

TWO MEMOIRS

OF

RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

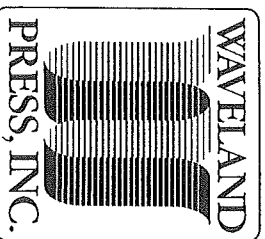
The Diaries of

Buonaccorso Pitti and Gregorio Dati

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"Gambling & Fights"



Prospect Heights, Illinois

It's nothing to me for the truth will come out in the end."

Then I took the letters straight over to the house of Buonaccorso, Ruccho Pitti's son, where my brothers were waiting with our host's son, Luigi, and his grandsons, Lionardo, the son of Geppo Pitti, and the wretched Ciro, son of Lapo Pitti. I told them what Cione had said and showed them the letters which, after due deliberation, they decided to keep, telling me to leave the matter in their hands.

About a month later they sent for me. Cione was with them and, after they had lengthily interceded for him, he begged my pardon, swearing that he did not remember who had struck him. This, he explained, was why he had been foolish enough to repeat what he had heard from trouble-makers but, since then, God had opened his eyes to the truth and he was now convinced that he had been stunned by a kick just as I had said. I pardoned him freely and, many years later, after repeated entreaties, was even prevailed upon to forgive his mother. He wanted me to forgive his cousins, the Mannelli, too, but this I refused to do until, one Good Friday, fully thirty years afterwards, when so as to earn grace in the sight of God, I summoned them to the chapter house in S. Spirito and, with God as our only mediator, made them an offer of peace which they accepted in a humble and contrite spirit.

In 1375, being young [twenty-two], inexperienced, and eager to see something of the world, I joined forces with Matteo dello Scelto Tinghi, a merchant and a great gambler. We went to Genoa, Pavia, back to Genoa and on to Nice and then Avignon, which we reached at Christmas time and where we were seized and thrown into the prison of the Pope's marshal. When we had been a week in prison, they had us up for questioning and accused us of being spies for the Commune of Florence. They produced a letter to Matteo from a brother of his in Florence telling him that Florence had instigated Bologna's rebellion against the Pope. After examining us closely, the court recognized our innocence but insisted nonetheless on our furnishing a ball of 3,000 florins lest we leave the city without the

marshal's permission. Matteo found someone to put up the money and, once we were out of prison, sagely decided that it would be dangerous to stay on here while our Commune was waging war in the territories of the Papacy. He concluded that we had better leave town and that if the merchants who had put up the bail were to lose their money we would reimburse them. Accordingly, we returned to Florence with all speed and had not been there long before news came from Avignon that the Pope had caused all Florentine citizens to be arrested and their records and possessions seized. Letters telling the same story came from all parts of Western Europe where Florentines were being imprisoned and undone as a result of Pope Gregory's decree. In spite of all this, our Commune kept on with its war against the priests, who were an unscrupulous lot at the time—not indeed that I ever met an honest one either before or since!⁴

The following year Matteo decided to go to Prussia and to take me with him. He sent me on ahead, promising to join me about a month later in either Padua or Venice. Having visited Padua, Vicenza, and Verona, I came back to Padua and proceeded from thence to Venice where, when Matteo arrived, he bought 1,000 ducats worth of saffron. We set sail from there to Segna in Slavonia and, from thence, made our way by land to Zagreb and Buda. There, Matteo sold his saffron at 1,000 ducats' profit, and I fell seriously ill with a fever and two tumors of the groin. Matteo left me at Michele Marucci's house at Buda. He gave Michele twelve ducats to pay my way back to Florence if I should survive, and promised that on his next visit he would repay him any expense he might be put to by my illness. Then he went on his way, leaving me alone, in great discomfort and with no one to look after me.

My bed was a large sack of straw in an alcove, and no doctor was brought to visit me. There were no women in

⁴This war between Florence and the Papacy, called the War of the Eight Saints, began in July 1375 and ended three years later, in the summer of 1378. The occupant of the Holy See was Pope Gregory XI (1370-1378).

that house either, only a serving lad who was kept busy cooking and waiting on Michele and on a couple of merchants who were staying with him. I came very close to dying. I had been six weeks lying on that sack, with a towel over me in place of a sheet and a shaggy bedcover and a greasy fur coat of my own, when, on St. Martin's Night, a party of Germans gathered in the next room to play the pipes and dance. They struck their heads in to see who was there and, finding me, forced me into my fur coat and dragged me round and round that room, in spite of all my entreaties, and only let me go when I collapsed from exhaustion. They put me back on my sack then, threw their lined mantles on top of me, and went back to their drinking and dancing. They kept that up all night while I stewed and sweated under that pile of clothes. In the morning, when they came for their mantles, they forced me to dress again and to have a drink with them—which I did willingly enough.

When they were gone, I rested for about an hour before setting out for the house of Guido Baldi from Florence who was master of the royal mint at Buda. He made me very welcome and kept me to dinner, after which we began to gamble. I had only 55 Venetian *soldini* left but I managed to win four florins with these. While we were playing, we were joined by a number of Jews and other Germans who were in the habit of coming over to Bartolomeo's to play. I played with them too and, by the end of the evening, had won 20 gold florins. I came back the next day and won 40 more gold florins, and so on every day for about twenty-five days, by the end of which I had turned my 55 Venetian *soldini* into approximately 1,200 gold florins.⁵

⁵ The complexities of European currency in this period have been clarified in a brief but lucid article by P. Spufford in *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, III (Cambridge, 1963), 576-602. The most valuable Florentine coin was the gold florin, worth approximately \$4.00 at the current price of \$35.00 per ounce. Independent of the florin was a monetary system based upon silver, comprising *lire* (pounds), *soldi* (shillings) and *denari* (pence): 12 *denari* to the *soldo*, 20 *soldi* to the *lire*. In 1400, a florin was worth approximately 75 *soldi*, or 3¾ *lire*. Day wages for unskilled laborers

Meanwhile, Michele Martucci kept begging me to stop gambling, saying, "Why don't you buy a number of horses to bring back to Florence? I will take off a few days to accompany you as far as Segna." In the end, I took his advice and bought six fine horses and hired four servants and a page and, when we reached Segna, Michele sold me five of his own horses. I hired a boat from Marseille and stowed the horses on it, but, as ill winds and fortune would have it, we were twenty-four days getting to Venice, and one of the best horses put his shoulder out as we were unloading them. When we reached Padua, I gave one of the horses to Giorgio Bagnesi, who was living there with his wife, Monna Caterina, a daughter of Niccolò Malegonelle and a first cousin of our own.

As the Bolognese were at war at that time, we came back to Florence by the Modena road and, in the mountains above Modena, another good horse was injured and had to be left behind at Pontremoli. I got back here with eight horses and sold six of them for money which I afterwards lost at the gaming tables. And indeed, six months later, what between losses, outlay for clothes, and other expenses, I found myself with no more than 100 florins in hand and two horses.

While I was in these straits, I fell in love with Monna Gemma, the wife of Jacopo, Messer Rinieri Caviccioni's son, and the daughter of Giovanni Tedaldini. She was staying at a convent outside the city at Pinta. As I happened to be passing by one day, some of her relatives invited me in for refreshments and I accepted. Although there were a number of people present, I managed to have a private word with her and told her very respectfully, "I am entirely yours and I beg you to take pity on me." "Does that mean," she asked me laughing, "that if I were to command you to do something you would obey?" "Try me." "Very well," she said, "go to Rome for love of me." I went home

⁶ In Florence varied between 7 and 15 *soldi*; a bushel of wheat in times of good harvest cost about 15 *soldi*. A small house might rent for 5 *fl.* annually; a large palace, for 50 *fl.*

and two days later, without a word to anyone, took horse and set out with one servant. I went by Siena, Perugia, Todi, Spoleto, Terni, and Narni to Orte where the Florentine League was fighting the Romans. Next, I managed to persuade Messer Bindo Buondelmonti and a group of his men to take me to Rome one night and smuggle me into the house of a secret friend of theirs within the city, Messer Cola Ciencio, who obtained a safeconduct for me for a week. When I had been there six days, he had me taken to a castle belonging to the Orsini, and from there to Orte, whence I returned to Florence by the way I had come. Between going and coming back and the time spent in Rome, the whole trip had taken me a month. When I got home I sent a woman to tell Monna Gemma how I had obeyed her. She sent back word that she had never supposed I would be so mad as to take such a risk on account of a challenge spoken in jest. That was in 1377.

In 1378, after peace had been made with Pope Gregory, disturbances broke out among the Florentine populace.⁶ The unskilled workers burned and sacked a number of houses and drove the Priors from the communal palace and with them Luigi Guicciardini who was Standard-bearer of Justice⁷ at the time. They then proceeded to take power and to appoint a Standard-bearer of their own choosing, a certain Michele di Lando, who, however, a day or so later, made common cause with the artisans, the Ghibellines and men barred from office, and withdrew all power from the mob.

As a militiaman enrolled under the Nicchio standard,⁸ I

⁶ Pitti is in error; peace was not made with Pope Gregory XI (who died in March 1378) but with his successor, Urban VI, in July 1378. In this paragraph, Pitti is describing the revolt of the Ciompi, a proletarian upheaval which established a regime dominated by artisans and workers in the cloth factories. Created in July, this regime was crushed in late August and replaced by another popular government of artisans and merchants.

⁷ The Standard-bearer of Justice was the ninth member of the Signoria. Although his office was considered the most prestigious in the city, the Standard-bearer had no more real power than any of the Priors.

⁸ Pitti was a member of the civic militia of his district (*gonfalone*) of Nic-

was on duty in the square when the artisans and their allies were returning after the mob's expulsion. When all the others had quieted down, a stonecutter who was clearly in a murderous mood, kept yelling: "String 'em up! String 'em up!" I walked over and told him to hold his tongue, whereupon he lunged for my chest with the point of his sword. I quickly drew a spear on him and, running it through his leather tunic, killed him on the spot. Several witnesses, who had seen him start the trouble, declared that I had acted in self-defense and that he deserved what he got. No more was said about this at the time.

I went home and, seeing that many Gueff citizens, including some of the best, were being proscribed and banished, resolved to leave the city.⁹ I went to Pisa where I was joined by Matteo Tinghi, who had been exiled. Some months later, news reached us here that a number of Gueff citizens were planning to start an insurrection in Florence with the help of a band of proscribed men who were to come in from Siena under the leadership of Messer Luca, Totto da Panzano's son. On hearing this, Giovanni dello Scelto Tinghi and Bernardo di Toppo organized and headed a Pisan contingent of about 200 exiles, proscribed men and sympathizers. I joined this group and, following a prearranged plan, went with them on a certain night at the gate of S. Piero Gattolino. Messer Luca's men were supposed to reach S. Miniato al Monte late the same night so as to sound the tocsin at dawn. This was to be the signal for the conspirators in Florence to arm themselves, take to the streets and open the gate of S. Giorgio to us. Accordingly, our party sent to find out whether Messer Luca was at

chio, one of the four subdivisions of his quarter of S. Spirito. He then lived in the parish of S. Felicità, a short distance from the Pitti palace, which was not built until after his death. Buonaccorso later moved to the parish of S. Felice in Piazza, in the district of Ferze.

⁹ The regime which governed Florence from September 1378 to January 1382 was too democratic for Pitti's taste. It had banned several members of prominent aristocratic families, and Pitti decided to throw in his lot with these Gueff exiles. He was convicted of treason and sentenced to death *in absentia*.