CHAPTER 1

POLICY

T HE PROSPERITY OF FLORENCE was dependent on the city's control of the neighboring countryside. As a source of food for its citizens, raw materials for its artisans, soldiers for its armies, tax revenue, and population itself, the city's territories were indispensable. Like other Italian communes, Florence had not always possessed this resource. The *comitatus*, or land tied to the urban centers of antiquity, passed out of the control of cities during the period of Longobard rule (568 – 774), and it was not until the twelfth century that the newly powerful communes began the reconquest of what was then called the *contado*. The cities' first goal was to extend political dominion to the diocesan boundary. Later, the more powerful of them began to acquire territory at the expense of neighboring towns. Florence was among the most expansive. In 1295 Pistoia came under the city's domination; in 1337, Arezzo; in 1351, Prato; in 1354, San Gimignano; in 1406, Pisa; in 1472, Volterra; and in 1559, Siena, the city's last great prize (see Fig. 2).

These successes came relatively late in the history of the Florentine commune. The victories on which the material prosperity of the city was based occurred earlier and closer to home. The government's rivals were not foreign powers but the great barons — the Guidi, the Uberti, the Ubaldini — who had ruled the lands immediately outside the city's walls since the period of the Ottonian emperors. To guarantee the safety of its trade routes and its access to the produce that fed its citizens, the communal government had to bring these noblemen under its authority. The valley of the Arno above and below the city, the Chianti hills to the south, and the valley of the Mugello in the Apennines were the first targets of Florentine expansion into the countryside.

The conquest of the *contado* demanded the best efforts of the Florentines for over a century. The city acquired single pieces of property and entire towns and their territories. Military campaigns produced some gains, but more was obtained by treaty and purchase than by strength of arms. The government forced the barons into the city's orbit by granting them citizenship and demanding that they establish a residence within the walls. Securing their loyalty, however, was not easily accomplished and retaining control of the newly acquired land proved to be as hard as winning it. Florence's citizen armies were not adequate for the task. Castles provided a more effective and permanent defense and in the late Middle Ages the Florentines built, repaired, and manned many of them. These fortifications differed little from those of the barons'. They were located where they could dominate the landscape, and their residential facilities were limited to the requirements of a small garrison.

At the close of the thirteenth century the city initiated a new strategy for stabilizing the military and political situation in the countryside. The policy required the rural population to move from the villages in which their families had lived for generations as subjects of the feudal barons to newly created towns sponsored and controlled by Florence. The immigrants were freed from their ties to the land and the lords. They swore loyalty to the city, were liable for its taxes, and became part of the Florentine defense of the region. The new towns were large by the standards of the countryside. While the villages from which the settlers came were seldom larger than fifty households, the new towns were planned for between three and five hundred families or as many as twenty-five hundred people. Organized into a militia, the immigrants manned the walls of the towns, giving Florence a permanent military presence in the newly conquered lands.

The role of the new towns in opposing the barons and strengthening Florentine control of the countryside is not a question of historical interpretation; it is explicit in all the documents of their early history. When, in the summer of 1285, the topic of founding towns in the upper Arno valley was introduced to the councils of the Florentine government for the first time, the ensuing debate pitted the interests of the city's merchant patriciate against those of the nobility. The *capitano del popolo,* the Florentine officer directly responsible to the merchants and artisans of the city, proposed the town foundation idea "to frustrate the schemes of the exiled citizens" (Document 1). The Ghibelline families, who had been banned from the city following the defeat of Conradin in 1268, were not present to defend themselves, but their cause found champions among nobles in the Guelph faction. In the debate merchants, artisans, and some noblemen

spoke in favor of the establishment of new towns; only knights, who shared the exiles' interests, opposed the proposition. Despite a compromise solution that would have left the settlements unfortified, the new-town idea was shelved for almost fifteen years.

When the project was taken up again at the end of the thirteenth century, the political situation in Florence was very different. The Ordinances of Justice of 1293 had dramatically reduced the power of the nobility in city affairs. The establishment of new towns now received the full support of the citizen councils, and government documents described the role of the towns in conquering the countryside and opposing the power of the nobility. The *Provvisione* of 1299 declared the city's intention to build towns in the upper Arno Valley "in order to increase and better to preserve the honor and the jurisdiction of the commune of Florence" (Document 2). The purpose of founding Scarperia and Firenzuola, in 1306, was "to crush the arrogance of the Ubaldini and others of the Mugello and the land beyond the Apennines, who have rebelled against the commune and populace of Florence and built the castle of Monteaccianico and others elsewhere, and who wage war and no longer have God before their eyes, and who do not remember that they were born part of the commune of Florence." The towns were built to "totally destroy their resources" (Document 3).

The military strength of the new towns derived in large part from the concentration of people. The Florentine army, never more than a temporary levy of citizens supplemented by mercenaries hired for a few months at a time, provided a garrison of only a few soldiers.[1] In an emergency the local militia was the first source of troops. This body was also under Florentine control; though led by the town's officers, it was periodically inspected by city officials. The militia at Scarperia, for example, was reviewed in January 1367 and each of its members told that he had personally to arm himself with a helmet, a buckler, a lance, and a knife or sword. In addition, fifty of the militiamen were to be equipped with cuirasses. The mayor and the rector of the town were given the further responsibilities of procuring bombards and slings for the communal arsenal and of replenishing the public grain stock.[2] In wartime the strength of the militia could be supplemented by Florentine troops. The new towns were particularly well designed to accommodate a large number of temporary occupants. When Scarperia was under siege in 1351, more than five hundred Florentine soldiers were packed inside its walls.[3] In 1359 the town was reported to have a capacity of four hundred cavalry. No other site in the Mugello

could take more than half that number, although other towns, notably Borgo San Lorenzo which was registered for two hundred, were larger in size.[4]

New towns facilitated the defense not only of people but also of property. While people might be able to move quickly to a safe place, they could not bring with them their homes or, more important, the grain in their storehouses. Food supplies were a significant factor in fourteenth-century warfare; a military campaign consisted as much of damaging the enemy's countryside as of pitched battles or sieges of towns. The description of the Florentine campaign of 1290 against Arezzo by the merchant and chronicler Giovanni Villani (c. 1275 – 1348) talks of a limited victory, even though the city was not taken, because the Florentine army camped for twenty-nine days before the walls of Arezzo "and pillaged the countryside from head to toe. For six miles around Arezzo not one vine, one tree, nor a stalk of wheat remained." On the way home the army passed through the Casentino region "laying waste to the lands of Count Guido Novello."[5] The only defenses against such tactics were armed warehouses, as provided by the new towns. In time of war the Florentine officials issued strict orders to the residents of weaker towns, enjoining them to bring their produce to specifically designated fortresses.[6]

Systematically carried out, such a policy also provided an offensive strategy against an attacker. Medieval armies depended heavily on the land for their supplies; if an enemy could be denied resources it could be driven from the field, even if it had not been defeated in battle. Matteo Villani, who continued his brother's chronicle, describes such a situation during the invasion of Florentine territory in 1351 by the forces of Giovanni Visconti. The Milanese army of five thousand German mercenaries, two thousand knights, and six thousand foot soldiers was "not well provided with foodstuffs and hoped to supply itself with goods from the Florentine *contado*." The troops had some successes at first, taking Campi and the neighboring towns, but soon they had used up this stock and, being unable to receive supplies from Bologna, were forced to withdraw from the Arno valley without ever engaging the weaker Florentine forces in battle.[7]

Another incident in the Visconti war illustrates how strong a new town's military position could be. After quitting the area immediately around Florence, the Visconti army moved north into the Mugello region where, after a few minor skirmishes, it laid siege to Scarperia. The camp of 13,000 Milanese soldiers completely surrounded the new town. Inside Scarperia there was only the local militia, no more than 400 men,[8] and 500

Florentine soldiers, commanded by the city's captain of the Mugello, the German mercenary Jacopo di Fiore. The siege lasted for sixy-one days and included three separate, full-scale attacks supported by catapults, movable archery towers, and sappers. Yet despite the tremendous strength of the Visconti army and the temporary nature of the town's wall, Scarperia could not be taken.[9]

It was not by chance that the Visconti army chose to attack Scarperia. This new town had a special military importance. Giovanni Villani says that it was founded as a bulwark against the Ubaldini.[10] In 1348, when Florence renewed its attack on the Apennine feudatories, Scarperia was the center of operations.[11] Other Florentine-controlled towns were nearer the battlefield, but Scarperia was selected as the site of the warehouse for the army's munitions and food supplies.[12] The carpenters and blacksmiths who built Florence's war machines were also located there.[13] Some indication of the town's importance is given by the correspondence of the Florentine war committee. Of the sixty-six letters sent by the committee to all its correspondents between May and September 1350, sixteen went to Scarperia while only twelve were addressed to the army in the field.[14] In 1351, as the Visconti army descended into the Mugello, but before its generals had committed their forces to a single strategy, it was to Scarperia that Florence sent its available troops. In the years following the Visconti war, Florence officially recognized the military preeminence of Scarperia by installing the Florentine vicar for the Mugello there.[15] In the fifteenth century three of the new towns, Scarperia, San Giovanni, and Firenzuola, served as the capitals of administrative subdivisions of the Florentine state.[16]

In the fourteenth century, communication and exchange depended almost exclusively on roads and the new towns were closely tied to this state-wide, government supported system. From the time of the first deliberations of the Florentine councils, protection of roads was considered one of the primary functions of the new towns. When one of the city's officers argued against the foundation of towns in the Arno Valley, he suggested as an alternative that "certain [already existing] communities be made responsible for the safety of the roads" (Document 1). Fifteen years later San Giovanni was built astride the main road between Florence and Arezzo (and ultimately Rome), and Castelfranco beside the older route to the same destination on the adjacent plateau.

The towns, of course, profited considerably from their location. Pietrasanta and the settlement on the Consuma pass were planned almost

exclusively in relation to the roads from the Romagna and the Casentino regions, which would bring produce to the towns' markets. Even when a settlement had only a local market, road traffic could be of benefit. Providing services to travelers was one of the main economic activities of at least three of the new foundations. Scarperia and Firenzuola housed more members of the Florentine hostellers' guild than any other towns between Florence and Bologna.[17] From the traveler's point of view, the ever-present danger of attack made the protection of the towns very welcome. The complementary nature of road and town sometimes even meant that the two were planned and constructed as part of the same project.

Until 1306, when the foundation of Scarperia and Firenzuola was declared, the route between Florence and the north ran for a considerable distance through land controlled by the Ubaldini barons.[18] Despite its victory over the clan in 1306, Florence had to fight these feudatories again in 1342, in 1348, and in 1351.[19] City officials seem to have had no illusions about their power over the Ubaldini. To ensure reliable communications with Bologna they decided to lay a new route to the east of the Ubaldini strongholds on land where, with the aid of two new towns, they could hope to keep a permanent presence (Fig. 35).

Work on the project began simultaneously with both the destruction of the Ubaldini castle that had dominated the Bologna road and the foundation of Scarperia about five kilometers away.[20] At first the old road was simply diverted to run through the new town,[21] but the location of Scarperia — on a spur of land that rises to the Apennine ridge below the pass now called the Giogo di Scarperia — reveals that the city had already decided to build the new route.

A first indication of the road's completion appears in the 1330s. In 1332 Firenzuola was laid out on the other side of the Apennine crest. Its street plan, like that of Scarperia, is oriented toward the new pass. The gate facing in that direction is called, in the documents of that year, "ianua florentina," while the street that leads to it, the main street of the town, "runs on a straight line toward Florence and toward Bologna" (Document 13). The older road lay a number of kilometers to the west, but the gate of the new town that was to face west is called, simply, "ianua S. Maria." The route of the new road was more fully mapped out in 1334, when the hostellers' guild of Florence listed the towns of Ponzalla, Rifredo, and Casa Nuova, all points on the Scarperia – Firenzuola road as it exists today, in the administrative section "della strada di San Gallo verso San Piero a Sieve" (and Bologna).[22] The first recorded use of the road was in 1342, when the Florentine army, in an attempt to raise the Ubaldini siege of
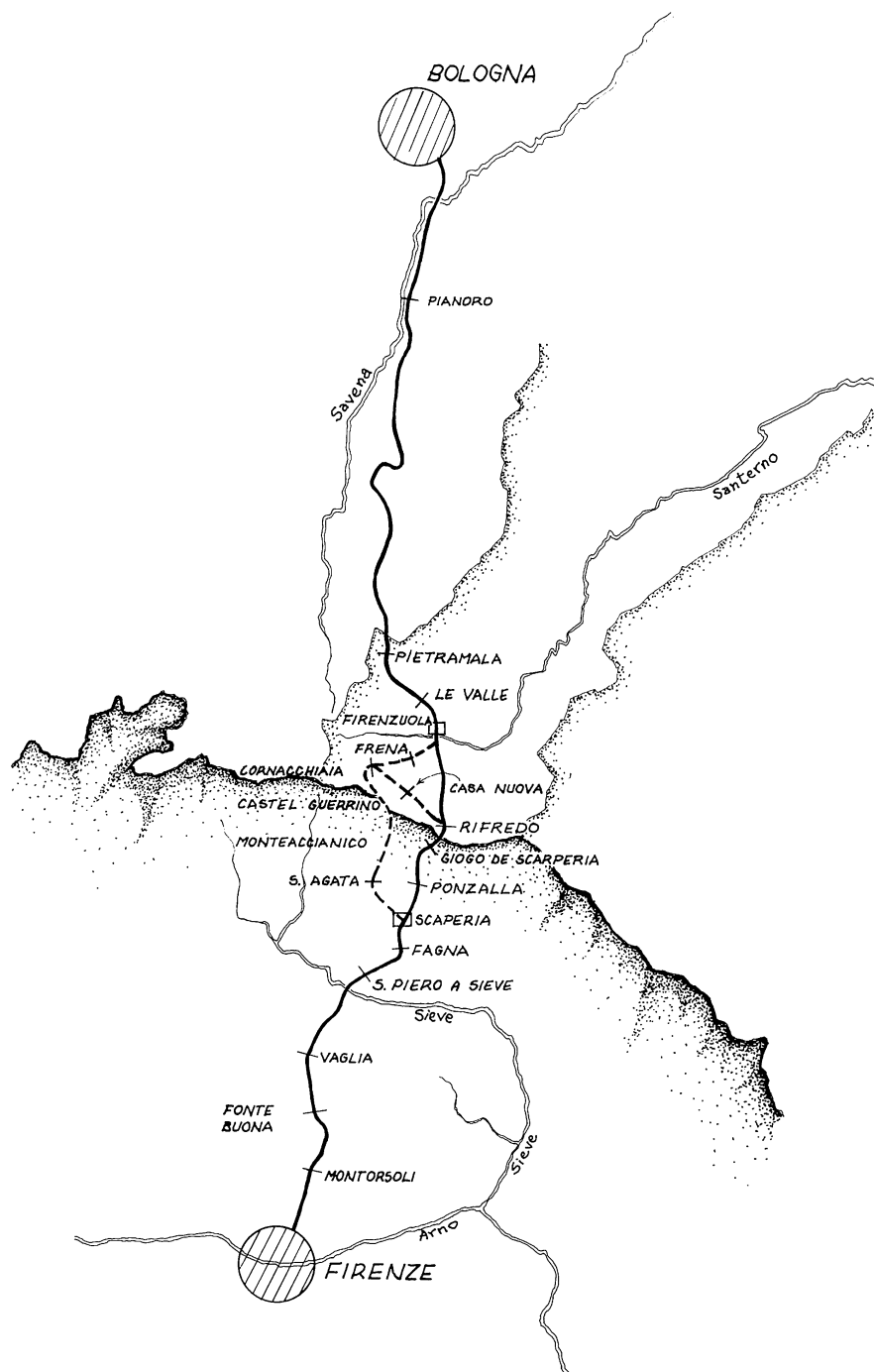
35 Roads across the Apennines in the area of Scarperia and Firenzuola. Fourteenth century.

Firenzuola, was defeated on the march from Florence at Rifredo.[23] In the early fifteenth century, when the new road was in common use, the route between Florence and Bologna ran as follows: Florence, Uccelatoio, Vaglia, Tagliaferro, San Piero a Sieve, Scarperia, Uomo Morto, Giogo, Rifredo, Firenzuola, Le Valle, Pianoro, Bologna.[24] The overnight stops on this journey were almost inevitably made at one or the other or both of the new towns.

The most distinctive feature of the founding of new towns — the feature that distinguishes these towns from Florence's other town building projects and had such a dramatic impact on the surrounding countryside — was the resettlement of population that accompanied each of the foundations. The new-town residents were for the most part people whom the city had only recently brought under its control, guaranteeing them freedom from feudal obligations. Members of the nobility were excluded from the settlements and could not own land or buildings within a mile of them or hold any public office. The Florentines saw the redistribution of the population as essential to their new-town effort. Scarperia "liberated the subjects of the Ubaldini so that [the castle of] Monteaccianico could never be rebuilt;"[25] Terranuova was populated by the villagers of the counts of Battifolle "to deprive" the counts "of their following and authority forever";[26] San Giovanni and Castelfranco di Sopra grew at the expense of the nobles of the Valdarno,[27] and the population of Firenzuola was composed of residents from villages that had once belonged to the Ubaldini.[28] Only a small number of the settlers seem to have come to the towns on their own initiative. New citizens were for the most part selected by Florentine officials who, when they could, relocated complete villages to gain the greatest strategic and political advantage.

The recruiting of settlers for Scarperia illustrates this. The founding of the town coincided with the declaration of war against the Ubaldini and the siege of their castle at Monteaccianico (Document 3). As usual, a Florentine official was given the power to select the new town's settlers. His patent of authority, granted a few months after the foundation act, contains a list of twenty-seven villages from the neighborhood surrounding the site — including the "populus de Monte Accianico," the village connected with the main Ubaldini castle — and the instructions "to place in the [new] community the following congregations, that is, villages or populi" (Document 4). To ensure that his orders were enforced and that the villages did not fall back into the hands of the Ubaldini, the official was given the power to destroy the places from which he had drawn the

settlers. Monteaccianico, the main Ubaldini stronghold, was thus destroyed and its population moved into Scarperia. In a petition to the Florentine *Signoria* of 1354, the residents of Scarperia clearly state their origins as vassals of the Ubaldini. "The men of this town are for the most part the descendants of people who lived under the yolk of the Ubaldini at Monteaccianico and elsewhere. They were liberated by the *popolo* and *comune* of Florence and sent to reside in the town of Scarperia, built by the *popolo* and *comune* of Florence, where they lived, and intend to continue to live, faithfully and obediently under the domination of the aforesaid *popolo* and *comune* and the *parte guelfe*."[29]

The relocation of population also had a decisive effect on legal claims to land. Evidence from the Val d'Ambra region illustrates this. In January 1350 Florence received the villages of Cappanole, Castiglione Alberti, Pieve a Prisciano, Montelucci, Cacciano, Cornia, San Lorentino, and Badia Agnano from the Benedictine abbey of Agnano. Within a month of signing the treaty, in which it promised to "defend and preserve" the abbey's villages, the city took the first steps toward the foundation of a new town, Giglio Fiorentino, that would require destruction of the villages and relocation of their population. One of the most important incentives for the proposed change was the uncertain state of the titles to the towns and land.

In the document by which he ceded the possessions of his abbey to Florence, the abbot of Agnano, Basileus, explained his decision by the fact that "for a long time this monastery with its possessions and its subjects has been invaded, usurped and held by certain magnates of the area who are also enemies of Florence. To such an extent has the abbey been bothered that it is not able peacefully to have or hold its possessions and goods, or its subjects." With Florentine support it hopes "freely to have and receive the fruit and income of its possessions and goods" (Document 17). Indeed, if an eighteenth-century commentator was right when he said that the abbey once controlled twenty-four towns,[30] the seven that it was able to hand over to Florence represent quite a depletion of its estate.

The abbey's chief enemy was the Ubertini clan whose head, Buoso degli Ubertini, was the bishop of Arezzo. On two occasions, in 1340 and 1350, the abbot and bishop had to refer their differences to papal adjudication.[31] A special provision in the abbey's treaty with Florence stipulated that if the city should ever cede its possessions in the Val d'Ambra to the bishop of Arezzo, the towns and property that had belonged to the abbey would be excepted.

The difficulties between the two parties were long-standing and seem

to have resulted from the Ubertinis' role in founding the abbey of Agnano.[32] Because the Ubertini considered the abbey part of their patrimony, they made donations of land to it without the land ever passing out of their control. Thus San Pancrazio, which was given to the abbey in 1262 by the four sons of Count Guido Ubertini, was immediately placed by the abbot under the administration of the vicar of the bishop of Arezzo at a time when both he and the bishop were Ubertini.[33] The town seemed so little to have changed lords, it was listed with other towns belonging to the Ubertini in a reaffirmation of the family charter by Corrado II in 1268.[34] Given this intermix of claims, it is easy to imagine that friction developed between the abbey and its benefactors when the abbot acted independently of them. In fact, the Ubertini had a strong claim to at least three of the villages ceded by Basileus to Florence.[35]

In the fourteenth century a legal claim to territory was formulated in terms of towns, or *comuni,* and their *curia,* the land surrounding them, which was owned by the inhabitants of the towns or by the lord of the *comune.* Land that Florence had bought from the Tarlati nobles in the lower Val d'Ambra in 1337 was defined as "the towns and the *curia,* territory, and district of the aforesaid fortified towns, *comunes* and villages."[36] The abbey of Agnano's land was described the same way (Document 17), as was the territory in the *Provvisione* for the foundation of Giglio Fiorentino (Document 18). Had the Florentines succeeded in relocating the population of the Val d'Ambra towns and razing the buildings on the old sites, they would have destroyed the territorial units by which the Ubertini could have made their claims. Even the parish organization would have been upset: of the six churches that existed in the area, not counting the church at the monastery of Agnano,[37] only one, the church of San Piero at Pieve a Prisciano, was to have been reestablished in the new settlement. Presumably the possessions of the destroyed churches would have gone to San Piero in Giglio Fiorentino. The difficulties of prosecuting a claim for properties whose parts were integrated into a wholly different context can well be imagined. As the power in control of the *de facto* situation, Florence could only expect to benefit from the confusion.

The reorganization of the Val d'Ambra would have weakened, too, the position of the abbey of Agnano. Under the old system, to the extent that the monks were able to make it work, the population was led by the abbey and directed the profits from the territory to the abbey's coffers. The new system was to be entirely out of the monks' control. All decisions for the organization and construction of Giglio Fiorentino were made by Florentine officials who consulted only with representatives of the villages. No

monks were included in any of the planning or governing committees; they were not even to participate in the religious organization of the town. There was to be no dedication, either of the church or of any of the town gates, to commemorate the abbey's relationship with the inhabitants. The abbey was not just excluded, it was humiliated. A short sentence after the description of the proposed new town ordered that the campanile of the abbey be lowered (Document 19). This was the same action Florentine governments in the period of the Guelph and Ghibelline wars of the mid-thirteenth century had taken against their enemies. Then, too, it was meant to weaken and embarrass the owner of the tower.

CHAPTER 2

PLANS

THE PLANS OF FLORENTINE NEW TOWNS form a distinctive family of orthogonal designs. They share essential qualities, despite diverse physical circumstances and the evolution of new-town planning during the fourteenth century. All the plans address a common set of problems and conform to the same planning principles. The new towns had as their first task the collection of a loyal population and the creation of a strong defensive position. They were all connected to Florence by a road, granted market privileges, and assigned an administrative role in the new Florentine territorial state. The balance between these functions varied from town to town. At Scarperia and Firenzuola the military situation was unusually perilous; Terranuova's character was heavily influenced by the fragmentation of its population; San Giovanni was the capital of the vicarate of the entire upper Valdarno; and Castelfranco was the center only for the league of villages in its immediate vicinity. These circumstances had a significant influence on the way the towns developed. Today each settlement has its own distinct character; at the moment of foundation, however, the plans were much less varied.

Assigned the task of selecting a site, Florentine town builders consistently chose flat ground. Hilltop locations and steep slopes were used for fortified retreats, but never for the new towns. Whether on the valley floor or on an upland plateau, only the most regular terrain would do. If nature had imperfections, Florentine officers ordered earth-moving operations to correct them. On the resulting standardized ground, the new towns conformed to a single basic pattern with two variations, both of which appear in the foundations of 1299. San Giovanni's plan, with its extended central