

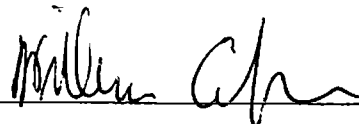
Transition to the Renaissance:
Republican Values and Ideals in Florence and Siena, 1300-1500

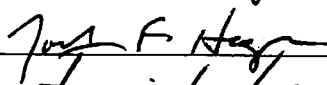
By

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On the basis of this thesis and of
The written and oral examinations
Taken by the candidate on
~~4/14/06~~ and on ~~5/1/06~~
we, the undersigned, recommend
that the candidate be awarded
~~Honors~~ in History.





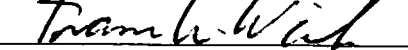


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Introduction

By the close of the fourteenth century, Siena, once an expanding medieval Italian commune, was declining almost as quickly as she had risen. Once a bright and shining star, Siena was once home to some of Europe's preeminent banking families, merchants, artists and papal financiers as well as a major stop for tradesmen and pilgrims from all over Europe on their way to or from Rome. By the end of the fifteenth century, all that remained of this productive period were works of art commissioned for public buildings, such as frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti in the *Palazzo Pubblico*, an incomplete cathedral (intended to be Europe's largest) and the memories of what had, briefly, been an apex of success, a "Golden Age" in which Siennese grandeur and power were insurmountable. In contrast, Florence's success gained momentum alongside Siena's decline. Thereafter, despite a few brief setbacks, often due to outbreaks of pestilence, Florentine's reached new heights in every field: in international banking, trade, cloth manufacture and painting. Florence was indeed a force to be reckoned with, and one with whom Siena held a long-standing rivalry.

As cities whose paths were quite similar, who each faced comparable internal and external challenges and circumstances, whose histories were thus interwoven and, in some places, inseparable, the question that remains is, how did this divergence occur? How did Florence move so quickly and relentlessly forward, while Siena regressed just as rapidly as she had risen? This is a complicated question and one with which historians have long grappled.

This thesis seeks to compare these once similar cities in a period of great transition. The movement from medieval to Renaissance eras brought about significant

social, cultural and political changes that definitively set Florence and Siena apart. Though the exact dates of this transition are not universally agreed upon, for the purposes of this paper. Renaissance ideas and values began to emerge in the latter part of the fourteenth century and continued to develop throughout the fifteenth century.¹ It was in this period that Siena's development more or less stagnated, while Florence's prosperity continued to grow exponentially. Florence was in every sense, the epicenter of Renaissance thought, values, culture and politics. Civic humanism fundamentally transformed the way in which Florentines viewed individual abilities and ideals concerning republican governance. Siena, in contrast, continued to promote medieval socio-political values and principles. However, the histories of Florence and Siena are not necessarily one of success versus one of failure. Rather, Florentine success was exceptional; her achievements the result of many forces, not the least of which were her citizens, who looked to the future and embraced its new ideals and principles. In contrast, Siena did not "fail," but instead was content to spend its future focused on the values of its past.

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It was during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that Florence grew into the jewel we know today. Florentines were renowned international merchants and bankers who held close ties with both the papacy and Angevin Kingdom. Florence developed a woolen cloth industry that quickly surpassed that of Flanders, growing into preeminence

¹ This transition, from medieval to renaissance eras, has been of great interest to scholars. The literature explores a variety of "start/end dates" for both periods, and varies on the rapidity of the transformation. See, for example, Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny, Volume I*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978. Quentin Skinner *Visions of Politics: Volume II Renaissance Virtues* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004 and John M. Najemy "Introduction: Italy and the Renaissance." *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance 1300-1550*, ed. John M. Najemy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

in European and Asiatic markets. Florentine businessmen were involved in a variety of industries, diversifying their entrepreneurial interests to maximize profits. Tenacious and industrious merchants kept the Florentine economy from stagnating despite numerous setbacks, company failures and bankruptcies; their “competitive spirit and desire for profit...[could] not [be] quenched by adversity.” This increased wealth caused a period of great construction; the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, Orsanmichele, the Ponte Vecchio, Santa Maria Novella, Santa Croce, to name a few, were all completed during this time. Building changed the face of the city, replacing antiquated, medieval towers, making the city more orderly, and in the process creating a new architecture. The “rediscovery” of classical authors and artists also revived the city, challenging ways of thought and intellectual activity. Importantly, civic humanism grew out of these scholarly pursuits. Despite this great progress, however, Florence was not immune to the problems that plagued city-states throughout the peninsula. Internal factions disrupted civic order, while external warfare necessitated the increased reliance upon mercenaries.²

Siena, in contrast, was more representative of city-states throughout the peninsula in that there was no great explosion of humanism, no rapid transition from medieval to Renaissance values and beliefs. Indeed, by the fifteenth century, Siena was rapidly losing the prominence she had so recently gained. Unlike Florence, Siena’s hilly location hindered industrial processes, such as cloth manufacture; consequently, she had no natural industry to fall back on as Florence began to control banking and trade. Siennese business depended a great deal upon the *Via Francigena* (the road that connected Rome and France; Siena was a major hub through which this highway passed); however, this

² Brucker. *Renaissance Florence*, New York: Robert E. Krieger Publishing, 1975.
Pg. 36-58

often became disrupted by warfare and bandits, necessitating the increased use of alternate routes.³ Siena's economy was not only weakened by the change in traffic, company failures and bankruptcies had serious repercussions throughout the city. In 1314 alone, three of the major banking companies went bankrupt: the Great Table of the Bonsignori, the Tolomei and Malavolti companies.⁴ Consequently, banking and trade became unstable and those who acquired wealth invested in that which had always been valuable: land.⁵ However, historian Guiliano Pinto contends, "investments in landed property in the countryside...were not intended to diversify sources of wealth, nor to create a balance among different economic activities, but were means of legitimizing rapid social advance and of consolidating the power of individual clans (*consorterie*)..."⁶ Unlike the Florentines, the Sienese were not innovators, but were content with their medieval values and rituals. New ideas concerning philosophy, literature, and art, did not begin circulating quickly in Siena, nor is it evident that these new humanist ideas had an influence upon the citizenry.

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Despite the obvious parallels between these cities, historians have always studied them as separate entities.⁷ Scholars have looked at Sienese decline without serious

³ Daniel Waley, *Siena and the Sienese in the thirteenth century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Pg. 4

⁴ William Bowsky, *A Medieval Italian Commune: Siena under the Nine, 1287-1355*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981. Pg. 63

⁵ David Hicks, "Sienese Society and the Renaissance," "Sienese Society in the Renaissance," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. Vol. 2. No. 4 (Jul., 1960), 412-420.

⁶ Guiliano Pinto, "'Honour' and 'Profit': Landed Property and Trade in Medieval Siena," *City and Countryside in Late Medieval & Renaissance Italy*, ed. Trevor Dean and Chris Wickham, London: The Hambledon Press, 1990. Pg. 86

⁷ In general, the historical literature is either specific to an individual city-republic or generalizes the experience of the late medieval city-state, emphasizing a particular time period or aspect of culture or politics. See, for example, Lauro Martines ed., *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200-1500*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972. Also, J.K. Hyde, *Society and Politics in Medieval Italy*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973; P.J. Jones, "Communes and Despots: The City State in Late-Medieval

reference to Florence's accomplishments. In contrast, the literature surrounding Florence often takes her superiority for granted, never directly addressing her great success. Instead, it is simply assumed that the Arno city's transition from medieval to Renaissance is representative of all contemporaneous city-republics. Consequently, the literature is somewhat biased in that it seems to infer the Florentine experience dictated how "Renaissance states" would emerge throughout the peninsula.

Florentine success was the result of a unique convergence of forces that produced a climate in which the city thrived. Thus, its achievements cannot be reduced to a single characteristic. A multitude of factors have been identified in the secondary literature as contributing to Florence's rise, including economy, demography, geography and even good fortune. For instance, Marvin Becker argues an economic angle as causal to Florence's transition from medieval to Renaissance. Persistent warfare and a growing funded debt, he contends, lead to an increased "search for revenue [which] led to the integration of Florentine territory and the rise of empire, and a strenuous program of mercantilism." In the creation of this *territorial state* a "cohesive aristocracy" developed in which communal finance, diplomacy and conduct in war became top priority. Ultimately, Becker asserts that the emergence of the Renaissance Florentine state was "an inadvertent by-product of the assertion of rights by the *novi cives* [citizens new to Florentine high offices] and the exigencies of mounting public debt."⁸

Italy." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, May 1964; David Abulafia, *Italy in the Central Middle Ages 1000-1300*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; John M. Najemy, *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance 1300-1500*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Specific examples include: William M. Bowsky, *A Medieval Italian Commune: Siena Under the nine, 1287-1355*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981; Gene A. Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, New York: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1975; Nicolai Rubinstein ed., *Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968. See bibliography for further examples.

⁸ Marvin Becker, *Florence in Transition, Volume One: The Decline of the Commune*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967. Pg. 4, 231

Gene Brucker takes a different perspective, arguing instead that the basis for this transition lay in “the transformation of the forms of association that underlay politics.” A shifting social order affected change, moving Florence from a medieval commune to a Renaissance republic. Brucker asserts that Florentine politics after 1378 reflected a “community’s efforts to sustain a polity that was firmly anchored in the past, institutionally and psychologically, but that could adapt to changes in social and economic order, as well as to discrete events.” It was not the institutions that changed, nor even the social groups who governed (though they did “wield power differently”); rather, Florentine politics became elitist rather than corporate. The state, once governed in accordance with corporate interests, was led in the Renaissance by a skilled group of professional statesmen.⁹

A more interesting line of discussion associated with Florence’s transformation into a “Renaissance state” has centered upon the ideas and values surrounding the significant cultural and political changes that accompanied humanism. Florentines embraced the new ideas and values of civic humanism and engaged in a political discourse that definitively set Florence and Siena apart. Indeed, Florentine achievement would not have been possible without the forward thinking citizens who embraced new humanistic ideas and conceptions regarding individual virtues and political principles. Siena, in comparison, represented a city uninfluenced by new modes of thought. A political discourse did not evolve inside the Sienese walls, and the people were content to be ruled by traditions of the past, despite their weaknesses. It was not only that Siena did

⁹ Gene Brucker, *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 197. Pg. 11

not embrace new principles, it was that she did not seem to desire to. Rather, Siena was content to allow the past to become her future.

The historiography surrounding Renaissance Florence has focused upon the emergence of civic humanism and its cultural and political implications. Hans Baron's *Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* argues that external forces, in the form of the Visconti duke, acted as a catalyst for change in Florence. Baron views this period, immediately following the war with Milan, as an essential turning point in which Renaissance values were clearly articulated for the first time. This "crisis" forced a period of rapid change in which political values were reexamined in order to assure republican liberty. In his *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Quentin Skinner asserts that Renaissance values gradually evolved. This progression of ideas stressed continuity with the past rather than the emergence of a new political ideology. Liberty, Skinner contends, continued to play a central role in both medieval and Renaissance political theories. However, it is the ideas surrounding its preservation that most fundamentally changed.¹⁰

The literature surrounding Siena in the fifteenth century centers on her "failure." Historians that have studied Sienese decline most often attribute it to three causes: a weakened economy, a return to traditional values, or factionalism. David Hicks views the economy as the main source of Sienese stagnation. In his article, "Sieneese Society and the Renaissance," he contends that a weakened economy caused a return to land as a principle source of income. This change in economy effected class structure as members of all classes began to focus their economic interests outside the city walls. Because of the change in investment, party membership no longer indicated occupation or social

¹⁰ Baron, 11-37; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: Volume 1 The Renaissance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. Pg. 75

standing. Consequently, although the government was made up of members of all five parties, they were all aristocrats. By the end of the fifteenth century, the government was no longer a coalition representative of diverse viewpoints, but had declined again into an aristocracy.¹¹

Ultimately, however, Hicks does not see Siena as a “failure.” A later article, “The Sienese State in the Renaissance,” argues that Siena eventually became a modern territorial state like that of Florence. Due to an economy in crisis, and the frequent invasion and occupation of mercenary companies, an “effective government came partly as a response to necessity and partly through simple evolution.”¹² His most recent article, “Sources of Wealth in Renaissance Siena: Businessmen and Landowners,” further asserts that the Sienese maintained traditional values and a traditional outlook because “the Sienese had a deep pride in themselves, and rather than try to be a smaller and poorer version of the great Arno city, or a kind of economic and cultural satellite as Pisa had become, they cultivated their own special qualities.”¹³ Thus, the Sienese did not “return to traditional values,” but rather, they “maintained traditional values.” This was particularly true with regards to land, which had always been associated with status and prestige as well as an important basis for the Sienese economy.¹⁴ However, it does not appear likely that the Sienese actively chose traditional values as a way in which to differentiate themselves from Florence.

¹¹ Hicks, “Sienese Society and the Renaissance,” 417-420

¹² David Hicks, “The Sienese State in the Renaissance,” *From the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation: Essays in Honour of Garrett Mattingly*, ed. Charles H. Carter, London: Jonathan Cape, 1966. Pg. 77-81

¹³ David Hicks, “Sources of Wealth in Renaissance Siena: Businessmen and Landowners,” *Bullettino senese di storia patria*. Vol. 93, (1986), 9-42. Pg. 90

¹⁴ *ibid.* 24

Historian Guiliano Pinto focuses on Siena's values in the context of her decline. In his article, "'Honour' and 'Profit': Landed Property and Trade in Medieval Siena," Pinto asserts that Siena, like Florence, began to move toward modern values associated with banking and trade. However, this progress was suddenly interrupted, giving way "to a brisk aristocratisation of society and to a recovery of traditional values." In essence, this regression of ideals, civic values, and desire for honor as associated with property, undermined the mercantile interests and caused a decline in trade and economic expansion. Pinto contends that as Siennese businessmen became successful, they quickly invested their money in land as a "means of legitimizing a rapid social advance" and as a consequence a "mercantile culture failed to establish deep roots."¹⁵

Historian Judith Hook promotes the third explanation of Siennese decline—factionalism. Her article, "Siena and the Renaissance State" asserts that the endemic partisanships of the Siennese state produced an extreme situation in which the civic authorities had no power or influence and no citizens were safe.¹⁶ The constant strife and the government's vacillation between parties created a political vacuum, which eventually led to the loss of Siennese independence. As if civic discord was a problem unique to Siena, historians nearly always mention the enmities rampant within the city as the foremost cause of her decline.¹⁷ In fact, quite the contrary was true: infighting and

¹⁵ Pinto, 87-90

¹⁶ Judith Hook, "Siena and the Renaissance State," *Bullettino senese di storia patria*, Vol. 77, (1980), pg. 107-122. Pg. 107

¹⁷ Hicks, "The Siennese State in the Renaissance;" Valerie Wainwright, "Conflict and Popular Government in Fourteenth Century Siena: Il Monte dei Dodici," *I ceti dirigenti nella Toscana tardo comunale: atti del III convegno*, Firenze, 5-7 dicembre 1980, (1983).

conflicts between parties was common throughout the Italian city-republics and Florence was no exception.¹⁸

Though factionalism seems to be overemphasized in Siena, it is nonetheless a stressor common to both cities, which can be used as a point of comparison to better understand the divergence that occurred between these city-republics. Factionalism did not cause Siennese decline. However, contemporary views regarding civic discord in Siena indicate a medieval value structure that equated factionalism directly with tyranny. In contrast, liberty was associated with the preservation of the common good and communal security. By the fifteenth century Renaissance standards, such views could only be described as antiquated. Further, it implies that partisanship in Siena, though detrimental, was likely symptomatic of greater problems within the commune, particularly in its value structure. Florence, in contrast, had evolved a much more complex political discourse in which factionalism did not pose the greatest threat to liberty, nor was it preserved by civic harmony and virtues. Instead, a growing civic humanism placed a greater emphasis on the importance of individual industriousness and virtue as well as a distinct civic patriotism.¹⁹

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Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries scholasticism guided political beliefs in Florence and Siena. Historian Quentin Skinner describes scholasticism as “the fundamental political commitment...to an ideal of political independence and republican

¹⁸ See: Lauro Martines, ed., *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200-1500*; John Najemy, ed., *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance, 1300-1500*; P.J. Jones, “Communes and Despots: The City State in Late-Medieval Italy;” Gene Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*.

¹⁹ Skinner, *Foundations*, 73-4, 80, 82

self-government.”²⁰ Liberty, in short, serves as the basis of political thought, while “the attainment of peace and concord. *pax et concordia*, represents the highest value in political life.”²¹ Indeed, historian Nicolai Rubinstein describes good government in the Italian city-republics “as being able to secure civic peace and unity without recourse to despotism.”²² Further, scholastic theorists believed that just as a direct relationship existed between tranquility and good government, a relationship existed between civil discord and tyranny, the primary threat to liberty.²³ Such views were representative of all republican communal governments at that time.

By the fifteenth century political values began to change shape, particularly in Florence, which would come to embody Renaissance principles. The importance of liberty continued to be emphasized as territorial states began to emerge, conquering smaller cities and towns throughout the Tuscan and Lombard countryside.²⁴ The dichotomy of liberty and tyranny also remained a central premise in Florentine Renaissance political discourse and encouraged a strong and distinct patriotism. Skinner writes, “the prevalence of faction had caused earlier theorists to feel that any blinkered pursuit of one’s own individual interest will be certain to be inimical to the maintenance of the common good.” However, with the changing perceptions of wealth and trade, humanist theorists promoted individual virtues as a way to attain the common good. Furthermore, where factions previously posed the greatest threat to liberty, humanist

²⁰ Skinner, *Foundations*, 53

²¹ *ibid.*, 56

²² Nicolai Rubinstein, “Political Ideas in Sieneese Art: The Frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti and Taddeo Di Bartolo in the Palazzo Pubblico,” *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 21, No. 34 (Jul.-Dec., 1958). Pg. 184

²³ Skinner, 56-7

²⁴ See Marvin Becker, *Florentine Essays: Selected Writings of Marvin B. Becker*, collected by James Banker and Carol Lansing, Ann Arbor: University Michigan, 2002., for the emergence of the “Florentine Territorial State.”

theorists proposed mercenaries and a lack of patriotism as the greatest dangers to Florentine freedoms. The nature of “good government” and the common good changed to better reflect a society in which virtuous individuals supported the commonweal, instead of a willing and unanimous citizenry.²⁵

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Florence is often taken as the paradigm with which all Italian Renaissance cities should be compared. Historians often indirectly focus on Florentine achievements making them appear as if standard, or at the very least, representative of Italian city-states during this period. Smaller, more characteristic cities, such as Siena, are therefore neglected or sidelined as failures that “once had potential.” It may in fact be best to reexamine this distinction, to consider Florence as the exception rather than the rule. Siena, like most city-republics, did not rapidly evolve: she did not readily embrace the developing Renaissance intellectual or cultural ideals, nor did she incorporate new political values. This is not to imply that the Renaissance did not actually occur in the majority of Italian city-republics, but rather to suggest that it emerged slowly and, often, incompletely in most states. Florence was the innovator, the city whose citizens were willing to develop and integrate emerging humanist principles into its civic structure. “Although policy was usually formulated within the context of the city’s republican...traditions, it was always subject to the changing light of new experience or particularly circumstances.”²⁶ It was this flexibility and willingness to integrate old and new which created a stronger and more resilient administration. Florence was a territorial state better able to respond to the unique and changing needs of its citizens. Furthermore,

²⁵ Skinner, *Foundations*, 74

²⁶ Brucker, *Renaissance Florence*, 256

the Florentine people, industrious, hard working and above all virtuous and educated, ensured its success and security. Where Siena appeared to stagnate under the weight of old ideals and traditional values, Florentines embraced a new patriotism and civic identity that allowed their city to flourish and become a place of great acclaim.

Chapter 1: 'Buon Governo': Ideals of Government in the Medieval Italian City-State

The Italian city-republics developed out of a strong and unyielding desire for liberty: "liberty in the double sense of elective government and independence from foreign domination."¹ It is, therefore, unsurprising that the governments of the newly-founded city-states sought to promote values that would provide security and safe-guard their hard-won freedoms. As a result of similar internal and external stressors faced by the independent republics, parallel goals and analogous governmental values developed among these cities.² Of these, the ideals of *Buon Governo* (Good Government), the principles of justice, liberty and the preservation of the common good, stand out as central and traditional elements of government administration in the late medieval period. These goals had long been a part of the republican city-state tradition and continued to evolve to become central elements of governance in the thirteenth century.³ In the maintenance of good government, six civic virtues were stressed: peace, fortitude, prudence, magnanimity, temperance and justice, as well as the theological virtues of charity, faith and hope. These virtues created the foundation for the "Common Good,"

¹ P.J. Jones, "Communes and Despots: The City State in Late-Medieval Italy," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Pg. 73; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: Volume 1: The Renaissance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, Pg. 7; Hans Baron, *Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Volume 1*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955, Pg. 53

² See: J.K. Hyde "Faction and Civil Strife in Italy," *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200-1500*, ed. Lauro Martines, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972; David Herlihy, "Some Psychological and Social Roots of Violence in The Tuscan Cities," *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200-1500*, ed. Lauro Martines, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972; William Bowsky, "The Buon Governo of Siena (1287-1355): A Medieval Italian Oligarchy," *Speculum*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Jul., 1962), 368-381.; William Bowsky "The Constitution and Administration of a Tuscan Republic in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance, The 'Maggio Sindaco' in Siena," *Studi Senesi*, Vol. 80, 1968, 7-22., William Bowsky, "The Medieval Commune and Internal Violence: Police Power and Public Safety in Siena, 1287-1355," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (Oct., 1967), 1-17.

³ See Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*; John Najemy, "Governments and Governance," *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance: 1300-1550*, edited by John Najemy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.; Hans Baron, *Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny, Volume 1*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978.

and thus, good government. Additionally, the civic harmony created through these virtues was believed to be the main deterrent against factionalism, which the scholastic writers recognized as the most dangerous weakness to a vulnerable system of government.⁴

Primarily a civic construct, the “Common Good” required the citizenry to set aside “personal and sectional interests,” and equate personal wellbeing with that of the city as a whole.⁵ Thus, in combination with justice and liberty, the common good provided the basis on which a strong republican government could be built and allow a city to thrive.

Though central to the administration and wellbeing of the commune, the principles of good government were not clearly documented.⁶ Indeed, intrinsic ideals inherent to civic constructs were difficult to convey. Thus, they have most commonly been inferred piecemeal through a variety of disjointed primary source materials. Further, values, as well as sources of civil strife are usually only indirectly discussed in these contemporary works.⁷ The greatest exception, however, is the cycle of frescoes in Siena known collectively as *The Good and Bad Government*. These frescoes, by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, were an exhaustive representation of good government and its benefits upon both city and countryside, as well as the disastrous ramifications of bad government. They represent the greater values inherent to Italian city-states of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as well as directives on how to achieve them.

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The frescoes of the *Sala dei Nove* in Siena’s *Palazzo Pubblico* were commissioned to Ambrogio Lorenzetti in 1337. Literally translated “the Room of the Nine,” the *Sala dei Nove*, held special importance in the Siennese government because it

⁴ Skinner, *Foundations*, 56

⁵ Skinner, *Foundations*, 44; Hyde, 300

⁶ Hyde, 304

⁷ Hyde, 278-9

was the meeting place of the nine magistrates that formed the main committee of the Siene administration at this time. The *Sala dei Nove* would have been the room in which governmental decisions were made, and consequently would have been open only to members of the government. Beyond records indicating Lorenzetti's payment in 1337 and 1340, there are no surviving records of his commission.⁸ Consequently, its direct intentions are not known per se; however, the Lorenzetti mural scheme must be taken in its context as an act of secular, civic and public patronage.⁹ The frescoes were to be seen in the context of public administration—to be seen by those governing in the process of governing: Indeed, Siene historian William Bowsky asserts that if the Nine chose to have the cycle painted “for their own pleasure and constant edification...[than] the choice [is] crucially significant for understanding the oligarchy's own conceptions of its duties and its role in the life of the commune.”¹⁰

The frescoes occupy the three large walls of the room, a window the fourth. Standing away from the window, *The Bad Government and City* occupies the undivided left (West) wall, while *The Good Government* prominently occupies the center (North) wall, *The Good City* the right (East) wall. The frescoes themselves are commanding, their vibrant colors and sheer size dictate the viewer's experience of the space. Such a commanding presence would have been impossible to disregard, something that appears quite intentional both from the frescoes dimensions and its subject matter.

Buon Governo (The Good Government), often described as *The Allegory of Good Government*, represents a series of figures, identified by their Latin inscriptions and

⁸ Diane Norman, *Siena, Florence and Padua: Art, Society and Religion 1280-1400*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995. Pg. 145

⁹ Norman, 147

¹⁰ Bowsky, *A Medieval Italian Commune: Siena Under the Nine, 1287-1355*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981. Pg. 288

corresponding symbols (*Figure 1*). At the far left appears Justice (*Iustitia*) above whom appears Wisdom (*Sapientia*) who holds the scales, which Justice must balance. Dante, writing his *Monarchy* during this period, describes justice:

...it must be understood that justice, considered in itself and in its own nature, is a kind of rectitude or rule which spurns deviation from the straight path to either side; and thus it does not admit of a more and a less—just like whiteness considered in the abstract.¹¹

Dante considers justice an abstract force until it is enacted, a force, which is strongest when it acts unopposed.¹² Justice may be impeded by disposition and action, “since [it] is a virtue that operates in relations to other people.”¹³ Consequently, justice is obstructed by self-serving greed and desire for power. Two angelic figures attend to the personification of Justice. The first, identified as Distributive Justice (*Distributiva*), is the force that guarantees each man his rights: this form of justice was held in high esteem in medieval Tuscany.¹⁴ Here, Distributive Justice is depicted beheading a kneeling figure, while holding a crown above the head of another figure clutching a palm.¹⁵ The second angelic figure, Commutative Justice, which punished the criminal and rewarded the virtuous, is shown giving a cylindrical object and two shaft-like objects to two kneeling figures.¹⁶ Together, these figures assist the greater allegorical figure. In theory these figures indicate an equality of justice among all Sieneese citizens, that each will be punished accordingly for their crimes. However, in actuality, distinctions were often made and preferential treatment given depending upon the wealth and importance of the accused. (whether these men were *boni homines* or ‘good men’). (Bowsky, “The

¹¹ Dante Alighieri, *Monarchy*, translated and edited Prue Shaw, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pg. 16

¹² Dante, 116

¹³ Dante, 16-7

¹⁴ Judith Hook, “Siena and the Renaissance State.” *Bullettino senese di storia patria*, Vol. 77, (1980), pg. 107-122. Pg. 110

¹⁵ Norman, 147

¹⁶ Hook, 110; Norman, 147; these objects are difficult to identify because of the fresco’s poor condition.

Medieval Commune and Internal Violence: Police Power and Public Safety in Siena, 1287-1355." 3)

From Justice's scales run two cords, which come together in the seated figure of Concord (*Concordia*), seated directly below. Concord holds a prominent position because of her importance in the administration of good government. It was widely acknowledged that the greatest danger to civic liberty, to all city-republics was continuous civic strife and a lack of internal peace.¹⁷ Indeed, Skinner asserts,

By the end of the thirteenth century most of the cities became so riven with internal factions that they found themselves forced to abandon their Republican constitutions, to accept the strong rule of a single *signore* and to make the move from a free to a despotic form of government in the name of attaining greater civic peace.¹⁸

In fact, by 1300, much of Lombardy, Emilia and Venetia, as well as Romagna, were already under despotic rule.¹⁹ It is clear, from this iconography, that the Sieneese were keenly aware of these dangers, as one of a dwindling number of republics, and consequently attempted to safeguard their freedoms by stressing civic peace and concord. Concord carries a carpenter's plane, and is shown handing the twined cords to a group of twenty-four men who form an orderly procession connecting both the composition and the cord to a larger seated male figure to the right of the picture plane. It is to this man that their attention is turned. Because of their dignified dress it is hypothesized that these men represent the Sieneese citizens eligible to govern, or perhaps, because of their number, the magistracy of twenty-four citizens, a government (1236-1270) which preceded the Nine.²⁰ It is also possible these men represent the nobility of Siena, whom Concord keeps in line, signified by both the cord to which she holds the men, literally in

¹⁷ Skinner, *Foundations*, 56

¹⁸ Skinner, *Foundations*, 23

¹⁹ Jones, 71

²⁰ Norman, 157

line, and the carpenter's plane which smoothes rough patches and prevents division.²¹ Quentin Skinner offers an alternate explanation, stressing that the citizens are shown holding the rope, not being held by it. evidence that they have agreed to act together, to voluntarily create a political unity, further evidenced by their equality of height—they have entered this pact on equal terms.²² This idea holds extra merit if one considers that concord may be interpreted as “the result of unity of will among the citizens, which meant that they must place the common good, or the good of the commune, above sectional or individual interests.”²³ Such an interpretation works well when one identifies the figure of their attention as a personification of the “Common Good;” these men, therefore, would represent a commitment to the protection of the *ben commune*. However, Skinner's suggestion also has important implications for the application of Good Government, for it implies that the citizens (or at the very least the nobles) have control over Concord, not the other way around. It further implies that one man, uninterested in the common welfare, could just as easily disrupt it. This has been seen time and again throughout the peninsula, as factional leaders gained power and control, such that, “in Italy unlike the ancient world, the origins of despotism lay in oligarchy rather than democracy.”²⁴ What then is the significance of Concord's carpenter's plane, if she has no authority to wield it?

The central seated figure, to which the twenty-four process, depicted as Ruler both by the supremacy of size as well as the scepter and shield he holds, is more problematic to identify. Siena was a republic and therefore an explanation of an ideal

²¹ Norman, 157

²² Quentin Skinner, “Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist as Political Philosopher,” *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. LXXII 1986, Oxford University Press, 1987. 1-56. Pg. 34

²³ Hyde, 300

²⁴ Jones, 79

monarch or prince is unacceptable. Instead, the figure has been explained in many forms. Some view him as “an aged king,” the Good Ruler, Good Government, or Justice, while others suggest that he is meant to personify the Commune of Siena.”²⁵ However, none of these suggestions has been widely accepted and the figure remains subject to interpretation, though Rubinstein finds the last of these possibilities to be the most reasonable. Indeed, the figure may represent the commune for he is dressed in Sieneese colors, in the same manner as the Sieneese banner (*balzana*), and at his feet lays the Sieneese wolf and twins, an oft-used reference to the city’s foundation myth.²⁶ However, the inscription, in the vernacular, at the bottom of the painting suggests otherwise:

This holy Virtue [Justice], where she rules, induces to unity the many souls [of citizens] and they, gathered together for such a purpose, make the Common Good [*ben commune*] their lord; and he, in order to govern his state, chooses never to turn his eyes from the resplendent faces of the Virtues who sit around him.²⁷

These lines suggest that the figure represents the “Common Good” (*ben commune*). Rubinstein supports this interpretation. He asserts that the common good was familiar in medieval thought and essential in Italian city-republics where “it was hailed as being able to secure civic peace and unity without recourse to despotism.”²⁸ Further, the common good had the potential to “serve as a republican alternative to the claims of the despots and their followers that only autocratic rule could bring salvation to the towns torn by factions and social struggles.” The common good could only become a reality if the public welfare was placed ahead of private interests. Only then could the city’s prosperity

²⁵ Nicolai Rubinstein, “Political Ideas in Sieneese Art: The Frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti and Taddeo Di Bartolo in the Palazzo Pubblico,” *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. Vol. 21, No. 34 (Jul.-Dec., 1958). Pg. 181

²⁶ A Sieneese myth purports that the twin sons of Remus, one of Rome’s founders, founded Siena. The iconography supporting this myth is strikingly similar to that of Rome—a she-wolf suckling twin boys—it seems every city-state strives to connect itself to Rome whenever possible in an effort, perhaps, to suggest themselves heir to her legacy.

²⁷ Norman, 167

²⁸ Rubinstein, 184

and liberty be secured. Likewise neglect of the common good, the fulfillment of selfish interests at the expense of the public, would upset the delicate balance of civic unity and lead to greater unrest and factional strife.²⁹

The scholastic theorists insist that the republican system of government, though admirable, is inherently vulnerable, particularly to the factious nature of its citizens. Thus, they purpose the only way to stabilize the republic and maintain peace is to preserve the common good. Though Skinner argues that the scholastic writers purposefully introduce this concept ambiguously, it essentially becomes a responsibility of each citizen to agree to uphold the communal goals and equate their personal wellbeing with that of the greater city. If the accompanying inscription were to be taken literally with this concept, it would imply that it is justice that further enables the common good, that it is justice that truly keeps the citizens in line. Thus, justice may be viewed as one of the primary instruments of good government, uniting citizens and compelling the common welfare to be placed ahead of private interests, for fear of repercussions.³⁰

Skinner offers an alternate explanation of this ambiguous figure. He suggests instead, that the Ruler represents the *Signoria*, or ruling magistracy, in this case most specifically, the nine. He bases his interpretation on the accessories the figure carries, the symbols of a Ruler. He believes that the “key to the common good [lies] in assigning a plentitude of power to an elected *signorie* or *signoria*.” These powers include: the control of the city and *contado*, the right to control feudatories’ allegiances, legal and legislative authority, right of judicial execution, as well as military and police backing.” (Skinner

²⁹ Rubinstein, 184

³⁰ Skinner, *Foundations*, 56-8

supports this argument through his interpretation of the figures beneath the ruler: two nobles kneeling and, apparently, presenting him with a castle in an act of homage (symbolizing the feudatories' allegiances), behind them stand a group of men under arrest (legal power); of these men, one stands with his head veiled by a black cloth, a device representing capital punishment (right of judicial execution), while behind these figures stand foot-soldiers (quite literally the military and police backing).³¹

Of these two arguments each has merit, and each is strongly supported by the visual imagery portrayed in the frescoes' political message. Though Skinner's interpretation is more controversial, it does not appear to be particularly incompatible with Rubinstein's analysis. Based upon the willing unanimity of the citizenry, the common good necessitates the involvement of each individual. Consequently, there must be a guiding force encouraging this kind of civic participation—the magistracy. In this sense the ruler figure may represent the oligarchic rule of the Nine, who are able to promote and maintain the common good through justice and in accordance with the other virtues, which surround the figure. The virtuous rule of the Nine preserves good government. Indeed Bowsky reminds us that the Nine's oath of office instructed they “provide that the commune and people of the magnificent city of Siena are and are preserved in good peace and concord.”³² Consequently, it would seem that contemporaneous viewers (particularly those who had taken the oath) would understand the implied connection between the common good and the leadership of the nine. Further, they would understand that the Nine had a responsibility to rule in accordance with the virtues that surround this figure.

³¹ Skinner, “Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist,” 23. 41-2

³² Bowsky, *A Medieval Italian Commune*, 289

The early political writers, the “rhetorical writers” as they have been called by Skinner, desired “to determine the range of qualities we ought to look for in our rulers if we wish to ensure that they are genuinely devoted to the common good.” Hence, the “Common Good” figure is surrounded by six female figures, identified by their inscriptions as virtues, from left to right they are: Peace (*Pax*), Fortitude (*Fortitudo*), Prudence (*Prudentia*), Magnanimity (*Magnimitas*), Temperance (*Temperantia*), and, again Justice (*Iustitia*) (*Figure 1*). In addition to these six virtues, three theological virtues are represented as angels hovering over the Ruler: Charity (*Caritas*), Faith (*Fides*), and Hope (*Spes*). Each virtue is further distinguished through intricate personification and symbolic images. Peace is identified by olive leaves in her hair, and olive branch in hand, an empty suit of armor lies beneath her cushion, while a shield and helmet rest beneath her feet, indicating the instruments of war are unnecessary under her watch. Additionally, she holds pride of place; peace (as well as concord) is highly valued in political life because of its importance in maintaining civic unity and order, and thus is cited as a basic aim of governance.³³

Fortitude holds a scepter and shield, while two knights sit at her feet. This imagery is clearly meant to emphasize the strength of the magistracy, as fortitude must enable the administration “to attain ‘magnificence in war and peace’ as well as constancy and patience ‘in the face of assaults from adversity.’”³⁴ Fortitude allows the administration to endure the inevitable hardships that face all city-republics. Next sits Prudence, who watches over a small lamp with three flames, an inscription indicates they

³³ Skinner, *Foundations*, 56-9

³⁴ Skinner, *Foundations*, 47

refer to the past, present and future (*Praeteritum, Praesens, Futurum*).³⁵ The first of Aristotle's virtues (though it is uncertain and widely debated whether Aristotle would have been available in Siena), Prudence includes "foresight, care and knowledge," of the past, present and future in all decisions.³⁶ Further, Prudence is crowned "Queen of the Virtues," and carries a lamp, suggesting that she is to lead the way for the other virtues.³⁷

Magnanimity sits next, with a crown in her lap and a dish of coins, ostensibly representing generosity.³⁸ It is clear that a good leader must be magnanimous, though this can be an ambiguous quality. It indicates a necessity of generosity, and noble-spiritedness. Skinner describes the views of the early political theorists on this point. They believe it is a "quality mainly to be associated with men of great fortune and public importance:" "the magnanimous man is distinguished not merely by his willingness to concern himself with petty things, but also by his sense 'that it is a nobler thing to give than to receive.'"³⁹

Finally, Temperance points to an hourglass while Justice holds a crown in one hand and a sword and decapitated head in another. Temperance is valued as it "involves honesty, sobriety and continence." Temperance denotes an honesty of character, a quality essential to administrations, which wished to preserve power. Earlier political theorists suggest that a ruler (or magistracy) " 'must actually be as he wishes to seem.' for he will be 'grossly deceived' if 'he tires to gain glory by false methods or faint words.'"⁴⁰

³⁵ Norman, 148

³⁶ Skinner, *Foundations*, 47

³⁷ Skinner, "Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist," 48-9

³⁸ Norman, 148

³⁹ Skinner, "Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist," 30

⁴⁰ Skinner, *Foundations*, 47

Justice is a more complicated virtue for it involves a variety of, sometimes conflicting, characteristics—“liberality, religiousness, pity, innocence, charity, friendship, reverence and the desire for concord.”⁴¹ The term “...was used on the one hand to express the concept of legal equity, the principle that the law sometimes needs to be supplemented or corrected by recourse to natural justice.”⁴² However, it was also used more broadly, referring “...to the idea of fairness between individuals, in contrast with malice, treachery, or the infliction of harm.”⁴³ Justice’s dual nature is depicted in the fresco by two separate figures. She is represented first on the left, enthroned and balancing scales. In her first appearance she plays the central role in an allegorical scene set apart from the ruler and virtues. Here she expresses legal equity and natural law qualities of justice. Skinner writes that in this figure “...what he [Lorenzetti] illustrates is the idea of justice or fairness as the essence of law, not justice or righteousness as a personal attribute.”⁴⁴ That Justice sits beneath Wisdom and that both Commutative and Distributive Justice attend to her, further attests to this interpretation. Skinner writes, “Justice is thus depicted as a source from which the rope of concord ultimately derives, and hence as the ultimate bond of human society.”⁴⁵ Consequently, it is the law, which justice delivers, and it is that which binds society. Thus, the figure of justice, which sits to the right, represents the virtue of justice. Here justice is portrayed as a personal attribute; her proximity to the ruler figure and the other virtues stresses that this is a quality that is to be embodied. Justice, therefore, frames the fresco, indicating her importance relative to the other figures—it is through justice that the other virtues exist.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Skinner, “Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist as Political Philosopher,” 35

⁴⁵ Skinner, “Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist as Political Philosopher,” 40

Further, what stands out in the frescoes is justice's preeminence and importance as the great equalizer. This was an important characteristic in city-states that strove for equality despite a fairly rigid class structure. In the scene on the left, the allegory of justice, she is seen balancing the scales, while commutative and distributive justice are carried out. The scales themselves are perfectly level, indicating that each receives an equitable punishment. Above Justice, in a position analogous to the theological virtues that float above the ruler, is Wisdom. While it is justice who, quite literally, holds the scales level, it is Wisdom that holds the scales themselves in position. Hence, it is Wisdom who guides, and rules over, Justice. In fact, Wisdom even wears a crown and appears to carry a bible, indicating her supremacy and adding a religious dimension to an overwhelmingly secular work. Thus, Wisdom provides moral guidance to Justice who in turn decides how best to keep "the scales level." Beneath Justice sits Concord, holding a carpenter's plane and handing the twined cords of justice to a group of twenty-four distinguished looking men. Based on the hierarchy of figures and the cords, which Justice passes to Concord, it can effectively be concluded that it is through Justice that Concord is achieved. Skinner writes of the relationship between wisdom and justice, "the hope by which these writers are animated [the pre-humanist writers] is that, if our rulers are inspired by wisdom, and therefore love justice, their enactments will succeed in binding us together in concord and equity in such a way as will bring about the common good and, in consequence, the triumph of peace."⁴⁶

Above the Ruler, Charity floats with a javelin and burning heart, while Faith supports a cross and Hope stares upward at a vision of Christ. It is important to note that there are nine virtues represented here. In addition to the four cardinal virtues, two extras

⁴⁶ Skinner, "Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist as Political Philosopher," 20

have been added, as well as the three theological virtues. This has been often noted as a symbolic correspondence to the *nove*, or nine ruling magistrates of the *Sala dei Nove*.⁴⁷ Further, these Christian virtues are representative of a society, which has yet to make any true distinctions between Church and State. Despite the secular nature of the *Palazzo Pubblico* and this cycle of frescoes, religious virtues reflect the values of a still very medieval society. Further, because of their placement, these virtues must be associated with the maintenance of the common good, as qualities, which the ruling group must possess, especially because they are to set the example for the people. Additionally, the early political writers assert, “in time of peace the maintenance of ‘a proper faith in God and towards one’s fellow-men’ is said to be the greatest virtue of all, and ‘the sum of all others,’ since ‘without good faith and loyalty there can be no upholding of what is right.’”⁴⁸

Ultimately, the *Buon Governo* portion of the fresco cycle illustrates the importance and interconnected nature of the principles of justice and the common good. Justice is visually tied to concord as a precondition to civic peace and unanimity among the citizens. Further, by creating harmony it assured that private interests would be satisfied. Justice would ensure equity, and thus, no factional interest would take precedence over the common good. However, the citizens must agree to uphold this common good; without a willing unanimity justice cannot take hold. Thus, justice and the common good are mutually dependent upon one another. When these two central principles are in balance the city is prosperous. Good government is possible and its virtues are manifest and fostered. Most importantly, however, liberty is preserved.

⁴⁷ Norman, 160; Rubinstein, 180; Skinner, “Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist as Political Philosopher,” 20

⁴⁸ Skinner, *Foundations*, 48

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To the right of *The Good Government* is *The Good City and Countryside* (Figures 2&3)—the literal consequences in both city and *contado*, the city's surrounding countryside, of good government. The composition divides city and countryside by a city wall and gateway, which notably is opened and unarmed. The city itself bears a strong resemblance to Siena, particularly the black and white campanile and *duomo* in the far left of the cityscape, and the red brick buildings. The cityscape (Figure 2) itself is animated, colorful and lively as residents go about their business. Within the scene are numerous shops, including a shoemaker and cloth workers dyeing fabric. In the foreground there is a school scene in which pupils earnestly listen to a professor's lecture, while in the background builders are seen adding to the already expansive skyline. Throughout the scene men and women carry food or move livestock and interestingly, a group of young women play the tambourine and dance in the streets. Additionally, all of the buildings are in good repair (if perhaps the perspective is a little off), the construction shows that the city itself is expanding, indicating its strength and vitality. Further, the dancing women may attest to the city's safety and security, they are comfortable on their own, without an escort. Perhaps they even symbolize the merriment inherent to a city that is functioning so smoothly, which is free of all strife.⁴⁹ Such actions, the movements of daily life, are indicative of a peaceful and thriving city. A city in which the common good is upheld, and an individual's wellbeing is no more important than that of his neighbors. Further, this scene of great concord is attributed to the virtue of justice by the inscription beneath the painting. Clearly, justice is a central driving force, a preeminent civic virtue, which promotes unity, peace and the *ben commune*. If justice is administered to, the

⁴⁹ Norman, 161

people need not fear that one individual may upset the balance. The inscription reads, “look how many goods derive from her [Justice] and how sweet and peaceful is that life of the city where is preserved this virtue who outshines any other.”⁵⁰

The right side of the composition depicts, in as great detail as the city, the effects of good government on the surrounding countryside (*contado*) (*Figure 3*). The view itself is sweeping, and the cultivation of the countryside and rural buildings can easily be admired. A steady stream of movement from the city to the country, indicates a healthy movement of goods, foodstuffs and people. Above the composition floats a figure, identified as Security (*Securitas*), carrying a gallows and hanged man in one hand and an inscribed scroll in the other:

Without fear every man may travel freely and each may till and sow. so long as this commune shall maintain this lady [Justice] sovereign, for she has stripped the wicked of all power.⁵¹

The use of the term “security” is very important here, and can further be seen in the open gates and dancing women in the city. “Security” refers to both personal safety as well as that of the community. Throughout the frescoes, a sense of personal security is addressed (that is particularly evident once one has looked at the corresponding *Bad City and Countryside*), as people move confidently through their daily activities. This is clearly a city in which the “wicked” that create fear have been brought to justice. Further, there is a sense of communal peace and unanimity. The city and countryside depict a place where civic freedoms are protected and consequently, republican liberty is secured. Liberty, the most important principle of good government, cannot exist unless justice and the common good are maintained.

⁵⁰ Norman 167

⁵¹ Norman, 167

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Finally, the last painting in the *Sala dei Nove* is that of *The Bad Government and City (Mal Governo)*, serving as the negative counterpart of the series. This fresco combines the two different pictorial representations of the opposing paintings, that of the virtues and their application in city and countryside. However, much of the fresco is obscured due to its poor condition. The right side of the composition portrays the allegory, whereby seven figures represent the personification of various human vices in direct juxtaposition to the virtues of the central wall.⁵² Indeed the placement of each figure is analogous to and contrasts with that of its opposing figure in the *Buon Governo*, such placement clearly intended to strengthen the message of the overall composition.⁵³ For example, War sits in the same position as Peace, indicating that if peace is neglected, war will be the natural state of affairs.

The central ruler figure is Tyranny (*Tramnice*), depicted with horns, cross-eyes and sharp teeth; he is clearly evil and demonic in appearance. In one hand he holds a knife, in the other a golden object, perhaps a goblet. Beneath his feet lies a goat. City-republics were especially vulnerable to tyrants, the scholastic theorists suggested, because they prosper in times of civil unrest, discord and disunity—periods of division that were all too common in these communal societies.⁵⁴ Hyde writes, “there was no question that in theory, unity was desirable, the greater the better, for history and philosophy taught that in this way cities grew strong so that they were able to subdue their neighbors, while disunity led to weakness and tyranny.”⁵⁵ Indeed, despots most commonly came to power

⁵² Norman, 150

⁵³ Skinner, Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Buon Frescoes, 3-4

⁵⁴ Skinner, *Foundations*, 55-57

⁵⁵ Hyde, 300

first as partisan leaders.⁵⁶ Tyranny hence resides only where peace and concord are absent, and, where the ruling magistracy has become divided.⁵⁷ Consequently, Tyranny is not only the cause of the following vices, but the result—for division can lead to tyranny, but tyranny may also lead to division.⁵⁸

Tyranny is flanked by, from left to right, Cruelty (*Crudelitas*), Treason (*Proditio*), Fraud (*Fraus*), Fury (*Furor*), Division (*Divisio*), and War (*Guerro*). Cruelty is depicted as a woman terrorizing a child with a serpent; Treason, as a man holding a sheep with a scorpion's tail. Fraud is a bearded figure with a claw foot and wings like those of a bat. Fury is personified as a black beast holding a stone and armed with a dagger. Division is shown as a woman, holding a huge saw, in a black and white dress (echoing the Sienese *balazana*, as the ruler figure in *Buon Governo*). The words Yes and No (*Si* and *Non*) are inscribed across her chest. Finally, War wears a helmet and carries a sword and shield with the word War (*Guerra*) written across it. While some of the exact meaning appears to have been lost, much of this imagery is rather self-explanatory. If order, honesty and justice are highly valued in good government, and assure the commonweal, then a ruler (or group of rulers) who is cruel, commits treason and employs deceit is actively working to destroy the common good for his (their) own private gain. Further, the early political writers insist that those who rule in accordance with vices will not remain in power long: "...the highest duty of any ruler must always be to serve as a model of probity, avoiding at all costs the temptations of fraud and deceit."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Jones, 85

⁵⁷ Skinner, *Foundations*, 57

⁵⁸ Skinner, *Foundations*, 56-7

⁵⁹ Skinner, *Foundations*, 47-8

Above Tyranny float three figures in the same positions as the theological virtues above the Ruler: Pride (*Superbia*), Avarice (*Avaritia*) and Vainglory (*Vaingloria*). Pride is the central figure, a woman dressed in red, complete with horns and carrying a sword and yoke. Avarice is to her left, an elderly woman who carries two purses and a flail. Finally, Vainglory is the right figure, a young woman carrying a reed, dressed in a finely decorated gown and watching herself closely in a hand-mirror.

Below the figures it is evident that the violent acts are being committed against both men and women, however, this part of the fresco is poorly preserved. The central figure, bound and humiliated is Justice (*Iustitia*) Her cords of justice, essential to the order and balance of good government, lay severed, one taken by the grisly figure that holds her captive. Additionally, she is identified by the text, written in the vernacular, along the lower border:

There, where Justice is bound, no one is ever in accord for the Common Good [*ben commun*], nor pulls the cord straight; therefore, it is fitting that Tyranny prevails. She, in order to carry out her iniquity, neither wills nor acts in disaccord with the filthy nature of the Vices, who are shown here conjoined with her. She banishes those who are ready to do good and calls around herself every evil schemer. She always protects the assailant, the robber and those who hate peace, so that her every land lies waste.⁶⁰

It is this mistreatment and abuse of Justice that is perhaps meant to be the most disturbing of the violent images portrayed in this scene. Where in the *Buon Governo*, justice sits serene and determined, her golden hair delicately arranged and her dress intricate and refined, in the *Mal Governo* fresco, Justice lies bound and barefoot, her golden hair a mess, her refined gown replaced with a plain white dress (perhaps her underclothes) and her expression frightful and dejected. Her importance is communicated through her increased size relative to her captor, but her authority is gone. Additionally, despite the

⁶⁰ Norman, 167

many vices that appear, none in particular is stressed as the sole perpetrator of the common good and civic peace. Though Tyranny sits in the place of the Ruler figure, he does not allow the vices to reign. The vices are both the cause and effect of Tyranny. Instead it is the absence of justice that allows the vices to run free and Tyranny to rule. The text asserts, “where justice is bound, no one is ever in accord for the Common Good...therefore it is fitting that Tyranny prevails.”⁶¹ Justice creates concord; she “pulls the cord straight.” indicating that it is justice who creates equality amongst the citizenry (recall the imagery of justice and concord in the *Buon Governo* fresco), who maintains not only balance but also unity. Additionally, the citizenry must submit to justice, to the common good by actively taking hold of the “cord.” It is the “fair administration of justice, the equality of men before the law, the giving of his due to each and every man, who both form the foundation and binding-force of the medieval Italian city-state.” (Lauro Martines, page?) While the actual execution of justice varied widely,⁶² in theory it was justice (in accordance with the citizen’s acceptance of the common good) that created and maintained good government and injustice, which promoted vice and tyranny.⁶³

To the left of the allegorical scene a city and its *contado* are portrayed, however, this city is more generic; there are no direct references to Siena and its imagery. Here civic life is not peaceful and pleasant. Violence, looting, even murder are depicted as the result of the *Mal Governo* vices. Depicted are soldiers assaulting women, buildings demolished, shops boarded shut—only a blacksmith works, fashioning weapons. The

⁶¹ Norman, 167

⁶² It has already been noted how justice may vary depending upon gender or social standing. See also William Bowsky, “The Medieval Commune and Internal Violence,” or Lauro Martines’ collection *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200-1500*.

⁶³ Hook, 110

countryside is also in peril. However, this portion of the fresco is the most poorly preserved. It is clear that villages have been burned or left ravaged, lands remain uncultivated and there is no easy or pleasant exchange between city and country. The gate is not open freely: instead it is open only enough for two armed men, one on horseback, and one on foot, to leave. Floating above the scene in a position analogous to Security in *The Good City*, is Fear (*Timor*), an old demonic woman, brandishing a sword toward the *contado* in one hand and gripping an inscribed scroll in the other:

Because each seeks only his own good, in this city Justice is subjected to Tyranny, wherefore, along this road nobody passes without fearing for his life, since there are robberies outside and inside the city gates.⁶⁴

Here it is the selfish interests of citizens, the neglect of the common welfare that has replaced justice with tyranny and its many vices. Fear reigns throughout the city and countryside, disrupting the easy flow of goods and people that once characterized their relationship. It is curious, however, how Justice came to be literally disregarded, figuratively bound. If it is justice who creates the common good, how could the neglect of common good lead to injustice? The answer, therefore, suggests that there is a reciprocal relationship between these ideals. While Justice creates an environment in which the common good can be cultivated, in which the other virtues are enacted and respected, the common good, must likewise flourish in order for Justice to be maintained. Further, injustice brings with it “violence and anarchy;” the city that had been governed in accordance with justice was free and happy, while the city governed by injustice is “corrupted by vice and oppressed by tyranny.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Norman, 167

⁶⁵ Hook, 110

Justice also guarantees peace, which, has been shown to be essential for the *Buon Governo* and the good of the commonweal. In the fresco, Peace appears as an essential virtue, both by her prominent placement and eye-catching posture. Peace, unlike the other virtues, lounges sedately, beneath her cushion and feet lay armor. Such placement implies that not only is armor unnecessary where peace thrives, but that Peace has conquered War (her feet and elbow drive prominently into the armor, indicating victory).⁶⁶ While it is fairly obvious that War sits in a seat corresponding to that of Peace in the *Mal Governo* fresco (after all what is the opposite of peace if not war?), it is not necessarily as obvious that there are two other figures who are related to the destruction of peace, that of Fury and Division.⁶⁷ These are, perhaps, the most relevant of the vices, for they are the ones that are most carefully guarded against, and, time and again referenced by the early political and scholastic writers. Feuds, particularly vendettas, often erupted violently in the streets of all the city-republics, and could easily lead to greater division and violence within the city.⁶⁸ Additionally, these instances were often due to lesser vices, such as pride, envy or avarice.⁶⁹

Fury, Division and War sit together to the right of Tyranny. Their position relative to one another suggests their connection, while their placement in the fresco is that closest to *Buon Governo*—it is these vices that are most dangerous to good government. War even raises his sword menacingly, as he looks in the direction of peace. Fury, a bestial figure, represents lawlessness,⁷⁰ like that of a mob, or factious rebellion. Such a figure, though strange in the context of the other figures of the fresco cycle, perhaps

⁶⁶ Norman, 147

⁶⁷ Skinner, "Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist," 8

⁶⁸ Jones, 84

⁶⁹ Hyde, 276

⁷⁰ Skinner, "Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist, 8

befits the vice, as fury knows no humanity, it is characteristic of situations in which control and reasoning are lost, and animalistic tendencies take over. He clutches a stone and dagger, instruments of civil disorder and mob violence. Division, like the ruler, is dressed in Siena's heraldic colors, strengthening the message's relevance, of faction and sedition, in the context of Siena. Because the rest of the *Mal Governo* fresco, including the cityscape and countryside is generic, meant to be an example of what *could* happen, Division's dress suggests that factionalism is already a problem quite prominent in Siena, one that must be solved in the context of the virtues of the *buon governo*. This message is further reinforced by the words YES and NO emblazoned upon her dress, and the saw, which she holds forebodingly. War, as has been discussed, is armed and ready for battle; clearly War rules in the absence of peace.

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What this fresco cycle most stresses is the importance, and interconnected nature, of justice and the common good in the administration of "good government" and preservation of liberty in an independent, Italian city-state. Though the frescoes may have direct relevance to Siena and the Siennese people, their message is universal, and can be generalized throughout the peninsula. These core values are what created civic peace and ensured republican freedoms, surely something to which all communities strive. Many of the other virtues may, perhaps, be interchangeable, but it is justice and the common good that are the keystones to good government, that hold everything in place. Further, these frescoes illustrate the vices, which most threaten the prosperity of a city and her people. Absent the communal good, justice is demeaned for personal interests, while vices and discord run freely. Good government cannot be maintained unless these principles are balanced. Thus, these paintings are timeless in the core ideals that they present; they

carefully depict the principles to which all cities should aspire, and though the specifics may change throughout the course of time, their enduring message does not. The struggle then, within each government, becomes the ideals to which they aspire, and the realities of that which they are able to attain.

Chapter 2: The Republicanism of Florence

In the medieval period the principle of justice formed a central component of good government. Justice created equality, ensuring, at least in theory, that each man would be treated fairly under the law. Concord followed justice, for citizens who felt secure in their rights could live in harmony. In turn, the citizenry agreed to uphold the common good thereby assuring civic peace, order and security. Justice, because it encouraged concord and fostered unanimity, became a principle guarantor of liberty. This remained true in the Renaissance. Where it formed the foundation on which republican liberty was situated. Thus, justice began a larger political discourse, which would ultimately transform political theory in Florence. Indeed, by the fifteenth century, this discourse focused on classical texts, ancient authors and, significantly, the ideals of liberty in regards to external forces. This new republicanism reshaped the focus of the Florentine administration and, in the end, their ideals of governance. While the central principles of good government persisted—justice, liberty and the common good—the ideas surrounding their purpose and preservation changed. Thus, the new political ideology did not represent a huge departure from the medieval values it had once upheld; rather it represented a progression of ideas that better reflected the intellectual, cultural and political environment of this renaissance city.¹

Dante's *Monarchy* epitomizes the emergence of this discourse. The frescoes of the *Palazzo Pubblico* separate divine justice from earthly justice. Dante asserts that

¹ For views concerning the evolution of political values see: Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: Volume 1 The Renaissance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978; Hans Baron, *Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny, Volume 1*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978; Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, Volume 1*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958.

divine and earthly justice move in synchrony. In arguing for a universal monarch he recognizes that justice must be dealt from a single source. Just leadership provides the greatest liberty. Thus, because “the whole universe is simply an imprint of divine goodness,” and “mankind is in a good (indeed, ideal) state...when it resembles god,” which occurs when it is most in unity, and the “world is ordered in the best possible way when justice is at its strongest in it,” it follows that divine and earthly justice must move together to create this unity. Dante asserted “now the human race is in its ideal state when it is completely free.” Justice thus administered and unity prevailing, liberty becomes the most important principle to which society must aspire.²

Republicanism of the fifteenth century centered its political discourse on sovereignty. Indeed, all republican states were founded upon principles of liberty. However, medieval and Renaissance societies differed in their understanding of civic freedoms. Medieval city-states, such as Siena, emphasized a communal interest and civic unity in order to maintain liberty. These cities viewed tyranny as the direct consequence of internal disorder. In the later period, republicanism became unique in that it no longer stressed civic harmony as the manner in which liberty could be maintained; likewise factionalism was not seen as the root cause of a republic’s loss of autonomy. Renaissance republicanism embodied an emerging civic humanism and revised value structure that stressed the reconsideration of the individual within the community. Quentin Skinner asserts that this new humanism was based in “ ‘a new philosophy of political engagement and active life’ and devoted to the celebration of Florence’s republican liberties,”³ Additionally, humanists promoted “...the citizen who, in addition to his studies,

² Dante Alighieri, *Monarchy*, translated and edited Prue Shaw, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pg. 13-19

³ Skinner, *Foundations*, 71

consummates his *humanitas* by shouldering man's social duties, and serving his fellow-citizens in public office."⁴ Individual virtuosity in the public sphere was lauded and promoted as the ideal way in which to contribute to the common good. Thus, humanism redefined individual virtue and the responsibility to civic life, while reasserting republican liberties that had always been central to the Italian city-states.

Humanism stressed individual industriousness, not just in business but also in self-improvement. This was an important change in values, indicative of a new outlook concerning human nature. For the first time, scholars came to view man's potential abilities as unlimited; men were capable of achieving excellence, and, consequently, of governing virtuously.⁵ Because their future was no longer predetermined by birth or ability, men could rise above their station. As a result, an individual's worth was not based solely upon his family's history or wealth, "but rather his capacity to develop his talents, to achieve a proper sense of public spirit, and deploy his energies in the services of the community."⁶ Humanism transformed the most basic constructs concerning human nature and perceptions of man's role in society. Not only was "individual self-development"⁷ possible, it was separate from ancestry and religion. Further, these new noble and virtuous men were urged to participate in civic affairs, to contribute their knowledge and wisdom to the public good. Their rank no longer static, a "new aristocracy" based on "talent and determination" developed.⁸

Civic humanism emphasized that individuals noble in character should work for the common good. These men were known for their traditional virtues such as honesty, as

⁴ Baron, 78

⁵ Skinner, *Foundations*, 91

⁶ *ibid.* 81

⁷ *ibid.* 82

⁸ Alfred Von Martin, *Sociology of the Renaissance*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963. Pg. 9

well as, new humanist ethics and individual accomplishments. Skinner describes the “truly noble man” as “a highly active and ambitious individualist,” who cultivated “honesty and valuable skills” which were then applied “to his own glorification and the service of the commonwealth.”⁹ Public service did not depend upon the agreement of all to uphold a common goal. Humanism developed an individualistic spirit in which the good of all no longer directly equated with the best interests of each citizen. Instead, the commonweal was served depending upon the unique resources and talents of its people. For some this meant active participation in governmental affairs, while for others it meant contributing to public works or giving alms to the poor. Regardless of the contribution, the community benefited by allowing citizen’s to provide that which they were able. In an era known for display and self-fashioning, successful citizens desired to be known for their generosity, knowledge and wisdom. More importantly, however, the community benefited from these citizens’ competitive desire for acclaim.

The security of the republic rested with the Florentine citizens who strove not only for personal greatness, but for that of the community as well. These virtuous individuals contributed to the common good and guaranteed civic freedoms. This was quite a departure from the medieval period in which factional interests and endemic infighting were the greatest threats to republican liberty; when sovereignty was protected solely by the community’s preservation of the common good. In Renaissance Florence infighting no longer posed a threat because liberty did not depend upon a willing communal unity. Rather civic humanism promoted a public life in which accomplished members of the community worked to create and maintain republican institutions and guarantee liberty. This, however, does not mean that factions were any less prevalent.

⁹ Skinner, *Foundations*, 82

Renaissance Florence remained as intensely factional as it had been in the medieval period (or as Siena continued to be) and such infighting continued to be problematic. The major difference between Sienese and Florentine factionalism was not its frequency or intensity, but rather that such discord was not capable of threatening Florence's liberty. The common good depended not upon unanimity but upon virtuous individuals to strengthen republican constructs and guarantee civic freedoms.¹⁰

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Renaissance Florence depended upon its citizens to strengthen its republican institutions and ensure sovereignty. Such citizens cultivated their individual virtues in order that they might be considered noble in character and eventually, serve the greater public. A contemporary writer, Leon Battista Alberti illustrates the virtues that were desired in a humanist man. First and foremost, he asserts, man must use his time wisely for "praiseworthy pursuits," live for himself and be self-sufficient. A truly honorable man must exemplify "virtue, kindness, helpfulness" and wish to "be and appear good, just and tranquil, a man who would never irritate or harm others." Alberti describes these as activities that are best for the spirit. Further, they reflect an overall change in the renaissance regarding man's innate abilities. Man is capable of looking after himself, his spirit, in a way that is separate from both church and government.¹¹

Humanism provides, for the first time, a sense of individual liberty. In the middle ages, "man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation—only through some general category."¹² By the fifteenth century, man's

¹⁰ Skinner, *Foundations*, 75

¹¹ Leon Battista Alberti, *The Family in Renaissance Florence*, translated Renee Neu Watkins, Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1969. Pg. 166-177

¹² Burckhardt, 143

individual liberty and virtues became preeminent. Concerning the body he writes, “nature has made it a vehicle, a kind of car moving the spirit about. and nature has commanded that it should never obey any spirit but its own...nature hates to have the body escape the guardianship of its spirit and man, above all, naturally loves liberty.”¹³ The humanistic individual enjoys a liberty of spirit, a distinct sense of self that drives his pursuits. He first and foremost has a responsibility to his self and to his family. However, Alberti also recognizes the responsibility man has to his community. Though he emphasizes that a “man wants to live for himself, not the community,” he also acknowledges, “he is willing to be asked for help by friends.” The assistance of others is a secondary desire and should “not mean that you neglect your other concerns...[or] lead to serious losses for you.”¹⁴ Though the common good of the republic depends upon the leadership of virtuous men, it is important that communal interests should not overshadow individual development or family. Virtues must be developed and attended to within each citizen before he may begin to assist others in the public forum. Further, a man who is unsuccessful in his private life is unable to effectively assist the republic.

Alberti’s emphasis on individual virtue appears as a precursor to involvement in public life. He asserts that a good man cannot focus only on wealth but must also support his community the best he can, so long as such efforts do not cause him harm. Though he cautions, “public honors will not feed the family,” he also stresses that public matters should be given “not whatever ambition and pride might suggest but what your conscience and gratitude of our fellow citizens dictate.” A noble and honorable man must also serve the public because it is the actions of such men that preserve the “good things”

¹³ Alberti. 165

¹⁴ *ibid.* 177

in a republic—“unity, calm, peace and tranquility.” Alberti advises that an interest in public life should come from a genuine desire to better the community, rather than a desire to increase notoriety. However, humanist men often sought attention and acclaim through their good deeds, and their hunger for praise benefited the community tremendously.¹⁵

The Florentine republic gained strength and unity from the diversity of its citizens who were able to actively participate in public affairs. “Wise men say that good citizens should undertake to care for the republic and toil at the tasks of their country, not shaken by the follies of men, in order to further the public peace and preserve the general good.”¹⁶ This “unity through diversity” strengthened republican institutions against the factions that inevitably arose (“follies of men”) and best guaranteed liberty.

Machiavelli describes Giovanni, Cosimo and Lorenzo de’Medici as superior examples of humanistic individuals who embody not only the important characteristics Alberti stresses, but also the wisdom and virtue important for governance. In his *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli eulogizes all three men as honorable and possessing “excellent qualities.” Giovanni is described first and foremost as charitable. Not simply did he provide alms to those who asked, “but many times he supplied the needs of the poor without being asked.” Further, “he supported men in their adversity and aided their prosperity.” As a man who “died very rich in treasure.” Giovanni had been successful in his private affairs and therefore had a greater responsibility to his community and fellow citizens. His benevolence was great, yet he was modest; “he never asked for honors yet had them all.” Further, despite his power and prominence, “he never went into the palace

¹⁵ *ibid.* 178-180

¹⁶ *ibid.* 178

unless he was called” and “he loved peace [and] avoided war.” As a man known for his prudence, noble character and wealth, he supported his government, lending his wisdom when called upon, rather than forcing his will upon the community. Indeed, Giovanni was celebrated as a man of greater “good reputation and good will” than wealth. His individual virtues made him, according to Machiavelli, the ideal citizen as well as a protector and “improver of the common good.”¹⁷

Like Giovanni, Cosimo and Lorenzo were described as very generous, lending great sums of money to those in need and building churches throughout the city for its betterment. Cosimo, though without great education, was “very eloquent and full of natural prudence.” qualities that allowed him to lead an active civic life. Additionally, he was a “lover...of literary men” and acted as a patron to both the philosopher Marsilio Ficino and a Greek scholar Argyropoulos (who he supported in order that he might teach young Florentines Greek). Cosimo contributed his greatest talents to the community and sought to provide those in which he was not well learned.¹⁸

Lorenzo, like his grandfather, sought to increase Florence’s beauty and greatness by building new streets and structures and acting as patrons to artists. He also sought to keep “the people united and nobility honored” by hosting festivities—“frequent jousts and representations of old deeds and triumphs were to be seen”—which increased harmony and civic pride. A great humanist and man of letters, Lorenzo “took marvelous delight in architecture, music and poetry,” which he shared with the greater community by hiring great architects and funding artists, musicians, and poets. In order that he might share his passion for learning with the public, he opened a school “so that the Florentine

¹⁷ Niccolo Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, translated by Laura F. Banfield and Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988. Pg. 161

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 281-283

youth might be trained in the study of letters...[and] to which the most excellent men in Italy were then brought.” Lorenzo also lent his wisdom and education to the administration of government where “his reputation grew every day because of his prudence: for he was eloquent and sharp in discussing things, wise in resolving them. quick and spirited in executing them.” Though these are eulogies and therefore idealized accounts of their lives, it is clear that the Medici embodied the ideals of civic humanism. As virtuous individuals these men shared their talents and wealth with the greater community in order that the common good might profit. They were passionate about self-improvement but even more so about the wellbeing of their city and fellow citizens. These men helped the community, strengthened republican institutions and guaranteed liberty. Such noble and honorable men are excellent examples of the type of active and energetic citizens who added to Florence’s reputation as a powerful and successful Renaissance city.¹⁹

Whereas in the medieval city-republics the common good relied upon the willing unanimity of its citizenry and the behavior of all its citizens working toward a common goal, Renaissance Florence depended upon virtuous individuals to take part in civic life and assure the public good. Consequently, individual differences were valued rather than condemned. Further, the well being of the community could not be jeopardized by the dishonorable actions of a single citizen. A great advocate of the Florentine administration, Leonardo Bruni asserts, “therefore, although there may be some persons in this republic of less than perfect behavior, it would not be right to blame the whole community for it. For this republic does not follow the deeds of these men but rather

¹⁹ *ibid.* 361-2

prosecutes, and punishes them.”²⁰ Florence created a greater internal strength because it did not expect unanimity amongst its people, nor did it base its administration upon each citizen’s commitment to the greater good of their neighbors. Rather civic humanism stressed that those of noble character and greater virtue and wealth should assist the community, thereby strengthening its civic institutions through its diversity.

Bruni especially praised the resiliency of the Florentine institutions and structures, particularly the constitution, as that which maintained liberty.²¹ Brunni argued that the soundness of each city lay in these offices and that “freedom and people are sovereign in every matter.”²² Indeed, Brunni strove to demonstrate how the interaction and “purposeful unity of the Florentine institutions” created a system of control, which prevented tyrannical powers in any singular agency.²³ Indeed, he insists that these boards “should not have exclusive power to decide on all matters” but that “their decisions should [also] be approved by the council of the people and the council of the community.”²⁴ Matters, which concern the community, he believes, are decided “with justice and reason” only “when they are submitted to the judgment of the majority.”²⁵ It is only in these instances that “the force of liberty is felt and the most holy justice is preserved among the citizens, so that no arbitrary decisions of a single man can be maintained against the judgment of so many people.”²⁶ It is in communities such as this that people are guaranteed their rights because “anyone is free to nurture grievances.”²⁷ He insists that “there is no place

²⁰ Leonardo Bruni, *In Praise of Florence: The Panegyric of the City of Florence*, translated by Alfred Scheepers, Olive Press, 2005. Pg. 102

²¹ Bruni, 113-6

²² *ibid.* 116-8

²³ *ibid.* 175

²⁴ *ibid.* 115

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.* 116-8

on earth where people are more free before the law” and “nowhere you can find such a measure of freedom and equal rights for the higher and lower classes.”²⁸ This is the greatest evidence of political wisdom.²⁹

Both Machiavelli and Bruni stress the importance of classical ties and Florence’s place as the successor of republican Rome. Bruni asserts that the Florentine people are the direct descendants of the Romans and are therefore “destined to rule the world by the right of succession.” Florence’s hereditary past meant that its citizens “find joy in freedom more than all other men, and that they are enemies of tyrants.” Florence’s greatness was built upon the same virtues that allowed her ancestors to reach preeminence. The city on the Arno could not reach acclaim through laziness nor vices, “but through wise council, facing dangers, reliability and integrity, modesty, but most of all by taking up the cause of the protection of the poor.” Florence did not desire “to excel [simply] in riches, but even more through zeal and graciousness.” Consequently, her “abundance of beauty was less a result of her power, than of her justice and humanity...through these she acquired authority and glory.” By seeking to emulate Rome, Florence reached her own success. Bruni asserts that this could not be accomplished simply by virtue of ancestry, for “the dignity and fame of ancestors shines upon the sons too, only if they also shine with their own virtues.” Consequently, Florence’s greatness rests not only upon her history but also upon the integrity of its administrators and the strength of its governmental structures.³⁰

Machiavelli stressed classical ties in relation to factionalism. In *Florentine Histories* he cites, “in Rome, as everyone knows after the kings were driven out, disunion

²⁸ *ibid.* 118

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Bruni, 94-99

between the nobles and the plebs arose and Rome was maintained by it until its ruin."³¹ These factions, according to Machiavelli, actually preserved the city rather than destroy it. Indeed, in his *Discourses* he asserts that it is "essential that men who live together under any constitution should frequently have their attention called to themselves either by some external or some internal occurrence."³² These internal "tumults" check the strength of the city's institutions, and reassert the importance of good citizens and individual virtues in the maintenance of an independent city.³³ He recognizes the ill effects of infighting—death, exile, and the destruction of families. However, he also asserts, "and truly, in my judgment no other instances appears to me to show so well the power of our city as the one derived from these divisions, which would have had the force to annihilate any great and very powerful city."³⁴ This is a compelling argument attesting to the inherent strength of Florence's citizens and institutions—able to withstand the divisions and disorders, which plague all cities, and often lead to their destruction. Machiavelli writes, "nonetheless ours, it appeared, became even greater from them; so great was the virtue of those citizens and the power of their genius and their spirit to make themselves and their fatherland great that as many as remained free from so many evils were more able by their virtue to exalt it, than could the malice of those accidents that had diminished it overwhelm it."³⁵ Factionalism allowed those citizens, secure in their interests and of great virtue, to aid their city and show their greater civic pride and patriotism. These citizens ensured Florentine liberty and justice from those who disrupted

³¹ Machiavelli, *The Florentine Histories*, 6-7

³² Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, edited Bernard Crick, translated Leslie J. Walker, revised Brian Richardson, London: Penguin Books, 1983. Pg. 387

³³ *ibid.* 386

³⁴ Machiavelli, *The Florentine Histories*, 7

³⁵ *ibid.*

the civic peace. That such men arose in times of need reaffirmed Machiavelli's faith in Florence's greatness and that of the Florentine people. It further demonstrated that liberty could be maintained despite a clearly articulated common good. Virtuous individuals could act as the guarantors of civic freedom.

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Ultimately, Florence's was altered by the changes in value provided by civic humanism. Attitudes regarding human nature, freewill and the importance of individual virtuosity fundamentally changed Florentine society. The virtue of the individual began to take precedence over those of the community. That is to say, there was no longer unanimity amongst the citizenry to uphold the common good. However, individual interests were best served when liberty reigned and the city was harmonious. Florentines, therefore, continued to take a strong interest in their community, even if their personal interests were no longer uniform. Further, there came to be honor associated with assisting the community as well as notoriety and praise. Humanism created individuals who sought not only to be industrious and virtuous, but who also desired recognition for their achievements. Essentially, civic humanism translated into a political discourse in which governance required the active participation of "good citizens." Liberty was no longer dependent upon internal harmony but was threatened mainly by external forces. The republicanism of the fifteenth century represented a highly evolved civic structure, which stressed individual virtues as the principle guarantor not simply of the common good, but of good government.

Chapter 3: "A state divided cannot stand:" Sienee factionalism as a cause of decline?

Despite a distance of only sixty miles, Siena was unaffected by the significant intellectual, cultural and political changes occurring in Florence. Unexposed to the burgeoning new intellectual and political theories of humanism, the Sienee continued to uphold the traditional values that had served them for so long. Fifteenth century Siena, in effect, represented a city not only obsessed with its past, but uninterested in its future. In both medieval and Renaissance republics, good government consisted of justice, liberty and the preservation of the common good. As a result, the main difference in political ideologies rested in how these ideals were maintained and protected. Renaissance Florence cultivated a republicanism that stressed greater civic participation, patriotism and individual virtue. Its civic humanism placed a heavy emphasis on the self-educated and honorable citizens' ability to affect change and work for the good of the community. Siena, in contrast, continued to emphasize a communal harmony in which all citizens agreed to act together for the greater good of the city, essentially placing its needs ahead of their own. Individual virtues were less important than communal responsibility and citywide interests. Because the principles of good government were interconnected and dependent upon one another they were reliant upon civic harmony. Consequently, as Siena became weak and disunited over the years, it is unsurprising that good government failed to exist. As time drew on, the commune, plagued by injustice and civic turmoil, began to closely resemble the *Mal Governo* fresco.

Factionalism in Siena was the byproduct of a value system that no longer functioned or adequately met the needs of its people. Civic unrest not only disallowed a common good, but also indicated the government was not upholding justice nor meeting

the needs of its people. The principles of good government required a balance that could not and would not be maintained within Sieneſe walls. Though factions undoubtedly weakened the ſtate, they were representative of greater weaknesses within the city. The adminiſtration had failed to maintain an environment in which the people felt comfortable tying their futures together. Further, the government remained idle and unresponsive to the breakdown of order and general chaos that threatened the city's liberty. In effect, the Sieneſe government stagnated under the weight of its old values, which were no longer actively maintained nor forced to evolve.

San Bernardino and Pope Pius II were compelled to viſit Siena often in hopes that they might ſave the city from certain failure. Internal turmoil was ſo great that there could be no reaſonable expectation of Sieneſe citizens within the city making any poſitive changes for the future. Thus, both Bernardino and Pius attempted to revitalize the city by appealing to the people and their ſenſe of communal duty. However, deſpite each man's good intentions neither had any laſting effect. That their efforts went unrewarded and their deſperate warnings unheeded indicates a problem larger than inſighting or a ſtubborn will. However, in an era in which traditional values continued to take precedence in moſt city-republics (Florence was, in many ways, the exception), it is expected that Bernardino and Pius would advocate communal reſponſibility to the common good and ſpeak vehemently againſt partiſanſhips. Further, their inſiſtence, in Siena, of mediaval values, of virtues, vices, juſtice and the common good as means to civic peace and ſecurity gives further credence to the argument that Florence was unique in its political progreſſion.

To best understand the problems in Siena it is necessary to look at the works of two of her most famous public figures, San Bernardino and Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (Pope Pius II). Though figures on the international stage, these men each took a special interest in their birthplace, and were often greatly disappointed by the less than harmonious state of affairs. Each returned often in an attempt to strengthen the city, to create peace and harmony: each also approached the task differently. As a Franciscan friar, Bernardino attempted to appeal to the people's moral convictions and religious values. It is often said, "the sky hung low in the middle ages." A strong sense of religiosity and desire for absolution and salvation continued to pervade the city and it was to these desires that Bernardino often turned. The friar preached to the citizens not simply for the safety and liberty of Siena, but for the safety of their souls. While Bernardino worked at this grass-roots level, Pius used his political power and religious authority to work with the Sienese magistrates in an attempt to strengthen the civic constructs of the city, to ensure the city's liberty and the common good, from above.

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The emblem of San Bernardino remains, to this day, displayed prominently on the front of Siena's *Palazzo Pubblico*. The symbol of an important figure, a saint, a Sienese citizen, it speaks to his enduring legacy and the effect he had upon his people. San Bernardino lived from 1380 to 1444, and was canonized in 1450 by Pope Nicholas V.¹ He was a friar of the Franciscan order, who traveled widely and was offered the bishoprics of several cities, each of which he declined.² San Bernardino gave his Sienese sermons in the *campo* in front of the *Palazzo Pubblico*, the civic and, in Bernardino's

¹ Iris Origo, *The World of San Bernardino*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1963. Pg. 2

² Origo, 1-2

presence, the spiritual heart of Siena. His sermons were delivered in the vernacular, directed at people of all walks of life, and, most importantly, topics were addressed that most affected the common people.³ Ada Harrison, a translator of an important collection of his sermons writes, “he speaks often of war, which touched the cities more than once in every lifetime, and of the plague, a hideously familiar visitant, and continually of party strife, which brooded permanently in all cities like a domestic curse; but of the spectacular glories of the Renaissance little enough.”⁴ That he spoke consistently of party strife in Siena (as well as other towns), indicates that it was a problem that affected daily life, not just of the nobles (who so often formed factions for their own selfish political purposes), but that of the common man as well. For Bernardino to speak often of it, in the same manner and with the same intensity with which he addressed war and pestilence, demonstrates its importance and its prevalent nature. Additionally, Harrison writes that Bernardino spoke little of the Renaissance, indicating its relative unimportance when compared to the spiritual and moral matters he addressed in his sermons.

In contrast Pope Pius II was descended from one of the most important Siennese noble families, the Piccolomini. Born Enea Silvio Bartolommeo Piccolomini, Pius grew up in poverty in the small town of Corsignano. A change in Siennese government many years before had passed power from the nobles to the people, exiling his family. Consequently, when he returned to Siena periodically throughout his life, he would be seen as a champion of the noble’s agenda. Prior to his ascendancy to the papal throne, Pius worked as a teacher and a diplomat, traveling widely and even arranging royal marriages (notably Frederick III and Eleanor of Aragon). Often called the first “humanist

³ Ada Harrison, “San Bernardino of Siena,” *Examples of San Bernardino*, London: Gerald Howe, 1926. Pg.

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⁴ Harrison, 2

pope” Pius was truly a “man of letters” who enjoyed writing his own poetry, short histories and memoirs. As pope he continued this legacy as a patron of the arts, commissioning many works, particularly in Corsignano, which was renamed Pienza in his honor following the renovations. Pius lived from 1405 to 1464. Despite his international status, Pius cared deeply about the affairs of his city, returning often and attempting to use his political and religious authority to create positive change. Though a humanist by reputation, Pius continued to support traditional values in Siena, both politically and religiously, and saw factionalism as the surest threat to Siennese civic liberty.⁵

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Bernardino strove, above all, for the harmony of his city. Partisanship and infighting had seriously weakened the Siennese administration. Every word spoken, every gesture made or even the way daily chores were performed was evidence of a person’s party affiliation. Bernardino preached, “this thou knowest, it reacheth even to the man who doth pare a peach, or to the cutting open crosswise of garlic.”⁶ Further, every man, woman, child—even the unborn, he stressed, have been made a supporter of one party or another.⁷ “Two things alone remain that stand outside the parties, which perhaps you would do well to include in them,” he asserted, “Do you know what they are? Bread and wine: and when you have assigned these factions, you would have to give up eating or drinking in order not to have to do with your enemies.”⁸ Bernardino clearly preached to

⁵ Anea Silvio Piccolomini, *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope: The Commentaries of Pius II, an abridgment*, translated by Florence A. Gragg, edited by Leona Gable, New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1959. Pg. 29

⁶ Saint Bernardine, *Saint Bernardine of Siena: Sermons*, translated by Helen Josephine Robins, edited by Don Nazareno Orlandi, Siena: Tipografia Sociale, 1920. Pg. 36

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*, 53

the absurdity of this form of discord. The prominent place these factions occupied in civic life was an obvious impediment to daily activities and detrimental to the well being of the populace. Origo writes, “Fra Bernardino had few illusions about his fellow-citizens, and did not hesitate to say so.”⁹

To complicate matters further, the divisions were numerous. The factions throughout the city were called *monti* (*monte* singular),¹⁰ and each was the result of a oligarchic or semi-oligarch regime of previous centuries.¹¹ Indeed, Pius asserted, “some [factions/parties] were more able than others and as one party after another became powerful, it seized the government.”¹² They included *gentiluomini* (landed nobility), the *nove* (merchants, bankers, cloth manufactures, alliance of rich commoners and former nobility), the *dodici* (middle guildsmen), the *reformatori* and the *popolari* (these two *monti* included artisans, shopkeepers, perhaps disenfranchised merchants and nobles).¹³ Though the length of their regimes varied, none had ever felt secure in office; discord always ran beneath the surface as each party vied for supremacy.¹⁴ Despite the fact that major revolution was averted from 1403 to 1480,¹⁵ Sieneese civic life remained volatile as each *monte* struggled for power. Thus, it was with this erratic and pervasive party politics in mind that Bernardino preached to his fellow citizens, and, it is this context that must be taken into account in order to fully understand the intensity of his sermons. Origo writes of his mindset, “he had watched them destroying, day by day, the peace of mind of his fellow-citizens and the prosperity of his city, and it is hardly surprising that he should

⁹ Origo, 131

¹⁰ Origo, 133

¹¹ Hicks, “The Sieneese State in the Renaissance,” 78

¹² Piccolomini, 29

¹³ Hicks, “The Sieneese State in the Renaissance,” 78

¹⁴ Origo, 133

¹⁵ Hicks, “Sieneese Society in the Renaissance,” 414

have attacked them with a vehemence such as he hardly showed towards any other sin or folly."¹⁶

Though there were no *coups* to speak of, at least in the fifteenth century, violence itself was endemic as party members sought revenge for alleged wrongs. Origo asserts that much of the brutality associated with party strife was closely connected to the medieval tradition of vendettas.¹⁷ In fact, revenge for an insult or injury through violent means was not legally considered a crime, simply an act of justice.¹⁸ In this sense, justice refers to a sense of fairness and equity between families rather than between citizens and government. However, legality does not negate immorality. Bernardino clearly saw this brutality as sinful (both in the form of vendettas and parties) and one of the primary reasons Sieneese life was precarious.¹⁹ He spoke out against violence and particularly against the hostilities committed in the name of the party. He preached:

How many evils have proceeded from these factions, how many women have been slaughtered in their own cities, in their own houses, how many have been disemboweled! Likewise, how many children have been killed for revenge upon their fathers. In the same manner babes have been torn from the wombs of their mothers and their bodies trodden underfoot, and little children seized and their heads dashed against the wall: the flesh of an enemy sold at the butcher's shop like any other flesh.--the heart torn from a body and eaten, raw, raw!²⁰

These atrocities were not limited for they appear throughout Bernardino's sermons:²¹ such descriptions could not have been randomly conceived, they are quite detailed. These events must have actually taken place within the city. It is no wonder, in such a place, that the common good could not exist, for the picture Bernardino paints could easily fill

¹⁶ Origo, 135

¹⁷ Origo, 137

¹⁸ Origo, 137

¹⁹ Origo, 138

²⁰ Saint Bernardine, 89

²¹ See: Saint Bernardine, *Saint Bernardine of Siena: Sermons*, and San Bernardino, *Examples of San Bernardino*

the lost portion of the *mal governo* fresco in the *Sala dei nove*. Such acts do not simply depict division but the greatest cruelty, and fury. It seems that these vices do not appear alone, but rather the presence of one naturally encourages the others. By detailing the brutality in stark terms, Bernardino desired to rouse feelings of guilt in his countrymen. Through his sermons he brought the average citizen within the *Sala*, to understand the reality that was “bad government” in Siena. He recognized that party feelings could drive a man to frenzy, such that he would kill his brother or father if he were to oppose him.²² Bernardino hoped that by preaching to all partisans, by condemning the actions of all party men, his greater point would be heard, and the “frenzy” which so often clouded their judgment could be lifted, so that they could see clearly. He further hoped that his fellow-citizens would begin to recognize that they had a responsibility to their city and that their actions, their parties or private feuds, had greater repercussions throughout the city and threatened its successes and future.

It was this violent, self-destructive behavior that Bernardino found when he returned to Siena periodically to preach. In fact, he was even asked by Pope Eugene V and Cardinal Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II) to return to Siena in 1427, for divisions there had “grieved them” greatly.²³ “I am come here upon their order, and I am come here most willingly,” he preached, “and I pray you all that you will cast off these parties and these divisions, in order that there may ever be peace among you, concord and unity.”²⁴ Civic concord is what Bernardino strove most for when he came to lecture in Siena, for it was this aspect of the Siennese *buon governo* that rested most with the citizens. Indeed, Skinner asserts that the unity of citizens creates concord only if they are willing to place

²² Saint Bernardine, 99

²³ *ibid.*, 100

²⁴ *ibid.*

the good of the commune ahead of their own partisan or individual interests,²⁵ and “the good of each individual citizen [is] equated with the good of the city as a whole.”²⁶ That Sieneſe infighting and party ſtrife was this ſignificant, that it had international recognition, ſpeaks volumes of its ſeverity, particularly in when compared to city-states that ſuffered ſimilar problems.

It was his wiſh for harmony that drove the friar to paſſionately denounce his own people, for he had ſeen them deſtroy not only the proſperity of the city, but alſo the welfare of his fellow countrymen.²⁷ Indeed, he feared for the fate of Siena, the hatred that divided them ſurely tempted God’s ire. Bernardino was able to aide the city of Crema (in Lombardy) in caſting aſide their parties and in finding civic harmony.²⁸ By turning againſt theſe factions, Bernardino believed that “God ſaved that land from many dangers...and many other places took example from this, and to-day it is one of the beſt villages in Lombardy.”²⁹ Bernardino took great ſatisfaction from his ability to help Crema as well as many other cities throughout Italy.³⁰ It muſt have been frustrating for him to ſee the ſucceſs of his work in other city-states, but find no real accompliſhment in the place he cared moſt deeply about. Conſequentially, this ſermon muſt have been given more forcefully, with the hopes that it would enable the Sieneſe to find ſimilar peace by example. Additionally, this may be the beſt indication that Sieneſe feuds were ſymptomatic of a greater problem within the government and ſociety.

²⁵ Skinner, “Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Ariſt as Political Philoſopher,” 34

²⁶ Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 58

²⁷ Origo, 135

²⁸ Saint Bernardine, 40

²⁹ *ibid.*, 41

³⁰ Origo, 139-140

If the citizenry could not be appealed to on the basis of patriotism for the collective good and prosperity of the city, then it became necessary to appeal to each citizen on an individual level. Bernardino asserted that the hatred harbored by party men for the opposition brought about sure damnation.³¹ Bernardino asserted time and again that if such men, “die without repentance. and perform not penance for this. they will die accursed, and he who is now dead heath died accursed.”³² Further, those who manage to avoid partisanship, those who, upon threat of death and dismemberment still refused to choose one faction over another, Bernardino affirmed, will not only be saved, but offered complete absolution.³³ In a society that was deeply concerned with religion and the afterlife, with eternal salvation. it is surprising that such threats did not encourage them to reform their ways. Indeed, absolution for a lifetime of sin would appear a powerful incentive. That more people did not change. did not renounce party politics, stands as a testament to the powerful hold these parties appear to have had over their followers. These fierce partisanship must also have been indicative of larger problems within the Sienese civic structure. Furthermore, because Siena remained a traditional medieval city, not just politically but also culturally, religion continued to play an important, indeed paramount, role in the lives of its citizens. It is, therefore, surprising that the frenzy of partisanship would override such moral and spiritual concerns. Bernardino remarked, “the sin of the party man is empty, vain and foolish, and yet it is the heaviest sin there is...o you factious man. you are like him who has a frenzy, and when it is on him he has regard for none.”³⁴ Beyond the vices of frenzy (fury) and vanity, and the shortcoming of

³¹ Saint Bernardine, 36

³² *ibid.* 99

³³ *ibid.* 37

³⁴ *ibid.* 87

foolishness, the sin of a party man is inherently selfish. Fury and vanity blind man to his civic responsibility, and, when many men (indeed, it appears the majority of Sieneese) are in such a state it quickly falls into disrepair. The Siena that Bernardino preached to may have idealized, or at the very least desired to emulate, the *buon governo* fresco in theory, but in point of fact, it most clearly resembled that of the *mal governo*. In the frenzy of partisanship, even respected principles were forgotten, despite their importance. Pope Pius II also recognized these sins in the Sieneese people, he wrote, “moreover the populace, corrupted by hate, avarice, and ambition, could not realize what was for their own good.”³⁵

San Bernardino also preached on the importance of justice. It is justice after all, that creates concord and harmony within the city, an important principle that is both a prerequisite and a result of a *ben commune*. Pius also stresses the importance in his memoirs, writing, “a state divided is threatened with ruin, and peace does not dwell where justice is an exile.”³⁶ Pius’ commentary clearly echoes the inscription of the *mal governo* fresco, “there, where Justice is bound, no one is ever in accord for the Common Good [*ben commune*] nor pulls the cord straight; therefore, it is fitting that Tyranny prevails...”³⁷ Justice guarantees peace: it is a keystone of good government, of stability. Justice is certainly among the most important administrative values, those that are best kept by the magistracy. Bernardino acknowledges it often, in particular on the morning in which the new rulers assume their offices (this happens often, as in Florence), perhaps in the hope they will remember “how to rule the republic rightly.”³⁸ In his sermon he

³⁵ Saint Bernardine, 103

³⁶ Piccolomini, 103

³⁷ Norman, 167

³⁸ Saint Bernardine, 58

includes many of the virtues detailed in the discussion of good government, including magnanimity and prudence. Justice, he describes, is a quality “which he who governs should possess.”³⁹ Kingdoms, which exist without this virtue, are a “very great robbery” primarily “because it is most plain and apparent that cities and provinces decline when justice is not maintained there.”⁴⁰ To these new rulers, Bernardino recommends “*diligite iustitiam qui iudicatis terram*, Love justice you that are judges of the earth... Then fail not: see that thou dost punish with mercy: do not hinder it, do nothing feignedly.”⁴¹ Bernardino’s language suggests that abuses of justice have been common. Indeed, they continue to be, Hook asserts, “despite the frequent expressions of such ideals and despite a genuine seeking after of Justice within Siena, by the early sixteenth century, although some admirers of the Sienese legal system could still be found. many Sienese. even more Florentines... were to maintain that in sober fact the state of Siena had become the epitome of Injustice.”⁴² It is perhaps for this reason that Bernardino continues his sermon requesting that justice be shown towards everyone, that it should not be like a rod “stand[ing] upright, that it should neither bend backwards nor forwards, nor to the right, nor to the left.”⁴³ Bernardino used parables in his sermons to greater explicate his point—that all should be treated equally in the eyes of the law, according to their crimes.⁴⁴

Where Bernardino focused on the internal affairs of discord, attempting to create change from the bottom up, Pius was ultimately worried about the external ramifications of Sienese infighting, attempting to instigate change within the administration to

³⁹ Saint Bernardine, 59

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Hook, 112-3

⁴³ Saint Bernardine, 60

⁴⁴ *ibid.* 63

safeguard Siennese liberties. Siena, by this time, suffered from a severely weakened economy, and, had already subjugated herself in the past to invading forces. In the late fourteenth, early fifteenth century, Siena surrendered to Milan and even began to use Milanese coinage, until, by a stroke of good fortune, the Duke, Giangaleazzo Visconti, died and the empire he had built quickly crumbled. Thus Pius was understandably concerned: a city disunited, struggling within itself for power, fighting for control, would eventually leave itself vulnerable to external threats and conquests. A former diplomat and political entity in his own right, Pius immediately saw that Siena was in jeopardy. In his memoirs he cited factionalism as its cause; “the whole city was so torn with civil discord that it was of the universal opinion that she would lose her liberty.” Such commentary further implied that Pius, despite his “humanist” reputation, continued to support a traditional political theory, in which faction posed the greatest threat to a republic’s sovereignty. It was for this reason that Pius visited Siena frequently, for he could use both his political and religious authority to save his city: “...[he] took thought of his dearly loved country...disrupt[ing] the schemes set on foot against her and frighten[ing] off her enemies by his authority.”⁴⁵

In the spring of 1459 Pius desired to change the administration of the Siennese government. He believed that if the nobles were restored to a place “befitting of their dignity” the state might be preserved and restored to peace. The Siennese people were, however, suspicious of his motives; he did after all have family (of noble stature) residing in Siena. Nevertheless, it appears the people may have misjudged Pius’ intent. The Siennese attempted to preempt Pius’ involvement in their government by electing a member of the Piccolomini to office; however, “Pius, who was concerned not for his own

⁴⁵ Piccolomini, 98

house but for the whole state, thought that nothing would be accomplished unless all the nobles were returned to power.” He contested that the nobles having lost their wealth, were humbler and more like the rest of the people. While Bernardino attempted to unite the citizens of Siena on moral and religious grounds, Pius took a different approach. Instead, he tried to create unity amongst the *monte* within the government in order that he might create harmony and give the appearance of strength. Indeed, this would only be an *appearance* of strength, for Pius’ plan was met with fierce opposition within the city. Indeed, “the people were violently excited by this demand” and declared it “outrageous” and intolerable.

The Sienese citizens were so infuriated by Pius’ work they declared, “they would never consent, even if they were compelled to stand a siege and starved into eating their own children.” Despite the hysterical response, the citizenry quickly realized that Pius was serious when he threatened to “...withdraw his favor from a city which refused to comply with just demands.” Pius was adamant his requests were followed. He saw the restoration of the nobles to government as the “one effective measure to keep [Sienese] liberty and preserve [the] city.” However, a newfound harmony would not have been the ultimate saving grace. It is evident from the people’s resistance that concord would not result from these changes. Indeed, Pius offered, as an extra incentive, papal support, in exchange for help with the nobles. “If adversity threatens,” he declared, “not only will our aid be prompt and ready but you will be helped by the omnipotent hand of god Himself. Who is ever on the side of the righteous.” Despite the bribe and support, the Sienese had difficulty passing the measure. While the magistrates “found it hard to deny the Pope what he asked,” they found it “harder still to grant it [the request].” The law

required not only a two-thirds majority agreement, but also that three hundred senators be present in order for the measure to pass. These restraints further decreased likelihood that the act would pass. Siena was truly a city divided and in chaos: its vices clouded the judgment of its leaders, and harmed the decisions made toward its future. It was only under papal pressure that the Sienese senators acquiesced and passed the measure, albeit with some modifications.⁴⁶

By 1462 Siena was again forced to seek help from Pius, under threat of a Florentine attack. However, Pius was not fooled; to the envoys that greeted him outside the city he observed the true state of affairs. The Sienese requested papal presence and support when “you yourselves [the Sienese] are persecuting her and pleading the cause of the enemy.” While the Florentines were indeed anxious to invade, Pius observed that it would not be the cause of Sienese subjugation. Though he acknowledged the Florentine threat as a “rival state, greedy for power, with great wealth and far-flung dominion” he recognized that they were “ever on the watch for your [Sienese] ruin.” He implied that Florence was simply waiting for Siena to self-destruct, that the real danger lay within the city walls not outside them. Pius realized that the Sienese had endangered themselves by allowing discord and self-interest to rule. The keystones of good government all but disappeared, vices such as vanity and frenzy replaced the virtues such as prudence, magnanimity and peace.⁴⁷

Upon arriving at the city limits Pius admonished the citizens who greeted him. Siena, he asserted, had fallen into such disorder that only “money and harmony” may

⁴⁶ Piccolomini, 98-103

⁴⁷ Pope Pius II, *The Commentaries of Pius II, on The Memorable Events of His Times, book IX*, Smith College Studies in History, Volume XXXI, translated by Florence Alden Gragg, edited by Vera B. Holms, Sidney R. Packard and Leona C. Gable, Northampton, Mass.: Department of History Smith College, 1951. Pg. 574

save her. The former is particularly dangerous because it reduces the state's ability to defend itself. Further, a lack of funds entices magistrates to sell Sienese freedoms to the highest bidder. Indeed, it was for this reason that Siena allowed herself to be ruled by Milan in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. By "passing every summer with the Roman Curia" in Siena, Pius tried to alleviate these concerns by providing funds. However, harmony he "can urge but cannot provide." Citizens must desire and seek harmony for themselves. He further reminded the Sienese that concord is the greatest source of security for "the love of the citizens [is] a fortification difficult to take." Pius admits he has no real control over civic order. However, his language suggests a sense of communal patriotism and a greater understanding of liberty. Despite his attempts to create a stronger civic structure by altering its class composition, he was unable to enact any lasting change. Pius, in his frustration, reprimands the envoys for their foolishness and lack of foresight: "we begged you to remove the seeds of dissension, that is the names of your factions... You refused to listen to advice; you followed your own desires. It is vain for you to commend to us a state which you are ruining with your private feuds." Try as he might to caution his beloved citizens, to aid them in understanding the greater implications of their actions, he continues to fail. Begrudgingly, Pius is forced to realize that harmony can only be encouraged, not enforced.⁴⁸

In a city so torn asunder, where violence reigned and commerce dwindled, where citizens were divided and so filled with undying hatred that they cared not even about their spiritual health, their salvation, what common good could exist? This question ultimately leads to the administration of governance—for justice, liberty and the common good are interconnected principles in republican "good government." In a city that held

⁴⁸ Pope Pius II, 575

so strongly to its traditional values, what happened to those espoused in the government frescoes so prominently placed in the civic center of the city? David Hicks asserts that these ideals were ever-present:

The devotion to the role of the Virgin in civic patriotism, the stubborn attachment to native themes and images in art, the persistence in justifying the republicanism without reference to the new humanism, the pride, indeed arrogance, in isolating their unique style of life from the larger Italian world: the Siense lived most comfortably with tradition.⁴⁹

The sermons and rhetoric of Bernardino and Pius attest to the continued importance of the *buon governo* values. Their diatribes against factionalism, their fears for the city, indicate that they saw Siena faltering. Factions threatened Siense liberty; had the Siense embraced a new value structure, the new republicanism of Florence, their lectures and commentaries would be unnecessary, for good government, civic peace and, ultimately, liberty would not necessitate a collective common good. The question then returns to administration of government. From Bernardino's point of view, it appears that despite the reliance upon a magistracy to ensure the smooth running of the commune, to enact justice and rule virtuously, much of the responsibility, at least for the commune's failings, lay with the people. Indeed, Bernadette Paton writes,

The friars [in Siena] believed that the preservation of both peace and justice was ultimately the responsibility of the citizens of the commune themselves. Despite their professed lack of faith in the ability of the masses to govern themselves in a righteous and orderly manner, in the final analysis they believed that the quality of the city's social fabric was dependent upon the relationship between any individual and his neighbor...[further,] they maintained that respect for the life, property and honour of another was the basis of charity, peace and, hence, of justice in the community."⁵⁰

Bernardino, a Franciscan friar, focused his sermons on the common man as a matter of principle. Given the state of affairs, it appears as if the people needed to be reminded of

⁴⁹ Hicks, "Sources of Wealth in Renaissance Siena: Businessmen and Landowners," 9

⁵⁰ Bernadette Paton, "Preaching Friars and the Civic Ethos in a Late Medieval Italian Commune Siena, 1380-1480," thesis Doctor of Philosophy, University of Oxford, 1986. Pg. 130

their responsibilities, their moral duties to their city and their fellow-citizens. Despite his greatest efforts, it seems as if the Sieneese continued to remain indifferent to his pleas.

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In spite of their differences, Pope Pius II and San Bernardino attempted to hold Siena accountable to higher standards, to the principles of the *buon governo* she had set herself in the *Palazzo Pubblico* frescoes. It can be inferred that these traditional values continued to be standards to which the Sieneese aspired based upon the commune's perceived failings and by the admonishments of Pius and Bernardino. Dante writes, an "...infallible Truth: 'Every kingdom divided against itself shall be laid to waste.'⁵¹ This is indeed how Bernardino and Pius viewed Siena. Time and again Bernardino attempted to foster a greater sense of community, a moral obligation between his fellow-citizens, while Pius endeavored to create a harmonious ruling body. However, it appears that no one ever questioned whether factionalism had deeper roots. It is highly likely that factionalism in Siena was symptomatic of greater problems within the political value structure, which disallowed a common good and justice. Thus, good government was not simply absent from the commune, but rather impossible to attain. Sadly, there is no evidence of any movement within the city to correct this. Instead, the Sieneese government stagnated, refusing to look ahead to its future, or even to correct the problems of its past. Thus, it would seem that it was not in fact factions and civic discord that led to Siena's decline; rather it was her antiquated value structure and rigid constructs with the Sieneese both refused to redefine and neglected to maintain.

⁵¹ Dante, 10-11

Chapter 4: Florentine Exceptionalism and the Rise of Civic Patriotism

In many ways Florence's triumph in the fifteenth century represented a remarkable and unique convergence of circumstances, which created an environment of great prosperity and greater achievement. Leonardo Bruni was not being especially boastful when he asserted "there is no city that can compare to Florence in all sorts of praiseworthiness...she cannot be matched in whatever is worthy of praise, neither in loyalty, nor industry or humanity, not in magnanimity."¹ Indeed, it is difficult to narrow the list, "not only, because there are so many subjects, which are mutually intertwined, but because all these things are so lustrous, and in a sense, so extraordinary, that they seem to compete in excellence."² Scholarship in this field has often focused on individual Florentine accomplishments. Consequently, historians have often neglected the most important force behind Florentine success—her citizens. Industrious, hardworking, self-educated and virtuous, these noble men embraced the new humanistic ideals and guided the greater good of the community, reinforcing republican institutions and guaranteeing liberty. It was the work of these Florentine citizens who definitively separated Florentine and Siennese futures.

Florence's civic humanism encouraged an active and engaged populace. Man's role shifted to include a civic life in which virtuous individuals actively served the common good, rather than passively agreeing to uphold it. Because the new humanist man was not satisfied simply with private virtue, but desired to be considered honorable within society and by his peers, he energetically devoted himself to the public good. In

¹ Bruni, 103

² Bruni, 78

doing so, he protected the principles of good government, which had remained as a stable and guiding force throughout a period of transition. Thus, the virtuosity of individuals guaranteed republican liberties. Further, it was the citizen's ability to embrace new ideals that ultimately created flexible and resilient civic constructs that allowed the administration great adaptability in foreign, as well as domestic affairs.

Siena, despite her continued support of traditional values, was not the failure she is so often purported to be. Her lack of success does not mean that she has failed, regardless of the comparisons to Florence. Florence, after all, represents the exception not the rule. Siena, however, simply stagnated. Unexposed to the evolution of values that caused such dramatic changes in Florence, the Siennese continued to support medieval political principles. Though often cited as causal to Siennese "decline," factionalism was in fact a byproduct of the greater problems within the civic administration. Where Machiavelli saw Florentine faction as beneficial because it reinforced the greater strength of Florence's institutions and values, in Siena, such partisanship simply exposed her greater weaknesses.

Historians have too often been content to categorize Siena as a city torn asunder by infighting. Rather, endemic civic discord has broader implications and indicates a larger problem within Siennese political values. Siennese and Florentine good government rested upon the same standards: justice, liberty and the preservation of the common good. These ideals were intertwined and therefore dependent upon one another. That civic harmony could not be restored in Siena implies that the problem lay in the place in which she and Florence differed most dramatically—principles. It would seem, therefore, that

the traditional value structure that continued to guide Sieneese government, no longer reflected the needs of its citizens.

Florence's civic humanism also developed and encouraged a deep pride in the Florentine state. Just as the honorable man desired to be well known and praised, he desired that his city receive similar honors and notoriety. A unique sense of patriotism and civic character developed in the citizen who actively participated in communal affairs. This civic identity fostered a public unity that supported the common good. For the first time, citizens could preserve the *ben commune* without being beholden to a communal interest. This relationship between citizen and state reflected man's increasingly independent nature. Further, in an era of display and self-fashioning, patriotism provided an additional excuse for ornate public works and extravagant sculptures. Ultimately, however, the newly developed Florentine civic identity encouraged civic action that allowed Florence to flourish and become a place of great acclaim.

The Sieneese had a great loyalty to their city, however, it did not manifest itself in a civic patriotism. Besieged by discord and party politics and constantly admonished to promote communal interests and civic harmony, the Sieneese people, almost stubbornly ignored their city's wellbeing. Poignantly, those most concerned for the city's future were those who no longer lived there—Bernardino and Pius. It seems a greater problem within the commune lay with its citizens who were unable to reconcile their desires to fulfill private interest with the needs of the commonweal. As a result, despite a strong civic loyalty, they were unable to continue to uphold the common good, nor the principles of good government. Consequently, Sieneese decline may have been the result of an

antiquated value structure that no longer fulfilled the needs of the people and the community equally. Balancing the unique needs of the citizens and the public was an especially important aspect of Renaissance Florence's political discourse.

While Siena's stagnation may be extreme, it is important to recognize that it is a story that is much more common in the greater history of Italian city-republics. Florence cannot and should not be taken as the paradigm of republican success, if only because no other state was as successful. Florence stands as a shining example of hard work and good fortune. It was, therefore, a combination of unique circumstances that allowed her to become the greatest exception to the rule.



Figure 1: The Good Government

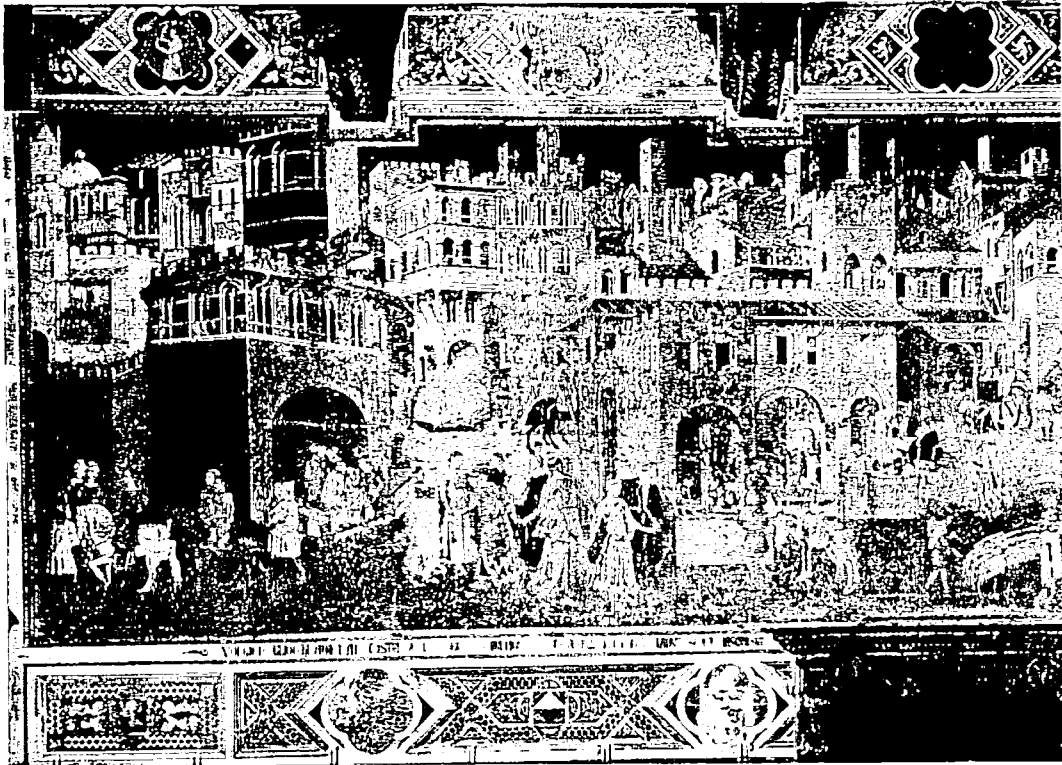


Figure 2: The Effects of Good Government on the City

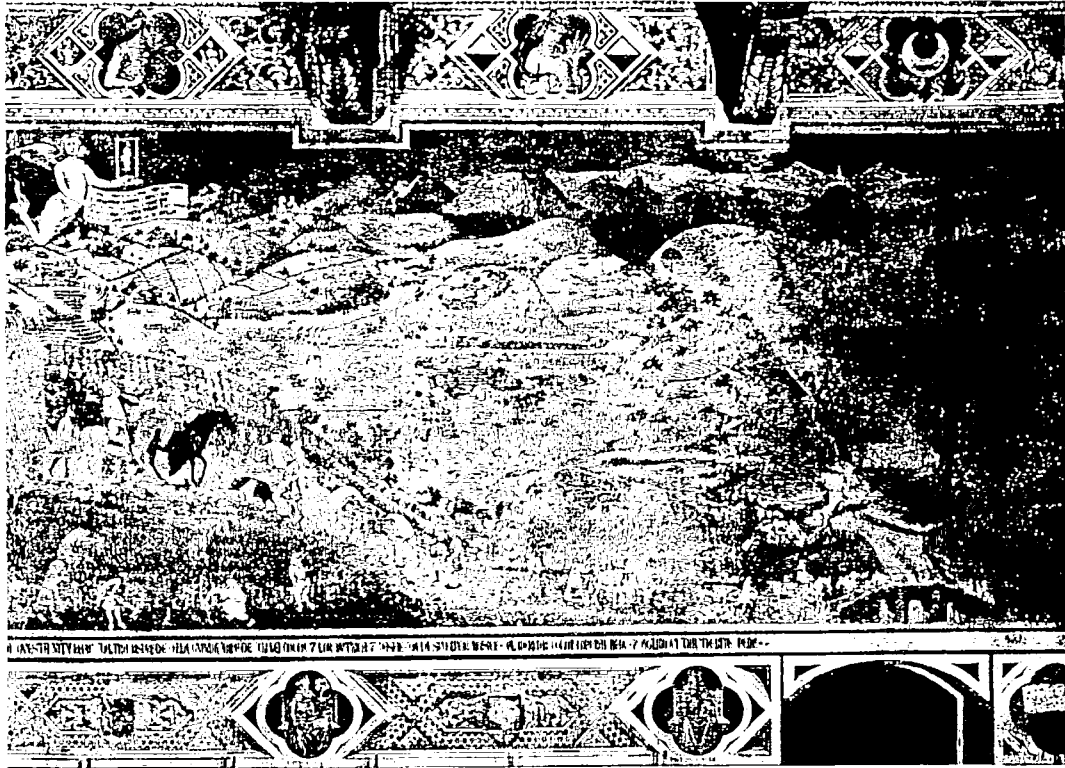


Figure 3: The Effects of Good Government on the Country

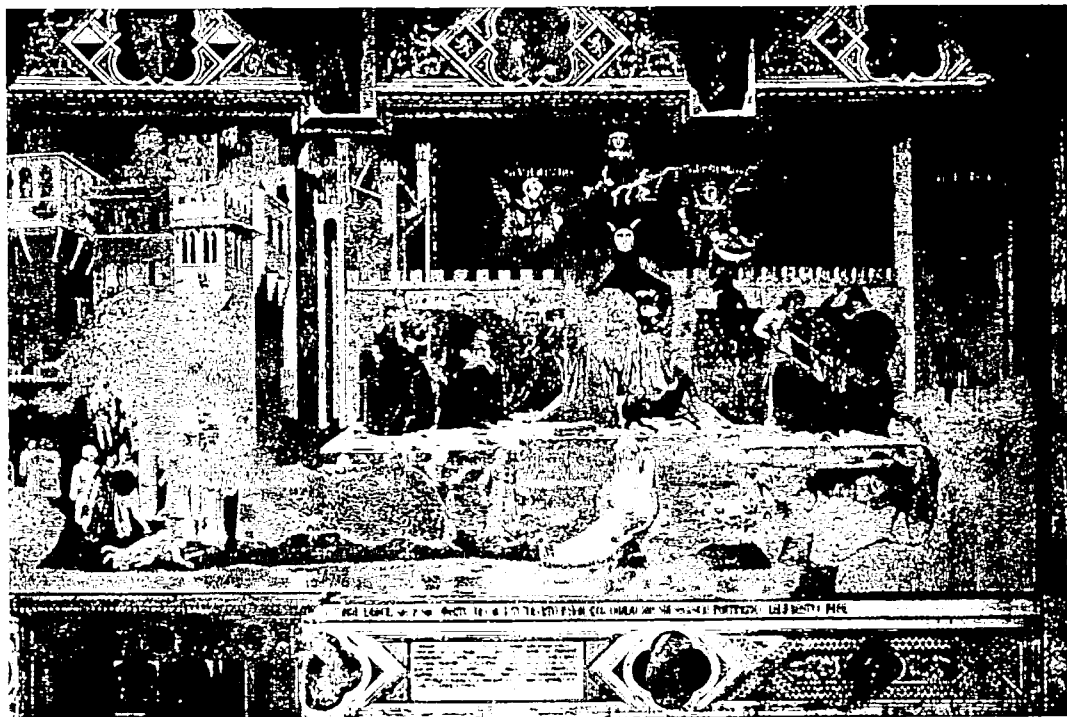


Figure 4: The Bad Government

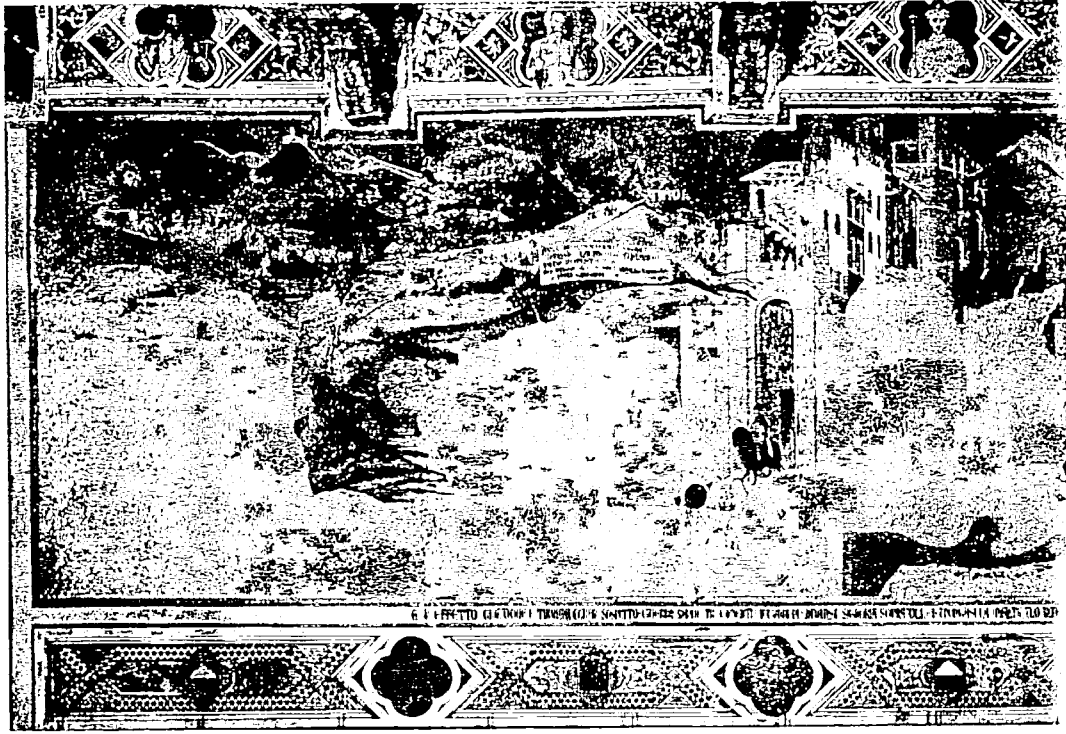


Figure 6: The Effects of Bad Government on the Country and City

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