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Storia Militare Medievale

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Targa in legno, ricoperta di gesso dipinto con tema cortese,
Francia o Belgio, 1470 circa, Londra, British Museum, inv. 1863.0501.1

"[W]e were being mercilessly killed": Chivalric Vengeance in Late Medieval Italy

by J. Tucker Million

Abstract: Chivalry, a central ideology of the medieval lay elite, shaped Italian violence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Studies for a general European context have traditionally focused on how court systems and knightly mores limited both the duration and deadliness of warfare. This article, however, challenges the interpretation of chivalry as a civilizing force by exploring the pervasive and deadly honor-violence practiced by Italian knights in battle. Indeed, while it is important to recognize long-term trends that brought peace to Europe, evidence drawn from both imaginative literature and chronicles suggests that personal conflicts motivated by knights' hyper-awareness of personal honor led to destruction, suffering, and death.

Keywords: chivalry, knighthood, vengeance, honor, Italy

Was chivalry a civilizing force in late medieval Italy?[1] This article suggests that it was not, because chivalry could encourage knights to obsessively cultivate and protect their personal honor with violence that was often transgressive and deadly even in the context of war. Consider a striking scene which followed the Battle of Serchio in 1263 (fought between the infamous Guelph and Ghibelline factions)[2]. During the battle, Messer Cece

1 I am very grateful to the many people who helped shape this project with their generous feedback, both written and verbal. I would especially like to thank Professors Peter Sposato, Richard W. Kaeuper, and Jonathan Boulton. I also want to thank the anonymous reviewers of the journal for their expert and inciteful feedback, as well as the staff and fellow researchers at the Herzog August Bibliothek whose support and encouragement helped me start work on this article.

2 Distilled to its simplest form, the Guelphs supported the pope while the Ghibellines supported the Holy Roman Emperor in territorial disputes of the early- to mid-thirteenth century. It was a pan-Italian war and also a uniquely Florentine war as the Guelphs slowly

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Buondelmonti was captured while leading the Guelph army to victory at which point he was placed under the protection of a rival Ghibelline captain, messer Farinata degli Uberti. The pair returned to camp where they encountered the captor's brother, messer Pietro Asino degli Uberti, who immediately surged forward and struck Cece "in the face with an iron mace"[3]. The captor and captive attempted to flee on a single horse, but Pietro aimed and struck the prisoner again, this time in the back. The chaos of the scene, with horses rearing and shouts of surprise and pain, quieted at last when Cece slumped over the captain, dead. The act was done, but we are left asking: why did Pietro, a member of the chivalric elite, kill Cece, a prisoner granted mercy by an enemy in the wake of a battle?[4] And what can this single act tell us about chivalric vengeance in particular and medieval warfare more generally?

In this essay, I try to uncover the motivations behind and possible justifications for Pietro's actions as well as for other knightly interactions similar to the one described above. I argue that Pietro likely acted with the intention to secure vengeance. More specifically, I demonstrate with evidence drawn from both imaginative literature and chronicles that honor-violence¾conflicts motivated by

divided into two factions within the city (several studies on the Guelphs and Ghibellines exist, but for a starting point see Tabacco, Giovanni, *The Struggle for Power in Medieval Italy: Structures of Political Rule*, tr. Rosalind Brown Jensen, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989; Najemy, John M., *A History of Florence, 1200-1575*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2008, pp. 20-27; Herde, Peter, «Guelfen und Ghibellinen beim Italienzug Henrichs VII», in Penth, Sabine and Thorau, Peter (eds.), *.Rom 1312: Die Kaiserkrönung Henrichs VII und die Folgen: Die Luxemburger als Herrscherdynastie von gesamteuropäischer Bedeutung*, Köln, Bohlau Verlag, 2016, especially pp. 43-47; Tarassi, Massimo, «Le famiglie di parte guelfa nella classe dirigente della città di Firenze durante il XIII secolo», in *I ceti dirigenti dell'età comunale nei secoli XII e XIII: Atti del II Convegno, Firenze, 14-15 dicembre 1979,* Pisa, Pacini Editore, 1982, pp. 310-21; Raveggi, Sergio, «Le famiglie di parte ghibellina nella classe dirigente Fiorentina del secolo XIII», in *I ceti dirigenti dell'età comunale nei secoli XII e XIII: Atti del II Convegno, Firenze, 14-15 dicembre 1979,* Pisa, Pacini Editore, 1982, pp. 279-99; Lee, Alexander, *Humanism and Empire: The Imperial Ideal in Fourteenth-Century Italy*, Oxford, OUP, 2018.

3 "diede d'una mazza di ferro in testa" (Porta, Giuseppe (cur.), Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, vol. III, Parma, Ugo Guanda Editore, 1990, p. 317). Messer Farinata degli Uberti (1212-1264), in a great case of irony, achieved immortality in Dante's *Inferno* for not believing in Heaven. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

4 See more below regarding the unwritten understanding among the chivalric elite that mercy meant protection was granted until the point of ransom. See for the specific Italian context, Zug Tucci, Hannelore, *Prigionia di Guerra nel Medioevo: Un'altura in mezzo pianura; l'Italia dell'"incivilmento"*, Venice, Ist. Veneto di Scienze, 2016.

knights' cultivation of personal honor¾led to destruction, suffering, and death in warfare.[5] We can find evidence of this violence not only in Tuscany but in southern Italy, too. For Pietro's case, Giovanni Villani (c. 1276-1348), the Florentine chronicler who recorded the murder, does not explicitly state what motivated the Florentine knight to act so violently. But the violence was not spontaneous in the chronicler's narrative. Cece had dishonored Pietro by routing him in battle. Moreover, the Guelphs had dishonored the Ghibellines, including Pietro, under Cece's banner by winning a series of important conflicts prior to the Battle of Serchio as they continued their quest to capture the city of Florence.[6] And the feud had even older roots since the Buondelmonte and Uberti, as outlined in more detail below, had been engaged in a feud for several generations by the time of Cece's death.[7] So, Pietro's outburst can be read as a reaction to his loss of honor. But this act of vengeance does not fit well within our traditional conception of medieval Italian chivalry or of elite European honor.

Honor, Mercy, and Vengeance

Max Gluckman, in his classic article on peacemaking, established a precedent in honor-based studies when he demonstrated how the Nuer people were pushed to agree to peace instead of seeking vengeance on account of a communal desire "to live [in peace] and produce food, marry into one another's families, [and] deal with one another." He continued on to state that these social pressures helped to "establish order."[8] Andrea Zorzi and Trevor Dean, similarly, explore how vengeance, directed by formal legal institutions and customs, served as a positive and balancing force within premodern Italian society.[9] In both narratives,

5 Sposato, Peter, «Chivalry and Honor-Violence in Late Medieval Florence», in Nakashian, Craig M. and Franke, Daniel P. (eds.) *Prowess, Piety, and Public Order in Medieval Society: Studies in Honor of Richard W. Kaeuper*, Leiden Boston, Brill, 2017, pp. 103-104.

6 The Ghibellines had exiled many Guelph families more than a decade earlier.

7 Faini, Enrico, «Il convito del 1216: La vendetta all'origine del fazionalismo fiorentino», in *Annali di Storia di Firenze*, I, 2006, pp. 9-36.

8 Gluckman, Max, «The Peace in the Feud», in *Past & Present* 8, 1955, p. 11.

9 Zorzi, Andrea, «La cultura della vendetta nel conflitto politico in età comunale» in Delle Donne, Roberto, and Zorzi, Andrea (eds.), *Le storie e la memoria: In onore di Arnold Esch*, Florence, 2002, pp. 135-170; Zorzi, Andrea (ed.), *Conflitti, paci e vendette nell'Italia comunale*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2008; Dean, Trevor, «Marriage and Mutilation: Vendetta in Late Medieval Italy», in *Past & Present* 157, 1997, pp. 3-36.

for Renaissance Italy and the modern Upper Nile, vengeance seldom disrupted the social order or rarely spiraled out of control. A recent flourishing of studies on medieval peace-making also highlights the limits imposed on vengeance by pre-modern social institutions and customs throughout Europe.[10] Why, despite these

10 E.g., Hyams, Paul R., *Rancor & Reconciliation in Medieval England*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2003; Miller, William Ian, «In Defense of Revenge», in Hanawalt Barbara H., and Wallace, David (eds.), *Medieval Crime and Social Control*, Minneapolis, Univ Of Minnesota Press,1999, pp. 70-89; Palmer, James A., «Piety and Social Distinction in Late Medieval Roman Peacemaking», in *Speculum*, 89, 2014, pp. 974-1004; Malegam, Jehangir, *The Sleep of the Behemoth: Disputing Peace and Violence in Medieval Europe, 1000-1200*,

Paolo Uccello, Assedio delle Amazzoni, dalla *Teseida* di Giovanni Boccaccio
(Yale University Art Gallery, Public Domain)

many checks on knightly violence, did Pietro murder Cece instead of seeking peace?

Some of the current scholarship on medieval warfare and captivity gets us no closer to an answer. Historians offer two explanations for how strenuous knights

Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2013; Kumhera, Glenn, *The Benefits of Peace: Private Peacemaking in Late Medieval Italy*, Leiden Boston, Brill, 2017; Jansen, Katherine Ludwig, *Peace and Penance in Late Medieval Italy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2018.

and arms bearers mitigated most of the risks to their person on the battlefield. One way in which they did this was by means of a complex captive-taking system founded upon ideals of chivalric mercy and the promise of profit through ransom.[11] But in these narratives the rigors and very real dangers of medieval warfare are obscured by the age of chivalric tournament and its game-like contests.[12] Knights could, alternatively, abide by the exhortations of clerics and lawyers to put down their swords and offer their defeated opponents mercy or even forgo continued warfare in favor of peace.[13] These conceptions conform to the narrative that knights, by protecting themselves and their peers, civilized warfare.[14] Yet knights remained central to an army's success in battle during the Middle Ages,

11 We can find this mentality with its earliest roots in, Michelet, Jules, *Histoire de France*, 17 voll., Paris, Hetzel, 1833-1867, Vol. III, p. 373. For more recent examples, see: Keen, Maurice, *The Laws of War in the Later Middle Ages*, London, 1965 (repr., 2017); Keen, Maurice, *Chivalry,* New Haven London, Yale University, 1984; AMBÜHL, Rémy, *Prisoners of War in the Hundred Years War: Ransom Culture in the Late Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013; Strickland, Matthew, *War and Chivalry: The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066-1217*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 153-58 and 183-203; Taylor, Craig, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France during the Hundred Years War*, Cambridge, 2013.

12 Keen, *Chivalry* cit., pp. 83-101; Crouch, David, *Tournament*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007; Crouch, David, *William Marshal*, 3rd ed., London, Routledge, 2016; Strickland, *War and Chivalry* cit., pp. 149-52; Barber, Richard *The Knight and Chivalry*, Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer LTD, 1996, pp. 155-244; Zug Tucci, *Prigionia di guerra nel medioevo* cit. On the social toll of medieval warfare, see Kaeuper, Richard, «Medieval Warfare – Representation Then and Now», in Bellis, Joanna and Slater, Laura (eds.), *Representing War and Violence, 1250-1600*, Rochester, NY, 2016.

13 On the clerical tradition, see Exodus 21:23-25 and Matthew 5:38-39; Kaeuper, Richard, «Vengeance and Mercy in the Chivalric *Mentalité*», in Lambert, T.B. and Rollason, David (eds.), *Peace and Protection in the Middle Ages*, Toronto, 2009), pp. 167-68; Jansen, *Peace and Penance in Late Medieval Italy* cit., pp. 129-59; Malegam, *The Sleep of the Behemoth* cit. On the legal tradition, see fn. 4 and Smail, Daniel Lord, *The Consumption of Justice: Emotions, Publicity, and Legal Culture in Marseille, 1264-1423*, Ithaca, NY, SMAIL, Daniel Lord, 2003; Klapisch-Zuber, Christiane, *Retour à la cité: Les magnats de Florence (1340-1440)*, Paris, Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2006.

14 Or, made it less brutal. Elias, Norbert, *The Civilizing Process*, tr. Edmund Jephcott, Vol. 1, Oxford, rev., 2000; Huizinga, Johan «The Political and Military Significance of Chivalric Ideas in the Late Middle Ages», repr. in *Men and Ideas: History, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance*, Princeton, 2014, p. 203. See also studies on the pageantry of medieval warfare and the development of the early modern European gentleman (or proto-gentleman), Keen, *Chivalry* cit.; Crouch, David, *The English Aristocracy, 1070-1272: A Social Transformation*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011.

and their participation in the chaos of war rarely afforded knights or any combatants protection.[15] Even accepting that knights pursued vengeance only to the point of "wiping out shame," what if the threshold to wipe out dishonor was exceptionally high for the chivalric elite?[16] Some scholars have suggested as much; the brutality of knightly violence in war, in fact, has led John Hosler to observe what he calls "chivalric carnage" against non-elite soldiers on the field of battle.[17] Carnage, as Cece experienced, was not limited to non-elite combatants and it even extended to knights taken into captivity. Vengeance proved a real and feared threat to many Italian knights during warfare.

In addition to using a chivalric lens to make sense of what appear to be a random act of violence, the issue of how we understand Pietro's actions also comes down to our chosen frame of reference. Factional violence in medieval Italy, when viewed on a large scale, appears as a series of outbursts between families and communes that are, more often than not, quickly reconciled to maintain social order and preserve economic development. When viewed on a local and personal scale, however, Italian factional violence reveals a great deal of pain, suffering, and death. Indeed, Cece and many other knights like him died in battle despite these peace-making customs and captive taking efforts. Knights died because of and for honor. As Richard Kaeuper for the general European and Peter Sposato for the Florentine context have argued persuasively, honor mattered more than

15 E.g., Kaeuper, Richard W., *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999; Kaeuper, Richard W., *Medieval Chivalry*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2016; Sposato, Peter «Reforming the Chivalric Elite in Thirteenth-Century Florence: The Evidence of Brunetto Latini's *Il Tesoretto*», in *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 46, 2015: pp. 203-227; Sposato, «Chivalry and Honor-Violence in Late Medieval Florence» cit., pp. 102-14; Claussen, Samuel, «Chivalric and Religious Valorization of Warfare in High Medieval France», in Nakashian, Craig M. and Franke, Daniel P. (eds.) *Prowess, Piety, and Public Order in Medieval Society: Studies in Honor of Richard W. Kaeuper*, Leiden Boston, Brill, 2017, pp. 199-217.

16 Kaeuper, "Vengeance and Mercy in the Chivalric *Mentalité*," cit., p. 177.

17 Hosler, John D. "Chivalric Carnage? Fighting, Capturing and Killing at the Battles of Dol and Fornham in 1173," in Nakashian, Craig M. and Franke, Daniel P. (eds.) *Prowess, Piety, and Public Order in Medieval Society: Studies in Honor of Richard W. Kaeuper*, Leiden, 2017, pp. 36-61. On the need to seek vengeance, Kaeuper writes that "among powerful chivalrous ranks vengeance achieved through prowess ranks as an honourable right and duty for the *bellatores*; as God takes holy vengeance on humans for sin, his good warriors on earth wipe out wrongs, harm and shame inflicted on them" (Kaeuper, "Vengeance and Mercy in the Chivalric *Mentalité*" cit., p. 174).

life itself to strenuous knights and arms bearers.[18] The prospect of dying for personal reputation might seem alien to a modern reader, but it is important to note that medieval people, and the younger sons of the nobility in particular, suffered the pressures of steady social decline.[19] Honor achieved on the battlefield could prove the only factor that separated a young lord from economic and social ruin in a world with few avenues for social advancement.[20] And if they gained honor through violence, so too did they defend it with sword in hand.[21] In order to protect honor, knights resorted to seeking vengeance and killing rivals, especially in communal Italy where enemies were often rivals in exile. This is perhaps why Pietro, upon seeing Cece in the field outside of Castiglione, rushed forward to kill a prisoner who was offered mercy just moments earlier. My contribution here is to demonstrate how chivalric notions of honor and violence made it more likely for knights, like Cece, to die even if they were taken into honorable captivity.

How great of a threat did this martial life pose to knights, though? Was Cece's death an isolated incident or just part of a larger problem within medieval chivalric society? While complete figures for knightly deaths in late medieval Italy do

18 Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence* cit., p. 133; Sposato, Peter, *'Forged in the Shadow of Mars'*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, forthcoming 2022. My thanks must go to Peter for letting me see early drafts of his excellent book.

19 Herlihy, David, «Three Patterns of Social Mobility in Medieval History», in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 3, 1973, pp. 623-47; Brown, A. T., «The Fear of Downward Social Mobility in Late Medieval England», in *The Journal of Medieval History*, 45 2019, pp. 597-617.

20 Herlihy notes the social mobility offered by clerical service, but that lifestyle had its limitations, too, Herlihy, "Three Patterns of Social Mobility," p. 624. This definition of honor, achieved through feats of arms on the battlefield, differs markedly from the courtly honor described by Norbert Elias and Johan Huizinga. See Huizinga, Johan, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, tr. Payton, Rodney J., and Mammitzsch, Ulrich, Chicago, University Chicago Press, 1996; Elias, *The Civilizing Process* cit.

21 According to Julian Pitt-Rivers, "achievement of honour depends upon the ability to silence anyone who would dispute that title" (Pitt-Rivers, Julian, «Honour and Social Status», in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. Jean Peristiany Chicago, 1966, p. 24). Only a knight's peers, however, could dispute any specific title or claim to honor, a system referred to by Frank Steward as "horizontal honor," which meant that the violent protection of personal honor often happened within knightly ranks (Pitt-Rivers, «Honour and Social Status» cit., p. 21; Hordon, Peregrine, and Purcell, Nicholas, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2000; Stewart, Frank Henderson, *Honor*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 54-63.

not survive, we can find a few striking estimates of the carnage left in knights' wakes which places Cece's death in a much larger, and far bloodier, context. Dino Compagni (c. 1255-1324), for example, remarks that so many knights died in a single battle that "all [of] Tuscany suffered harm."[22] In another case, the Florentines engaged the Sienese with an army of approximately 2300 against a much smaller force, leaving "300 of the best citizens of Siena and of the best and most noble men of Maremma" dead.[23] In 1260, the Florentines killed everyone in a Sienese force that marched against the city.[24] During the Sicilian Vespers (1282), the islanders killed every Frenchman, as many as 4,000, "without any mercy" (*sanza misericordia niuna*).[25] And Florentine forces killed almost 1,700 Arentines just a few years later, in 1289.[26] In a 1315 battle between Florence and Romagna, 2,000 foot and knight combined were slain.[27] The accuracy of the numbers aside, contemporaries noticed and society certainly suffered on account of these fatalities.[28] Consider the pre-speech battle given by Messer Barone de' Mangiadori of San Miniato outside of Arezzo in 1289 in which he addressed his soldiers on the eve of a battle, saying, "Lords, the wars of Tuscany were once won through a good charge and they did not last long, and only few men died in them because it was not the custom to kill them. But now ways have changed."[29] Although an expression of nostalgia, this sentiment for a by-gone era reveals a concern about contemporary knightly deaths: deaths were to be expected, and on a large enough scale to warrant hesitation on the eve of combat. Together, Mangiadori's fear and Villani's

22 "che ne fu danno per tutta la Toscana" (Luzzatto, Gino (cur.), Compagni, Dino,*Cronica delle cose occorrenti ne' tempi suoi* [hereafter, *Chronicle of Florence*], Torino, Einaudi, 1968, p. 13).

23 "IIIc pur de' migliori cittadini di Siena, e de' migliori e gentili uomini di Maremma" (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 484). Maremma is a large region that includes most of modern Tuscany and northern Lazio. Villani appears to be commenting that not only Siena was impacted by this violence but the entire region of northwestern Italy.

24 Villani, *Cronica* cit., pp. 301-02.

25 Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 419.

26 Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 498.

27 Villani, *Cronica* cit., pp. 742-43.

28 Compagni, too, refers to a "customs of war" (*uso della guerra*) that allows prisoners, but this only when writing about the violent excesses of victorious parties in his own age (Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 75).

29 "Signori, le guerre di Toscana si soglìano vincere per bene assalire; e non duravano, e pochi uomini vi moriano, ché non era in uso l'ucciderli. Ora è mutato modo" (Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 12).

Sandro Botticelli, Story of Nastagio degli Onesti, Scena III, From Boccaccio's *Decameron,* V, 8). Prado Museum. Rejected by a girl, Nastagio convinces her to accept his love, making her witness the punishment of an ancestor of Nastagio, who committed

suicide for unrequited love. Damned both he and the cruel girl, they eternally repeat his pursuit and killing of her. (Source: Web Gallery of Art. Public domain).

striking fatality estimates unveil the dangers of warfare because knights could not and did not expect captives or captivity from an armed engagement. How could it not with so many citizens dying on a single day? In other words, knights did die in battle in numbers sufficient to cause concern.

Imaginative Literature and a Chivalric Mentalité

Ultimately, the difficulty of our task at hand lies not in demonstrating the importance of honor to the chivalric elite or revealing the number of knights slain in combat but rather in identifying the extent to which the desire to pursue and vindicate honor influenced knightly behavior. Illuminating even a general chivalric *mentalité* proves difficult considering the centuries-long gap that separates us from them and so it is necessary to combine evidence provided in both medieval chronicles and imaginative literature. On the one hand, chroniclers, the authors of sources most often used by historians to describe medieval battles and factional conflict, do not always connect violence with honor and thus do not seek to explain the reasons behind the lack of mercy.[30] On the other hand, the authors of im-

30 *Mentalité*, as used by Jacques le Goff and Roger Chartier, among many others, refers to a collective discourse related to culture. This discourse can transcend social groups, not unlike Clifford Geertz's work on cultural symbolism and Greg Dening's pioneering study on cultural barriers, which makes it a useful framework for studying an ideology as pervasive as chivalry (Le Goff, Jacques, *The Medieval Imagination*, tr. Arthur Goldhammer Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 264 n. 5 and p. 265 n. 21; Burke, Peter, «Strengths and Weaknesses in the History of Mentalities», in *History of European Ideas*, 7, 1986, pp. 439-51; Chartier, Roger, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1988; Geertz, Clifford, «Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight», in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, Basic Books, 1977, pp. 412-454; Dening, Greg, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land Marquesas, 1774-1880*, Honolulu, The University Press of Hawaii, 1980). See also the concept of *habitus* in Bourdieu, Pierre, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique: Précédé de trois études d'ethnologie Kabyle*, Geneva, Librairie Droz, 1972; Blanshei, Sarah Rubin, «Habitus: Identity and the Formation of Hereditary Classes in Late Medieval Bologna», in Anselmi, Gian Mario, De Benedictis, Angela, and Terpstra, Nicholas (eds.), *Bologna: Cultural Crossroads from the Medieval to the Baroque: Recent Anglo-American Scholarship*, Bologna, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2013; Crouch, David, *The Birth of Nobility: Constructing Aristocracy in England and France, 900-1300*, Oxford, Pearson, 2005, pp. 52-57. On the use of chronicles in military history, see DeVries, Kelly, «The Use of Chronicles in Recreating Medieval Military History», in *The Journal of Medieval Military History*, 2, 2004, pp. 1-15. Peter Sposato treats the perspective of medieval Florentine Brucker at length, see Sposato, *'Forged in the Shadow of Mars'* cit., Introduction.

aginative literature¾written for and read (or listened to) by contemporary knights and arms bearers¾often describe the motivations behind vengeance but do not record historical acts of violence.[31] And while Florence (or Tuscany more specifically) produced many chronicles during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Naples lay at the heart of European literary production in the fourteenth century which when combined makes the peninsula an excellent case study in medieval chivalric culture.[32] Combining the two source-bases helps provide both historical context and potential motivations behind those actions. Only by combining historical records of knightly violence with the ideas present in imaginative literature does it become clear how chivalric ideas influenced strenuous knights on the battlefield, and only by understanding these chivalric ideas might we begin to glimpse the importance placed on preserving and cultivating personal honor instead of offering mercy in medieval warfare.[33]

But first we must briefly address the decision to treat the histories of medieval Naples and Florence together in this essay. It has only recently become

31 Bouchard, Constance Brittain, *Strong of Body, Brave & Noble: Chivalry and Society in Medieval France*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1998, pp. 105-09; Tyreman, Christopher, *How to Plan a Crusade: Religious War in the High Middle Ages*, New York, Pegasus Books, 2017, pp. 21-22; Aurell, Martin, *Le chevalier lettré: Savoir et conduit de l'aristocratie aux xii^e^ et xiii^e^ siècles*, Paris, Fayard, 2011, pp. 54-106; Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea* cit., p. 491; Kaeuper, Richard W., «Literature as Essential Evidence for Understanding Chivalry», in *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 5, 2007, pp. 1-15; Kaeuper, Richard W., *Chivalry and Violence* cit., pp. 30-5; Sposato, «Reforming the Chivalric Elite in Thirteenth-Century Florence» cit.; Sposato, «Chivalry and Honor-Violence in Late Medieval Florence».

32 Authors at the royal court of Naples, under the direction of Robert I of Anjou (r. 1309-1343), captured many of the knightly ideas circulating around the peninsula, contextualizing the accounts of deadly honor-violence preserved in the historical record. On Neapolitan imaginative chivalric literature, see Million, J. Tucker, *Worthy Lords and Honorable Violence: Chivalry in Angevin Naples, c. 1250-1382*, PhD Diss., University of Rochester, 2021. On patronage, see Kelly, Samantha, *The New Solomon: Robert of Naples (1309-1343) and Fourteenth-Century Kingship*, Leiden Boston, Brill, 2003. On the application of these ideas in an Italian context, see Sposato, Peter, «The Chivalrous Life of Buonaccorso Pitti: Honor-Violence and the Profession of Arms in Late Medieval Italy», in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 13, 2016, pp. 141-176.

33 Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* cit.; Huizinga, «The Political and Military Significance of Chivalric Ideals in the Late Middle Ages», cit., pp. 196-206; Elias, *The Civilizing Process* cit. Or on eternal salvation through the grace of God (adding to the work of John Gillingham, Matthew Strickland, and Craig Taylor found in fn. 7), see Kaeuper, «Vengeance and Mercy in the Chivalric *Mentalité*» cit., in pp. 168-80.

commonplace in Italian studies to compare the two allied powers at the heart Italian politics in the mid-thirteenth through fourteenth centuries.[34] The connections between Naples and Florence were strong. The kings of Naples acted as stable customers for Florence's leading banking families¾including but not limited to the Buonaccorsi and Acciaiuoli families¾and they also served as the leaders of the Guelph party.[35] As the lords of Avignon, the Angevins leased lands to the papacy and received papal support in northern Italian affairs in return. The Angevins also fielded armies to repel numerous imperial invasions of the peninsula.[36] Meanwhile, Florence, as a financial center of Europe, provided money and native Florentine knights to Neapolitan armies. The commune consulted with the Angevins and often requested their support in northern Italian politics, too.[37] At all times the two cities were in contact and exchanging both material goods and soldiers for war. At a more practical level, however, Florentine chroniclers had a long-standing interest in the Angevin kingdom which allows their sources to stand in for the less developed Neapolitan chronicle tradition.

But which works allow us to bridge the gap between Naples and Florence, between our own age and the Middle Ages? We can start, as suggested above, with imaginative literature as well as with the lives of two influential Florentines who had careers in Naples, Niccolò Acciaiuoli (1310-65) and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75). Acciaiuoli, the son of a Florentine banker, became a member of the chivalric elite in Naples after working at the city's branch of the family business. Acciaiuoli, at first an outsider in Naples, used his prowess to cement and then increase his standing in his new home as he became first a seneschal of Naples and later an invaluable advisor to the royal family, even serving as tutor to the fu-

34 There remains much work to be done on this topic, but see TERENZI, Pierluigi *Gli Angiò in Italia centrale: Potere e relazioni politiche in Toscana e nelle terre della Chiesa (1263-1335)*, Rome, Viella, 2019; GENSINI, Sergio, «I Toscani nel Mezzogiorno medievale: Genesi ed evoluzione trecentesca di una relazione di lungo periodo», in *La Toscana nel secolò XIV: Caratteri di una civiltà regionale*, Pisa, Pacini, 1988, pp. 287-336.

35 MILLION, J. Tucker, «Tuscan Warfare and Angevin Identity in Naples's Hundred Years's War (1266-1382)», in *Urban Communities and War in Medieval Europe*, NAKASHIAN, Craig and SPOSATO, Peter (eds.), Leiden, forthcoming 2022; BRUCKER, Gene A., *Florentine Politics and Society, 1343-1378*, Princeton, Princeton Legacy Library, 1962, pp. 3-32.

36 See Terenzi, *Gli Angiò in Italia centrale* cit.; Million, «Tuscan Warfare and Angevin Identity in Naples's Hundred Years' War (1266-1382)» cit.

37 TERENZI, *Gli Angiò in Italia centrale* cit.; NORMAN, Diana *Siena and the Angevins, 1300-1350: Art, Diplomacy, and Dynastic Ambition,* Turnhout, Brepols,2018.

ture king, Louis I of Naples (r. 1352-62).[38] To craft a legacy and spread chivalric culture at the Neapolitan court, Acciaiuoli acted as patron to the son of another Florentine banker, Boccaccio, who, although not a knight himself, wrote about and preserved the knightly lifestyle embodied by Acciaiuoli.[39] I intend, therefore, to reinterpret Boccaccio's lesser known romances through a chivalric lens by highlighting the Florentine's descriptions of war and chivalric violence. Two of the epics that Boccaccio wrote in Naples between 1335 and 1343, *Teseida* and *Filocolo*, are particularly illuminating as they, like other works of imaginative literature, both reflected historical behavior and helped shape it.[40] The *Teseida* establishes the knightly obsession with honor, and the *Filocolo* offers insight into how knights used vengeance to protect and vindicate honor. This connection between honor and violence sheds light on the motivations behind the historical accounts of knightly violence in warfare that comprise the following section.

Boccaccio on Honor and Violence

Boccaccio's *Teseida* is a tale of two halves, the first a series of conquests and acts of honor-violence and the second the use of violence in the pursuit of love. The former concerns us here, because the hero acts in the interest of increas-

38 Palmieri, Matteo *La vita di Niccola Acciaioli, Gran Siniscalco de' Regni di Cicilia, e di Gierusalemme. E l'Origine della famiglia de gli Acciaioli; e I fatti de gli huomini famosi d'essa*, tr. Donato Acciaioli, Florence, 1588, p. 9; Budini Gattai, Niccolò, «Condottieri fiorentini nella penisola balcanica nel XIV secolo», in Agnoletti, Silvia, and Mantelli, Luca (eds.), *I Fiorientini alle Crociate: Guerre, pellegrinaggi e immaginario 'orientalistico' a Firenze tra Medioevo ed Età moderna*, Florence, Edizioni della Meridiana, 2007, pp. 196-243.

39 Burke, Peter *Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society*, 3rd ed., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 2; Olson, Kristina Marie, *Courtesy Lost: Dante, Boccaccio, and the Literature of History*, Buffalo, 2014; Casteen, Elizabeth, *From She-Wolf to Martyr: The Reign and Disputed Reputation of Johanna I of Naples*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2015, pp. 82-83.

40 See, Casteen, *From She-Wolf to Martyr* cit., pp. 68, 79-84, and 89-92. Armstrong, Guyda, Daniels, Rhiannon, and Milner, Stephen J., «Boccaccio as cultural mediator», in Armstrong, Guyda, Daniels, Rhiannon, and Milner, Stephen J. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Boccaccio*, Cambridge New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 4 and 6-7; Boli, Todd, ««Personality and Conflict», in Kirkham, Victoria, Sherberg, Michael, and Smarr, Janet Levarie (eds.), *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013, p. 296; Kelly, *The New Solomon* cit., pp. 9 and 43.

ing his honor through warfare while giving little regard, at first, to any potential repercussions for his actions. The epic opens with the mythical Greek king Theseus, famous for defeating the minotaur, as he travels Greece defeating first the Amazons and then a race of giants led by king Creon. The trajectory of his victories serves as a warning for any knights listening to the tale who might wish to slow their martial activity. After defeating the Amazons and enjoying married life with their former queen, for instance, Theseus receives a vision in which a spirit asks, "What are you doing here, inactive […] shrouding your famous name under the cloud of love? […] Have you slid back shamefully into immaturity?"[41] We might speculate as Theseus does that the spirit belongs to Mars since the gods held an interest in the king's honor. Theseus heeds the divine advice with the approval of his wife who does not want a dishonored man for a husband and decides it is time to return to Athens where he awaits the next adventure. He does not have to wait long before he has an enemy against whom he can wage war: Creon the tyrant. A group of women seeking the king's aid against the tyrant remind Theseus when he delays in pledging his support that it would be a great dishonor to allow someone else to take up an act of vengeance brought before him.[42] Not wishing to risk his own honor and with the hope of acquiring more the king agrees to raise an army with which to face Creon. The motivation behind Theseus's actions are clear: the societal expectations around honor influenced the king's behavior. His followers and the heavens remind the king several times that fame and glory lay in warfare and that to pass on an act of vengeance is to acquire shame. At every turn, then, the characters urge the king to take up arms when he would otherwise have put them down. And so, warfare and violence come to define the king and his most loyal knights.

But why the obsessive cultivation of honor within knightly circles? Much like *fama* (public reputation) to which it is related, peers conferred honor upon members of their own class, making it a marker of distinction in a world with limited opportunities for social mobility.[43] This, of course, did not mean that an

41 "che fai tu otioso/ con Ipolita inscitia dimorando/ sotto amor offuschando il tuo famoso/ nome perche ingrecia horamai/ nontorni hove piu groria araiassai" (Traversa, Vincenzo (ed.), Giovanni Boccaccio, *Teseida delle Nozze di Emilia*, New York, Peter Lang, 2002, pp. 33-34.

42 Boccaccio, *Il Teseida* cit., pp. 33-34.

43 Stewart, *Honor* cit.; Pitt-Rivers, «Honour and Social Status» cit., pp. 19-77; Horden and

The Cerchi seek vengeance. workshop of Pacino da Bonaguida, in Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica*, Ms Chigiano LVIII 296 Biblioteca Vaticana.

individual failed to understand how his actions could bring honor, but that his actions had to publicly demonstrate and confirm his claim to honor.[44] Theseus had to maintain a life of arms as a king beholden to knightly customs, because to speak of someone as honorable was to condone his actions as acceptable within the community. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, Boccaccio models Theseus

Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea* cit., pp. 485-529.

44 As Stewart observes, a man "is unlikely […] thinking of his honor as something that the world accords to him. The chances are rather that he is viewing his honor as something to which his personal qualities entitle him, irrespective of what the world may believe. He is taking, that is, an idealistic view" (Stewart, *Honor* cit., p. 25).

after an Angevin conception of ideal kingship rooted, above all, in martial activity.[45] And to perform acceptably within the group was to increase one's status for which there were several benefits in the Middle Ages. The most honorable knights, for instance, could, but did not always, have an advantage when looking to acquire beneficial marriage arrangements or had a better chance of receiving lucrative lands in return for their service to monarchs. The fragile nature of honor as a social construct, however, often limited a single knight from acquiring too much of it since rivals (the Amazons or Creon in Theseus's case) would work to undermine those who enjoyed too much favor. Honor, furthermore, lasted only so long as did the memory of deeds that conferred it on a person, committing each knight to a life of arms.[46] Not even kings, as Theseus was to find out, were exempt from these expectations. Both explain why knights, real or mythical, sought honor so tirelessly and why they were willing to kill rivals to defend it. Honor was more than just an abstract social construct. To talk of honor was to talk about one's public existence, and Cultural conditioning from youth (in the form of imaginative chivalric literature and examples set by other practitioners) and constant advice offered by friends and advisors (as Theseus receives above) forced knights to continuously pursue honor, or validation for their actions by peers.

Let us consider Theseus's character as a guide for young elites with their eyes set on a life as a strenuous knight or arms bearer. His words speak as loud as his actions. "In this world," Theseus tells his men on the eve of battle with Creon, "each man is as valiant as the worthy deeds he performs," and, hypocritically considering how Mars rebukes him, "let everyone who desires to rise to fame keep himself from a life of idleness."[47] Again, Theseus focuses on acts of violence in the pursuit of honor as a central part of his and his knights' identity. But he does not stop with his pre-battle speech. As a leader of other knights, Theseus must set an example through his actions. He takes this duty seriously and places his men in situations where they can gain honor. As Boccaccio writes about the battle,

45 Million, «Worthy Lords and Honorable Violence» cit.

46 We are constantly reminded in our sources that knights must maintain their life of arms because memories are short when it comes to honor (e.g., Quaglio, Antonio Enzo (ed.), Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo*, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, Verona, 1967, p. 194.

47 "Tanto e nel mondo ciaschun valoroso/ quanto virtu lipiacie adoperare/ donchua ciaschun-divivare hotioso/ sighuardi che infama vuol montare" (Boccaccio, *Il Teseida*, p. 44).

"The good Theseus on a tall charger and with a mace in hand was riding through the field badly wounding knights, knocking down every enemy he met. He was also comforting his soldiers, who he encouraged with his great skill, often giving arms to those who had lost them and even remounting those who had fallen."[48] Theseus also shouts at his followers, calling those who fight with shaking hands cowards and otherwise verbally assaulting them until they perform better.[49] After all, the king had a duty to lead his knights to honor only achievable through the use of violence. Theseus performed this duty ably after a gentle reminder from the god of war. Yet this drive to acquire honor gets us no closer to understanding the lack of mercy in Italian warfare, it only explains the expectations that knights seek out battle.

The use of arms in the pursuit of honor only explains one reason for which knights turned to violence during warfare. A second type, violence in the defense of honor, or vengeance, lies at the heart of Boccaccio's *Filocolo*.[50] In the epic, Boccaccio writes about an evil, shapeshifting king who, jealous of King Felix¾the benevolent monarch of the tale¾imitates the appearance of one of Felix's knights and rushes off to Felix's court. Once there, the shapeshifter fabricates a tale about an ambush of the army, proclaiming "we were harshly assaulted by an innumerable multitude of the enemy, and while we were defending ourselves manfully, I saw a great number of my comrades bathe the earth with their blood, and being mercilessly killed by their adversaries."[51] The shape shifter had calculated that Felix would retaliate in the wake of the loss of honor, and he was correct. Upon hearing the news, Felix orders his knights to arm themselves so he can exact revenge.[52] When he goes to the described location Felix finds the

48 "Ilbuon theseo sopra hunaltro destriere/ chonuna lanccia inmano pelchampo andava/ ferendo forte ciaschun chavaliere/ eabbattendo chi elli trovava/ spesso chonfortando lesuo schiere/ colsuo benfare tutti lincorava/ porggiendo arme sovente achi lavesse perduta errimontando chi chadesse" (Boccaccio, *Il Teseida* cit., p. 56).

49 Boccaccio, *Il Teseida*, p. 57.

50 As Julian Pitt-Rivers observed of the honor-obsessed Andalusian peoples, "the ultimate vindication of honour lies in physical violence" (Pitt-Rivers, «Honour and Social Status» cit., p. 30).

51 "fummo da innumerabile moltitudine di nemici aspramente assaliti, e quivi difendendoci virilmente, vidi io gran parte de' miei compagni bagnare la terra del loro sangue, e sanza niuna misericordia essere dagli avversarii uccisi" (Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p. 78).

52 Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p. 79, explicit desire for vengeance, p. 82.

shapeshifting king waiting with his own army. The king had sprung the trap.

Battle follows the confrontation between the shapeshifter and Felix. In many ways, Boccaccio's description of the battle matches what we expect of imaginative chivalric literature, as when a knight kills dozens of men and, blunting his axe, he must resort to crushing the bones and skulls of his enemies. These are knightly deaths, too, but they get us no closer to understanding how or why the Italian chivalric elite lacked mercy. Boccaccio, however, writes that Felix reacted to mercilessness with mercilessness. This is key. The shapeshifter's lies and subsequent ambush justified Felix's harsh reaction. Felix makes a decision in the wake of winning the battle and vindicating his honor which sheds light on chivalric mercy: The king orders that every enemy be killed. His knights neither object to the order nor hesitate in executing it because, as Boccaccio conveys, the knights had internalized these ideals.[53] A modern reader might question the severity of the reaction, but Boccaccio did not. Why, after all, would a member of one community grant mercy to a member of another community if he thought the favor had little chance of being reciprocated?[54] We will return to this idea soon. But, first, Felix's vengeance came at a cost.

Having achieved the vengeance he desired, King Felix surveys the battlefield he and his knights had left in their wake. He saw "the bloody fields and a great number of his knights fallen, dead" and the many dead moved him to tears.[55] Knights, not foot soldiers or others unbeholden to the chivalric *mentalité*, were not spared**.** Boccaccio goes on to write that Felix weeps at the sight of the wounded and further that the king finds sadness in the loss despite his increased honor.[56] Felix, in other words, struggles to come to terms with the product of his vengeance. But Felix's pain becomes more poignant still: "at first," Boccaccio writes, "[the survivors] failed to recognize their fathers and brothers and comrades who lay there dead, because of the mixture of dust and blood on their faces."[57] No

53 Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., pp. 97-99.

54 See Ambühl, *Prisoners of War in the Hundred Years War* cit., pp. 229-56.

55 "i sanguinosi campi, vide grandissima quantità de' suoi cavalieri giacer morti" (Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p. 103).

56 Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p. 103.

57 "E i miseri cavalieri, i quali questo andavano faccendo, aveano perduta la conoscenza de' loro padri e fratelli e compagni che morti giacevano, per la polvere mescolata col sangue sopra i loro visi" (Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p.103).

prisoners, only the dead from both armies. After the victors, the women of the defeated army travel to the field to find their dead husbands, fathers, and children. There the women were greeted by "the sound of scavengers and saw the dry field all wet with warm blood."[58] Boccaccio continues to describe the devastation even after the families had buried or burnt the dead, writing in a final passage,

Within a few days the breath of corruption gathered to it infinite beasts, filling [the field] completely … [and even] those of foreign lands came and devoured these meals of the dead. [As the] lions came running to the gruesome scent … and the bears smelled the filthy odor from the bloody carnage … the air had never been clothed with so many vultures.[59]

And those birds replace the leaves, recently fallen due to the onset of autumn, with human entrails dripping with blood.[60] So many knights die that the landscape is altered. With this scene, Boccaccio provides his audience at court a stark reminder of what vengeance can bring: death, and a lot of it. Where, then, is the mercy?

Chivalric Violence and Knightly Deaths in Italy

The critical or observant reader might comment at this point that the gory trees in Boccaccio's Hell-ish battlefield come from the world of imaginative literature, not the reality that knights occupied. But Boccaccio wrote for knights at the royal court of Naples, knights who lived within the complicated political arena of the Guelph and Ghibelline factions. The warfare between the Guelphs and Ghibellines, two political factions with roots in Tuscany but which spread across the peninsula and even into modern Germany and France, lasted for more than a century and took countless knightly lives due to the thirst for vengeance and a lack of mercy on both sides of the conflict.[61] So, while the near constant

58 "sentì lo spiacevole romore degli spogliatori e vide il secco campo essere di caldo sangue tutto bagnato" (Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p. 104).

59 "in pochi giorni col corrotto fiato convocò in sé infinite fiere, delle quali tutto si riempié [...] ma ancora quelli delle strane contrade vennero a pascersi sopra' mortali pasti. E i leoni affricani corsero al tristo fiato [...] E gli orsi, che sentirono il fiato della bruttura dello 'nsanguinato tagliamento [...] l'aria mai non si vestì di tanti avoltoi" (Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p. 113).

60 Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p. 114.

61 See, Najemy, *History of Florence* cit.; Tabacco, *The Struggle for Power in Medieval Italy*

warfare ensured plenty of opportunities for knights to acquire honor, it also offered plenty of opportunities for knights to die in war. For the remainder of this article, I focus on the factional warfare between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines to showcase, first, why the experience of chivalric violence became common in daily Italian life and, second, how the chivalric elite, motivated to cultivate their honor through feats of arms like Felix and Theseus, justified their lack of mercy in the pursuit of vengeance. Some of these accounts can be difficult to read at times, but the unsettling nature of these cases makes them all the more important for the insight they offer into the sometimes brutal and often bloody lifestyle of the medieval chivalric elite.

It is difficult to ignore accounts of the war between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, as prevelant as they are. Villani and Compagni both placed the factions at the heart of their communal histories as the violence, spurred, at least in part, by the chivalric pursuit of vengeance, surrounded the chroniclers and thus made its way into their narratives. As Villani writes, "Italy was stained and almost all of Europe, and many ills and perils, and destructions and changes have followed thereupon to our city and to the whole world."[62] Compagni calls this divide an "evil" (*mali*).[63] This plague of insatiable vengeance which consumed Italy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries grew from a broken marriage vow between Buondelmonte dei Buondelmonti and a local woman. The family of the shamed ex-fiancée, upon consultation and deciding "that he should be slain," murdered Buondelmonte at the foot of the statue of Mars, on the north end of the Ponte Vecchio, and so sparked warfare between the two parties.[64] The god of war

cit.; Lansing, Carol, *The Florentine Magnates: Lineage and Faction in a Medieval Commune*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992; Zorzi, Andrea, *La transformazione di un quadro politico: Ricerche su politica e giustizia a Firenze dal comune allo Stato territorial*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2008; Lee, *Humanism and Empire* cit.

62 "le quali crebbono tanto che tutta Italia n'è maculata e quasi tutta Europia, e molto mali, e pericoli, e distruggimenti, e mutazioni ne sono seguitate all anostra città e a tutto l'universo mondo" (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 150).

63 Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 3.

64 Villani says she was an Amidei (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 215); Compagni says she was a Giantruffetti (Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 3). For the rest of the tale, see Villani, *Cronica*, pp. 214-16; Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., pp. 3-4. Quote: "disse la mala parola [...] che fosse morto" (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 214). Compagni similarly records that a member of the Uberti agreed with the first statement, reasoning that "the hatred provoked by a killing is as great as that provoked by wounds" and so they should

Murder of Buondelmonte at Ponte Vecchio. workshop of Pacino da Bonaguida, in Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica,* Ms Chigiano LVIII 296 Biblioteca Vaticana

stood watch as a group of elite Florentines killed one of their own, and he would continue to watch as Florence descended into civil war. Just as a broken marriage vow led to a murder so too did the murder spiral out of control.

kill the young man ("ché così fia grande l'odio della morte come delle ferite") (Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 4). On the statue of Mars, see Davis, T., «Topographical and historical propaganda in Early Florentine Chronicles and in Villani», in *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 2, 1988, pp. 33-51; Cassidy, Brendan, *Politics, Civic Ideals and Sculpture in Italy, c.1240-1400*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2007, pp. 101-102.

Every chivalric family took a side in the conflict following Buondelmonte's death.[65] It was a complicated period of warfare driven by honor and the pursuit of wealth and power. With the influence afforded to honor by Boccaccio in his epics, this spiral should not come as a shock. When honor was at stake, the chivalric elite did not risk letting their public reputation decline any further.[66] Yet the rancor that followed Buondelmonte's murder might surprise us, as it did contemporaries. Compagni, in particular, is stunned when members of a local faction, the Black Party (which itself was already an internal faction of the Guelphs), turned their frustrations against their previous allies, the White Party. Compagni writes that, "indignant with their own Black Party due to outrages and insults they had suffered [in a past conflict,] went against [the Whites] to show that they were not traitors; they strove to outdo the rest, coming towards Santa Reparata shooting with crank-loading crossbows."[67] The Blacks, in other words, waged a pitched battle against their rivals, the Whites. As the bolts whizzed through the streets, the confrontation appeared normal. But the Blacks showed no hint of mercy as they gained the upper hand and pulled the Whites from hiding (Compagni does not give an exact number, only referring to "many") and either killed them on the spot or had them hanged.[68] The behavior of the party, even in victory, demonstrates the dangers of chivalric honor-violence and indicates one possible reason why contemporaries, such as Compagni, feared the city's knights. In the midst of battle the chivalric elite did not act with the goal of profit through captive-taking nor did they seek the promise of mercy in the future. No, they hanged their enemy or cut them down in the streets.[69]

65 Villani, *Cronica* cit., pp. 214-15.

66 Sposato, "Chivalry and Honor-Violence in Late Medieval Florence," pp. 103-04

67 "i quali erano co' loro sdegnati, chi per oltraggi e onte ricevute [...] anzi feciono loro contro, per mostrarsi non colpevoli; e più si sforzavano offernderli che gli altri; con balestra a tornio vennono saettando a Santa Reparata" (Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 96).

68 Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 96.

69 On vengeance, see, Miller, «In Defense of Revenge» cit.; Miller, William Ian, *Humiliation: And other essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence*, Ithaca, NY, 1993; Kaminsky, H., «The noble feud in the later Middle Ages», in *Past & Present*, 179, 2002, pp. 56-83; Hyams, *Rancor & Reconciliation* cit.; Barthélemy, Dominique, Bougard, François, and Le Jan, Régine, (eds.) *La vengeance 400-1200*, Rome, École française de Rome, 2006; Throop, Susanna and Hyams, Paul (eds.), *Vengeance in the Middle Ages: Emotion, Religion and Feud,* Aldershot, Cornell University, 2010; Throop, Susanna, *Crusading as an Act of Vengeance, 1095-1216*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2011; Rosenwein, Bar-

This violence had a way of perpetuating itself as knights and their peers considered how best to balance their survival with the cultivation of their personal honor (Farinata degli Uberti once said that "death and defeat would be better for us than crawling around the world any longer"[70]). The average Florentine knight could not wait to put himself on the battlefield and prove his worth, but in doing so he knowingly risked his life and acknowledged the unlikeliness of being offered mercy upon defeat by the enemy.[71] At the Battle of Montaperti, for example, the Sienese with help from Florentine Ghibelline exiles and their German allies famously routed the Florentines and killed thousands. And just like King Felix, the Florentines did not waver from reacting to mercilessness with mercilessness. In 1267, the Guelphs took no prisoners and instead killed their enemies "in revenge for their parents and comrades in arms killed at Montaperti," the great battle against Siena of 1260.[72] Montaperti was not an isolated incident. In another route a few decades later, the Florentines were the subject of an ambush outside of Lucca where "many [Florentine] knights" (*più cavalieri*) died, but they would have their revenge later when, confronting a band of imperial forces and *condoterri* led by Uguccione della Faggiuola, they set an ambush, causing 150 Ghibellines "checked and well-nigh all cut off [to be] slain."[73] And then in 1345, almost 300 Florentines died alongside their commander, messer Ghiberto da Fogliano, when a band of knights loyal to the Gonzaga family ambushed them outside the town of Reggio and left none alive.[74]

The many knightly deaths hint at the dangers that medieval warfare posed to Italian knights during the Middle Ages, but the chivalric elite did not limit their pursuit of vengeance to, and thus the threat of death did not end on, the battlefield. In many cases where a chronicler does note that victors took captives, he often must write about the captives' deaths, too. Being taken into captivity, in other

bara H. (ed.), *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1998.

70 "e per noi farebbe meglio la morte e d'essere isconfitti, ch'andare più tapinando per lo mondo" (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 306).

71 Sposato, *Forged in the Shadow of Mars* cit.

72 Villani, *Cronica*, pp. 377-79.

73 The forces were fighting for Henry VII (Villani, *Cronica*, pp. 71 and 1253).

74 This was in October 1345. Both forces had 300 arms bearers, the losses of the assaulting forces, however, are not recorded by Villani; "furono asaliti dinanzi e di dietro, e inchiusi e presi; e chissi volle difendere fu morto" (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 1493).

words, did not always mean that mercy had been granted, as we saw with Pietro and Cece above. Compagni records one case in which, after a series of skirmishes between the White and Black parties, the two factions met in battle outside of Pulicciano in 1302. The Blacks enjoyed the support of Folcieri da Calboli, the podestà of Florence, so the Whites chose Scarpetta degli Ordelaffi as their captain on the grounds that he had a personal grievance against Folcieri.[75] They used Folcieri's desire for vengeance to motivate the army to take up arms. But it failed. The Blacks, with a smaller force, took heart when the Whites assumed a defensive position as they approached the town. This allowed the Blacks to get men across the bridges and meet the Whites head-on. The latter faction fled – shamefully, Compagni adds. The Blacks took advantage of the retreat, killing (not granting mercy to) as many of the Whites as they could capture. What happened next is striking. The Blacks captured Donato Alberti, a Whites leader, and led him to Folcieri so the Podestà could rule on his fate. Folcieri tortured the knight beside a set of open windows to gather a crowd. With a sufficient part of the town's population come to see the source of the cries, the captain then cut off Donato's head. He did not do this out of vengeance so much "as because war was good for him and peace harmful; and he [Folcieri] did this with all [of the captives]" and it was on display for all to see.[76] Folcieri only had his career and personal honor in mind; Folcieri was concerned with cultivating a life of arms and the assurance of war driven by the Donati seeking vengeance seemed the best way of ensuring that the city of Florence continued to employ him as an able military commander.

Several other exiles, captured in the century-long conflict, would also face either immediate execution or torture and then execution at the hands of merciless rivals, as seen with a striking consistency over the course of several decades.[77] Around 1249, for example, Emperor Frederick II took Ghibelline advice after a battle in Capraia and ordered that his knights gouge out the eyes of his Guelph captives. Those same captives were later drowned.[78] Then in 1288 a Pisan

75 Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., pp. 74-75.

76 "E questo fece, perché la guerra gli era utile, e la pace dannosa: e così fece di tutti" (Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 75).

77 E.g., Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., pp. 73-74 and 97-98; Villani, *Cronica*, pp. 476-77, 492, 602-03, 604, and 627. There was even a case of a captor poisoning a family of captives (Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence*, cit., pp. 26-28).

78 Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 206.

captain named Guido of Montefeltro kept several Ghibelline leaders in a prison tower. Not interested in offering his prisoners any comforts or basic necessities, Guido threw the tower key into the Arno and allowed all five prisoners to die of starvation. Among the dead were young sons and grandsons of the men with whom Guido had a grievance.[79] Once again vengeance, rather than any concern for mercy, appears to have motivated knightly action. Years later, Boccaccio dei Cavicciulli killed Gherardo dei Bordoni and nailed Gherardo's severed hand to a palace door "because of animosity" between himself and another local knight.[80] Slowly but steadily, chivalric violence, defined as such by its lack of mercy and the pursuit of vengeance, spilled out from fields of battle into towns, cities, and the everyday lives of Italians.

This behavior was not limited to the Florentine chivalric elite. Similar acts reflect a Mediterranean-wide chivalric obsession with cultivating honor through feats of arms. Charles of Anjou, the king of Naples (1226-85), emphasized the importance of honor to him during his papally sanctioned crusade to wrest southern Italy from the hands of the Hohenstaufen kings.[81] Not long into his invasion (1265), Charles and his army began to run out of food and money, forcing them to look for a swift end to the campaign.[82] On a rapid march south to confront the occupying forces, the French prince and his army arrived in San Germano where he found a Hohenstaufen army waiting out in a hot, empty field. The Hohenstaufen king, Manfred, reasoned that their best chance at victory lay in taking the French off guard, while Charles believed that the French needed to attack before they starved. Both, then, preferred an immediate confrontation. Charles did want to pause for a night's rest so that he could give his horses respite from a hard day of marching. The constable of France, however, informed Charles that if he, the prince, did not want to fight on that day then the other barons would without him.

79 Villani, *Cronica* cit., pp. 491-93.

80 "per nimistade avuta tralloro" (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 670). My many thanks to Peter Sposato to for drawing my attention to this graphic killing and mutilation of a rival knight by a member of the Florentine chivalric elite.

81 Dunbabin, Jean, *Charles of Anjou: Power, Kingship and State-Making in Thirteenth-Century Europe*, New York, Routledge, 1998; Dunbabin, Jean, *The French in the Kingdom of Sicily, 1266-1305*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011; Housley, Norman, *The Italian Crusades: The Papal-Angevin Alliance and the Crusades against Christian Lay Powers, 1254-1343*, Oxford, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

82 Villani, *Cronica* cit., pp. 338-40.

They had come for honor and wealth, they reminded him, and now that it was in sight, they would wait for nothing, not even the orders of the king.[83] Unable to argue with such reasoning, Charles agreed and ordered the army to prepare for battle. But first he had to ease the mind of Giles of Brun, a member of his council who showed an uncommon, perhaps even un-chivalric, reluctance to participate any longer in a campaign which had to that point lacked mercy. So Charles took a religious line of argument for Giles and reminded all of the men present that the pope had excommunicated Manfred and his followers and that the enemies of the Christian faith did not deserve mercy.[84] This excuse sufficed for Giles, but his complaint alone was registered by Villani.

When it came time to fight Villani notes that both armies fought bravely. Manfred, in the chivalric tradition, "would rather die in battle as king than flee with shame," but that did little to repel the advancing invaders, because the battle unfolded as much the rest of the campaign, with the Hohenstaufen king's army abandoning him on the battlefield.[85] Manfred fell dead around nightfall, and Charles, with his army, chased down fleeing troops and captured both them and the city of Benevento. The noblest prisoners were all taken prisoner as Charles took no risks of letting a claimant to his new throne survive.[86] Charles put to death (*mettre a mort*) all of the prisoners and, for added effect, took Manfred's body

83 Villani, *Cronica* cit., pp. 340-42.

84 Sources for Angevin Naples are in short supply due to the destruction of the royal archives during World War II. For that reason, I present here an excerpt from an early modern chronicle summary which aligns with Villani and Compagni's accounts: "courageux et baillans francois desquelz les prouesses sont racoptees par luniuerses monde tant que ells sont crainte et terreur des nations barbares gardez que an iourdbuy ne perdez vostre vertueux renom et ne degenerez de la magnanimite de vos ancestres. Je ne vous prie de combater pour moy: mais combatez pour nostre mere saincte eglise de lauctorite de laquelle (pour ceste besongne auoir entreprinse) auez este absouvs et desliez de voz pechez. Cosiderez voz aduersairres mauldictz et excommuniez pource quilz mesprisent dieu et leglise. Ceste malediction et anathema est ia le commencement de leur ruyne et destruction. Leur armee is meslee de chrestiens. (Si licite est de appeller chrestiens les heretiques) et de sarrazins infidelles et nous sommes tous dune foy et gens de bien et pourtant mes amys prenez bon courage et ayez fiancé en dieu et es prieres de leglise esquellese nous sommes et ilz en font banniz et forclos" (Boingne, Jehan de, *Hystoire aggregative des Annalles et cronicques d'Anjou*, Angers, 1529, p. 97r).

85 "Manfredi rimaso con pochi, fece come valente signore, che innanzi volle in battaglia morire re, che fuggire con vergogna" (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 343); Villani, *Cronica*, pp. 343-45.

86 Villani, *Cronica* cit., pp. 344-45.

Murder of Corso Donati and Gherardo Bordoni (1308). workshop of Pacino da Bonaguida, in Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica,* Ms Chigiano LVIII 296 Biblioteca Vaticana

on a tour of public humiliation through the local towns, a chilling message to the Italians that the kingdom had a new king.[87] This lack of mercy was not met with any complaints from Giles despite the many knightly deaths.

87 Boingne, *Hystoire aggregative des Annalles et cronicques d'Anjou* cit., p. 98v.

Conclusions

So, let us return in conclusion to Boccaccio's description of the entrail-covered trees in the *Filocolo*. Perhaps Boccaccio exaggerates the extent of knightly deaths in the epic, or instead maybe he warns his readers of what might happen if they stop granting mercy on the battlefield. But, as we have seen, Boccaccio does not construct a landscape far removed from reality. Anyone who had walked the battlefield outside of Siena on the day in which 500 men fell would have seen a ground soaked with blood. Anyone who had heard Donato's cries before his public beheading could have connected it with Felix's insistence on use of violence to that of Folcieri. The extremity of the physical landscape, such as the trees full of human organs, fits with Boccaccio's tendency to provide social commentary in his literature.[88] He repeats this theme of the dangers of vengeance throughout the text as he comments on knights' quick recourse to violence and adds his voice to those calling for a reform of this violence. He makes a point to show that if knights rushed rashly into an engagement with an enemy then there was a good chance that they would not be offered mercy. When knights went to battle, Boccaccio tells us, there were no delusions that either victory or captivity awaited them on the other side. This was not a game to be tried, tested, and used by some for profit. This was war.

What does all of this evidence reveal to historians? First, the field of battle was not a theatrical pageant or just a steppingstone on the path to creating the European gentleman. To medieval knights and arms bearers, war was chaotic, war was crowded, war was gory. But second, and most importantly, war could be deadly and lacking in mercy even for Europe's ruling class, especially in medieval Italy where there existed a particularly potent chivalric tradition rooted in acts of honor-violence. And we must remember that tradition as I offer one final example of knights reacting to mercilessness with mercilessness. In 1305, a Florentine army established a siege around the city of Pistoia. The citizens of Pistoia withstood the assault and even found success in repelling Florentine advances. When the Pistoians captured an enemy they killed him, every time. By acting without mercy, though, they only sought vengeance. The invaders had raped captive women (expelled from the city by the city's leaders due to a short-

88 Delogu, Daisy, «'Ala grant temps de douleur languissant': Grief and Mourning in Girart d'Amiens' *Istoire le roy Charlemaine*», in *Speculum*, 93, January 2018, pp. 1-26.

age of food) within view of the wall and also cut off the feet of captive Pistoian knights and displayed them around camp.[89] Rape and mutilation appear often in these cases and it stems from the same *mentalité* that led to so many knightly deaths in warfare.[90] And as a lack of mercy took its toll on non-chivalric Italians, they too began to seek vengeance. Much work remains to be done on the societal impact of medieval warfare, but chivalric culture encouraged strenuous knights and arms bearers to use violence in the pursuit or defense of that honor. Vengeance, not mercy, reigned in their world, and many people died because of it. Cece certainly did, as did those countless knights outside of Pistoia

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89 Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 101.

90 Caferro, William, «Honour and Insult: Military Rituals in Late Medieval Tuscany», in Cohn, Samuel K. Jr., Fantoni, Marcello, Franceschi, Franco, and Ricciardelli, Fabrizio (eds.), *Late Medieval and Early Modern Ritual: Studies in Italian Urban Culture*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2013, pp. 183–209; Taddei, Ilaria, «Recalling the Affront: Rituals of War in Italy in the Age of the Communes», in Cohn, Samuel K. Jr., and Ricciardelli, Fabrizio (eds.), *The Culture of Violence in Renaissance Italy: Proceedings of the International Conference* (Georgetown University at Villa Le Balze, 3–4 May, 2010), Florence, Le Lettere, 2012, pp. 81–98.

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"[W]e were being mercilessly killed": Chivalric Vengeance in Late Medieval Italy

by J. Tucker Million

Abstract: Chivalry, a central ideology of the medieval lay elite, shaped Italian violence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Studies for a general European context have traditionally focused on how court systems and knightly mores limited both the duration and deadliness of warfare. This article, however, challenges the interpretation of chivalry as a civilizing force by exploring the pervasive and deadly honor-violence practiced by Italian knights in battle. Indeed, while it is important to recognize long-term trends that brought peace to Europe, evidence drawn from both imaginative literature and chronicles suggests that personal conflicts motivated by knights' hyper-awareness of personal honor led to destruction, suffering, and death.

Keywords: chivalry, knighthood, vengeance, honor, Italy

Was chivalry a civilizing force in late medieval Italy?[1] This article suggests that it was not, because chivalry could encourage knights to obsessively cultivate and protect their personal honor with violence that was often transgressive and deadly even in the context of war. Consider a striking scene which followed the Battle of Serchio in 1263 (fought between the infamous Guelph and Ghibelline factions)[2]. During the battle, Messer Cece

1 I am very grateful to the many people who helped shape this project with their generous feedback, both written and verbal. I would especially like to thank Professors Peter Sposato, Richard W. Kaeuper, and Jonathan Boulton. I also want to thank the anonymous reviewers of the journal for their expert and inciteful feedback, as well as the staff and fellow researchers at the Herzog August Bibliothek whose support and encouragement helped me start work on this article.

2 Distilled to its simplest form, the Guelphs supported the pope while the Ghibellines supported the Holy Roman Emperor in territorial disputes of the early- to mid-thirteenth century. It was a pan-Italian war and also a uniquely Florentine war as the Guelphs slowly

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Buondelmonti was captured while leading the Guelph army to victory at which point he was placed under the protection of a rival Ghibelline captain, messer Farinata degli Uberti. The pair returned to camp where they encountered the captor's brother, messer Pietro Asino degli Uberti, who immediately surged forward and struck Cece "in the face with an iron mace"[3]. The captor and captive attempted to flee on a single horse, but Pietro aimed and struck the prisoner again, this time in the back. The chaos of the scene, with horses rearing and shouts of surprise and pain, quieted at last when Cece slumped over the captain, dead. The act was done, but we are left asking: why did Pietro, a member of the chivalric elite, kill Cece, a prisoner granted mercy by an enemy in the wake of a battle?[4] And what can this single act tell us about chivalric vengeance in particular and medieval warfare more generally?

In this essay, I try to uncover the motivations behind and possible justifications for Pietro's actions as well as for other knightly interactions similar to the one described above. I argue that Pietro likely acted with the intention to secure vengeance. More specifically, I demonstrate with evidence drawn from both imaginative literature and chronicles that honor-violence¾conflicts motivated by

divided into two factions within the city (several studies on the Guelphs and Ghibellines exist, but for a starting point see Tabacco, Giovanni, *The Struggle for Power in Medieval Italy: Structures of Political Rule*, tr. Rosalind Brown Jensen, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989; Najemy, John M., *A History of Florence, 1200-1575*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2008, pp. 20-27; Herde, Peter, «Guelfen und Ghibellinen beim Italienzug Henrichs VII», in Penth, Sabine and Thorau, Peter (eds.), *.Rom 1312: Die Kaiserkrönung Henrichs VII und die Folgen: Die Luxemburger als Herrscherdynastie von gesamteuropäischer Bedeutung*, Köln, Bohlau Verlag, 2016, especially pp. 43-47; Tarassi, Massimo, «Le famiglie di parte guelfa nella classe dirigente della città di Firenze durante il XIII secolo», in *I ceti dirigenti dell'età comunale nei secoli XII e XIII: Atti del II Convegno, Firenze, 14-15 dicembre 1979,* Pisa, Pacini Editore, 1982, pp. 310-21; Raveggi, Sergio, «Le famiglie di parte ghibellina nella classe dirigente Fiorentina del secolo XIII», in *I ceti dirigenti dell'età comunale nei secoli XII e XIII: Atti del II Convegno, Firenze, 14-15 dicembre 1979,* Pisa, Pacini Editore, 1982, pp. 279-99; Lee, Alexander, *Humanism and Empire: The Imperial Ideal in Fourteenth-Century Italy*, Oxford, OUP, 2018.

3 "diede d'una mazza di ferro in testa" (Porta, Giuseppe (cur.), Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, vol. III, Parma, Ugo Guanda Editore, 1990, p. 317). Messer Farinata degli Uberti (1212-1264), in a great case of irony, achieved immortality in Dante's *Inferno* for not believing in Heaven. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

4 See more below regarding the unwritten understanding among the chivalric elite that mercy meant protection was granted until the point of ransom. See for the specific Italian context, Zug Tucci, Hannelore, *Prigionia di Guerra nel Medioevo: Un'altura in mezzo pianura; l'Italia dell'"incivilmento"*, Venice, Ist. Veneto di Scienze, 2016.

knights' cultivation of personal honor¾led to destruction, suffering, and death in warfare.[5] We can find evidence of this violence not only in Tuscany but in southern Italy, too. For Pietro's case, Giovanni Villani (c. 1276-1348), the Florentine chronicler who recorded the murder, does not explicitly state what motivated the Florentine knight to act so violently. But the violence was not spontaneous in the chronicler's narrative. Cece had dishonored Pietro by routing him in battle. Moreover, the Guelphs had dishonored the Ghibellines, including Pietro, under Cece's banner by winning a series of important conflicts prior to the Battle of Serchio as they continued their quest to capture the city of Florence.[6] And the feud had even older roots since the Buondelmonte and Uberti, as outlined in more detail below, had been engaged in a feud for several generations by the time of Cece's death.[7] So, Pietro's outburst can be read as a reaction to his loss of honor. But this act of vengeance does not fit well within our traditional conception of medieval Italian chivalry or of elite European honor.

Honor, Mercy, and Vengeance

Max Gluckman, in his classic article on peacemaking, established a precedent in honor-based studies when he demonstrated how the Nuer people were pushed to agree to peace instead of seeking vengeance on account of a communal desire "to live [in peace] and produce food, marry into one another's families, [and] deal with one another." He continued on to state that these social pressures helped to "establish order."[8] Andrea Zorzi and Trevor Dean, similarly, explore how vengeance, directed by formal legal institutions and customs, served as a positive and balancing force within premodern Italian society.[9] In both narratives,

5 Sposato, Peter, «Chivalry and Honor-Violence in Late Medieval Florence», in Nakashian, Craig M. and Franke, Daniel P. (eds.) *Prowess, Piety, and Public Order in Medieval Society: Studies in Honor of Richard W. Kaeuper*, Leiden Boston, Brill, 2017, pp. 103-104.

6 The Ghibellines had exiled many Guelph families more than a decade earlier.

7 Faini, Enrico, «Il convito del 1216: La vendetta all'origine del fazionalismo fiorentino», in *Annali di Storia di Firenze*, I, 2006, pp. 9-36.

8 Gluckman, Max, «The Peace in the Feud», in *Past & Present* 8, 1955, p. 11.

9 Zorzi, Andrea, «La cultura della vendetta nel conflitto politico in età comunale» in Delle Donne, Roberto, and Zorzi, Andrea (eds.), *Le storie e la memoria: In onore di Arnold Esch*, Florence, 2002, pp. 135-170; Zorzi, Andrea (ed.), *Conflitti, paci e vendette nell'Italia comunale*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2008; Dean, Trevor, «Marriage and Mutilation: Vendetta in Late Medieval Italy», in *Past & Present* 157, 1997, pp. 3-36.

for Renaissance Italy and the modern Upper Nile, vengeance seldom disrupted the social order or rarely spiraled out of control. A recent flourishing of studies on medieval peace-making also highlights the limits imposed on vengeance by pre-modern social institutions and customs throughout Europe.[10] Why, despite these

10 E.g., Hyams, Paul R., *Rancor & Reconciliation in Medieval England*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2003; Miller, William Ian, «In Defense of Revenge», in Hanawalt Barbara H., and Wallace, David (eds.), *Medieval Crime and Social Control*, Minneapolis, Univ Of Minnesota Press,1999, pp. 70-89; Palmer, James A., «Piety and Social Distinction in Late Medieval Roman Peacemaking», in *Speculum*, 89, 2014, pp. 974-1004; Malegam, Jehangir, *The Sleep of the Behemoth: Disputing Peace and Violence in Medieval Europe, 1000-1200*,

Paolo Uccello, Assedio delle Amazzoni, dalla *Teseida* di Giovanni Boccaccio
(Yale University Art Gallery, Public Domain)

many checks on knightly violence, did Pietro murder Cece instead of seeking peace?

Some of the current scholarship on medieval warfare and captivity gets us no closer to an answer. Historians offer two explanations for how strenuous knights

Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2013; Kumhera, Glenn, *The Benefits of Peace: Private Peacemaking in Late Medieval Italy*, Leiden Boston, Brill, 2017; Jansen, Katherine Ludwig, *Peace and Penance in Late Medieval Italy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2018.

and arms bearers mitigated most of the risks to their person on the battlefield. One way in which they did this was by means of a complex captive-taking system founded upon ideals of chivalric mercy and the promise of profit through ransom.[11] But in these narratives the rigors and very real dangers of medieval warfare are obscured by the age of chivalric tournament and its game-like contests.[12] Knights could, alternatively, abide by the exhortations of clerics and lawyers to put down their swords and offer their defeated opponents mercy or even forgo continued warfare in favor of peace.[13] These conceptions conform to the narrative that knights, by protecting themselves and their peers, civilized warfare.[14] Yet knights remained central to an army's success in battle during the Middle Ages,

11 We can find this mentality with its earliest roots in, Michelet, Jules, *Histoire de France*, 17 voll., Paris, Hetzel, 1833-1867, Vol. III, p. 373. For more recent examples, see: Keen, Maurice, *The Laws of War in the Later Middle Ages*, London, 1965 (repr., 2017); Keen, Maurice, *Chivalry,* New Haven London, Yale University, 1984; AMBÜHL, Rémy, *Prisoners of War in the Hundred Years War: Ransom Culture in the Late Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013; Strickland, Matthew, *War and Chivalry: The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066-1217*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 153-58 and 183-203; Taylor, Craig, *Chivalry and the Ideals of Knighthood in France during the Hundred Years War*, Cambridge, 2013.

12 Keen, *Chivalry* cit., pp. 83-101; Crouch, David, *Tournament*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007; Crouch, David, *William Marshal*, 3rd ed., London, Routledge, 2016; Strickland, *War and Chivalry* cit., pp. 149-52; Barber, Richard *The Knight and Chivalry*, Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer LTD, 1996, pp. 155-244; Zug Tucci, *Prigionia di guerra nel medioevo* cit. On the social toll of medieval warfare, see Kaeuper, Richard, «Medieval Warfare – Representation Then and Now», in Bellis, Joanna and Slater, Laura (eds.), *Representing War and Violence, 1250-1600*, Rochester, NY, 2016.

13 On the clerical tradition, see Exodus 21:23-25 and Matthew 5:38-39; Kaeuper, Richard, «Vengeance and Mercy in the Chivalric *Mentalité*», in Lambert, T.B. and Rollason, David (eds.), *Peace and Protection in the Middle Ages*, Toronto, 2009), pp. 167-68; Jansen, *Peace and Penance in Late Medieval Italy* cit., pp. 129-59; Malegam, *The Sleep of the Behemoth* cit. On the legal tradition, see fn. 4 and Smail, Daniel Lord, *The Consumption of Justice: Emotions, Publicity, and Legal Culture in Marseille, 1264-1423*, Ithaca, NY, SMAIL, Daniel Lord, 2003; Klapisch-Zuber, Christiane, *Retour à la cité: Les magnats de Florence (1340-1440)*, Paris, Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2006.

14 Or, made it less brutal. Elias, Norbert, *The Civilizing Process*, tr. Edmund Jephcott, Vol. 1, Oxford, rev., 2000; Huizinga, Johan «The Political and Military Significance of Chivalric Ideas in the Late Middle Ages», repr. in *Men and Ideas: History, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance*, Princeton, 2014, p. 203. See also studies on the pageantry of medieval warfare and the development of the early modern European gentleman (or proto-gentleman), Keen, *Chivalry* cit.; Crouch, David, *The English Aristocracy, 1070-1272: A Social Transformation*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011.

and their participation in the chaos of war rarely afforded knights or any combatants protection.[15] Even accepting that knights pursued vengeance only to the point of "wiping out shame," what if the threshold to wipe out dishonor was exceptionally high for the chivalric elite?[16] Some scholars have suggested as much; the brutality of knightly violence in war, in fact, has led John Hosler to observe what he calls "chivalric carnage" against non-elite soldiers on the field of battle.[17] Carnage, as Cece experienced, was not limited to non-elite combatants and it even extended to knights taken into captivity. Vengeance proved a real and feared threat to many Italian knights during warfare.

In addition to using a chivalric lens to make sense of what appear to be a random act of violence, the issue of how we understand Pietro's actions also comes down to our chosen frame of reference. Factional violence in medieval Italy, when viewed on a large scale, appears as a series of outbursts between families and communes that are, more often than not, quickly reconciled to maintain social order and preserve economic development. When viewed on a local and personal scale, however, Italian factional violence reveals a great deal of pain, suffering, and death. Indeed, Cece and many other knights like him died in battle despite these peace-making customs and captive taking efforts. Knights died because of and for honor. As Richard Kaeuper for the general European and Peter Sposato for the Florentine context have argued persuasively, honor mattered more than

15 E.g., Kaeuper, Richard W., *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999; Kaeuper, Richard W., *Medieval Chivalry*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2016; Sposato, Peter «Reforming the Chivalric Elite in Thirteenth-Century Florence: The Evidence of Brunetto Latini's *Il Tesoretto*», in *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 46, 2015: pp. 203-227; Sposato, «Chivalry and Honor-Violence in Late Medieval Florence» cit., pp. 102-14; Claussen, Samuel, «Chivalric and Religious Valorization of Warfare in High Medieval France», in Nakashian, Craig M. and Franke, Daniel P. (eds.) *Prowess, Piety, and Public Order in Medieval Society: Studies in Honor of Richard W. Kaeuper*, Leiden Boston, Brill, 2017, pp. 199-217.

16 Kaeuper, "Vengeance and Mercy in the Chivalric *Mentalité*," cit., p. 177.

17 Hosler, John D. "Chivalric Carnage? Fighting, Capturing and Killing at the Battles of Dol and Fornham in 1173," in Nakashian, Craig M. and Franke, Daniel P. (eds.) *Prowess, Piety, and Public Order in Medieval Society: Studies in Honor of Richard W. Kaeuper*, Leiden, 2017, pp. 36-61. On the need to seek vengeance, Kaeuper writes that "among powerful chivalrous ranks vengeance achieved through prowess ranks as an honourable right and duty for the *bellatores*; as God takes holy vengeance on humans for sin, his good warriors on earth wipe out wrongs, harm and shame inflicted on them" (Kaeuper, "Vengeance and Mercy in the Chivalric *Mentalité*" cit., p. 174).

life itself to strenuous knights and arms bearers.[18] The prospect of dying for personal reputation might seem alien to a modern reader, but it is important to note that medieval people, and the younger sons of the nobility in particular, suffered the pressures of steady social decline.[19] Honor achieved on the battlefield could prove the only factor that separated a young lord from economic and social ruin in a world with few avenues for social advancement.[20] And if they gained honor through violence, so too did they defend it with sword in hand.[21] In order to protect honor, knights resorted to seeking vengeance and killing rivals, especially in communal Italy where enemies were often rivals in exile. This is perhaps why Pietro, upon seeing Cece in the field outside of Castiglione, rushed forward to kill a prisoner who was offered mercy just moments earlier. My contribution here is to demonstrate how chivalric notions of honor and violence made it more likely for knights, like Cece, to die even if they were taken into honorable captivity.

How great of a threat did this martial life pose to knights, though? Was Cece's death an isolated incident or just part of a larger problem within medieval chivalric society? While complete figures for knightly deaths in late medieval Italy do

18 Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence* cit., p. 133; Sposato, Peter, *'Forged in the Shadow of Mars'*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, forthcoming 2022. My thanks must go to Peter for letting me see early drafts of his excellent book.

19 Herlihy, David, «Three Patterns of Social Mobility in Medieval History», in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 3, 1973, pp. 623-47; Brown, A. T., «The Fear of Downward Social Mobility in Late Medieval England», in *The Journal of Medieval History*, 45 2019, pp. 597-617.

20 Herlihy notes the social mobility offered by clerical service, but that lifestyle had its limitations, too, Herlihy, "Three Patterns of Social Mobility," p. 624. This definition of honor, achieved through feats of arms on the battlefield, differs markedly from the courtly honor described by Norbert Elias and Johan Huizinga. See Huizinga, Johan, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, tr. Payton, Rodney J., and Mammitzsch, Ulrich, Chicago, University Chicago Press, 1996; Elias, *The Civilizing Process* cit.

21 According to Julian Pitt-Rivers, "achievement of honour depends upon the ability to silence anyone who would dispute that title" (Pitt-Rivers, Julian, «Honour and Social Status», in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. Jean Peristiany Chicago, 1966, p. 24). Only a knight's peers, however, could dispute any specific title or claim to honor, a system referred to by Frank Steward as "horizontal honor," which meant that the violent protection of personal honor often happened within knightly ranks (Pitt-Rivers, «Honour and Social Status» cit., p. 21; Hordon, Peregrine, and Purcell, Nicholas, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2000; Stewart, Frank Henderson, *Honor*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 54-63.

not survive, we can find a few striking estimates of the carnage left in knights' wakes which places Cece's death in a much larger, and far bloodier, context. Dino Compagni (c. 1255-1324), for example, remarks that so many knights died in a single battle that "all [of] Tuscany suffered harm."[22] In another case, the Florentines engaged the Sienese with an army of approximately 2300 against a much smaller force, leaving "300 of the best citizens of Siena and of the best and most noble men of Maremma" dead.[23] In 1260, the Florentines killed everyone in a Sienese force that marched against the city.[24] During the Sicilian Vespers (1282), the islanders killed every Frenchman, as many as 4,000, "without any mercy" (*sanza misericordia niuna*).[25] And Florentine forces killed almost 1,700 Arentines just a few years later, in 1289.[26] In a 1315 battle between Florence and Romagna, 2,000 foot and knight combined were slain.[27] The accuracy of the numbers aside, contemporaries noticed and society certainly suffered on account of these fatalities.[28] Consider the pre-speech battle given by Messer Barone de' Mangiadori of San Miniato outside of Arezzo in 1289 in which he addressed his soldiers on the eve of a battle, saying, "Lords, the wars of Tuscany were once won through a good charge and they did not last long, and only few men died in them because it was not the custom to kill them. But now ways have changed."[29] Although an expression of nostalgia, this sentiment for a by-gone era reveals a concern about contemporary knightly deaths: deaths were to be expected, and on a large enough scale to warrant hesitation on the eve of combat. Together, Mangiadori's fear and Villani's

22 "che ne fu danno per tutta la Toscana" (Luzzatto, Gino (cur.), Compagni, Dino,*Cronica delle cose occorrenti ne' tempi suoi* [hereafter, *Chronicle of Florence*], Torino, Einaudi, 1968, p. 13).

23 "IIIc pur de' migliori cittadini di Siena, e de' migliori e gentili uomini di Maremma" (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 484). Maremma is a large region that includes most of modern Tuscany and northern Lazio. Villani appears to be commenting that not only Siena was impacted by this violence but the entire region of northwestern Italy.

24 Villani, *Cronica* cit., pp. 301-02.

25 Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 419.

26 Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 498.

27 Villani, *Cronica* cit., pp. 742-43.

28 Compagni, too, refers to a "customs of war" (*uso della guerra*) that allows prisoners, but this only when writing about the violent excesses of victorious parties in his own age (Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 75).

29 "Signori, le guerre di Toscana si soglìano vincere per bene assalire; e non duravano, e pochi uomini vi moriano, ché non era in uso l'ucciderli. Ora è mutato modo" (Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 12).

Sandro Botticelli, Story of Nastagio degli Onesti, Scena III, From Boccaccio's *Decameron,* V, 8). Prado Museum. Rejected by a girl, Nastagio convinces her to accept his love, making her witness the punishment of an ancestor of Nastagio, who committed

suicide for unrequited love. Damned both he and the cruel girl, they eternally repeat his pursuit and killing of her. (Source: Web Gallery of Art. Public domain).

striking fatality estimates unveil the dangers of warfare because knights could not and did not expect captives or captivity from an armed engagement. How could it not with so many citizens dying on a single day? In other words, knights did die in battle in numbers sufficient to cause concern.

Imaginative Literature and a Chivalric Mentalité

Ultimately, the difficulty of our task at hand lies not in demonstrating the importance of honor to the chivalric elite or revealing the number of knights slain in combat but rather in identifying the extent to which the desire to pursue and vindicate honor influenced knightly behavior. Illuminating even a general chivalric *mentalité* proves difficult considering the centuries-long gap that separates us from them and so it is necessary to combine evidence provided in both medieval chronicles and imaginative literature. On the one hand, chroniclers, the authors of sources most often used by historians to describe medieval battles and factional conflict, do not always connect violence with honor and thus do not seek to explain the reasons behind the lack of mercy.[30] On the other hand, the authors of im-

30 *Mentalité*, as used by Jacques le Goff and Roger Chartier, among many others, refers to a collective discourse related to culture. This discourse can transcend social groups, not unlike Clifford Geertz's work on cultural symbolism and Greg Dening's pioneering study on cultural barriers, which makes it a useful framework for studying an ideology as pervasive as chivalry (Le Goff, Jacques, *The Medieval Imagination*, tr. Arthur Goldhammer Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 264 n. 5 and p. 265 n. 21; Burke, Peter, «Strengths and Weaknesses in the History of Mentalities», in *History of European Ideas*, 7, 1986, pp. 439-51; Chartier, Roger, *Cultural History: Between Practices and Representations*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1988; Geertz, Clifford, «Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight», in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, Basic Books, 1977, pp. 412-454; Dening, Greg, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land Marquesas, 1774-1880*, Honolulu, The University Press of Hawaii, 1980). See also the concept of *habitus* in Bourdieu, Pierre, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique: Précédé de trois études d'ethnologie Kabyle*, Geneva, Librairie Droz, 1972; Blanshei, Sarah Rubin, «Habitus: Identity and the Formation of Hereditary Classes in Late Medieval Bologna», in Anselmi, Gian Mario, De Benedictis, Angela, and Terpstra, Nicholas (eds.), *Bologna: Cultural Crossroads from the Medieval to the Baroque: Recent Anglo-American Scholarship*, Bologna, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2013; Crouch, David, *The Birth of Nobility: Constructing Aristocracy in England and France, 900-1300*, Oxford, Pearson, 2005, pp. 52-57. On the use of chronicles in military history, see DeVries, Kelly, «The Use of Chronicles in Recreating Medieval Military History», in *The Journal of Medieval Military History*, 2, 2004, pp. 1-15. Peter Sposato treats the perspective of medieval Florentine Brucker at length, see Sposato, *'Forged in the Shadow of Mars'* cit., Introduction.

aginative literature¾written for and read (or listened to) by contemporary knights and arms bearers¾often describe the motivations behind vengeance but do not record historical acts of violence.[31] And while Florence (or Tuscany more specifically) produced many chronicles during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Naples lay at the heart of European literary production in the fourteenth century which when combined makes the peninsula an excellent case study in medieval chivalric culture.[32] Combining the two source-bases helps provide both historical context and potential motivations behind those actions. Only by combining historical records of knightly violence with the ideas present in imaginative literature does it become clear how chivalric ideas influenced strenuous knights on the battlefield, and only by understanding these chivalric ideas might we begin to glimpse the importance placed on preserving and cultivating personal honor instead of offering mercy in medieval warfare.[33]

But first we must briefly address the decision to treat the histories of medieval Naples and Florence together in this essay. It has only recently become

31 Bouchard, Constance Brittain, *Strong of Body, Brave & Noble: Chivalry and Society in Medieval France*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1998, pp. 105-09; Tyreman, Christopher, *How to Plan a Crusade: Religious War in the High Middle Ages*, New York, Pegasus Books, 2017, pp. 21-22; Aurell, Martin, *Le chevalier lettré: Savoir et conduit de l'aristocratie aux xii^e^ et xiii^e^ siècles*, Paris, Fayard, 2011, pp. 54-106; Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea* cit., p. 491; Kaeuper, Richard W., «Literature as Essential Evidence for Understanding Chivalry», in *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 5, 2007, pp. 1-15; Kaeuper, Richard W., *Chivalry and Violence* cit., pp. 30-5; Sposato, «Reforming the Chivalric Elite in Thirteenth-Century Florence» cit.; Sposato, «Chivalry and Honor-Violence in Late Medieval Florence».

32 Authors at the royal court of Naples, under the direction of Robert I of Anjou (r. 1309-1343), captured many of the knightly ideas circulating around the peninsula, contextualizing the accounts of deadly honor-violence preserved in the historical record. On Neapolitan imaginative chivalric literature, see Million, J. Tucker, *Worthy Lords and Honorable Violence: Chivalry in Angevin Naples, c. 1250-1382*, PhD Diss., University of Rochester, 2021. On patronage, see Kelly, Samantha, *The New Solomon: Robert of Naples (1309-1343) and Fourteenth-Century Kingship*, Leiden Boston, Brill, 2003. On the application of these ideas in an Italian context, see Sposato, Peter, «The Chivalrous Life of Buonaccorso Pitti: Honor-Violence and the Profession of Arms in Late Medieval Italy», in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 13, 2016, pp. 141-176.

33 Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* cit.; Huizinga, «The Political and Military Significance of Chivalric Ideals in the Late Middle Ages», cit., pp. 196-206; Elias, *The Civilizing Process* cit. Or on eternal salvation through the grace of God (adding to the work of John Gillingham, Matthew Strickland, and Craig Taylor found in fn. 7), see Kaeuper, «Vengeance and Mercy in the Chivalric *Mentalité*» cit., in pp. 168-80.

commonplace in Italian studies to compare the two allied powers at the heart Italian politics in the mid-thirteenth through fourteenth centuries.[34] The connections between Naples and Florence were strong. The kings of Naples acted as stable customers for Florence's leading banking families¾including but not limited to the Buonaccorsi and Acciaiuoli families¾and they also served as the leaders of the Guelph party.[35] As the lords of Avignon, the Angevins leased lands to the papacy and received papal support in northern Italian affairs in return. The Angevins also fielded armies to repel numerous imperial invasions of the peninsula.[36] Meanwhile, Florence, as a financial center of Europe, provided money and native Florentine knights to Neapolitan armies. The commune consulted with the Angevins and often requested their support in northern Italian politics, too.[37] At all times the two cities were in contact and exchanging both material goods and soldiers for war. At a more practical level, however, Florentine chroniclers had a long-standing interest in the Angevin kingdom which allows their sources to stand in for the less developed Neapolitan chronicle tradition.

But which works allow us to bridge the gap between Naples and Florence, between our own age and the Middle Ages? We can start, as suggested above, with imaginative literature as well as with the lives of two influential Florentines who had careers in Naples, Niccolò Acciaiuoli (1310-65) and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75). Acciaiuoli, the son of a Florentine banker, became a member of the chivalric elite in Naples after working at the city's branch of the family business. Acciaiuoli, at first an outsider in Naples, used his prowess to cement and then increase his standing in his new home as he became first a seneschal of Naples and later an invaluable advisor to the royal family, even serving as tutor to the fu-

34 There remains much work to be done on this topic, but see TERENZI, Pierluigi *Gli Angiò in Italia centrale: Potere e relazioni politiche in Toscana e nelle terre della Chiesa (1263-1335)*, Rome, Viella, 2019; GENSINI, Sergio, «I Toscani nel Mezzogiorno medievale: Genesi ed evoluzione trecentesca di una relazione di lungo periodo», in *La Toscana nel secolò XIV: Caratteri di una civiltà regionale*, Pisa, Pacini, 1988, pp. 287-336.

35 MILLION, J. Tucker, «Tuscan Warfare and Angevin Identity in Naples's Hundred Years's War (1266-1382)», in *Urban Communities and War in Medieval Europe*, NAKASHIAN, Craig and SPOSATO, Peter (eds.), Leiden, forthcoming 2022; BRUCKER, Gene A., *Florentine Politics and Society, 1343-1378*, Princeton, Princeton Legacy Library, 1962, pp. 3-32.

36 See Terenzi, *Gli Angiò in Italia centrale* cit.; Million, «Tuscan Warfare and Angevin Identity in Naples's Hundred Years' War (1266-1382)» cit.

37 TERENZI, *Gli Angiò in Italia centrale* cit.; NORMAN, Diana *Siena and the Angevins, 1300-1350: Art, Diplomacy, and Dynastic Ambition,* Turnhout, Brepols,2018.

ture king, Louis I of Naples (r. 1352-62).[38] To craft a legacy and spread chivalric culture at the Neapolitan court, Acciaiuoli acted as patron to the son of another Florentine banker, Boccaccio, who, although not a knight himself, wrote about and preserved the knightly lifestyle embodied by Acciaiuoli.[39] I intend, therefore, to reinterpret Boccaccio's lesser known romances through a chivalric lens by highlighting the Florentine's descriptions of war and chivalric violence. Two of the epics that Boccaccio wrote in Naples between 1335 and 1343, *Teseida* and *Filocolo*, are particularly illuminating as they, like other works of imaginative literature, both reflected historical behavior and helped shape it.[40] The *Teseida* establishes the knightly obsession with honor, and the *Filocolo* offers insight into how knights used vengeance to protect and vindicate honor. This connection between honor and violence sheds light on the motivations behind the historical accounts of knightly violence in warfare that comprise the following section.

Boccaccio on Honor and Violence

Boccaccio's *Teseida* is a tale of two halves, the first a series of conquests and acts of honor-violence and the second the use of violence in the pursuit of love. The former concerns us here, because the hero acts in the interest of increas-

38 Palmieri, Matteo *La vita di Niccola Acciaioli, Gran Siniscalco de' Regni di Cicilia, e di Gierusalemme. E l'Origine della famiglia de gli Acciaioli; e I fatti de gli huomini famosi d'essa*, tr. Donato Acciaioli, Florence, 1588, p. 9; Budini Gattai, Niccolò, «Condottieri fiorentini nella penisola balcanica nel XIV secolo», in Agnoletti, Silvia, and Mantelli, Luca (eds.), *I Fiorientini alle Crociate: Guerre, pellegrinaggi e immaginario 'orientalistico' a Firenze tra Medioevo ed Età moderna*, Florence, Edizioni della Meridiana, 2007, pp. 196-243.

39 Burke, Peter *Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society*, 3rd ed., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 2; Olson, Kristina Marie, *Courtesy Lost: Dante, Boccaccio, and the Literature of History*, Buffalo, 2014; Casteen, Elizabeth, *From She-Wolf to Martyr: The Reign and Disputed Reputation of Johanna I of Naples*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2015, pp. 82-83.

40 See, Casteen, *From She-Wolf to Martyr* cit., pp. 68, 79-84, and 89-92. Armstrong, Guyda, Daniels, Rhiannon, and Milner, Stephen J., «Boccaccio as cultural mediator», in Armstrong, Guyda, Daniels, Rhiannon, and Milner, Stephen J. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Boccaccio*, Cambridge New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 4 and 6-7; Boli, Todd, ««Personality and Conflict», in Kirkham, Victoria, Sherberg, Michael, and Smarr, Janet Levarie (eds.), *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013, p. 296; Kelly, *The New Solomon* cit., pp. 9 and 43.

ing his honor through warfare while giving little regard, at first, to any potential repercussions for his actions. The epic opens with the mythical Greek king Theseus, famous for defeating the minotaur, as he travels Greece defeating first the Amazons and then a race of giants led by king Creon. The trajectory of his victories serves as a warning for any knights listening to the tale who might wish to slow their martial activity. After defeating the Amazons and enjoying married life with their former queen, for instance, Theseus receives a vision in which a spirit asks, "What are you doing here, inactive […] shrouding your famous name under the cloud of love? […] Have you slid back shamefully into immaturity?"[41] We might speculate as Theseus does that the spirit belongs to Mars since the gods held an interest in the king's honor. Theseus heeds the divine advice with the approval of his wife who does not want a dishonored man for a husband and decides it is time to return to Athens where he awaits the next adventure. He does not have to wait long before he has an enemy against whom he can wage war: Creon the tyrant. A group of women seeking the king's aid against the tyrant remind Theseus when he delays in pledging his support that it would be a great dishonor to allow someone else to take up an act of vengeance brought before him.[42] Not wishing to risk his own honor and with the hope of acquiring more the king agrees to raise an army with which to face Creon. The motivation behind Theseus's actions are clear: the societal expectations around honor influenced the king's behavior. His followers and the heavens remind the king several times that fame and glory lay in warfare and that to pass on an act of vengeance is to acquire shame. At every turn, then, the characters urge the king to take up arms when he would otherwise have put them down. And so, warfare and violence come to define the king and his most loyal knights.

But why the obsessive cultivation of honor within knightly circles? Much like *fama* (public reputation) to which it is related, peers conferred honor upon members of their own class, making it a marker of distinction in a world with limited opportunities for social mobility.[43] This, of course, did not mean that an

41 "che fai tu otioso/ con Ipolita inscitia dimorando/ sotto amor offuschando il tuo famoso/ nome perche ingrecia horamai/ nontorni hove piu groria araiassai" (Traversa, Vincenzo (ed.), Giovanni Boccaccio, *Teseida delle Nozze di Emilia*, New York, Peter Lang, 2002, pp. 33-34.

42 Boccaccio, *Il Teseida* cit., pp. 33-34.

43 Stewart, *Honor* cit.; Pitt-Rivers, «Honour and Social Status» cit., pp. 19-77; Horden and

The Cerchi seek vengeance. workshop of Pacino da Bonaguida, in Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica*, Ms Chigiano LVIII 296 Biblioteca Vaticana.

individual failed to understand how his actions could bring honor, but that his actions had to publicly demonstrate and confirm his claim to honor.[44] Theseus had to maintain a life of arms as a king beholden to knightly customs, because to speak of someone as honorable was to condone his actions as acceptable within the community. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, Boccaccio models Theseus

Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea* cit., pp. 485-529.

44 As Stewart observes, a man "is unlikely […] thinking of his honor as something that the world accords to him. The chances are rather that he is viewing his honor as something to which his personal qualities entitle him, irrespective of what the world may believe. He is taking, that is, an idealistic view" (Stewart, *Honor* cit., p. 25).

after an Angevin conception of ideal kingship rooted, above all, in martial activity.[45] And to perform acceptably within the group was to increase one's status for which there were several benefits in the Middle Ages. The most honorable knights, for instance, could, but did not always, have an advantage when looking to acquire beneficial marriage arrangements or had a better chance of receiving lucrative lands in return for their service to monarchs. The fragile nature of honor as a social construct, however, often limited a single knight from acquiring too much of it since rivals (the Amazons or Creon in Theseus's case) would work to undermine those who enjoyed too much favor. Honor, furthermore, lasted only so long as did the memory of deeds that conferred it on a person, committing each knight to a life of arms.[46] Not even kings, as Theseus was to find out, were exempt from these expectations. Both explain why knights, real or mythical, sought honor so tirelessly and why they were willing to kill rivals to defend it. Honor was more than just an abstract social construct. To talk of honor was to talk about one's public existence, and Cultural conditioning from youth (in the form of imaginative chivalric literature and examples set by other practitioners) and constant advice offered by friends and advisors (as Theseus receives above) forced knights to continuously pursue honor, or validation for their actions by peers.

Let us consider Theseus's character as a guide for young elites with their eyes set on a life as a strenuous knight or arms bearer. His words speak as loud as his actions. "In this world," Theseus tells his men on the eve of battle with Creon, "each man is as valiant as the worthy deeds he performs," and, hypocritically considering how Mars rebukes him, "let everyone who desires to rise to fame keep himself from a life of idleness."[47] Again, Theseus focuses on acts of violence in the pursuit of honor as a central part of his and his knights' identity. But he does not stop with his pre-battle speech. As a leader of other knights, Theseus must set an example through his actions. He takes this duty seriously and places his men in situations where they can gain honor. As Boccaccio writes about the battle,

45 Million, «Worthy Lords and Honorable Violence» cit.

46 We are constantly reminded in our sources that knights must maintain their life of arms because memories are short when it comes to honor (e.g., Quaglio, Antonio Enzo (ed.), Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo*, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, Verona, 1967, p. 194.

47 "Tanto e nel mondo ciaschun valoroso/ quanto virtu lipiacie adoperare/ donchua ciaschun-divivare hotioso/ sighuardi che infama vuol montare" (Boccaccio, *Il Teseida*, p. 44).

"The good Theseus on a tall charger and with a mace in hand was riding through the field badly wounding knights, knocking down every enemy he met. He was also comforting his soldiers, who he encouraged with his great skill, often giving arms to those who had lost them and even remounting those who had fallen."[48] Theseus also shouts at his followers, calling those who fight with shaking hands cowards and otherwise verbally assaulting them until they perform better.[49] After all, the king had a duty to lead his knights to honor only achievable through the use of violence. Theseus performed this duty ably after a gentle reminder from the god of war. Yet this drive to acquire honor gets us no closer to understanding the lack of mercy in Italian warfare, it only explains the expectations that knights seek out battle.

The use of arms in the pursuit of honor only explains one reason for which knights turned to violence during warfare. A second type, violence in the defense of honor, or vengeance, lies at the heart of Boccaccio's *Filocolo*.[50] In the epic, Boccaccio writes about an evil, shapeshifting king who, jealous of King Felix¾the benevolent monarch of the tale¾imitates the appearance of one of Felix's knights and rushes off to Felix's court. Once there, the shapeshifter fabricates a tale about an ambush of the army, proclaiming "we were harshly assaulted by an innumerable multitude of the enemy, and while we were defending ourselves manfully, I saw a great number of my comrades bathe the earth with their blood, and being mercilessly killed by their adversaries."[51] The shape shifter had calculated that Felix would retaliate in the wake of the loss of honor, and he was correct. Upon hearing the news, Felix orders his knights to arm themselves so he can exact revenge.[52] When he goes to the described location Felix finds the

48 "Ilbuon theseo sopra hunaltro destriere/ chonuna lanccia inmano pelchampo andava/ ferendo forte ciaschun chavaliere/ eabbattendo chi elli trovava/ spesso chonfortando lesuo schiere/ colsuo benfare tutti lincorava/ porggiendo arme sovente achi lavesse perduta errimontando chi chadesse" (Boccaccio, *Il Teseida* cit., p. 56).

49 Boccaccio, *Il Teseida*, p. 57.

50 As Julian Pitt-Rivers observed of the honor-obsessed Andalusian peoples, "the ultimate vindication of honour lies in physical violence" (Pitt-Rivers, «Honour and Social Status» cit., p. 30).

51 "fummo da innumerabile moltitudine di nemici aspramente assaliti, e quivi difendendoci virilmente, vidi io gran parte de' miei compagni bagnare la terra del loro sangue, e sanza niuna misericordia essere dagli avversarii uccisi" (Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p. 78).

52 Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p. 79, explicit desire for vengeance, p. 82.

shapeshifting king waiting with his own army. The king had sprung the trap.

Battle follows the confrontation between the shapeshifter and Felix. In many ways, Boccaccio's description of the battle matches what we expect of imaginative chivalric literature, as when a knight kills dozens of men and, blunting his axe, he must resort to crushing the bones and skulls of his enemies. These are knightly deaths, too, but they get us no closer to understanding how or why the Italian chivalric elite lacked mercy. Boccaccio, however, writes that Felix reacted to mercilessness with mercilessness. This is key. The shapeshifter's lies and subsequent ambush justified Felix's harsh reaction. Felix makes a decision in the wake of winning the battle and vindicating his honor which sheds light on chivalric mercy: The king orders that every enemy be killed. His knights neither object to the order nor hesitate in executing it because, as Boccaccio conveys, the knights had internalized these ideals.[53] A modern reader might question the severity of the reaction, but Boccaccio did not. Why, after all, would a member of one community grant mercy to a member of another community if he thought the favor had little chance of being reciprocated?[54] We will return to this idea soon. But, first, Felix's vengeance came at a cost.

Having achieved the vengeance he desired, King Felix surveys the battlefield he and his knights had left in their wake. He saw "the bloody fields and a great number of his knights fallen, dead" and the many dead moved him to tears.[55] Knights, not foot soldiers or others unbeholden to the chivalric *mentalité*, were not spared**.** Boccaccio goes on to write that Felix weeps at the sight of the wounded and further that the king finds sadness in the loss despite his increased honor.[56] Felix, in other words, struggles to come to terms with the product of his vengeance. But Felix's pain becomes more poignant still: "at first," Boccaccio writes, "[the survivors] failed to recognize their fathers and brothers and comrades who lay there dead, because of the mixture of dust and blood on their faces."[57] No

53 Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., pp. 97-99.

54 See Ambühl, *Prisoners of War in the Hundred Years War* cit., pp. 229-56.

55 "i sanguinosi campi, vide grandissima quantità de' suoi cavalieri giacer morti" (Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p. 103).

56 Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p. 103.

57 "E i miseri cavalieri, i quali questo andavano faccendo, aveano perduta la conoscenza de' loro padri e fratelli e compagni che morti giacevano, per la polvere mescolata col sangue sopra i loro visi" (Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p.103).

prisoners, only the dead from both armies. After the victors, the women of the defeated army travel to the field to find their dead husbands, fathers, and children. There the women were greeted by "the sound of scavengers and saw the dry field all wet with warm blood."[58] Boccaccio continues to describe the devastation even after the families had buried or burnt the dead, writing in a final passage,

Within a few days the breath of corruption gathered to it infinite beasts, filling [the field] completely … [and even] those of foreign lands came and devoured these meals of the dead. [As the] lions came running to the gruesome scent … and the bears smelled the filthy odor from the bloody carnage … the air had never been clothed with so many vultures.[59]

And those birds replace the leaves, recently fallen due to the onset of autumn, with human entrails dripping with blood.[60] So many knights die that the landscape is altered. With this scene, Boccaccio provides his audience at court a stark reminder of what vengeance can bring: death, and a lot of it. Where, then, is the mercy?

Chivalric Violence and Knightly Deaths in Italy

The critical or observant reader might comment at this point that the gory trees in Boccaccio's Hell-ish battlefield come from the world of imaginative literature, not the reality that knights occupied. But Boccaccio wrote for knights at the royal court of Naples, knights who lived within the complicated political arena of the Guelph and Ghibelline factions. The warfare between the Guelphs and Ghibellines, two political factions with roots in Tuscany but which spread across the peninsula and even into modern Germany and France, lasted for more than a century and took countless knightly lives due to the thirst for vengeance and a lack of mercy on both sides of the conflict.[61] So, while the near constant

58 "sentì lo spiacevole romore degli spogliatori e vide il secco campo essere di caldo sangue tutto bagnato" (Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p. 104).

59 "in pochi giorni col corrotto fiato convocò in sé infinite fiere, delle quali tutto si riempié [...] ma ancora quelli delle strane contrade vennero a pascersi sopra' mortali pasti. E i leoni affricani corsero al tristo fiato [...] E gli orsi, che sentirono il fiato della bruttura dello 'nsanguinato tagliamento [...] l'aria mai non si vestì di tanti avoltoi" (Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p. 113).

60 Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo* cit., p. 114.

61 See, Najemy, *History of Florence* cit.; Tabacco, *The Struggle for Power in Medieval Italy*

warfare ensured plenty of opportunities for knights to acquire honor, it also offered plenty of opportunities for knights to die in war. For the remainder of this article, I focus on the factional warfare between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines to showcase, first, why the experience of chivalric violence became common in daily Italian life and, second, how the chivalric elite, motivated to cultivate their honor through feats of arms like Felix and Theseus, justified their lack of mercy in the pursuit of vengeance. Some of these accounts can be difficult to read at times, but the unsettling nature of these cases makes them all the more important for the insight they offer into the sometimes brutal and often bloody lifestyle of the medieval chivalric elite.

It is difficult to ignore accounts of the war between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, as prevelant as they are. Villani and Compagni both placed the factions at the heart of their communal histories as the violence, spurred, at least in part, by the chivalric pursuit of vengeance, surrounded the chroniclers and thus made its way into their narratives. As Villani writes, "Italy was stained and almost all of Europe, and many ills and perils, and destructions and changes have followed thereupon to our city and to the whole world."[62] Compagni calls this divide an "evil" (*mali*).[63] This plague of insatiable vengeance which consumed Italy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries grew from a broken marriage vow between Buondelmonte dei Buondelmonti and a local woman. The family of the shamed ex-fiancée, upon consultation and deciding "that he should be slain," murdered Buondelmonte at the foot of the statue of Mars, on the north end of the Ponte Vecchio, and so sparked warfare between the two parties.[64] The god of war

cit.; Lansing, Carol, *The Florentine Magnates: Lineage and Faction in a Medieval Commune*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1992; Zorzi, Andrea, *La transformazione di un quadro politico: Ricerche su politica e giustizia a Firenze dal comune allo Stato territorial*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2008; Lee, *Humanism and Empire* cit.

62 "le quali crebbono tanto che tutta Italia n'è maculata e quasi tutta Europia, e molto mali, e pericoli, e distruggimenti, e mutazioni ne sono seguitate all anostra città e a tutto l'universo mondo" (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 150).

63 Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 3.

64 Villani says she was an Amidei (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 215); Compagni says she was a Giantruffetti (Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 3). For the rest of the tale, see Villani, *Cronica*, pp. 214-16; Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., pp. 3-4. Quote: "disse la mala parola [...] che fosse morto" (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 214). Compagni similarly records that a member of the Uberti agreed with the first statement, reasoning that "the hatred provoked by a killing is as great as that provoked by wounds" and so they should

Murder of Buondelmonte at Ponte Vecchio. workshop of Pacino da Bonaguida, in Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica,* Ms Chigiano LVIII 296 Biblioteca Vaticana

stood watch as a group of elite Florentines killed one of their own, and he would continue to watch as Florence descended into civil war. Just as a broken marriage vow led to a murder so too did the murder spiral out of control.

kill the young man ("ché così fia grande l'odio della morte come delle ferite") (Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 4). On the statue of Mars, see Davis, T., «Topographical and historical propaganda in Early Florentine Chronicles and in Villani», in *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 2, 1988, pp. 33-51; Cassidy, Brendan, *Politics, Civic Ideals and Sculpture in Italy, c.1240-1400*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2007, pp. 101-102.

Every chivalric family took a side in the conflict following Buondelmonte's death.[65] It was a complicated period of warfare driven by honor and the pursuit of wealth and power. With the influence afforded to honor by Boccaccio in his epics, this spiral should not come as a shock. When honor was at stake, the chivalric elite did not risk letting their public reputation decline any further.[66] Yet the rancor that followed Buondelmonte's murder might surprise us, as it did contemporaries. Compagni, in particular, is stunned when members of a local faction, the Black Party (which itself was already an internal faction of the Guelphs), turned their frustrations against their previous allies, the White Party. Compagni writes that, "indignant with their own Black Party due to outrages and insults they had suffered [in a past conflict,] went against [the Whites] to show that they were not traitors; they strove to outdo the rest, coming towards Santa Reparata shooting with crank-loading crossbows."[67] The Blacks, in other words, waged a pitched battle against their rivals, the Whites. As the bolts whizzed through the streets, the confrontation appeared normal. But the Blacks showed no hint of mercy as they gained the upper hand and pulled the Whites from hiding (Compagni does not give an exact number, only referring to "many") and either killed them on the spot or had them hanged.[68] The behavior of the party, even in victory, demonstrates the dangers of chivalric honor-violence and indicates one possible reason why contemporaries, such as Compagni, feared the city's knights. In the midst of battle the chivalric elite did not act with the goal of profit through captive-taking nor did they seek the promise of mercy in the future. No, they hanged their enemy or cut them down in the streets.[69]

65 Villani, *Cronica* cit., pp. 214-15.

66 Sposato, "Chivalry and Honor-Violence in Late Medieval Florence," pp. 103-04

67 "i quali erano co' loro sdegnati, chi per oltraggi e onte ricevute [...] anzi feciono loro contro, per mostrarsi non colpevoli; e più si sforzavano offernderli che gli altri; con balestra a tornio vennono saettando a Santa Reparata" (Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 96).

68 Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 96.

69 On vengeance, see, Miller, «In Defense of Revenge» cit.; Miller, William Ian, *Humiliation: And other essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence*, Ithaca, NY, 1993; Kaminsky, H., «The noble feud in the later Middle Ages», in *Past & Present*, 179, 2002, pp. 56-83; Hyams, *Rancor & Reconciliation* cit.; Barthélemy, Dominique, Bougard, François, and Le Jan, Régine, (eds.) *La vengeance 400-1200*, Rome, École française de Rome, 2006; Throop, Susanna and Hyams, Paul (eds.), *Vengeance in the Middle Ages: Emotion, Religion and Feud,* Aldershot, Cornell University, 2010; Throop, Susanna, *Crusading as an Act of Vengeance, 1095-1216*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2011; Rosenwein, Bar-

This violence had a way of perpetuating itself as knights and their peers considered how best to balance their survival with the cultivation of their personal honor (Farinata degli Uberti once said that "death and defeat would be better for us than crawling around the world any longer"[70]). The average Florentine knight could not wait to put himself on the battlefield and prove his worth, but in doing so he knowingly risked his life and acknowledged the unlikeliness of being offered mercy upon defeat by the enemy.[71] At the Battle of Montaperti, for example, the Sienese with help from Florentine Ghibelline exiles and their German allies famously routed the Florentines and killed thousands. And just like King Felix, the Florentines did not waver from reacting to mercilessness with mercilessness. In 1267, the Guelphs took no prisoners and instead killed their enemies "in revenge for their parents and comrades in arms killed at Montaperti," the great battle against Siena of 1260.[72] Montaperti was not an isolated incident. In another route a few decades later, the Florentines were the subject of an ambush outside of Lucca where "many [Florentine] knights" (*più cavalieri*) died, but they would have their revenge later when, confronting a band of imperial forces and *condoterri* led by Uguccione della Faggiuola, they set an ambush, causing 150 Ghibellines "checked and well-nigh all cut off [to be] slain."[73] And then in 1345, almost 300 Florentines died alongside their commander, messer Ghiberto da Fogliano, when a band of knights loyal to the Gonzaga family ambushed them outside the town of Reggio and left none alive.[74]

The many knightly deaths hint at the dangers that medieval warfare posed to Italian knights during the Middle Ages, but the chivalric elite did not limit their pursuit of vengeance to, and thus the threat of death did not end on, the battlefield. In many cases where a chronicler does note that victors took captives, he often must write about the captives' deaths, too. Being taken into captivity, in other

bara H. (ed.), *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1998.

70 "e per noi farebbe meglio la morte e d'essere isconfitti, ch'andare più tapinando per lo mondo" (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 306).

71 Sposato, *Forged in the Shadow of Mars* cit.

72 Villani, *Cronica*, pp. 377-79.

73 The forces were fighting for Henry VII (Villani, *Cronica*, pp. 71 and 1253).

74 This was in October 1345. Both forces had 300 arms bearers, the losses of the assaulting forces, however, are not recorded by Villani; "furono asaliti dinanzi e di dietro, e inchiusi e presi; e chissi volle difendere fu morto" (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 1493).

words, did not always mean that mercy had been granted, as we saw with Pietro and Cece above. Compagni records one case in which, after a series of skirmishes between the White and Black parties, the two factions met in battle outside of Pulicciano in 1302. The Blacks enjoyed the support of Folcieri da Calboli, the podestà of Florence, so the Whites chose Scarpetta degli Ordelaffi as their captain on the grounds that he had a personal grievance against Folcieri.[75] They used Folcieri's desire for vengeance to motivate the army to take up arms. But it failed. The Blacks, with a smaller force, took heart when the Whites assumed a defensive position as they approached the town. This allowed the Blacks to get men across the bridges and meet the Whites head-on. The latter faction fled – shamefully, Compagni adds. The Blacks took advantage of the retreat, killing (not granting mercy to) as many of the Whites as they could capture. What happened next is striking. The Blacks captured Donato Alberti, a Whites leader, and led him to Folcieri so the Podestà could rule on his fate. Folcieri tortured the knight beside a set of open windows to gather a crowd. With a sufficient part of the town's population come to see the source of the cries, the captain then cut off Donato's head. He did not do this out of vengeance so much "as because war was good for him and peace harmful; and he [Folcieri] did this with all [of the captives]" and it was on display for all to see.[76] Folcieri only had his career and personal honor in mind; Folcieri was concerned with cultivating a life of arms and the assurance of war driven by the Donati seeking vengeance seemed the best way of ensuring that the city of Florence continued to employ him as an able military commander.

Several other exiles, captured in the century-long conflict, would also face either immediate execution or torture and then execution at the hands of merciless rivals, as seen with a striking consistency over the course of several decades.[77] Around 1249, for example, Emperor Frederick II took Ghibelline advice after a battle in Capraia and ordered that his knights gouge out the eyes of his Guelph captives. Those same captives were later drowned.[78] Then in 1288 a Pisan

75 Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., pp. 74-75.

76 "E questo fece, perché la guerra gli era utile, e la pace dannosa: e così fece di tutti" (Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 75).

77 E.g., Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., pp. 73-74 and 97-98; Villani, *Cronica*, pp. 476-77, 492, 602-03, 604, and 627. There was even a case of a captor poisoning a family of captives (Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence*, cit., pp. 26-28).

78 Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 206.

captain named Guido of Montefeltro kept several Ghibelline leaders in a prison tower. Not interested in offering his prisoners any comforts or basic necessities, Guido threw the tower key into the Arno and allowed all five prisoners to die of starvation. Among the dead were young sons and grandsons of the men with whom Guido had a grievance.[79] Once again vengeance, rather than any concern for mercy, appears to have motivated knightly action. Years later, Boccaccio dei Cavicciulli killed Gherardo dei Bordoni and nailed Gherardo's severed hand to a palace door "because of animosity" between himself and another local knight.[80] Slowly but steadily, chivalric violence, defined as such by its lack of mercy and the pursuit of vengeance, spilled out from fields of battle into towns, cities, and the everyday lives of Italians.

This behavior was not limited to the Florentine chivalric elite. Similar acts reflect a Mediterranean-wide chivalric obsession with cultivating honor through feats of arms. Charles of Anjou, the king of Naples (1226-85), emphasized the importance of honor to him during his papally sanctioned crusade to wrest southern Italy from the hands of the Hohenstaufen kings.[81] Not long into his invasion (1265), Charles and his army began to run out of food and money, forcing them to look for a swift end to the campaign.[82] On a rapid march south to confront the occupying forces, the French prince and his army arrived in San Germano where he found a Hohenstaufen army waiting out in a hot, empty field. The Hohenstaufen king, Manfred, reasoned that their best chance at victory lay in taking the French off guard, while Charles believed that the French needed to attack before they starved. Both, then, preferred an immediate confrontation. Charles did want to pause for a night's rest so that he could give his horses respite from a hard day of marching. The constable of France, however, informed Charles that if he, the prince, did not want to fight on that day then the other barons would without him.

79 Villani, *Cronica* cit., pp. 491-93.

80 "per nimistade avuta tralloro" (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 670). My many thanks to Peter Sposato to for drawing my attention to this graphic killing and mutilation of a rival knight by a member of the Florentine chivalric elite.

81 Dunbabin, Jean, *Charles of Anjou: Power, Kingship and State-Making in Thirteenth-Century Europe*, New York, Routledge, 1998; Dunbabin, Jean, *The French in the Kingdom of Sicily, 1266-1305*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011; Housley, Norman, *The Italian Crusades: The Papal-Angevin Alliance and the Crusades against Christian Lay Powers, 1254-1343*, Oxford, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

82 Villani, *Cronica* cit., pp. 338-40.

They had come for honor and wealth, they reminded him, and now that it was in sight, they would wait for nothing, not even the orders of the king.[83] Unable to argue with such reasoning, Charles agreed and ordered the army to prepare for battle. But first he had to ease the mind of Giles of Brun, a member of his council who showed an uncommon, perhaps even un-chivalric, reluctance to participate any longer in a campaign which had to that point lacked mercy. So Charles took a religious line of argument for Giles and reminded all of the men present that the pope had excommunicated Manfred and his followers and that the enemies of the Christian faith did not deserve mercy.[84] This excuse sufficed for Giles, but his complaint alone was registered by Villani.

When it came time to fight Villani notes that both armies fought bravely. Manfred, in the chivalric tradition, "would rather die in battle as king than flee with shame," but that did little to repel the advancing invaders, because the battle unfolded as much the rest of the campaign, with the Hohenstaufen king's army abandoning him on the battlefield.[85] Manfred fell dead around nightfall, and Charles, with his army, chased down fleeing troops and captured both them and the city of Benevento. The noblest prisoners were all taken prisoner as Charles took no risks of letting a claimant to his new throne survive.[86] Charles put to death (*mettre a mort*) all of the prisoners and, for added effect, took Manfred's body

83 Villani, *Cronica* cit., pp. 340-42.

84 Sources for Angevin Naples are in short supply due to the destruction of the royal archives during World War II. For that reason, I present here an excerpt from an early modern chronicle summary which aligns with Villani and Compagni's accounts: "courageux et baillans francois desquelz les prouesses sont racoptees par luniuerses monde tant que ells sont crainte et terreur des nations barbares gardez que an iourdbuy ne perdez vostre vertueux renom et ne degenerez de la magnanimite de vos ancestres. Je ne vous prie de combater pour moy: mais combatez pour nostre mere saincte eglise de lauctorite de laquelle (pour ceste besongne auoir entreprinse) auez este absouvs et desliez de voz pechez. Cosiderez voz aduersairres mauldictz et excommuniez pource quilz mesprisent dieu et leglise. Ceste malediction et anathema est ia le commencement de leur ruyne et destruction. Leur armee is meslee de chrestiens. (Si licite est de appeller chrestiens les heretiques) et de sarrazins infidelles et nous sommes tous dune foy et gens de bien et pourtant mes amys prenez bon courage et ayez fiancé en dieu et es prieres de leglise esquellese nous sommes et ilz en font banniz et forclos" (Boingne, Jehan de, *Hystoire aggregative des Annalles et cronicques d'Anjou*, Angers, 1529, p. 97r).

85 "Manfredi rimaso con pochi, fece come valente signore, che innanzi volle in battaglia morire re, che fuggire con vergogna" (Villani, *Cronica* cit., p. 343); Villani, *Cronica*, pp. 343-45.

86 Villani, *Cronica* cit., pp. 344-45.

Murder of Corso Donati and Gherardo Bordoni (1308). workshop of Pacino da Bonaguida, in Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica,* Ms Chigiano LVIII 296 Biblioteca Vaticana

on a tour of public humiliation through the local towns, a chilling message to the Italians that the kingdom had a new king.[87] This lack of mercy was not met with any complaints from Giles despite the many knightly deaths.

87 Boingne, *Hystoire aggregative des Annalles et cronicques d'Anjou* cit., p. 98v.

Conclusions

So, let us return in conclusion to Boccaccio's description of the entrail-covered trees in the *Filocolo*. Perhaps Boccaccio exaggerates the extent of knightly deaths in the epic, or instead maybe he warns his readers of what might happen if they stop granting mercy on the battlefield. But, as we have seen, Boccaccio does not construct a landscape far removed from reality. Anyone who had walked the battlefield outside of Siena on the day in which 500 men fell would have seen a ground soaked with blood. Anyone who had heard Donato's cries before his public beheading could have connected it with Felix's insistence on use of violence to that of Folcieri. The extremity of the physical landscape, such as the trees full of human organs, fits with Boccaccio's tendency to provide social commentary in his literature.[88] He repeats this theme of the dangers of vengeance throughout the text as he comments on knights' quick recourse to violence and adds his voice to those calling for a reform of this violence. He makes a point to show that if knights rushed rashly into an engagement with an enemy then there was a good chance that they would not be offered mercy. When knights went to battle, Boccaccio tells us, there were no delusions that either victory or captivity awaited them on the other side. This was not a game to be tried, tested, and used by some for profit. This was war.

What does all of this evidence reveal to historians? First, the field of battle was not a theatrical pageant or just a steppingstone on the path to creating the European gentleman. To medieval knights and arms bearers, war was chaotic, war was crowded, war was gory. But second, and most importantly, war could be deadly and lacking in mercy even for Europe's ruling class, especially in medieval Italy where there existed a particularly potent chivalric tradition rooted in acts of honor-violence. And we must remember that tradition as I offer one final example of knights reacting to mercilessness with mercilessness. In 1305, a Florentine army established a siege around the city of Pistoia. The citizens of Pistoia withstood the assault and even found success in repelling Florentine advances. When the Pistoians captured an enemy they killed him, every time. By acting without mercy, though, they only sought vengeance. The invaders had raped captive women (expelled from the city by the city's leaders due to a short-

88 Delogu, Daisy, «'Ala grant temps de douleur languissant': Grief and Mourning in Girart d'Amiens' *Istoire le roy Charlemaine*», in *Speculum*, 93, January 2018, pp. 1-26.

age of food) within view of the wall and also cut off the feet of captive Pistoian knights and displayed them around camp.[89] Rape and mutilation appear often in these cases and it stems from the same *mentalité* that led to so many knightly deaths in warfare.[90] And as a lack of mercy took its toll on non-chivalric Italians, they too began to seek vengeance. Much work remains to be done on the societal impact of medieval warfare, but chivalric culture encouraged strenuous knights and arms bearers to use violence in the pursuit or defense of that honor. Vengeance, not mercy, reigned in their world, and many people died because of it. Cece certainly did, as did those countless knights outside of Pistoia

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89 Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence* cit., p. 101.

90 Caferro, William, «Honour and Insult: Military Rituals in Late Medieval Tuscany», in Cohn, Samuel K. Jr., Fantoni, Marcello, Franceschi, Franco, and Ricciardelli, Fabrizio (eds.), *Late Medieval and Early Modern Ritual: Studies in Italian Urban Culture*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2013, pp. 183–209; Taddei, Ilaria, «Recalling the Affront: Rituals of War in Italy in the Age of the Communes», in Cohn, Samuel K. Jr., and Ricciardelli, Fabrizio (eds.), *The Culture of Violence in Renaissance Italy: Proceedings of the International Conference* (Georgetown University at Villa Le Balze, 3–4 May, 2010), Florence, Le Lettere, 2012, pp. 81–98.

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Francia o Belgio, 1470 circa, Londra, British Museum, inv. 1863.0501.1

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• Duccio Balestracci, *Stato d'assedio. Assedianti e assediati dal Medioevo all'età* moderna,
[Filippo Vaccaro]