I intend to take a heuristic approach, to attempt to put some pieces together in the framework of a unified discussion. It seems to me that the best starting point is the *Chronicle* by Giovanni Villani. The structure of book XII is indicative: the narrative covers nine years of the history of Florence, bookended by the devastating flood of November 1333 and the inauspicious fall of Lucca into the hands of the Pisans in 1342, which opened the path to power for the duke of Athens Walter of Brienne. Compared to the preceding books, book XII is a gloomy one, whose 143 chapters are filled with a staggering number of negative events and great “adversities”; the floods of 1333 and 1334; the drowning of fifteen people when a large boat overturned on the Arno in December 1333; repeated fires burning houses in the city (in 1334, 1335, 1337, 1338, 1340, and 1342); the devastating landslide on a hill at Dicomano in the Mugello Valley (in May 1335) which swept away an

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10 “Isbigottiti e impauriti per li detti segni e danni”.
12 As Giuseppe Porta has shown, the 1333 flood stopped Villani on writing his chronicle: Villani, *Nuova cronica*, I, p. XIII.
entire village and muddied the waters of the Arno for months, damaging textile production; flu and smallpox epidemics in 1335 and 1340; the sighting of comets in 1337 and 1340; a solar eclipse in 1339; torrential rains and hail that destroyed the harvests in 1339 and 1340, resulting in famines, hunger and death; etc. 14

Villani recognizes these events as “signs of future ills for our city”; 15 in particular, the natural phenomena appear to be, at the same time, evident manifestations of “God’s judgment on our sins” 16 and of “strong planetary conjunctions”. 17 The appearance of the comets is interpreted as a “sign of new things in the future, for the most part bad, and sometimes the sign of the death of great kinds and lords, or overturning of kingdoms and of peoples […]; but most of them mean ill, that is to say hunger and death, and other great misfortunes and mutations of centuries; and these too meant big and new things” 18 Villani observed about Saturn that “its opposition” brings “misfortune, and tumult, and ruin, and floods” 19 About the smallpox epidemic which broke out in the summer of 1335, he records that “it was said by some astrologers and experts on nature that the conjunction of Mars and Saturn in the sign of Libra, and Jupiter in opposition to them in Aries, was its cause”. 20

Astrology - as is well-known - was an integral part of late medieval political culture. 21 According to Villani, too, the heavenly signs foretold events, but men were responsible for their own destinies: their errors were the cause of failure and could bring down divine punishment. 22 In the days following the tragic flood of 1333, which resulted in hundreds of people dead and enormous devastation, for example, both “religious sages and masters of theology” and “philosophers of nature and astrologers” were consulted, using the usual method of the scholastic quaestio, 23 in order to determine whether the explanation for the catastrophe was “a judgment from God” or “in the natural course”. 24 As Enrico Artifoni

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14 Villani, Nuova cronica, III, l. XII [al the following quotations are from volume I. chapter XII and from volume III], pp. 3-289.
18 “Segno di futura novità al secolo, il più in male, e talora segno di morte di grandi re e signori, o tramutazioni di regni e di genti […]; ma*le più significano male, cioè fame e mortalità, e altri grandi accidents e mutazioni di secoli; e queste pure significarono grandi cose e novità”: Ibidem, r. LXVIII, p. 152.
20 “Dissesi per alcuni strolagi e naturali, che la congiunzione di Marte e di Saturno nel segno de la Libra, e il Giove a’lloro opposizione nell’Ariete, ne fu cagione”: Ibidem, r. XXXIII, p. 81.
23 “E di ciò fu fatta quistione”: Villani, Nuova cronica, r. II, p. 12, also for quotations: “savi religiosi e maestri in teologia”, and “filosofi in natura e a strolagli”.
has hypothesized, very probably Villani incorporated into his chronicle the translation, in a Tuscan vernacular that reveals its derivation from the original scholastic Latin, of extensive excerpts from the dossier of answers supplied by the experts who were interrogated for the purpose of adopting suitable public policies. Villani himself embraced the theological interpretation of the events as divine punishment for the immoral behavior of the Florentines, although he did not fail to remember that the effects of the flood were made particularly disastrous by the “raising of the riverbed of the Arno, because of bad planning on the part of the communal government in allowing those who had their mills on the Arno to raise the weirs, bringing the level more than seven braccia higher than its former course.”

A good part of book XII is dominated also by the nightmare brought upon the Florentines by the expansionist actions of Mastino della Scala, signore of Verona (from 1329 to 1351) and of the Marca, who launched an offensive in Emilia and Tuscany with the intent of expanding and developing his dominion beyond regional borders and of conquering Pisa, the bulwark of Italian Ghibellinism. Between 1335 and 1336 he obtained from the Rossi family dominion over Parma, Lucca, and Massa di Lunigiana and lent support to the Tarlati family, lords of Arezzo. The opening up of a Tuscan front unleashed the reaction of Florence which, in an alliance with Venice, engaged in a debilitating war from 1336 to 1339, which ended in an insidious and uncertain peace. The events of “our war with Mastino of Verona” underlie the four chapters (XCI-XCVI) in which Villani described the grandeur of the city, “so that our dependents may understand the state of our Commune of Florence in those times, and how it supplied the expense of that war […] in short we shall narrate now the wealth of our Commune, the revenues and also expenditures […] of the Commune, from the year 1336 to 1338, the duration of the war between us and Mastino”. Placed in context, what can appear as encomiastic praise of the city at the height of its demographic, economic, and social development by an influential member of the ruling class turns out in reality to be a reaction of pride, veined with a sense of insecurity brought about by the fearful threat coming from the active presence of Mastino della Scala in Tuscany. Villani writes, in fact, “so that our successors who will come in time may be aware of the rise or fall of the status or power which our city underwent, so that for the wise and worthy citizens who, over time, will be charge of it;
they may, in our memory and also of this chronicle, provide for advancing it in condition and wealth”.29

Besides, Villani wrote these chapters, and indeed the entire book, after the fact, in the middle of the following decade. He placed the enormous effort made by the commune in the disturbing overall picture of the crisis of the Florentine financial economy caused by the insolvency of loans made by the principal banking companies to the king of England, who had gone to war with the king of France right in 1336, and by the confiscations decreed by the French sovereign of the holdings of the Florentine merchants and bankers in France in 1337 and 1338: international events to which Villani devoted - not coincidentally - specific chapters of book XII,30 a book traversed not only by the dark description of the effects of the interregional Italian wars but also by the reverberations of the European conflicts on the local scene. The first to fail were the Peruzzi and the Bardi banks, about which Villani observes: “because of this default and because of the Commune's expenses in Lombardy the [purchasing] power and state of the merchants of Florence failed greatly; but also of all the Commune and the merchants and every guild was lowered, and they fell into a terrible state […]. And for these said reasons and for others […], our city of Florence suffered a great collapse and this universally bad state did not improve after that […], so that then by repercussions and the failure of credit many other smaller companies in Florence soon afterwards failed”.31 This collapse, as is known, affected even Villani himself as a result of the bankruptcy of the Buonaccorsi company in which he was a partner, costing him the humiliating experience of imprisonment for debt in the Stinche prison in 1338.32

Villani linked the natural catastrophes, wars, and economic crises to the political tensions internal to the communal regime of Florence and discord among the “sects”,33 manifesting all his concern that these could possibly develop into authoritarian actions. Reconstructing the failed plot by the faction of magnates in November 1340, for example, his comment is explicit: “recounting the adversities which occurred in our city of Florence in these times because of its bad governance disturbs my mind greatly, foreseeing worse for the future. Considering that the citizens, it seems, do not fear God either because of heavenly signs or pestilences of flood, or death, or hunger, nor do they acknowledge their faults and sins; but having completely abandoned holy human and civic charity and only by fraud and tyranny with great greed to govern the republic. Which makes me fear greatly God’s judgment”.34 In this passage Villani’s dual levels of reading emerge: his “ability to

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29 “Perché i nostri successori che verranno per li tempi s’avegghino del montare o bassare di stato o potenza che facesse la nostra città, acciò che per li savi e valenti cittadini, che per li tempi saranno al governo di quella, per lo nostro ricordo e asempro di questa cronica procurino d’avanzarla inn*istato e podere”: Ibidem, r. XCIV, p. 197.
30 Cf., respectively, Ibidem, r. LV, pp. 123-126, and r. LXXII, pp. 156-159.
31 “Per questa difalta e per le spese del Comune in Lombardia molto mancò la potenzia e stato di mercatanti di Firenze; e però di tutto il Comune e*lla mercatantia e ogni arte n’abassò, e vennero in pessimo stato […]. E per le dette cagioni e per altre […], la nostra città di Firenze ricevette gran crollo e male stato universale non guari tempo apresso. […], onde poi de’ rimbalzi e del mancamento della credenza più altre minori compagnie di Firenze poco tempo apresso ne fallirono”: Ibidem, r. LXXXVIII, pp. 182-183.
32 Cf. Luzzati, Giovanni Villani.
33 “sette”.
34 “Raccontando l’aversità occorse alla nostra città di Firenze in questi tempi per lo suo male reggimento, mi fa molto turbare la mente sperando peggio per l’avenire. Considerando che per segni del cielo, né per pistolenze di diluvio, né di mortalità, e di fame, i cittadini non pare che temano Iddio, né si riconoscano di loro difetti e peccati; ma al tutto abandonata per loro la santa carità umana e civile, e solo a baratterie e tirannia con grande avarizia reggere la republica. Onde mi fa temere forte del giudizio d’Iddio”: Villani, Nuova cronica, r. CXVIII, p. 231.
identify the tangible causes of an event” and to “bring out at the same time the moral significance”.35

Following a precise scheme, in book XII Villani devoted a chapter to each act on the part of the institutions which altered the organization of the commune: he recorded the institution in 1334 of several police magistrates, not failing to observe that “those who govern the city did it more for their own guard and relief of their state”;36 the establishment in 1335 of the “captain of the guard and preserver of the peace and state of the city”, a new foreign official “with great discretion and power over the exiled; and under his title of guard he extended his office in name and in fact as a police magistrate above any other rule, and exacting blood justice as he pleased, without any statutory order”, this too willed by “those citizens of the people who govern the land in order to strengthen their state and for fear not to lose it”;37 and the creation in 1339 of a new “war captain, that is to say […] bargello”, the infamous Iacopo Gabrielli of Gubbio, who in his two years in office “did foul deeds in Florence and its countryside and arbitrated without any form of reason, so that new disgraceful things arose in the city”, and “in the guise of a tyrant, or a performer of tyrannies, proceeds in civil and criminal affairs according to his will, as had been placed in his hands by these said governors, without following laws or statutes, whereby he condemned many innocent people in their property or person, and kept the citizens great and small in great fear, except for his governors, who using his stick carried out their vendettas and sometimes offenses and frauds”.38 Villani’s political judgment on the leaders of the commune of Florence in the 1330s is severe and negative, and can take on overtones of sarcasm, for example where, commenting on Iacopo Gabrielli’s exit from office in 1341 (“who was captain of the guard of the people, that is to say tyrant of the ruling people”),39 he observed that “the wise rulers of Florence corrected their error of his tyrannical office, and decreased the Commune’s expenses, that is to say they doubled them, because where before they had one policeman as their executor they chose two […] but both one and the other office was an outrage and brought great damage and expense to the Commune”. His analysis is merciless: “The city’s rulers, to maintain their tyrannies, and such of their frauds, as we said earlier, supported him to the great detriment of the Commune and burden on the citizens in order to be feared and grand”.40

35 Barbero, *Storia e politica fiorentina*, p. 15.
36 “Quelli che reggeano la città il feciono più per loro guardia e francamento di loro stato”: Villani, *Nuova cronica*, r. XVI, pp. 56-57.
37 “Capitano della guardia e conservatore di pace e di stato de la città”; “con grande arbitrio e balìa sopra li sbanditi; e sotto il suo titolo de la guardia stendea il suo uficio di ragione e di fatto a modo di bargello e sopra ogni altra signoria, e facendo iustizia di sangue come li piaacea, sanza ordine di statuti”; “quelli cittadini popolari che reggeano la terra per fortificare loro stato e per paura di non perderlo”: *Ibidem*, r. XXXIX, p. 87.
38 “Capitano di guerra, overo […] bargello”; “fece in Firenze e nel contado di sconce cose e albitrare sanza ordine di ragione, onde nacquero novitadi sconce di città”, and “a guisa di tiranno, o come esecutore di tiranni, procedea di fatto in civile e cherminale a sua volontà, come gli era posto in mano per li detti reggenti, sanza seguire leggi o statuti, onde molti innocenti condannò a*ttorto inn*avere e in persona, e tena i cittadini grandi e piccoli in grande tremore, salvo i suoi reggenti, che col suo bastone faceano le loro vendette e talora l’offese e*lle baratterie”: *Ibidem*, r. CXXII, pp. 240-241.
40 “I savi rettori di Firenze corressonno il loro errore del suo tirannico uficio, e scenaro le spese del Comune, overo le radoppiarono, che là dove prima avieno uno bargello per loro esecutore ne elssono due […] ma’l’uno e’l’altro uficio era d’oltraggio e a grande danno e spesa del Comune”; “i reggenti cittadini per mantenere le loro tirannie, e tali di loro baratterie, come dicemmo adietro, gli sosteneno a tanto danno di Comune e gravezza di cittadini per essere temuti e grandi”: *Ibidem*, r. CXXII, pp. 240-241.
In Villani’s work, moral judgment is accompanied by an admonitory intent for future governors. The explicit fear was of the possible degeneration of “bad government” into a tyrannical regime. Referring to the emergence of Taddeo Pepoli’s rule in Bologna in 1337, for example, he stated that “we said much about the events in Bologna [...], considering the ancient union and liberty and state and power of the good people of Bologna, who have gone back in our time because of discord and the tyrannical rule of one citizen, so as to let our city and people of Florence always know for our citizens to guard the liberty of our republic and not fall under the tyranny of lords. Which cause makes me fear for our city of Florence because of discord and bad government; and may this be enough for those who understand”.

3. “Think about it now before Death pulls you away”; Buonamico Buffalmacco in Pisa

Now let us look at the frescoes painted by Buonamico Buffalmacco in the monumental cemetery of Pisa between 1336 and 1338, and in particular at The Triumph of Death. Next to The Triumph of Death on the same south wall of the Camposanto were The Last Judgment, Hell, and The Thebaid. The cycle dwelt on terrifying and admonitory themes more than on the salvation and mercy of God. The frescoes aimed at showing, at one and the same time, the eternal future of divine judgment and the eternal present of death: the intent was to induce the viewer, by thinking about his present and his past, to change his future. The context is public. Construction began on the Camposanto in 1278 under the responsibility and supervision of the commune. The great painted decorations were initiated in the course of the fourteenth century. Nonetheless, relations with the ecclesiastical authorities were very close, and studies have brought out the directorial role played by the Dominicans of Pisa, who worked out the iconographical program of the frescoes painted by Buffalmacco, centering around the theme of repentance and confession, following the example of the hermits. The direct overseers were probably the archbishop Simone Saltarelli (who directed the diocese from 1323 to 1342) and authoritative members of the convent of Saint Catherine in Pisa such as Bartolomeo di San Concordio (dead in 1347) and Domenico Cavalca (dead in 1342)

The patrons chose one of the most brilliant exponents of the expressionist Gothic style, who had already showed his mettle in fresco cycles painted in the Badia a Settimo and

41 “Avemo sì lungo fatta memoria di questo officio [il citato capitano di guardia creato nel 1335] e de’ suoi processi per lasciarne esempio a’ cittadini che saranno, a ciò che per bene de la nostra città non siano mai vaghi di fare ufficiali arbitrari, che perché si crino sotto colore e titolo di bene di Comune, sempre mai fanno dolorosa uscita per le cittadi, e nascene tirannica signoria”: Ibidem, r. XXXIX, p. 91.
42 “Male reggimento”; “assai avemo detto de’ fatti di Bologna […], considerando l’antica unione e libertà e stato e potenza del buono popolo di Bologna, tornato a ‘ nostri tempi per discordie e signoria tirannica di singolare cittadino, per dare asempro alla nostra città e popolo di Firenze a*ssapere i nostri cittadini guardare la libertà della nostra repubblica, e non cadere a tirannia di signore. Onde mi fa temere della nostra città di Firenze per le discordie e, male reggimento: e questo basti a’ buoni intenditori”: Ibidem, r. LXX, pp. 154-155.
43 “Pensalo or prima che Morte ti tiri”.
the convent of the Donne di Faenza in Florence and the Vescovado in Arezzo, as the artist best suited to depict the moralizing endeavor which the Dominicans wanted to impart to the frescoes that would decorate the great complex in Pisa. The educational intent explicitly orients those who viewed the paintings towards practices of repentance and confession of sins, given the imminence of death. Jérôme Baschet has stressed the absence of a textual source from which the frescoes would have been adapted, tracing the logic of the program back to the pastoral vocation of the preachers to use all available means for spreading religious messages; he has found in the sermons of Giordano da Pisa and treatises by Bartolomeo di San Concordio, Gli ammaestramenti degli antichi, a typical picture of vices and virtues, dated to the first decade of the century, and Domenico Cavalca, Specchio dei peccati dated 1333 and Disciplina degli spirituali, devoted to the vices and dated 1335, the orientations of this reflection on sin, confession, and the efficacy of moral discourse. Chiara Frugoni has brought out the connections with Cavalca’s Trattato della pazienza, it too written before 1333.53

Lina Bolzoni, for her part, has emphasized that the period when the decoration of the Camposanto was begun corresponds to the time when the first great collections of sermons in the vulgate were compiled. Preaching helped create a public capable of reading the painted images and furnished the necessary tools for reading the pictures in the Camposanto, first and foremost to the illiterate. The fresco cycle was also studded with large scrolls that originally held rhymed vernacular epigraphs, later partially substituted by Latin inscriptions, which were not limited to narrating the scene but were intended to give them a moral charge and a value as examples. It should be noted, however, that the references identified by Baschet, Bolzoni, and Frugoni are to sermon cycles dated some thirty years before the frescoes were commissioned, which Luciano Bellosi has dated between 1336 and 1338: Giordano da Pisa preached in Florence in 1304-1306 and in Pisa in 1307-1309. This chronological leap is too great to be able to hypothesize a direct link between the different kinds of works; above all, it does not explain why the

54 Cf. Bolzoni, “Gli affreschi del ‘Trionfo della Morte’”. According to Frugoni, Altri luoghi, p. 1561, the Trionfo should be a “painted prayer”.
55 Bolzoni, Educare lo sguardo, pp. 522-528.
57 Baschet, Les justices de l’an-delà, p. 625
Dominicans in Pisa only felt in the second half of the 1330s the need not only to preach on repentance but also to rely on the force of images on this theme.

An intriguing connection can be made, however, with the great pilgrimage to Rome made by the flagellants, spurred right in 1334-1335 by the preaching initiated in those years by Venturino da Bergamo, less erudite than that of Giordano da Pisa but unquestionably more emotional. It is Villani once again, still in book XII, who records *How one Friar Venturino da Bergamo moved many Lombards and Tuscans to repentance.* This is his report: “In said year [1334], for the feast days of Christ’s Nativity, a friar of the order of preachers aged 35, from a small nation, because of his sermons brought to repentance many murderous and thieving sinners, and other bad men from his city and from Lombardy. And for his efficacious preaching moved to go to Rome during the Lent and to pardon more than ten thousand Lombards, gentlemen and otherwise, all dressed practically in the habit of Saint Dominic, that is to say with a white surplice and a sky-blue or indigo cloak, and on the cloak a cut-out white dove with three olive leaves in its beak; and they came through the towns of Lombardy and Tuscany in groups of twenty-five or thirty, and each brigade with its cross in front, shouting peace and mercy; and arriving in the cities they gathered first in the church of the preaching friars, and in it, before the altar, they disrobed from the waist up and humbly beat themselves for a while […]. His said preaching was not, however, subtle sermons or of deep learning, but were very effective and eloquent and with holy words, uttering them very doubtful and meant to move people, as it were stating and saying: ‘What I say to you I know, and nothing more, because God wills it this way’. He went to Rome with said pilgrims, and with many others from Tuscany who followed him, which was innumerable people with great honesty and patience”.

The spiritual unease that Venturino interpreted and the collective emotions he was able to arouse closely linked the theme of repentance with that of death. Venturino and his pilgrims to Rome did not pass through Pisa, but his endeavor had vast resonance in the Dominican order and earned the favor of almost all the provincial priors of communal and signorial Italy. We also know that some flagellant confraternities held rites of repentance in Pisa’s Camposanto in those years; the founder of the Compagnia dei Battuti of San Giovanni Evangelista della Porta della Pace, the hermit Giovanni Soldato, was buried in the Camposanto probably before 1338, thus right when Buffalmacco was frescoing that
same space. The mass penitential movement set in motion by the preaching of one of the most fervid members of the Dominican order could therefore have been one of the elements that led his Pisan confreres to embrace strongly the power of images right in the second half of the 1330s, not before or after.

What is more, it is possible to trace a further connection, tied to the iconography of death. Venturino’s activity was probably at the root of an innovation introduced in those years in the procedures of accompanying those sentenced to die to the scaffold. We know that he preached in Bologna in 1331 and 1332, where he sometimes accompanied the condemned, persuading them to bear up under their suffering for the remission of their sins, reminding them of Christ’s passion and encouraging them to hope for divine mercy. In 1335 he passed through the city again with his pilgrims to Rome, and in 1336 Santa Maria della Morte, the first confraternity devoted to comforting those sentenced to die of which we have documentary evidence in any Italian city, was founded there. A processional cross dated 1335-1340, painted by Bernardo Daddi, was commissioned by the Dominicans, probably in connection with Venturino’s preaching, for accompanying prisoners about to be put to death. As Massimo Ferretti has pointed out, on the recto of the cross is painted the unusual figure of a flayed corpse, almost certainly a condemned prisoner, wearing the execution tunic that left the neck bare for the axe, “a Gothic zombie”, revealing an evident taste for the macabre [see figure 1].

Right here, starting from the topic of justice, the frescoes commissioned by the Dominicans in Pisa became majestic interpreters of the divulgation of macabre themes. In his representation of Hell, in particular, Buffalmacco broke with the tradition of images of the world beyond, as Baschet has demonstrated, presenting a diversification of tortures, dividing them into compartments based on the scheme of the seven deadly sins, and a more general redefinition of the composition of the Last Judgment. Rather than confining it to the right corner, as in the earlier iconographic tradition, Buffalmacco set the cave of hell next to the Judgment, giving it the same amount of space as the rest of the entire picture. Every type of sin is reserved its own well-defined space (from lower left are portrayed the avaricious, lustful (including sodomites), wrathful (including suicides), gluttons, slothful, and envious). Above all, he illustrated in detail the torments inflicted with a “massive use of evisceration, decapitation, amputation of arms, and flaying”, (1968), pp. 199-228; Frugoni, Altri luoghi, pp. 1636, 1639.

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66 This issue has not been studied by scholars, also by those who have dedicated their attention to assigning a date to the Pisan frescos with philological approach, paying more attention to consider social and cultural elements instead of focusing on the spiritual emotions shared by the contemporaries at that time.


68 As theorized by M. Ferretti, “Pitture per condannati a morte del trecento bolognese”, in Misericordie. Conversioni sotto il patibolo tra medioevo ed età moderna, ed. by A. Prosperi, Pisa 2007, p. 150.

69 On this processional cross as one of the first examples of painted crosses painted for the confortation for those put to death, cf. Di Lorenzo, La croce. (card catalog).

70 As theorized by M. Ferretti, “Pitture per condannati a morte del trecento bolognese”, in Misericordie. Conversioni sotto il patibolo tra medioevo ed età moderna, ed. by A. Prosperi, Pisa 2007, p. 150.


73 Ibidem, p. 294: the fresco misses a space devoted to those who are proud, while part of it is representing to the enemies of the Church (heretics, excommunicated, simoniacs, etc.).

evidently mirroring contemporary practices of capital execution employed by the forces of justice in the cities\textsuperscript{75} - the very ones which Venturino had juxtaposed to the cross and the invitation to repent and hope in divine mercy. Having noted these fairly important connections, let us now turn to examine \textit{The Triumph of Death}, beginning with its unusual layout. Occupying more than half of the fresco is an enormous rocky outcropping, split by a precipice at the bottom of which the dead are piled up, while angels and devils fly about in the sky above; the picture then rises up into the garden where the hedonistic young people are gathered. The overall effect is that of a “grand vision congested by the figurative movement” of “an astonishingly effective visual clamor”.\textsuperscript{76}

The fresco has two main cores. On the left is the theme, deeply rooted in the literary and figurative tradition, of the meeting between the living and the dead.\textsuperscript{77} Here we see a splendid cavalcade of ladies and knights returning from the hunt, who come upon three coffins containing the corpses, in progressive states of decomposition, of a prelate, a king, and a skeleton. One of the corpses addresses one of the knights with these words: “You who look at me and gaze at me so fixedly,/ see how disgusting I am in your sight,/ even though you are a splendid young man,/ think about it now before Death pulls you away […]/ As you are now you must think that I was,/ but to each person the world is not a great friend,/ you too will have to come to this point and place”.\textsuperscript{78} A hermit urges the viewer to meditate on the meaning of this encounter and marks the boundary between two worlds: behind and above him are numerous vignettes of the life of the fathers in the desert. The scenes of hermitic life are juxtaposed with images of courtly life (the group on horseback), indicating a model distant in time and space (depicted also in the \textit{Thebaid} in the fourth fresco in the cycle) but at that time a living and current reality: forms of hermitic life were practiced in Pisa and were well-known.\textsuperscript{79} Another hermit admonishes another character with these words: “If your mind will stay well aware/ keeping your sight trained here, / vainglory will be defeated/ and pride you will see dead./ And you will still meet this same fate!/ Now observe the law that is written here”.\textsuperscript{80}

The images and verse inscriptions insist on the fleeting nature of worldly power (vainglory and pride) and the inevitability of death. Among the riders wearing clothing and hats in a great variety of forms can be seen the crowned heads of sovereigns (including a queen). Ancient chronicle and Vasari in his \textit{Lives}\textsuperscript{81} maintained that the figures portrayed included Castruccio Castracani degli Antelminelli, the first great Tuscan lord who extended his dominion over Lucca, Pisa, Pistoia and Luni between 1316 and 1328; the emperor


\textsuperscript{76} Bellosi, \textit{Buffalmacco}, p. 17.


\textsuperscript{78} “Tu che mi guardi et si fisso mi miri, / vedi quanto io son ladio al tuo conspecto, / quantunque che tu sii chiaro giovanetto, / pensalo or prima che Morte ti tiri […]. / Si come hora se’ dèi ben pensar che io fui; / ma il mondo amico ad ciascheduno è poco, / venir pur dèi a questo punto et luoco”: Morpurgo, \textit{Le epigrafi volgari}, p. 57.


\textsuperscript{80} “Se vostra mente serrà bene accorta / tenendo qui la vostra vista fitta, / la vanagloria ci sarà sconfitta / e la superbia vedrete morta. / E tu voi serrete ancor di questa sorta! / Or observe la lege che v’è scripta”: Morpurgo, \textit{Le epigrafi volgari}, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{81} Frugoni, \textit{Il tema dei tre vivi e dei tre morti}, pp. 211-212, n. 293.
Ludwig the Bavarian, who had taken Pisa after a siege in 1327 and then granted it to Castruccio in 1328 for him to rule on the emperor’s behalf; and Uguccione della Faggiola, who was lord of Pisa from 1313 to 1316.82

On the right side of the fresco, under the monstrous figure of Death, are piled the bodies of the victims. Vasari describes them as dead “of every state and condition, poor, rich, crippled, well-formed, young, old, male, female; and in short, of every age and sex in good number”.83 Death turns to strike with his scythe also a merry band of young people seated in a garden and given over to worldly pleasures, music and cheerful conversation in a typically courtly setting. Around and above him, souls are being contested by angels and demons. The ancient chroniclers and Vasari point to the “young man of very fine aspect, with a blue hood around his head and a hawk in his hand” as the picture of Castruccio Castracani.84

Even though uncertain, this identification does have some basis. Castruccio, and before him Uguccione, had been mercenary war captains legitimated by the emperor to exercise their lordly power over Pisa. Memory of them must have been still quite vivid: the Pisans perceived them as elements extraneous to their political tradition, which had not yet known a seigniorial court like the one echoed in the way (between falconry and entertainment) the probable Castruccio appears in the fresco. In the 1330s, however, the city had returned to being governed by a mixed regime, between commune and seigniory, led by Bonifazio (Fazio Novello) of the counts of Donoratico, a family who played a leading role on the political scene of the city, but with connections to the most prominent mercantile and “popular” component as well.85

It is thus probable that, among its many meanings, the fresco aimed in some way to exorcise through the theme of the fleetingness of power the foreign seigniorial dominations that had not left behind them a positive memory in the city. An echo in this sense can be found once again in Villani’s chronicle where, still in book XII, he admonishes about the vanity of power, referring to the experience of Mastino della Scala:86 “And note, reader, how fortune works in the world, and even more in the processes of wars, which a short time earlier Messer Mastino who was in such great status and lordship […] and was a great and powerful tyrant, the greatest in all Italy or had been in one hundred years […] and soon before had threatened the Florentines to come visit them as far as the gates of Florence with 5,000 iron basinets, and had ordered a rich crown of gold and precious stones to be made, to have himself crowned king of Tuscany and Lombardy”. Notice the mirrored motif of the crown (present in Buffalmacco’s fresco) as a new attribute of lordly power, by this point perceived as tyrannical. Villani goes on: “And he would have done it, if it had not been that God’s judgment humiliated his pride, and the power of the commune of Florence and that of Venice, which rejected and brought to a loss of power

84 “Giovane di bellissimo aspetto, con un cappuccio azzurro avvolto intorno al capo e con uno spaviere in pugno”: Ibidem, p. 596.
86 Villani, Nuova cronica, r. LXXVII, pp. 165-167.
and a low state with their work and money [...] so that he had to pawn his crown and all his jewels to usurers in order to have the money to resist in his war”. The moral tone of Villani’s comment is right in line with the theme of the fragility and evanescence of all worldly power: “And yet no lord or tyrant or commune can trust in its own power, since every human power is vain and fleeting. And the almighty God of Hosts gives wins and losses to whomever he pleases according to merits and sins”.

Death, which in Buffalmacco’s painting floats like a monstrous figure, thus inexorably struck Castruccio too, revealing the ephemeral dimension of his lordship over Pisa. In the Camposanto frescoes, the public could see the past and present of life in their city. The social circulation of this message must have been boosted not only by direct vision (or reported by others) of the fresco but also, indirectly, by the notoriety and fame of both Castruccio and Buffalmacco, well testified in Tuscan novellas.

4. “So that no one passes along this way without any doubt about death”: Ambrogio Lorenzetti in Siena

Frugoni has shown how Death, winged and menacingly armed, closely recalls Timor in the fresco of the effects of Bad Government painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in that same span of years in Siena; this figure, too, flies armed with a sword, its hands and feet like hooks, its emaciated form barely covered with rags. The resemblance is striking also with the demon, a winged figure that flies over the countryside during famines, depicted in a miniature in the Specchio umano, better known as the Libro del Biadaiolo, by the Florentine Domenico Lenzi, a memoir with a moralizing intent (and, note too, written under Dominican influence), profoundly imbued with the sense of the precariousness of human fortunes that spread gloomily after the grave famine of 1329-1330 and recently dated to 1337 [see figure 2]. In any case, looking now at Siena, Timor was in all probability the first, frightening, image seen by those entering, through a door in the opposite wall, the room where the Council of Nine met in the Palazzo Pubblico, frescoed by Lorenzetti. 

87 “E nota, lettore, come adopera la fortuna nel secolo, e maggiormente ne’ processi delle guerre, che poco tempo dinanzi messere Mastino ch’era in tanto stato e signoria [...] ed era un grande e possente tiranno, il maggiore di tutta Italia o che fosse stato intra C anni [...]; e poco dinanzi minacciati avea i Fiorentini di veniri a vedere infino alle porte di Firenze con Vm barbute di ferro, e fatta fare una ricchissima corona d’oro e di pietre preziose per coronarsi re di Toscana e di Lombardia”; “e sarebbe venuto fatto, se non fosse il giudicio di Dio per aumiliare la sua superbia, e*lla potenza del Comune di Firenze e di quello di Vinegia, che ripugnaro e recaro a poca potenza e basso stato co*lloro operazione e danari [...], che convenne che *ngaggiasse a usura la sua corona e tutti i suoi gioelli per avere danari per resistere alla sua guerra”; “E però nullo signore o ti ranno o Comune si può fidare nella sua potenza, imperò che* ogni potenza umana è van a e fallace. E l’onnipotente Iddio Sabaot dà vinto e perduto a*ccui gli piace secondo i meriti e i peccati”: Ibidem.


89 Buffalmacco is the main character of the novelle VIII, 3, 6, 9 and IX, 3, 5 of Giovanni Boccaccio’s Decameron, and of the novelle CXXXVI, CLX, CLXIX, CXCI, CX XII of the Trecentonovelle by Franco Sacchetti. Castruccio is the protagonist of the novella V of the Trecentonovelle of Franco Sacchetti, and of the novelle XXXV and LXXI of Giovanni Sercambi’s Novelle.

90 “Unde per questa via non passa alcun senza dubbio di morte”.


As is well known, interpretation of the meanings of this extraordinary cycle of political iconography remains an open question, despite the constant exegesis of which it has long been the object.\textsuperscript{94} I mention only that the main debate is between those who maintain that the iconographical cycle is largely based on an adaptation of Thomist Aristotelian thought - such as, principally, Nicolai Rubinstein\textsuperscript{95} - and those who trace in it the rediscovery of republican values in the Latin sources made by the pre-humanist writers, like Quentin Skinner.\textsuperscript{96} Scholars agree on seeing it as an advanced example of political communication of eminently republican values, just as there is substantial convergence on identifying a dual admonition to the citizens of Siena: on the dangers of the degeneration of the communal regime towards tyranny, and on the servile conditions in which, it was felt, contemporary seigniorial regimes languished in other cities.\textsuperscript{97}

As in the case of the Pisan frescoes, those who have concerned themselves with dating and interpreting the cycle in Siena have up until now eluded the key question: why were the frescoes commissioned right between 1337 and 1338 and not, let's say, five years earlier or ten years later? This is not a trivial question. Crucial aid in answering it comes now from research done by Gabriella Piccinni on the very difficult economic and political situation in Siena in the 1330s, which has highlighted the dramatic credit crisis that broke out between 1336 and 1340 as a result of the definitive bankruptcy of the last great Sienese banking companies.\textsuperscript{98} The mercantile regime of the Nine had on various occasions from 1310 on, adopting a series of support measures, protected from failure the companies headed for the most part with the families with whom many members of the Nine had done business and were related by ties of kinship. At a certain point however, between 1338 and 1339, an intolerable juncture was reached: many banks were in bankruptcy as a result of the crisis of confidence which had struck the operators who had lent enormous sums to the king of England to finance the beginning of the long war with France - the same crisis which led to Villani's imprisonment and to which he had reacted by extolling the greatness of Florence; the public coffers were strangled by creditors; artisans could not get credit for their activities; and the merchants saw their business decline drastically. A petition submitted to the General Council of the Commune on 24 April 1339 by a group of bankers and merchants, and adopted by the Nine, went so far as to ask that imprisonment for debt to usurers be forbidden;\textsuperscript{99} the presenters of the proposal maintained that “the city and countryside of Siena are about to go under completely”\textsuperscript{100} and traced a dark picture of the situation, which contrasted with the image of a rich and solid society offered by the


\textsuperscript{96} Skinner, *Virtù rinascimentali*, pp. 53-153.


\textsuperscript{99} Because of the economic crisis in Siena, in 1340 the Nine decided to allow the practice of usury:
contemporary chronicles and the effects of Good Government which Lorenzetti was finishing painting in those very same days in the room of the palace adjacent to the one where the Council met.

It was thus at a delicate and dramatic juncture, which placed their political survival in jeopardy, that the Nine resolved to use, along with other instruments like reform of the statutes (which were revised right in 1337-1338, in the direction of full “sovereignty”), also the tool of propaganda to present themselves as the champions of wellbeing, security, and above all civic concord. It should be noted, too, that in the winter of 1335 the city had been invaded in the name of peace by the penitents led by Venturino da Bergamo on their way to Rome. Simmering under the portrayal of an age of “great peace and tranquility” in which “each one attended to his earnings […] and everyone loved each other as brothers”, in the words of the chronicler Agnolo di Tura del Grasso, and where the effects of good government were ideologically contrasted by Lorenzetti with those of bad government, were not only the tensions already noted (the conspiracies of 1318 and 1328, the riots over the famine of 1329, the accusations of tyranny leveled by the poet Bindo Bonichi, etc.), but also profound economic changes and wide political fissures. Duccio Balestracci has highlighted the divisions that undermined the regime, split between “a current favorable to the broadening of the social alliances” and “a majority, on the contrary, glued to power and not willing to share it with anybody”.

Lorenzetti received the commission for the frescoes in a situation of grave crisis for the regime of the Nine. This lends credence to the interpretation of a cycle of images dominated by anxiety and fear - in the midst of which looms a “melancholic” Pax, that is to say, threatened, “doubtful and always hanging in the balance”, mirroring the “city’s ‘dark illness’, tristizia [sadness], timor [fear]” - recently advanced by Pierangelo Schiera. Pax is shown reclining on a cushion under which a suit of armor is clearly visible, while her feet rest on a shield: this is a peace resting after winning a war and ready to take up arms again. The olive branch she holds in her hand confirms this: it is a symbol of peace but also of victory. Lorenzetti has painted an armed Pax, the result of military defeat of the enemy; not coincidentally, seated next to her is Fortitudo, holding a mace and shield, while at his feet mounted soldiers stand guard, closed in their armor, at the head of a troop of foot soldiers armed with pikes. It should be kept in mind that from the beginning, and for


100 "La città e ’l contado di Siena è per venire al tutto meno": Ibidem, p. 281.
104 “Grande pace e tranquillità”, “ognuno attendeva ai suoi guadagni […] e tutti s’amavano come fratelli”: Ibidem, p. 367.
106 D. Balestracci, “Quando Siena diventò guelfa. Il cambiamento di regime e l’affermazione dell’oligarchia novesea nella lettura di Giuseppe Martini”, in Fedeltá ghibellina, affari guelfi, p. 381.
109 In May 1260, after having conquered some castles owned by the Siennese Senesi, the Florentines planted “in su uno poggetto rilevato che si vedea dalla cittade ... [a] dispetto de’ Sanesi, e a ricordanza di vittoria, ripiena di terra, vi piantaron suso uno ulivo, il quale infino a’ nostri di ancora v’era”: Villani, Nuova cronica, I, VII, r. L.XXV, p. 371.
a long time, the room containing the frescoes was called the Peace Room. The frescoes themselves were known as Peace and War; the title of Good and Bad Government is a nineteenth-century invention.  

War could be the outcome of conflict with external enemies: on the right of the figure of the old man (representing the Commune, but also the Common Good), for example, a crowd of soldiers on foot and horseback, they too armed with pikes, escort a group of bound prisoners and two rural lords who kneel and offer the Commune towers and castles as a sign of submission; the virtues presiding over the scene are Magnanimitas, Temperantia and Iustitia; this last shown holding a sword and, as further warning, a severed head on her lap. But the outcome of internal conflict could also be peace: above all, it was always threatened by discord among the sects and its possible degeneration in an authoritarian and tyrannical direction, as was very clear also to Villani in those same years. This is the meaning of the scene on the Commune’s left, presided over by Prudentia, Fortitudo, and Pax. About Prudentia, suffice it to note that this virtue is the protagonist of the treatise on the management of civic conflict by Alberto da Brescia entitled Liber consolationis et consili, which, while written in the middle of the preceding century, was widely distributed and published in numerous vernacular editions also in the following ones.

We have already discussed the other two virtues. At their feet are lined up citizens who grasp a rope (which, inspired by Sapientia, falls from the plates of the scales held by Iustitia) twisted by Concordia and offer it to the Commune to emphasize the connection between the values of “justice” and the “common good.”

On one hand the rope ties up the prisoners, while on the other it binds the citizens to concord, Concordia (as is made explicit also in the “songs” that illustrate the frescoes). The rope is a bond, but also an instrument of power: a rope is used to drag Iustitia to the feet of Tyrannides in the Bad Government fresco, while on the opposite wall a criminal hangs by a rope from the scaffold which Securitas seraphically displays as she flies over the well-governed city. Thus Lorenzetti also uses this civic “bondage” to express the “melancholic” tone, the tristitia, which infuses the manifestations of power - a civic power here captured in all its uncertainty and in full awareness of its fragility, exposed to the threats of its enemies. Skinner has shown how the dancers in the Good Government fresco express the tripudium aimed at dispelling just this tristitia, symbolized by the worms

114 Following the false etymology diffused at the time, cum chorda instead of concors: cf. Ibidem, pp. 147-148.
116 Cf. Schiera, Il Buongoverno “melancolico”.
117 For along time they were believed to be female dancers. On the contrary, J. Bridgeman, “Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s dancing ‘maidsens’. A case of mistaken identity”, Apollo, 133 (1991), pp. 245-251, has shown that they are male dancers presumably some jesters.
and moths decorating their dresses: the gaudium of the dance, which is guaranteed by pax, struggles against the despondence (acidia) which leads man to death.\textsuperscript{118}

A great many other cues for analysis are offered by this outstanding “monument” of political iconography of the Italian communes, the work, as has been said, of a “doctus pictor”.\textsuperscript{119} It is one that, we should reiterate, should not be read as a theoretical treatise, as has sometimes been done by its exegetes, but as the “manifesto of a great Commune, conscious of the constant, impending possibility of subversion by powerful social groups”.\textsuperscript{120} I shall limit myself here to noting some other points of contact with the contemporary works by Villani and Buffalmacco. First of all, we should remember that above and below the frescoes run two friezes containing other figures and the “songs” written as explanation and commentary on the images in the central bands. Even though heavily damaged, they reveal a dual register.\textsuperscript{121} The allegory of \textit{Good Government} is framed at the bottom by figures of the Liberal Arts and above by pictures of the planets and seasons: Venus (under whose sign it was thought that Siena was founded\textsuperscript{122}), Spring, Mercury, Summer, and the Moon. Conversely, the allegory of \textit{Bad Government} is framed across the bottom by figures of ancient tyrants (the only one still visible is Nero in the act of falling on his sword), and above by the bare, destitute seasons (Fall and Winter), and especially by the planets (Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars) whose conjunction, we have seen, was interpreted by Villani as presaging adversity. Saturn in particular was associated with tyranny and timor in texts about astrology.\textsuperscript{123} Astrology, publicly called on by the Commune of Florence in 1333 to interpret the horrific calamities of that period, was thus cited as an explanation of the manifestations of tyrannical bad government in Siena in those same years.

An anguished sense of death and squalor runs through the whole wall of the \textit{Bad Government} fresco, which is dominated by two figures: Tyrannides, surrounded by the vices, and Timor, a horrid old woman dressed in rags with claws on her hands and feet, who recalls the figure of Death painted by Buffalmacco in Pisa. Floating through the air, Timor wields a sword and displays a large scroll which explains what can be seen in this part of the allegory: “Due to seeking one’s own good in this land/ Justice is subjugated to tyranny/ so that by this path/ no one may pass without doubting death/ because thievery goes on outside and inside the gates”.\textsuperscript{124} Fear is the great protagonist of this part of the fresco, paralyzing every form of civic life.\textsuperscript{125} In the city the houses are knocked down and set on fire, the streets blocked by rubble, violence and abuse of power are rampant everywhere,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{118} Skinner, \textit{Virtù rinascimentali}, pp. 141-152.
  \item \textsuperscript{119} Boucheron, \textit{“Tournez les yeux”}, p. 1143. M.M. Donato, “Dal “Comune rubato” di Giotto al “Comune sovrano” di Ambrogio Lorenzetti (con una proposta per la ‘canzone’ del Buon governo)”, in \textit{Medioevo: immagini e ideologie}, ed. by A.C. Quintavalle, Milan 2005, pp. 502-504, has proposed they were written by the Siennese poet Bindo di Cione del Frate.
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Donato, \textit{Ancora sulle fonti}, p. 72.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} “Per volere el ben proprio in questa terra / sommess’è la giustitia a tyrannia / unde per questa via / non passa alcun senza dubbio di morte / ché fuor si robba e dentro da le porte”: cf. Brugnolo, \textit{Le iscrizioni in volgare}, p. 385.
  \item \textsuperscript{125} Donato, \textit{Ancora sulle fonti}, cit., p. 69, sotto la scritta Timor dell’affresco senese traspare un precedente Pavor.
\end{itemize}
and no one is working except a blacksmith who is making weapons, instruments of death. In the parched, desolate countryside as well, the few people who are out and about are intent only on destroying the harvests and burning the houses and villages.

Right across from Timor, on the opposite wall, is Securitas: the contrast between them is a recurrent theme in moral and pedagogical treatises starting in the preceding century, from *Moralium dogma philosophorum* (attributed to Guillaume De Conches) to *Summa virtutum ac vitiorum* by the Dominican Guillaume Peyrat and Brunetto Latini’s *Tesor* (where Timor becomes Paor). Thomas Aquinas, in particular, had reflected on timor as a complex phenomenon, natural and intellectual at the same time, an inescapable Christian emotion. Lorenzetti, too, faces this combat between emotions, opposing to the old woman embodying Timor the figure of a young winged woman with her bosom bared (the symbol of prosperity, mirrored by the abundance of the harvests in the countryside over which she floats), holding not a sword which sows violence and death but an admonitory scaffold. Securitas, the only virtue pictured on the wall, presides over the allegory of *Good Government*. The scroll she holds in her other hand opposes to the doubt about death unleashed by Timor the fearless certainty of punishment: “Without fear every man may travel freely and each may till and sow, so long as this commune shall maintain this lady as sovereign, for she has stripped the wicked of all power”. The warning is clear: any violence, any disorder, any revolt will be repressed firmly. It is no coincidence that the figure of Pax recalls that of Securitas as it is depicted on Roman coins. The guarantee of peace and the resulting good government can only be certainty of punishment, the outcome of a repressive justice used as the instrument of choice for dealing with the insecurity and anguish of a “melancholic” power.

Another chronological correspondence notable in this span of time, which reveals the deep sense of disquiet racking Italian urban society, was the appearance in Florence between 1334 and 1336 of the first images of Justice holding a sword. Mario Sbriccoli sees in the panels by Andrea Pisano on the cathedral bell tower and the south doors of the baptistery [see figures 3 and 4] the sign of a break with the iconographical tradition which corresponds with the contemporary rise, in the governing regimes of Italian cities, of a “hegemonic” type of justice, founded on punishment, on the principle of obedience to the law and a repressive type of political action. Just a few short years later Lorenzetti would depict Justice holding a sword (and with a severed head on her lap) as a political virtue tied to the action of the Commune.

Looking closely, then, the frescoes in Siena, more than a conciliatory celebration of the triumph of Republican values, appear as the expression of the crisis of the experience of being a commune, the anguished, and by this point almost anachronistic, ideological

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manifesto of a political season now on the wane. The “song” that accompanies the images, addressed to the governors (“you who rule”) made its intent explicit, warning that “where there is tyranny there is great suspicion,/ wars, robberies, betrayals, deceit”, and urges those who read it to put their “mind and intellect/ to each person keeping justice always in mind/ to ward off such dark damage,/ destroying the tyrants”. The danger of tyranny was the major concern motivating the Nine to commission the fresco cycle, and this is the same worry that we have see emerging in those same years also in Villani’s historical memoir and Buffalmacco’s macabre iconography. There are those who have gone so far as to hypothesize that the Bad Government fresco depicts Pisa, Siena’s “tyrannical” rival for control of the Maremma area in that period. In reality, the antithesis was not between two forms of power - the commune and the signoria - but between two ways of governing, two ideal models, one oriented towards the common good, the other towards tyranny. A more plausible hypothesis was advanced by Patrick Boucheron, who says that the centrality given to peace in the Siena frescoes was part of a “battle of images” which was becoming popular in those years between communal and seigniorial regimes precisely on this theme, with even the latter increasingly claiming it as a civic value.

5. Which “sweet life”?
The three “monuments” which I have examined here belong to different cultural contexts, each having its own tradition, which shape their literary and artistic expressions in specific and characteristic ways: the mercantile environment and the writing of an urban memoir in a perspective of universal history in Villani’s Chronicle; the religious sphere, the theological culture of the Dominicans, and Gothic expressionism in Buffalmacco’s paintings; and the political sphere, the pre-humanist secular culture (the approach taken to city life bears witness to the triumph of earthly values that are not measured against the backdrop of eternity), and figurative realism in Lorenzetti’s frescoes. Nonetheless, the three texts express - to my mind - a common language of anguish, a feeling of great worry, of insecurity, of foreboding regarding dangers perceived as real or potential. The levels of reading remain multiple. There can be no doubt that in the course of the 1330s the principal cities of Tuscany began to develop a sense of anguish in the face of the proliferation of seigniorial powers which had already emerged sometime earlier in the rest of Italy. Villani mentions, once again in book XII, the expansion in those years of the dominion of the Tarlati family of Arezzo over Città di Castello, Borgo San Sepolcro, and Massa Trabaria, the establishment of Batino Abati’s hegemony over Grosseto, and of Belforti’s over Volterra, reporting with manifest pleasure the expulsion of the Monaldeschi from Orvieto and the return of “popular” regimes in many cities and lands of the Marches. Siena and Florence were by now among the very few Italian cities which still

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134 As evidenced in Rubinstein, Le allegorie, pp. 357-364; e Donato, Il pittore del Buon Governo, pp. 247-249.
137 The Siennese cicle is without religious references, except the bell tower and the Dome on the right of the Allegory of the Good Government, as noticed by Frugoni, Una lontana città, p. 170.
138 Cf. Villani, Nuova cronica, III, rr. XXV, XXXIV, CXVI, LXXV, CVII, respectively, pp. 70-71, 81-82.
had a republican government, along with Venice and, for a short time still, Perugia. Pisa was governed by a “hybrid” regime - “popular” and seigniorial - as we have seen; Lucca was a subject of signori from outside the city; Bologna and Genoa had seen Taddeo Pepoli and Simone Boccanegra take power right between 1337 and 1339. All the other cities, from Milan to Padua, Verona to Piacenza, were solidly in the hands of seigniorial regimes.139

The sense of isolation was accentuated also by the “mutation” in the nature of seigniorial powers that was taking place during that period, and that right in the 1330s made manifest the irreversibility of phenomena that had long been a full and consistent part of the communal experience, beginning with the real consensus enjoyed by many signori because of their ability to act for the common good of the civitas. The seigniorial powers were not only taking on a dynastic nature, but also they were revealing their tyrannical side, due to the growing distance in the relationship between the signore and the community of citizens and in the ability of the rulers to interpret the community’s interests and aspirations.140

Hence the feeling of anguish which all three works endeavored to interpret. But if the reading remained on just this one level, we would not perceive the deeper disquiet, the widespread fear about the impending presence of death - the “doubt of death” to use the words from Timor’s scroll in Siena - which all the texts mentioned (and probably many more, if we expanded the reach of our investigation) make palpable, and which must have corresponded to the spread of a feeling that the people of that time sensed as a strong break with earlier generations. The “sweet life”141 portrayed by Lorenzetti in the well-governed city, the wealth and power celebrated by Giovanni Villani during a time of war, and the courtly entertainment pictured by Buffalmacco, appear at bottom almost to be apotropaic devices to ward off the dismay and gloom of the new, changing times.

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229-230, 164 and 217.


141 To quote the memorable “canzone” admonishing ammoniva “vo’ che reggiete”: cf. Brugnolo, Le iscrizioni in volgare, p. 385.
03. Zorzi - Figures

- Fig. 1 - Bernardo Daddi, *Double Sided Cross* (recto), 1335-1340(?), particular (Milan, Museo Poldi Pezzoli).

- Fig. 2 - Anonymous, *Wheat Harvest During Starvation*, 1337(?), Miniature in Domenico Lenzi, *Specchio umano*, (Florence, Biblioteca Mediceo-Laurenziana, Laurenziano Tempiano 3, c. 78v).

- Fig. 3 - Andrea Pisano, *Justice*, 1334 (Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo).

- Fig. 4 - Andrea Pisano, *Iustitia*, 1336 (Florence, Battistero di San Giovanni, South Door).

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