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*The 'Ciompi Revolution' Constructed:
Modern Historians and the Nineteenth-Century Paradigm
of Revolution*¹

In July 1378, Florence saw its governmental palace sacked by wool-workers called Ciompi and a new, socially representative government put in place. Not surprisingly, this event has always gripped modern historians and entered the annals of Italian history, whether written in the nineteenth, twentieth or twenty-first centuries, as «une véritable révolution sociale et ouvrière»², «una Rivoluzione Politica»³, «the Ciompi Revolution»⁴ or a «révolte de masse»⁵. Most recently, Ernesto Screpanti has both added to and echoed this sprawling historiography with his exceptionally thorough monographical study entitled *L'angelo della liberazione nel tumulto dei Ciompi* (published in 2008), in which 1378 is even considered as «la prima rivoluzione proletaria moderna scoppiata nel luogo più alto dello sviluppo capitalistico». After all, according to Screpanti, the Ciompi were driven by what was «decisamente un programma di classe», became a «soggetto politico autonomo» in the summer of 1378 and for three days created «la forma più avanzata di democrazia» which Florence had ever experienced⁶.

Both the tenor and the interpretation offered by Screpanti's book can, in fact, be inserted into a long tradition of approaching the 'Ciompi revolution' within a modern vocabulary of politics, and of evaluating it according to the assumptions of modern political ideologies. For some, the Ciompi had always been «sfruttati»⁷ who appeared «im Zeichen voller Legitimität»⁸, whereas more conservative scholars had condemned the Ciompi as a «feccia plebea»⁹ who fundamentally acted in «illegality»¹⁰. Not surprisingly, modern proponents of revolution discerned «a remarkable political consciousness for working men in an emerging capitalist society»¹¹, while for its opponents the 'Ciompi revolution' was little more than a «Florentine imbroglio»¹². In the pursuit of their ideological divisions, the Ciompi historians came to replicate the modern political sphere and modern political divisions when conceptualising, interpreting or narrating the 'Ciompi revolution'. However much they were, in fact, divided by political vitriol, the Ciompi historians of the last two hundred years operated under the same conceptual paradigm of revolution, which originated in the nineteenth century, and shaped their interpretations of what they came to construct as a 'revolution'. In what follows I shall seek to reconstruct this paradigm by considering the interpretations of twenty-five Marxist, liberal and conservative

historians of the 'Ciompi revolution' from three different centuries, of which Screpanti is but the most recent exponent (see Appendix for a list)¹³. This may elucidate the conceptual processes underlying historical scholarship, and help detect the often unstated assumptions of historians' conceptual frameworks in the study of political conflict. Specifically, I will explore how the paradigm's conceptual and normative baggage has tended to guide the historians' reading of the often contradictory or scant evidence, giving rise to, at times, generalising and self-referential interpretations and conclusions that are closer to modern than medieval realities. While this article chiefly discusses historiography and cannot therefore propose the necessary alternative framework for the study of the Ciompi revolt, it is hoped that, by stating the defining features of the paradigm, its short-comings and arguable fallacies will also become apparent.

The importance of paradigms has long been recognised for the history of science by Thomas Kuhn who argued that scholars are conditioned by broad conceptual paradigms, which mould their expectations and research, until a paradigm shift occurs and scholarship is rearranged under a new framework¹⁴. While there have been adaptations of Kuhn's approach to the field of historical scholarship, in broad terms we know comparatively little about how paradigms influence historians' sympathies, interpretations, or indeed their very handling of sources and the writing of history¹⁵. An avenue of research into this issue has been opened by historians who have analysed the 'tyrannies' of single constructs such as 'feudalism' or the 'state'¹⁶. However, in what follows it will be argued that the paradigm of revolution, to which the Ciompi historians have clung so assiduously, goes considerably beyond the mere staying power of a single term or even concept. Students of *Begriffsgeschichte* have rightly pointed to the need to understand political concepts as historically mediated through a number of terms with varying descriptive and normative meanings attached to them¹⁷.

In this sense, I shall analyse the paradigm of revolution as a complex structure, constituted by a series of concepts, coordinated by normative choices and associated with particular expectations concerning the narrative structure of events. The paradigm of revolution rests, firstly, on the use and adaptation of the two core concepts of state and class which are essential building blocks in any nineteenth-century conceptualisation of revolution as a disruption of the political order. (Section One) Secondly, the paradigm is bound up with a normative framework and liberal, conservative or socialist interpretations of processes of social change which have tended to condition historians' evaluation of the character of the Ciompi revolt and the issues at stake in it. (Section Two) Lastly, depending on the ideological approach taken by historians, the paradigm is associated with particular plots and narratives of the revolution which Ciompi historians have put forward. (Section Three) It is, of course, important to emphasise that each work on the Ciompi revolt deserves to be read and understood in its own right and, particularly, that

there are considerable differences between works written from different ideological standpoints. However, it will be argued that historians have generally positioned themselves within the broad outlines of the paradigm of revolution, even if this has expressed itself in different ways. As recent studies of ideology have emphasised, ideologies should not be seen as monolithic entities, but as combinations of often similar political concepts organised and prioritised in different ways¹⁸.

The origins of this paradigm of revolution lie in the nineteenth century. Like so much else of our modern constitutional and political vocabulary, and our conceptual universe, the concepts of 'state', 'class' and 'revolution', which Ciompi historians make use of, and even their very ideological divisions stem from this Age of Revolution¹⁹. Indeed, the deployment of a modern paradigm is not surprising, since many liberal and conservative nineteenth-century historians were brought to the study of the Ciompi revolt by fundamentally modern concerns. Thus, many French and Italian historians, like Giuseppe Ferrari or Edgar Quinet, wanted to study the 'revolutionary' character of the Italian people in order to test the grounds for a revolution to bring about Italy's national unity. This was often related to particular historical experiences. During the Risorgimento Pietro de' Rossi, later a minister under Cavour, mused about the virtues of popular participation in politics in his book on the Ciompi. A few decades later, one of several French historians analysing 1378 following the experience of the Paris Commune in 1871 even drew a direct parallel with that event when asking: «Ne croirait-on pas entendre le cri des bandes communalistes de Paris, à la journée du 31 octobre 1870 devant l'Hôtel-de-Ville?»²⁰ As has already been mentioned, professionalised twentieth-century historians were no less influenced by questions of their own day: the large number of Marxists attracted to the study of 1378, from the Leninist Rutenburg to Screpanti, have framed their analyses in a modern perspective, be this on the question of the modernity of the Ciompi's motivations or their forms of association²¹. Non-Marxists, like Brucker or Trexler, by contrast, wrote within a historiographical tradition which valued the Italian Renaissance as foreshadowing modernity. In particular, both historians showed an interest in the roots of social cohesion and consensus, a notoriously American concern of the 1950s and 1960s²². In the context of this general mindset and the political baggage of the nineteenth century, it is no surprise that historians from different centuries, countries and political ideologies came to share a common paradigm of revolution with which they approached the 'Ciompi revolution'.

1. *Two Core Concepts: State and Class*

The nineteenth-century paradigm of revolution is constituted and sustained by two core concepts, without which it would not work: the state as the guar-

antor of the political order, against which revolutions are directed; and class, since popular involvement is a defining criterion of revolutions. It should not be suggested that the application of these concepts by Ciompi historians was necessarily wrong, but rather that their use could involve generalisations at the cost of complex evidence and the introduction of unstated assumptions related to the concepts in question²³.

The State. The state is possibly the most crucial, and one of the most resilient, organising principles of modern political thought²⁴. It is not surprising, then, that historians of all colours have framed their narratives of the 'Ciompi revolution' as attacks on the 'Florentine state'. To be sure, the Florentine governmental palace was indeed sacked on 22 July 1378, but the fault-lines of the conflict did not correspond to what a modern observer would consider a confrontation between 'state' and 'society'. Numerous semi-autonomous public bodies, like guilds, the Parte Guelfa and ecclesiastical institutions had been involved in the conflict, either by providing the insurgent coalition with crucial support or by being attacked. In any case, only in June 1378 many of those involved in the insurgency had actually used, rather than challenged, the 'state' apparatus of the Florentine government in various ways to take legal action against the Parte Guelfa²⁵.

In spite of these more complex patterns of confrontation historians have tended to devote most of their attention to the insurgents' attack on the Florentine state. For instance, for one of the earliest historians of the Ciompi, Sismondi, the significance of the 'Ciompi revolution' lay in the change of «gouvernement» and «constitution» that it brought about. After all, Sismondi had famously written in the introduction to his *Histoire des républiques italiennes du Moyen Âge* that «l'une des plus importantes conclusions que l'on puisse tirer de l'étude de l'histoire, c'est que le gouvernement est la cause la plus efficace du caractère des peuples»²⁶. Sismondi's view continued to prevail among historians of following generations. According to the Ciompi historian and liberal Zeller, writing in Paris at the time of the Commune, «livrer le palais public, symbole de l'ordre et de la loi, c'était livrer la république, accepter sa propre déchéance»²⁷. It is this assumption which has also been carried into the twentieth century. Brucker's description of the revolt in July is described as a build-up to the sack of the governmental palace on 22 July predominantly from the viewpoint of «the priors who stared out of the palace windows». The Ciompi are first described as engaging in a «campaign of destruction» and of then obstructing «the regular process of government», so that eventually «the regime finally collapsed»²⁸. This perspective was also taken up by Marxist interpreters of 1378. The GDR historian Werner argued that «der Kampf um die Macht im Staat [...] gab den Aufständen den Charakter von einer revolutionären Bewegung». Cohn even proposed that the Ciompi attacked the Florentine state, while «accepting rather than resisting the priority of the national government over its rivals»²⁹.

Problematically, such a statist perspective enabled historians who leant to the political right to call into doubt the legitimacy of the insurgents' activities, as they broke what the nineteenth-century paradigm would view as the state's monopoly of violence. Thomas, another French historian writing in the aftermath of the Paris Commune, commented on the conquest of the governmental palace: «Quand les citoyens n'usent plus que de la force pour acquérir des droits nouveaux, leurs armes tombent facilement aux mains d'hommes habiles»³⁰. From this assertion a straight line runs to the view of Mollat and Wolff in the 1970s that «the [Ciompi's] step over into illegality had been secretly prepared by a few conspirators»³¹. Brucker also assumed that the 'Ciompi revolution' had «introduced violence into the political arena», even though his own monograph on the Florentine politics of the preceding decades is replete with references to violence as consistently being part of political discourse³². Marxists did not, of course, dismiss attacks on the state as forms of subversion, but instead defended the legitimacy of the Ciompi's actions by accounting for their accomplishments in highly statist terms. After all, according to Screpanti, the Ciompi ultimately aimed at creating «una repubblica veramente democratica», while for Rutenburg the Ciompi's organising committee was designed to represent «il potere supremo dello Stato»³³. Quite clearly, while more conservative historians and Marxists have evaluated the concept of the state in different ways to express either disapproval or approval of the Ciompi, they have both written within a framework in which the state is seen as a central mechanism in society, and as the evident focus of any 'revolution'.

Class. In a similar vein, historians of the most different persuasions have also made use of the concept of class to explain the 'Ciompi revolution', a historical tool of analysis that had always provoked fierce debate in Italian historiography³⁴. Again, any explanation that relied on class to explain the Ciompi revolt could only do so at the expense of considerably more complex evidence. The insurgent coalition of June and July 1378 cut across classes: it did contain unenfranchised wool-workers, but also incorporated many guilds and families from all sections of Florentine society, including the Medici. In fact, the very success of this coalition may have been owed to its cross-class character: in the month of August what appears to be a splinter group of Ciompi were easily crushed on the Piazza della Signoria, arguably precisely because they lacked support from other sections of society³⁵.

This complex evidence has allowed many recent Ciompi historians to deny or affirm the importance of class in typically nineteenth-century ways. Like some nineteenth-century historians, conservatives like Mollat and Wolff did recognise the presence of the Ciompi, but only in order to belittle it and affirm that «men of middling rank» who were «conservative by instinct» ensured that a radicalisation of the Ciompi could initially be avoided³⁶. Marxists have tended to argue the contrary. Screpanti acknowledged the cross-class character of the Ciompi coalition, but also emphasised that by the middle of July 1378 the Ciompi had any-

way assumed «egemonia sul movimento e la direzione della rivolta». The same «piccola borghesia e piccola aristocrazia», which Mollat and Wolff had identified as conservative influences, were interpreted by Screpanti as actually furthering the Ciompi cause, because, like the Ciompi, these social groups shared a belief in «semplicità, religiosità genuina, la sete di giustizia»³⁷. Some historians have rightly put the applicability of the modern class epithet to the study of 1378 into perspective. Franceschi has only recently warned against reading a clear-cut class struggle into the revolt, and Najemy has emphasised the importance of guilds as driving forces in the conflict. However, both historians have nevertheless almost exclusively focused on the participation of the *popolo minuto* or the guilds at the expense of other insurgents, and Najemy has even spoken of «class antagonisms» as the principal driving force of the conflict³⁸.

To account for what they regarded as the imposing presence of the Ciompi in 1378, historians have transferred modern debates to the Middle Ages. Rutenburg argued that the key to Ciompi action lay in their leadership's ability to direct the masses, a view also held by his Russian colleague Gukowski³⁹. Echoing twentieth-century debates on the necessity of class consciousness for social revolutions, Marxist historians like Werner, Cohn and Screpanti have accounted for Ciompi assertiveness by referring to the Ciompi's «coscienza politica dell'azione di massa, una coscienza cioè che vedeva nel fatto insurrezionale un mezzo per raggiungere fini politici»⁴⁰. Like the debate over the role of class in general, the concept of class consciousness was inescapably ideologically loaded. While Marxists stressed the inevitable and desirable nature of class consciousness, some earlier conservative or liberal historians emphasised its subversive and destructive nature. The Cavouriano De Rossi had argued in the 1840s that the Florentine workers obtained «coscienza» in July 1378, but stressed that this resulted in a «moto e tumulto terribile». In the early twentieth century, both Rodolico and Caggese fundamentally shared this view. Rodolico even alluded that the working classes' self-awareness amounted to the «eterna illusione che l'autonomia avrebbe loro dato ogni benessere, ogni libertà»⁴¹.

In this light, when interpreting the 'Ciompi revolution' historians of different centuries and political colours have subscribed, in their different ways, to the core concepts of state and class. Viewing 1378 through this optic made, of course, most sense to nineteenth-century historians and their successors, but it sits uneasily with other, often significant details of the 'Ciompi revolution'. Crucially, the use of these concepts also meant the importation of related nineteenth-century debates upon problems posed by them, such as violence or collective action. Most of all, these core concepts, so closely bound up with a modern interpretation of political order, would be the building blocks for historians' interpretation of 1378 as a 'revolution', and the different manifestations this concept could have in accordance with the nineteenth-century paradigm.

2. Revolutionary Change and Political Norms

The term 'revolution', as we have seen, regularly appears in the writings of many historians to designate the events of 1378. Some historians appear to have used the term 'revolt' in order to avoid association with the more radical Marxist interpretations, though even Brucker can be found using both terms interchangeably⁴². In any case, regardless of the choice of terminology, historians have generally been influenced by a nineteenth-century conception of revolution, and their own normative evaluations of the trajectories of revolutionary change. The concept of 'revolution' was, alongside a teleological view of history, bound up with nineteenth-century debates on disorder and popular participation in politics. Different notions of 'revolution', in fact, emerged following the 1830 July Revolution in France and hinged on a different assessment of the core concepts analysed in the previous section. 'Political revolutions' (such as 1830) were to do with moderate reforms of states, while 'social revolutions' entailed a radical change of the political and social order and by default necessitated the participation of the lower classes. Yet the concept of revolution is not a mere descriptive category, but must be seen as what philosophers call an essentially contested concept. In fact, the distinction between 'political' and 'social' revolutions also corresponded to a split in nineteenth-century political theory, between Marxists who preferred the latter, radical, and liberals who often (but not always) argued in favour of the former, moderate type of revolution⁴³.

In this context, any interpretation of the 'Ciompi revolution' necessitated an evaluation of the 'moderation' or 'radicalism' of the insurgents, which involved an essentially normative and ideological assessment of whether a specific demand of the insurgents amounted to being 'moderate' or 'radical'. As will be seen, the logic of this exercise is almost circular, since Ciompi historians based their judgements of the revolution's 'moderate' or 'radical' character on their own ideologically loaded abstractions of what they believed the 'moderate' or 'radical' character of the insurgent's motivations to be in the first place. Not surprisingly, therefore, historians' interpretations of the petitions, which the insurgents put forward in July 1378, often reflected the ideological viewpoints from which they started and resulted in two altogether different characterisations of 1378: either that the 'Ciompi revolution' was driven by 'moderates' intending to bring about a 'political' revolution, or that it was sustained by 'radical' Ciompi attempting a 'social' revolution. A further problem is not only that this classification replicates concepts that originated in ideological divisions and normative debates of the nineteenth century in order to make sense of an event that had taken place 500 years earlier, but that historians have derived a number of interpretative conclusions from such problematic analytical categories. In particular, as we shall see, this concerns questions regarding the reasons behind the Ciompi

revolt's eventual failure and the sequence of events of the revolt, and it may well be wondered whether, for such uses, concepts more closely attuned to the fourteenth-century experience would have been more useful.

Political Reform through Political Revolution. According to many liberal historians the 'Ciompi revolution' was a 'political revolution'. Brucker argued that the Ciompi were driven by an «innate conservatism», since «the workers did not demand the abolition of private property, the repudiation of debts or even the reduction of interest rates»⁴⁴. Even conservative historians like Mollat and Wolff were keen on stressing the initial moderation of the Ciompi, since, in their view, even «the most ardent of the Ciompi [did not] conceive a programme outside the traditional framework». The main object of the revolution was, in any case, only «to replace one set of men with another»⁴⁵.

As is evident from this, the classification of 1378 as a 'political revolution' has depended on assessing the motivations imputed to insurgents on a liberal-conservative spectrum of 'respectable' views, an approach whose genealogy reaches back once again to the nineteenth century. Zeller, writing three years after the Paris Commune, also noted that the 'Ciompi revolution', before becoming derailed by radicals, involved acceptable political demands which legitimately concerned a «malaise que toute société devrait chercher à amoindrir»⁴⁶. According to the late nineteenth-century liberal Falletti-Fossati, the Ciompi leader Michele di Lando pursued 'moderate' policies and had evidently recognised that «sull'uguaglianza dei diritti politici si fonda il benessere sociale». Falletti-Fossati, like the other historians who saw the unfolding of a 'political revolution', could scarcely disguise the normative judgement that was necessary to determine the original character of the 'Ciompi revolution'. After all, in his view, the 'moderate phase' of the 'Ciompi revolution' demonstrated that «non concedendo a tempo le riforme necessarie, il popolo si ribella e finisce per vincere»⁴⁷.

Social Revolution. Conversely, the same motivations of the insurgents were interpreted by other historians to prove that the Ciompi were truly radical and revolutionary⁴⁸. Marxists in particular used the Ciompi's supposed motivations to argue that 1378 saw an at least attempted 'social revolution', since historians like Werner discerned the «erste Formulierung der politischen und wirtschaftlichen Ziele des Vorproletariats» in the Ciompi petitions⁴⁹. Such judgements, aided by normative preconceptions, would also give rise to very generous interpretations of actual source material. For Rutenburg, for instance, the Ciompi demand for fiscal equality was pointing in the direction of «un'uguaglianza universale, in cui la parità dei diritti avrebbe comportato la parità delle condizioni materiali ed economiche di tutti i popolani». The normative judgement was explicit: the Ciompi had never intended any moderation in the first place. In the words of Rutenburg, other historians who preached «la parola d'ordine dell'amicizia tra sfruttati e sfruttatori» were only afraid of «le vittoriose idee del marxismo-leninismo»⁵⁰.

Interestingly, several nineteenth-century conservative and liberal historians had anticipated this Marxist position which credited the Ciompi with a socially 'subversive' or 'destructive' role, even though they had come to such a judgement for their own ideological reasons. Gino Capponi, echoing both Marxists' recognition of the force of class and conservative fears about the same, acknowledged the Ciompi's importance as «una moltitudine [...] la quale non puoi né dirigere né contenere, e che travalica ogni tuo disegno», while making it clear that he viewed the Ciompi as «una plebe di mal vissuti»⁵¹. By contrast, in 1858 the liberal historian Ferrari noticed the 'revolutionary' potential of the Ciompi in a more approving tone, and credited them with effectively striving for equality rather than what Ferrari understood as the bourgeois ideal of liberty. For Ferrari, whose book considered the whole history of Italian revolutions and their failure in the nineteenth century, 1378 clearly marked a 'social revolution' that involved the proclamation of a «république nouvelle des gueux, sans rancunes, sans exclusions, sans inégalités, sans exils, sans injustices organisées»⁵².

Political/Social Revolution Derailed. While they have disagreed sharply over the original character of the 'revolution', historians from both sides have shared the view that someone or other derailed the original character of the 'revolution'. However, depending on the judgement of the original type of 'revolution', blame was also apportioned to different actors in accordance with the historians' ideological position: almost tautologically, the already generous construction of the 'revolution' as political/moderate or social/radical now also dictated the nearly predictable reasons for its failure. Thus, those who had seen the 'Ciompi revolution' as a 'political revolution', not surprisingly, accused the Ciompi of straying from their allegedly moderate path and radicalising in the month of August. According to Thomas, «la révolution politique se perd dans une émeute sociale». This was ultimately the fault of the Ciompi's role in the insurgent coalition, since they had been animated by the «rêve d'un droit égal pour tous» and, thus, been driven into «la recherche de l'anarchie et l'amour de la destruction». Also for Falletti-Fossati the «intransigenti» among the Ciompi were responsible for the radicalisation of the whole movement. For Mollat and Wolff, the Ciompi had simply fallen victim to the «naïveté of [their] revolutionary dreams, devoid of any political sense»⁵³. It is scarcely surprising that historians who regarded the Ciompi as attempting a 'social revolution', by contrast, saw the betrayal in August not as attributable to the Ciompi, whose radicalisation they viewed in a continuity with their supposed original intentions, but to their former allies, who were bought off by the ruling classes. Only recently Stella has argued that the «tentative révolutionnaire» had been forestalled because the artisans had abandoned the Ciompi, while for Trexler the Ciompi had been fundamentally «betrayed». According to Rutenburg this was only natural, since the artisans, with whom the Ciompi had allied, had simply been «spaventati dal programma e dalla practica egualitarie [sic] dei Ciompi»⁵⁴.

These different classifications of the 'Ciompi revolution', and differing constructions of insurgents' motivations, should not suggest that Ciompi historians were writing altogether unrelated histories. On the contrary, liberal, conservative and Marxist historians operated on a shared spectrum, on which the evaluation of the 'moderation' or 'radicalism' of the Ciompi's challenge to the political order was possible and following which blame could be apportioned for the supposed 'failure' of the 'revolution' according to the ideological positions of historians. However, it should be asked whether the Ciompi's supposed or actual demands on property-holding should really be read in the context of nineteenth-century left-right distinctions, and whether far-reaching (and incidentally diametrically opposed) conclusions can be drawn from the same evidence interpreted in such a way. It appears particularly questionable whether such constructed typologies should be used to make inferences about the actual course of events and the behaviour of individuals. The problem, of course, is that cumulatively the nineteenth-century paradigm weighs heavy on the entire interpretation of the 'Ciompi revolution': modern political concerns bring historians to the study of this historical event, while received conceptual categories and normative evaluations of conflict mould their interpretations. Yet, as the divergent readings of Ciompi motivations have shown, interpretations are not mere analyses crafted on to any 'real' series of facts. This problem is particularly acute with the construction of the plot of the 'Ciompi revolution'.

3. Emplotment and the Nineteenth-Century Paradigm of Revolution

The paradigm of revolution and the conceptual apparatus associated with it has played a crucial role in the way historians have structured their narratives of the 'revolutionary process' in 1378. After all, as Noël Parker has shown in a study of modern revolutions, particular narrative expectations and sequences have frequently been associated with revolutionary ideologies⁵⁵. Scholars interested in historical narrative have often tended to look at literary models as templates for the 'stories' told by historians, but the plots of Ciompi historians rather suggest the importance of the conceptual categories of the revolutionary paradigm in moulding their narratives⁵⁶.

Generally speaking, historians' shared understanding of 1378 as a 'revolution' which, for one or the other reason, failed, has given rise to an overall narrative which has worked towards accounting for a foiled revolution, while the plot manifested itself differently according to the problematic and ideologically loaded interpretation of the 'moderate' or 'radical' character of the 'Ciompi revolution'. Of particular interest in this regard is the narrative of the events of August 1378, reported in often patchy and contradictory fashion by more than

half a dozen chroniclers and judicial records: at the end of this month, what have been interpreted as either the Ciompi *per se*, or a splinter group, were defeated in an armed battle on the Piazza della Signoria by a coalition of all other guilds and the Florentine government led by Michele di Lando after which the newly-established Ciompi guild was suppressed⁵⁷. Naturally, those viewing 1378 as a 'political revolution' have taken particular care to tell the story of an essentially reversible process of radicalisation of the Ciompi, while those arguing in favour of 'social revolution' have sought to demonstrate the radical continuity of the Ciompi enterprise and the inevitability of the confrontation on the Piazza della Signoria. An exemplary comparison of the narratives used by Brucker, who argues in favour of the former perspective, and Screpanti, as a recent representative of the latter, will make this clearer.

According to most chroniclers, on 27 August the Ciompi assembled on the Piazza della Signoria to submit a petition which concerned rules of office-holding and public finances, and which the Florentine government also accepted in the following days⁵⁸. For Brucker, unsurprisingly, the petition amounted to being a «weak and unoriginal document». Crucially, at the time of the petition's submission the Ciompi had not intended an escalation of the conflict, since «the Ciompi leaders appeared to be hypnotized by their petitions, and to consider their passage and implementation as the keystone of their operation»⁵⁹. For Screpanti, the petition assumed an altogether different importance. In the month of August, the Ciompi movement fully assumed its «carattere realmente rivoluzionario», and the Ciompi demands in the petition were interpreted accordingly: the demand to suspend interest payments from the *Monte* to its creditors is viewed as a programme of expropriation, while demands to punish specific individuals and former allies of the Ciompi are interpreted as provisions against the «nemici di classe» in order to purge «il Comune della classe dirigente borghese». In this revolutionary process, the petition itself is, in fact, almost irrelevant for Screpanti, since the Ciompi supposedly did not even bother to write their real demands into the petition and were already aiming at a much more far-reaching confrontation with the Florentine government⁶⁰.

The different trajectories of Brucker's and Screpanti's plots, in fact, become more evident in the context of the role they award to the *Otto di Santa Maria Novella* in this context. The *Otto*, founded by the Ciompi in the last week of August, were a body composed of eight leaders which had been given «merum et mixtum imper[i]um» by the insurgents⁶¹. In Screpanti's understanding of the paradigm of revolution, the *Otto* were nothing less than an «organo direttivo della rivoluzione, governo della Repubblica e legislatore costituzionale». Their aim was «una "dittatura del proletariato" che instaura la democrazia», and the *Otto* were for this reason to be the supreme government of the town. Clearly, in this narrative there was no place for a moderate petition, and Screpanti vigor-

ously argues that the *Otto* had been founded before 27 August, even though only some of the sources allow such an interpretation⁶². Brucker was also faithful to a statist vocabulary in his interpretation of the *Otto*, but was considerably more circumspect about their role. For him, this institution was merely founded to become «a permanent element in the commune's institutional fabric». Created at around the same time at which the petitions were submitted, the *Otto*'s policies only radicalised in the following days, when they eventually engaged in violence and started vetoing prospective members of the Florentine government. In Brucker's view, only at this point «the effect of this illegal action upon the guild community was pernicious, for it reaffirmed the growing suspicion that the Ciompi were a lawless rabble»⁶³.

Slowly, the Brucker narrative suggests, the Ciompi coalition disintegrated and some of their former leaders, like Michele di Lando, were eventually won over to the side of their opponents in the last days of August, though only one chronicler specifically states that Michele switched sides at this precise juncture⁶⁴. For Screpanti, in fact, Michele had already broken with the Ciompi soon after their victory in July. However, Screpanti relied on the report of a chronicler who noted the disappointment of the Ciompi after the July revolt, while not even specifically mentioning Michele di Lando in this context⁶⁵. The keenness of both historians on the precise timing of Michele's defection was clearly related to the overall plots that Brucker and Screpanti charted for the 'August revolution'. Brucker's interest in emphasising the cumulative radicalisation of the Ciompi also revealed itself in other ways. He stressed that the *Otto* repeatedly sent delegates to the Florentine government, and when the final confrontation on the Piazza happened on 31 August, the Priors of the Florentine government «appealed to the workers to surrender their standards» as a final attempt at reconciliation, a view that is shared by possibly only one chronicler. Only then, Brucker argues in perfect consonance with the logic of the paradigm of revolution, did this materialise into «the most naked confrontation between haves and have-nots, between possessors and the dispossessed, in the history of the Arno city»⁶⁶. None of this is accepted by Screpanti: the *Otto* sent the delegates to the Florentine government not to negotiate, but to challenge them. Basing himself on a chronicler's remark on the Ciompi plans to fortify the town, Screpanti argues that the Ciompi were aware of the «inevitabilità di uno scontro militare finale» and wanted to anticipate a confrontation that the government may have been planning for the following day. Screpanti, in fact, even refuses to talk of a «rivoluzione tradita», because this would imply that the Ciompi had not proactively sought to «liberarsi da sé». Similarly, the government, too, when ordering the return of the guild banners, did not seek reconciliation, but used this as the sign to start the battle. The final confrontation on the Piazza was not the outcome of a process of radicalisation, but had been intended from the start, and Screpanti organised his plot accordingly⁶⁷.

Brucker's and Screpanti's plots of the 'August revolution', in fact, follow two veritable master-narratives of 'revolutionary change' whose character is derived from the conceptual, normative and descriptive assumptions of the paradigm of revolution. These two plots were essentially based on preconceptions Brucker and Screpanti derived from their problematic interpretation of the 'original' motivations of the Ciompi and the 'original' character of the 'Ciompi revolution' as 'moderate' or 'radical'. Imposing these modern revolutionary narratives entailed the different interpretation of commonly recognised facts, playing with the temporal ordering of events and the imputation of intentions to actors whose ambitions are not directly known. As in respect to other elements of the 'Ciompi revolution', its narrative and plot was clearly subject to the overall logic of the paradigm of revolution.

4. *Conclusion*

It is remarkable that over such a long period of modern scholarship on the 'Ciompi revolution' a real paradigm shift has not taken place. In spite of ideological clashes and diametrically opposed sympathies for the Ciompi's cause (and the corresponding interpretations and plots associated with these), Ciompi historians have, more or less, operated within the same paradigm of research by, fundamentally, recurring to nineteenth-century concepts, norms and narrative models whose assumptions, while ideologically contested, formed part of a commonly understood and shared analytical and interpretative framework.

In the optic of this framework, political 'disorder' is a desirable or objectionable phenomenon that stands in stark contrast to what the Ciompi historians expected 'ordinary' and 'orderly' politics to be like. With the help of empirical categories borrowed from modern political experience, the Ciompi revolt has come to be characterised as an attack on the state as the guarantor of the political order, while the destabilising force of class has been used to account for this political rupture. In this context, historians were made to feel the need to assess the 'moderate' and 'radical' character of the revolt to evaluate the extent of the disruption, and therefore had to recur to a nineteenth-century normative framework against which the character of the disorder of 1378 could be measured almost as if it concerned 1789. It is not surprising, then, that two plots exist for the Ciompi revolt which try to account for the outbreak of disorder by emphasising the cumulative or abrupt nature of the 'revolution'. Since both narratives, like the concepts and interpretative framework of the paradigm itself, correspond rather neatly to pre-existing ideological divisions, the usefulness and analytical rigour of this approach must be called into question.

This is not to dispute the extraordinary nature of 1378, nor any arguments about the (more or less) lasting impact of the Ciompi revolt on the following dec-

ades and centuries of Florentine history. Quite independently from whether the Ciompi revolt represented a turning point or not, it does not appear justified to construct it retrospectively into a nineteenth-century type of 'disorder' or 'revolution', with all the analytical and ideological preconceptions that this conjurs up. It must, for instance, be wondered whether the Ciompi revolt could more fruitfully be interpreted as a phenomenon more organically tied to the political texture of late medieval Florence. In fact, recent work on political conflict, including on Florence itself, has suggested that conflict involving all sections of society and numerous political bodies was deeply ingrained in late medieval politics⁶⁸. To be sure, especially Brucker and Najemy have, in their different ways, sought to locate the Ciompi revolt in the larger framework of Florentine political history and the ongoing 'dialogue' between different political groups in Florence, but both, as has been seen, have tended to interpret 1378 in accordance with the received paradigm. Indeed, Brucker's emphasis on violence against the state or Najemy's views on class conflict, so bound up with the conceptual, interpretative and narrative short-comings of the paradigm, appear rather unconvincing as indicators of 'revolution' as a disruption of the political order. In particular, this view seems hard to reconcile with the picture emerging from the recent literature on late medieval political conflict which suggests that ongoing conflict, frequently involving violence and the lower orders of society, almost constituted part of the political order itself⁶⁹. Different concepts are possibly needed to capture the logic of political conflict in 1378 and its embeddedness in political exchange. For instance, it must be wondered whether the pluralism of political institutions and the analysis of coalitions may provide a fruitful avenue of research, if, as has been suggested earlier, the Ciompi revolt can be characterised by the interaction of numerous semi-autonomous political institutions and of different sections of society in often changing composite coalitions. Further investigation is necessary into the degree to which such more fluid political relations characterised the political order in other periods, why it was that precisely in 1378 a particular escalation of conflict was possible and how the Ciompi revolt can be understood in a wider spectrum of manifold forms of conflict for which, contrary to the implicit assumptions of the paradigm of revolution, no straightforward distinction between order and disorder should possibly be assumed⁷⁰.

Of course, 'state', 'class' or 'revolution' will always be concepts that come to mind when approaching the political and social history of any epoch. The problem lies in overemphasising these aspects of the debate and, in so doing, importing a normative and narrative baggage that takes an interpretation well beyond what would constitute an acceptable framework for the study of a phenomenon such as the 'Ciompi revolution'. In many ways, the excessively polarised conclusions to which Ciompi historians have come in their interpretations can expose the deficiencies of a paradigm which has failed to provide a conceptual apparatus

able to discriminate between the validity of differing interpretations. Historians have produced numerous contradictory positions which are clearly intelligible within the paradigm, but can appear, nonetheless, simply incompatible by their own standards: on the basis of the same evidence, historians have viewed insurgents as both politically moderate and radical, they have interpreted the revolution as derailed by both radicalising Ciompi and conservative forces, and they have constructed a plot of the revolt as characterised by both the cumulative radicalisation of political subjects and by an inexorable clash between classes.

These contradictions and inadequacies speak for themselves, and the extent to which the historiography of the 'Ciompi revolution' has been so resilient to a paradigm change is remarkable, especially when older assumptions in other fields of Florentine history have recently undergone much revision. Indeed, this field has not experienced the 'revolution' which Thomas Kuhn spoke of in the context of scientific paradigms. In part, this, of course, shows that academic enquiry may not proceed in revolutionary waves at all⁷¹. But it also demonstrates the strength of the nineteenth-century paradigm, and its whole conceptual apparatus which has remained with us ever since. It may well be wondered whether the changing political structures, social formations and ideological divides of the twenty-first century will significantly alter the existing paradigm of revolution, and our understanding of political conflict in the Middle Ages. If it does, it would, after nearly two centuries, also bring a long-awaited revolution to the study of the 'Ciompi revolution'.

Appendix

*Historians of the 'Ciompi Revolution' in Chronological Order*⁷²

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- Ferrari, G., *Histoire des révolutions d'Italie ou Guelfes et Gibelins*, III, Paris, Didier, 1858, pp. 501-506
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- Rutenburg, V., *Popolo e movimenti popolari nell'Italia del Trecento e Quattrocento* [1958], trad. it., Bologna, Mulino, 1971, pp. 157-330
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² L. Simonin, *Une insurrection ouvrière à Florence*, «Journal des Économistes», XXXII (1873), pp. 425-466: 426-427.

³ C. Falletti-Fossati, *Il tumulto dei Ciompi. Studio-storico sociale*, Roma, Loescher, 1882, p. 315.

⁴ G. Brucker, *The Ciompi Revolution*, in N. Rubinstein (ed. by), *Florentine Studies. Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, London, Faber, 1968, pp. 314-356: at 326. As shall be seen, Brucker contested this label, while staying within its parameters.

⁵ A. Stella, *La révolte des Ciompi. Les hommes, les lieux, le travail*, Paris, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1993, p. 31.

⁶ E. Scrapanti, *L'angelo della liberazione nel tumulto dei Ciompi. Firenze, giugno-agosto 1378*, Siena, Protagon, 2008, pp. 19, 140-142, 208-216.

⁷ V. Rutenburg, *Popolo e movimenti popolari nell'Italia del Trecento e Quattrocento* [1958], trad. it., Bologna, Mulino, 1971, p. 300.

⁸ E. Werner, *Probleme städtischer Volksbewegungen im 14. Jahrhundert, dargestellt am Beispiel der Ciompi-Erhebung in Florenz*, in E. Engelmann (hrsg. von), *Städtische Volksbewegungen im 14. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1960, pp. 11-55: 51.

⁹ G. Capponi, *Storia della repubblica di Firenze* [1876], II, Firenze, Barbera, 1888, p. 37.

¹⁰ M. Mollat, P. Wolff, *The Popular Revolutions of the Late Middle Ages* [1970], English transl., London, Allen&Unwin, 1973, pp. 147-8.

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¹⁸ M. Freedon, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 47-95.

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²⁰ G. Ferrari, *Histoire des révolutions d'Italie ou Guelfes et Gibelins*, IV, Paris, Didier, 1858, pp. 507-509. E. Quinet, *Les révolutions d'Italie*, Bruxelles, Vanderauwera, 1853, pp. LXX-LXXII, 155. P. di Santa Rosa, *Storia del tumulto dei Ciompi avvenuto in Firenze l'anno 1378*, Torino, Pomba, 1843, p. xxiii. L. Simonin, *Une insurrection ouvrière* cit., p. 446. For the historical and historiographical context see E. Artifoni, *Salvemini e il Medioevo. Storici italiani fra Otto e Novecento*, Napoli, Liguori, 1990, pp. 11-48. P. den Boer, *History as a Profession. The Study of History in France, 1818-1914*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987, pp. 3-117. G.B. Furiozzi, *Pietro di Santa Rosa e il cattolicesimo liberale in Piemonte (1850)*, «Rassegna storica del Risorgimento», LVIII (1971), pp. 21-47. C. Lovett, *Giuseppe Ferrari and the Italian Revolution*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina University Press, 1979, pp. 51-107.

²¹ V. Rutenburg, *Popolo e movimenti popolari* cit., pp. 25-88. E. Werner, *Probleme städtischer Volksbewegungen* cit., pp. 34-35. Š. Cohn, *Laboring Classes* cit., pp. 129-131. E. Screpanti, *L'angelo della liberazione* cit., pp. 189-216.

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²⁶ J. de Sismondi, *Histoire des républiques italiennes du Moyen Âge* [1809-18], IV, Bruxelles, Société typographique belge, 1839-40, pp. 33-34; I, 1.

²⁷ J. Zeller, *Les tribuns et les révolutions en Italie*. Jean de Procida, Arnaud de Brescia, Nicolas Rienzi, Michel Lando, Masaniello, Paris, Didier, 1874, p. 295.

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²⁹ E. Werner, *Probleme städtischer Volksbewegungen* cit., p. 46. S. Cohn, *Laboring Classes* cit., p. 152.

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³² G. Brucker, *Ciompi Revolution* cit., p. 349. Id., *Florentine Politics* cit., e.g. pp. 196-99, 238, 251-252, 259.

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⁴⁰ E. Screpanti's phrase in *L'angelo della liberazione* cit., pp. 123-128, 203-204 (at 128). E. Werner, *Probleme städtischer Volksbewegungen* cit., pp. 34-36. S. Cohn, *Laboring Classes* cit., p. 152. Cfr. G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, English transl., London, Merlin, 1971.

⁴¹ P. de Rossi, *Storia del tumulto dei Ciompi* cit., pp. 116, xiv. N. Rodolico, *Il popolo minuto. Note di storia fiorentina (1343-1378)* [1899], Firenze, Olschki, 1968, p. 79. R. Caggese, *Firenze dalla decadenza di Roma al Risorgimento d'Italia*, II, Firenze, Seeber, 1912-21, pp. 253-256. Cfr. E. Sestan, *Niccolò Rodolico storico*, «Archivio storico italiano», CXXVIII (1970), pp. 3-23.

⁴² G. Brucker, *Ciampi Revolution* cit., p. 326. See also A. Stella, *Révolte des Ciampi* cit., p. 29.

⁴³ R. Koselleck, *Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution*, in Id., *Futures Past* cit., pp. 39-51. Id., *Revolution*, in O. Brunner, W. Conze, R. Koselleck (hrsg. von), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, V, Stuttgart, Klett, 1984, pp. 653-788: 766-774. N. Parker, *Portrayals of Revolution. Images, Debates and Patterns of Thought on the French Revolution*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1990, pp. 160-191. On 'revolution' as an ideologically loaded concept see J. Dunn, *Modern Revolutions. An Introduction to the Analysis of a Political Phenomenon*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 226-257. For essentially contested concepts see W. Gallie, *Essentially Contested Concepts*, «Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society», LVI (1955-6), pp. 167-198.

⁴⁴ G. Brucker, *Ciampi Revolution* cit., pp. 353-354.

⁴⁵ M. Mollat, P. Wolff, *Popular Revolutions* cit., pp. 159-160.

⁴⁶ J. Zeller, *Les tribuns et les révolutions* cit., pp. 281, 293-294.

⁴⁷ C. Falletti-Fossati, *Tumulto dei Ciampi* cit., pp. 314, 14-15.

⁴⁸ J. Najemy, *Corporate Origins* cit., pp. 59-61. F. Franceschi, *I "Ciampi"* cit., pp. 298-300.

⁴⁹ E. Werner, *Probleme städtischer Volksbewegungen* cit., pp.39-40.

⁵⁰ V. Rutenburg, *Popolo e movimenti popolari* cit., pp. 297, 300. The latter remark was aimed at Rodolico.

⁵¹ G. Capponi, *Storia della repubblica di Firenze* cit., p. 15.

⁵² However, like other liberal historians Ferrari disapproved of the 'radical' wing of the Ciampi. G. Ferrari, *Histoire des révolutions* cit., III, pp. 502-504.

⁵³ G. Thomas, *Révolutions politiques* cit., pp. 174, 177-178. C. Falletti-Fossati, *Tumulto dei Ciampi* cit., pp. 255-260. M. Mollat, P. Wolff, *Popular Revolutions* cit., pp. 159-160.

⁵⁴ A. Stella, *Révolte des Ciampi* cit., p. 53. R. Trexler, *Neighbors and Comrades. The Revolutionaries of Florence, 1378*, «Social Analysis», XIV (1983), pp. 53-106: 80. V. Rutenburg, *Popolo e movimenti popolari* cit., p. 297.

⁵⁵ N. Parker, *Revolutions and History. An Essay in Interpretation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 111-183.

⁵⁶ For the role of conceptual categories in shaping narratives see M. Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* cit., pp. 58-73. For the notion of historical paradigms as narratives see also C. Wickham, *Early Middle Ages and National Identity* cit. For the role of literary models of narrative see among others H. White, *The Content of the Form. Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, pp. 26-57. More generally see G. Roberts (ed. by), *The History and Narrative Reader*, London, Routledge, 2001, esp. pp. 335-434.

⁵⁷ Most of these chronicles are contemporary or near-contemporary: the chronicles of the anonymous continuator of the Acciaiuoli chronicle, three further anonymous chronicles, and a letter by Nanni Bonifazi in *Cronache e Memorie* cit., pp. 37-40, 58, 78-83, 116-120, 131, 151-152. Stefani, *Cronaca* cit., rub. 799-807. *Diario d'Anonimo* cit., pp. 375-380. Pagolo di ser Guido Morello's *memoria* in A. Stella, *Révolte des Ciampi* cit., pp. 273-274. For the judicial records see N. Rodolico, *La democrazia fiorentina nel suo tramonto (1378-1382)*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1905, pp. 441-445.

⁵⁸ *Cronache e Memorie* cit., pp. 79, 116-117, 151. Different dates for the petition are offered by two chroniclers: Stefani, *Cronaca* cit., rub. 800. A. Stella, *Révolte des Ciampi* cit., p. 274.

⁵⁹ G. Brucker, *Ciampi Revolution* cit., pp. 347-349.

⁶⁰ E. Screpanti, *L'angelo della liberazione* cit., pp. 147, 206-208. For these specific demands see Stefani, *Cronaca* cit., rub. 800. *Cronache e Memorie* cit., pp. 80, 117.

⁶¹ This is reported by Stefani in *Cronaca* cit., rub. 802.

⁶² E. Screpanti, *L'angelo della liberazione* cit., p. 147. Sources claiming foundation of the *Otto* before the petitioning process: *Cronache e Memorie* cit., p. 79. N. Rodolico, *Democrazia fiorentina* cit., pp. 442-443. A. Stella, *Révolte des Ciompi* cit., p. 274. Sources describing foundation of the *Otto* only after the petitioning process: *Cronache e Memorie* cit., pp. 119, 151. Stefani, *Cronaca* cit., rub. 802-3.

⁶³ G. Brucker, *Ciompi Revolution* cit., pp. 348-349.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*. *Cronache e Memorie* cit., p. 81. Most of the other chronicles mention that Michele di Lando had switched sides, but do not specifically say when this had happened.

⁶⁵ E. Screpanti, *L'angelo della liberazione* cit., pp. 136-137. *Cronache e Memorie* cit., p. 33.

⁶⁶ G. Brucker, *Ciompi Revolution* cit., pp. 350-351. *Diario d'Anonimo* cit., p. 378.

⁶⁷ E. Screpanti, *L'angelo della liberazione* cit., pp. 158-165 (at 165), 315, 12-13. Stefani, *Cronaca* cit., rub. 804.

⁶⁸ A. Zorzi, *La cultura della vendetta nel conflitto politico in età comunale*, in Id., R. delle Donne (a cura di), *Le storie e la memoria. In onore di Arnold Esch*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 2002, pp. 135-170. A. Zorzi, *Politiche giudiziarie e ordine pubblico*, in M. Bourin, G. Cherubini, G. Pinto (a cura di), *Rivolte urbane e rivolte contadine* cit., pp. 381-420. One historian has spoken of *Konfliktkontinuität*: P. Blickle, *Unrhuben in der ständischen Gesellschaft, 1300-1800*, München, Oldenbourg, 1988, pp. 7-12, 135-7. Cohn has also recently demonstrated how wide-spread political conflict was: S. Cohn, *Lust for Liberty. The Politics of Social Revolt in Medieval Europe, 1200-1425*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 2006.

⁶⁹ For Brucker see *Florentine Politics* cit., for Najemy see *History of Florence* cit. and *The Dialogue of Power in Florentine Politics*, in A. Molho, K. Raaflaub, J. Emlen (ed. by), *City-States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy: Athens and Rome, Florence and Venice*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991, pp. 269-288.

⁷⁰ I am currently working on a DPhil at the University of Oxford in which I try to address these issues. My preliminary title is *The Logic of Urban Political Conflict in the Late Middle Ages. A Comparative Study of Urban Conflicts in Northern France and Italy, c. 1370-1440*.

⁷¹ S. E. Toulmin, *Does the Distinction between Normal and Revolutionary Waves Hold Water?*, in I. Lakatos, A. Musgrave (ed. by), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* cit., pp. 39-48.

⁷² This list makes no claim to mention all historians that have worked or touched on the Ciompi.

