Police Power in the Italian Communes, 1228-1326
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Premodern Crime and Punishment

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Police Power in the Italian Communes, 1228–1326

Gregory Roberts

Amsterdam University Press
This book was published with the generous assistance of a Book Subvention Award from the Medieval Academy of America.
To my parents
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Note on Usage</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police as a Mode of Governance</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police and Impersonal Rules</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Plan of the Book</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Police Power in the Italian Communes</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Podestà’s Household</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Patrols and Inspections</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Legal Process: From Detention to Trial</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Comparison of Selected Data</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: Policing and Hegemonic Justice</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Police Discretion and Personal Autonomy</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Identity</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Status</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factual Matters</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Presumptions</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Jurisdiction</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitigating Factors</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: The Paradox of Impersonality</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Logic of Third-Party Policing</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“To [...] Pursue and Capture Outlawed Criminals”</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“To [...] Search for Men Bearing Prohibited Arms”</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Trustworthy Foreign Men”</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Good State of the Commune”</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: A Preventive Police</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. External Threats: Policing Out-Groups and Criminality
   Judicial Violence
   The Public Interest
   Outlaws, *Infames*, and Men of Ill Repute
   Police Patrols as Dragnet
   The Role of *Fama*
   Conclusion: A Persecuting Society?

5. Internal Threats: Policing Violence and Enmity
   Enmity and Instability
   Policing Feud
   Toward a Monopoly on Violence
   Preventing Enmity
   Conclusion: Legislating in the Shadow of Violence

6. The Social Impact of Third-Party Policing
   Mandatory Rules
   Legal Literacy
   Fear of the *Familia*
   Violent Self-Help
   Police-Community Relations
   Public Corruption
   Legal Privilege
   Conclusion: A Legacy of Government Coercion

Conclusion

About the author

Index
List of Figures

Table 1: Bologna: Persons Denounced per Semester 69
Table 2: Bologna: Curfew Case Outcomes by Percentage 72
Table 3: Bologna: Arms-bearing Case Outcomes by Percentage 72
Table 4: Bologna: Gambling Case Outcomes by Percentage 73
Table 5: Bologna: Total Amount of Penalties in Lire 74
Table 6: Bologna: Case Type by Percentage of Total Cases 75
Table 7: Bologna: Convictions, January–March 1256 75
Table 8: Bologna: Crowns and Arms Fragment, April–October 1264 77
Table 9: Perugia: Inventiones, January–December 1279 78
Table 10: Perugia: Inventiones, January–August 1283 78
Table 11: Perugia: Persons Convicted 79
Table 12: Perugia: Persons Convicted by Percentage of Total Convictions 79
Table 13: Siena: Convictions, 1305II 81
Table 14: Siena: Convictions, 1306I 81
Table 15: Siena: Convictions, 1306II 81
Table 16: Siena: Total Convictions, 1305II–1306II 81
Table 17: Orvieto: Convictions, November 1294–November 1295 83

Image 1: The record of Carlo Baciacomari's trial in the Crowns and Arms series. Archivio di Stato di Bologna. 118
Image 2: Drawings of prohibited weapons on the cover of a Crowns and Arms register. Archivio di Stato di Bologna. 230
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A Note on Usage

The standards for dates, currencies, and measures varied from town to town in medieval Italy. In many cities, the calendar year began on 25 March, but in Bologna it began on Christmas (25 December). I have adjusted dates as necessary to match the Gregorian calendar. Despite local variations in coinage, public courts across northern Italy assessed fines according to the standard monies of account: the lira (libra or pound), soldo (solidus or shilling), and denaro (denarius or penny). I use these denominations accordingly, without attempting to determine their actual economic value in a given context. Their ratios were fixed as follows: 1 lira = 20 soldi = 240 denari. Most measures of length derived from the Roman duodecimal system based on the pes or foot (29.6 cm), but their actual length deviated from the Roman standard depending on the city. Wherever measures of length figure into cases, I provide them as given in the source, without attempting a conversion. Common measures included the piede (foot), braccio (arm's length), pertica (rod), and millia (mile). In some contexts, the piede was divided into palmi (palms) and digiti (digits) according to a Greek system, where 1 piede = 4 palmi = 16 digiti. For more detailed information on Bolognese measures, see Franco Bergonzoni, “Note sulle unità di misura bolognesi,” in I portici di Bologna e l’edilizia civile medievale, ed. Francesca Bocchi (Casalecchio di Reno: Grafis, 1990), 161–70. As for personal names, I have converted the Latin names in the sources to modern Italian except in a few cases where individuals hailed from beyond the peninsula. I give their names in the appropriate modern vernacular.
Abbreviations

ASB  Archivio di Stato di Bologna
Accusationes  Curia del podestà, Giudici ad maleficia, Accusationes
Cartacea  Riformagioni e provvigioni, serie cartacea
Corone  Curia del podestà, Ufficio corone ed armi
Fango  Curia del podestà, Ufficio delle acque, strade, ponti, calanchi, selicate e fango
Giudici  Capitano del popolo, Giudici del capitano del popolo
Inquisitiones  Curia del podestà, Giudici ad maleficia, Libri inquisitionum et testium
Provvigioni  Governo, Provvigioni dei consigli minori
Riformagioni  Riformagioni del Consiglio del Popolo
Sindacato  Curia del podestà, Ufficio del giudice al sindacato
Tesoreria  Camera del comune, Tesoreria e controllatore di tesoreria
Vigne  Curia del podestà, Ufficio per la custodia delle vigne, palancati e broili

ASO  Archivio di Stato di Orvieto

Podestà  Podestà, capitano del popolo e vicario, Sentenze, condanne e assoluzioni

ASP  Archivio di Stato di Perugia

Capitano  Capitano del popolo, Processi e sentenze della curia

ASS  Archivio di Stato di Siena

Malefizi  Podestà, Malefizi


Introduction

One Saturday in August 1286, the podestà of Bologna—the city’s chief magistrate—dispatched some of his retainers to investigate a suspected gambling house not far from the piazza. They quietly surrounded the building, positioning four men at its rear escapes and three at its front door. From the doorstep they heard voices inside calling out bets, all but confirming their suspicion that the house was the site of illicit gaming. The podestà’s men ordered whomever was inside to open up at once. One of the alleged gamblers came to the front door but, seeing it was the podestà’s men, alerted his companions in the back. Pandemonium erupted as the suspects scattered. Some fled through windows and over the rooftops of neighboring houses, while others hid under beds. But the podestà’s men gave chase. Despite having to break down two doors to get inside, they managed to arrest nine fugitives before the dust settled. In the ensuing trial, the podestà’s judge found all nine suspects and one other individual guilty of illicit gaming, and sentenced each to the statutory fine of 25 lire.¹

Conventional wisdom holds that police are an invention of modernity. In today’s usage, “police” typically refers to the government entity responsible for civil order and law enforcement; “to police” is to perform the functions of a police department, namely to prevent and detect crime and bring criminals into custody. Social scientists and historians alike generally conceive of the police, along with the military, as the main instruments of the modern state’s claim to a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence within its territory.² According to a popular Anglo-American narrative, modern policing did not exist until 1829, when Sir Robert Peel founded London’s Metropolitan Police. As the story goes, the “bobbies” were a new kind of police, defined by their bureaucratic organization and preventive function. They were full-time, salaried public employees, unlike the part-time, parish-based watchmen who came before them. And their regular street patrols served to deter crime and maintain order, not merely detect crime and apprehend

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¹ ASB, Corone 1, 1286II, 12r–v. Massimo Vallerani first presented this case in “Giochi di posizione,” 33.
² Tilly, Coercion; Ruff, Violence, 87–92; Barzel, A Theory of the State.

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criminals after the fact. Granted, Continental Europe had an older and more expansive concept of police. As discussed later in the Introduction, the “police science” of the eighteenth century meant something more like “public policy,” and encompassed virtually any rule or regulation instated with the public interest in mind. But by most accounts even that kind of police did not exist until the early modern period. In the Middle Ages, criminal offenses were redressed by members of the community, not punished by the authorities of a centralized state.

Yet even by today’s narrow definition, the above raid on a gambling house—described in Bologna’s thirteenth-century court records—looks remarkably like “modern” policing. The tactics on display will be familiar to anyone who has watched a television crime drama. Like modern law enforcement officers, the podestà’s men surrounded the building, broke down the doors, and attempted to take their suspects by surprise. Called berrovarii in the sources (berrovieri in Italian), the podestà’s men were in fact paid by the city government to serve as public law enforcement officers. It would still be a stretch to call them “policemen” or “police officers,” since they were a kind of mercenary and policing was not yet a distinct profession with its own standards and specialized training. But the berrovarii patrolled the city streets on a full-time basis and booked or arrested men they found violating the statutes, especially those concerning gambling, curfew, and the bearing of arms. Furthermore, the berrovarii belonged to the podestà’s “household” (familia), the retinue of judges, notaries, and armed retainers that all podestà employed to help execute their official duties. By statute, all familiares had to be foreigners like the podestà, so that they would (in theory) enforce the statutes impartially, removed from the prejudices of local politics. Although police officers today are not required to be foreign, the principle of employing neutral public officials to exercise legal authority is classically modern. In the raid above, the theory appears to have worked in practice: three of the convicted gamblers were notaries, who received no

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3 For a textbook example, see Dempsey and Forst, An Introduction to Policing, 8. For more nuanced histories, see Finnane, “The Origins of ‘Modern’ Policing”; Barrie, “Policing Before the Police”; Emsley, The Great British Bobby; Reynolds, Before the Bobbies. On preventive police, see Reith, “Preventive Principle of Police.” The foundational texts are Chadwick, “Preventive Police”; Colquhoun, A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis.

4 Lenman and Parker, “The State, the Community, and the Criminal Law.”

5 Cf. Bowsky, “The Medieval Commune.” On the functional overlap of early police and military forces, see Nippel, Public Order, 1; Bayley, “The Police.” This was especially true in early modern France; Emsley, Policing, 9–33. For the case of Italy, see Antonielli and Donati, eds., Corpi armati.
The notaries were Giovanni da Paglia, Venedico Aimeri, and Paolo di Ventura. On the notaries’ guild in Bologna, see Tamba, Una corporazione; Tamba, ed., Rolandino e l’ars notaria. More generally, see Bartoli Langeli, Notai.

For the Italian communes, the key works are: Vallerani, Medieval Public Justice; Wickham, Courts and Conflict; Kuehn, Law, Family & Women. The literature on dispute resolution in medieval Europe is vast, but highlights include Esmark et al., eds., Disputing Strategies; Tuten and Billado, eds., Feud, Violence and Practice; White, ed., Feuding and Peace-Making; Brown and Górecki, eds., Conflict in Medieval Europe; Hyams, Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England; Le règlement des conflits; Miller, Bloodtaking and Peacemaking; Davies and Fouracre, eds., The Settlement of Disputes; Bossy, ed., Disputes and Settlements. For a recent retrospective, see Jordan, “Rethinking Disputes.” For the literature on peacemaking in Italy, see Chapter 5.

For recent statements on the Italian communes’ limited police power, see Carraway, “Contumacy,” 103; Blanshei, Politics and Justice, 339; Lansing, Passion and Order, 34.
Archival records of police interventions like the one above suggest that a closer examination of communal governments’ capacity for coercion is in order.

Second, how and why did communal governments come to exercise greater police power over their citizens? After all, it was not always the case that the government strictly regulated dice games and the bearing of arms in the city streets. The question is especially intriguing given the political context. For the towns of northern Italy, the thirteenth century was a moment of unprecedented experimentation in self-government, as urban elites developed new institutions free of interference from pope or emperor. In many communes, the thirteenth century was also a moment of growing participation in politics. In the first half of the century, a political coalition of bankers, merchants, artisans, lawyers, and notaries—as well as allied nobles—calling themselves the popolo wrested constitutional power from the noble families who had long dominated local politics. They established republican systems of government with rotating offices and relatively large representative bodies.11 For example, around the turn of the fourteenth century, roughly 15,000-18,000 men out of a total population of 50,000 participated in politics in Bologna. By 1282, Bologna had a Council of 4,000 (among others) that voted to determine which citizens would hold administrative offices, and its main legislative council, the Council of the Popolo, boasted as many as 1,400 members per semester.12 And yet, as the example of the notaries caught in the police raid above suggests, this expanded political elite used their autonomy, at least in part, to hire foreign police forces to discipline their own behavior. This apparent paradox of self-repression begs for explanation. It is not at all obvious why self-governing citizens would amplify government police power seemingly at their own expense.13

This question of historical change can also be posed more generally in the language of state formation. To borrow Douglass North, John Joseph Wallis, and Barry Weingast’s definition, the state is best understood as an “organization of organizations,” wherein the government is a public

11 Chapter 3 will discuss the literature on the popolo in more detail. For general overviews of the period, see Waley and Dean, The Italian City-Republics; Ascheri, Le città-stato; Milani, I comuni italiani.
12 Blanshei, Politics and Justice, 84, 113; Vallerani, “Criminal Court Procedure,” 27.
13 Carol Lansing explores this paradox of self-repression in her study of funeral law enforcement, Passion and Order. However, the paradox is much broader than funeral law.
organization whose purpose is to coordinate and enforce rules.\textsuperscript{14} As noted above, government police power is usually assumed to be a manifestation of the state’s claim to a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Yet in the Italian communes, the government enjoyed no such monopoly. The right to use violence and coercion was diffuse, shared and contested among the multiple power centers that made up the communal state.\textsuperscript{15} In this context, it is not obvious why elites, who already enjoyed the capacity and right to coerce, would cede any portion of that right to a government. The conceptual framework behind this observation is discussed in more detail below, but the rise of police power in the communes provides an opportunity to explore the basic question of how the institutions of the modern state might arise from the logic of a premodern social order.

Thus, this book seeks to explain why government police power grew in the city-republics of thirteenth-century Italy, and what it means for our understanding of medieval justice and state formation. The records of Bologna’s Office of “Crowns and Arms” (\textit{corone ed armi}) provide an unparalleled opportunity to explore these questions.\textsuperscript{16} The office fell under the podestà’s jurisdiction and was overseen by one of the notaries in his \textit{familia}. By statute, this notary was responsible for enforcing Bologna’s sumptuary laws, which forbade (among other things) women from wearing tiaras or “crowns”—whence the first half of the office’s name.\textsuperscript{17} In practice, this same notary also recorded the trials of individuals denounced by the \textit{familia}, mostly for violations of the curfew, gambling, and arms-bearing laws—whence the second half of its name. The Crowns and Arms registers thus provide a concentrated record of police activity in medieval Bologna. Through witness testimony in particular, they also offer an exceptional window into the experience of police power in a medieval commune. As primary sources, witness depositions present a number of well-known challenges to the historian: they are constrained by the judge’s questioning and procedural norms; performative in nature; and translated from the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} North, Wallis, and Weingast, \textit{Violence and Social Orders}, 31; Wallis, “Rules, Organizations, and Governments.” North, Wallis, and Weingast define an organization as a group of individuals who act in a coordinated manner to pursue both common and individual goals; see \textit{Violence and Social Orders}, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Patrick Lantschner emphasizes the “polycentric” order of medieval cities in \textit{The Logic of Political Conflict}.
\item \textsuperscript{16} On the Crowns and Arms series, see Tamba and Zanni Rosiello, eds., “Archivio di Stato di Bologna,” 572; Vallerani, “Giustizia e documentazione,” 301–02. For studies that draw on the Crowns and Arms series, see Lansing, \textit{Passion and Order}; Vallerani, “Giochi di posizione.”
\item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{Statuti} 1288, 1:26–27.
\end{itemize}
vernacular (and potentially redacted) by an intermediary (i.e., a notary). Yet even as they present unique challenges, the statements individuals were willing to make in court offer valuable insights into everyday life in the commune, including the role of policing. The series survives in varying degrees of completeness from 1285 to 1381. Following the precedent of other studies, this book takes 1326 as its terminus. In the following year, Bologna would grant lordship of the city to a papal legate, formally ending the communal era of republican self-governance.

Of course, the Crowns and Arms series alone does not suffice for a study of policing in Bologna, let alone other Italian communes. Hence this study draws extensively on Bologna’s other judicial and legislative acts—council resolutions, inquisitions, legal sentences, records of payment, public proclamations, and so forth—to put the growth of policing in context. It takes 1228, the year of the popolo’s founding revolt in Bologna, as its approximate starting point, with Bologna’s judicial records providing evidence as far back as 1226. The study also draws on the archives of Siena, Perugia, and Orvieto to show that the case of Bologna is in fact representative of the northern Italian communes. Siena, Perugia, and Orvieto were all “popular” republics like Bologna in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, and they shared a legal-political culture defined in part by the circulation of foreign magistrates (both podestà and capitani del popolo) and their familiari. Although the archives of these communes have no analogue to Bologna’s Crowns and Arms series, their judicial acts amply attest the police activity of their foreign magistrates. Even in cities that never experienced a republican moment under a popular regime, such as signorial Ferrara, municipal laws and law enforcement were more alike than not (see Chapter 3). Thus, despite important constitutional differences among communes, this study contends that the development of policing followed the same basic trajectory across northern Italy.

This book, based on these rich archival sources, is both the first full-length study of government police power in medieval Italy and the first to examine it through the lens of criminal trials. If the perception that medieval governments lacked police power has proved enduring, it is in part because scholars have devoted little attention to it. Since William Bowsky’s

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18 For the methodological issues raised by inquisitorial records, see Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics*, 11–49.
19 Both Vallerani, *Medieval Public Justice* and Blanshei, *Politics and Justice* use 1326 as a terminus. For Vallerani’s reasoning, see 123, 172.
20 On the events of 1228, see Milani, “From One Conflict to Another,” 242–43; Wandruszka, “Die Revolte.”
pioneering work five decades ago, there have been only a handful of articles and chapter-length studies dedicated to the communes’ police forces, and these have focused more on the organization of policing than the role of police power in communal life. Studies of negotiated justice—based in community membership, defined by custom and informal norms, and oriented toward reparations and agreements—have proliferated, but the rise of hegemonic justice—based in subjection to authority, defined by written law, and oriented toward punishment of the guilty—has received lighter treatment. And yet, as Mario Sbriccoli argued, the societal shift from negotiated to hegemonic justice—of which the growth of government police power was a part—was one of the most important developments of the later Middle Ages. By illuminating police power in the communes, I hope this book will encourage scholars to focus once more on explaining this historical change.

Police as a Mode of Governance

It may seem anachronistic to write a history of police power from sources that have no word for “police.” The communes’ judicial records refer to the “policemen” in this study as the podestà’s (or capitano del popolo’s) berrovarii or familiare or collectively as his familia. Similarly, the sources call their patrols inquisitiones (investigations) and the crimes they denounce inventiones (discoveries). However, the exercise of police power can be said to predate the word itself. Building on Michel Foucault’s seminal work on early modern police, Markus Dubber has argued that state police power derives from the paterfamilias’ practically limitless power to govern his household. His authority encompasses both the people and resources that make up his household, and he governs them not merely to ensure their survival but

21 The seminal study remains Bowsky, “The Medieval Commune.” Bowsky further elaborated on these themes in Bowsky, A Medieval Italian Commune, 117–58. One of the few other studies to focus narrowly on police forces in the commune is Manikowska, “Polizia e servizi d’ordine.” Other studies that cover policing in the communes, though their scope is broader, include Graziotti, Giustizia penale; Dean and Lowe, eds., Crime, Society, and the Law; Stern, The Criminal Law System; Vallerani, Il sistema giudiziario; Zorzi, “Contrôle social”; Manikowska, “Il controllo sulle città”; Manikowska, “Accorr’uomo”; Crouzet-Pavan, “Potere politico e spazio sociale”; Crouzet-Pavan, “Recherches sur la nuit vénitienne”; Ruggiero, Violence in Early Renaissance Venice. Also important is the contribution by Sbriccoli, “Polizia (diritto intermedio).”

to maximize their collective welfare. In this conception, police is a mode of governance, and states exercise police power insofar as the sovereign governs his realm as his household. For Foucault, the absolute monarchies of early modern Europe provided the paradigmatic examples of this kind of governance, but republics, like those of medieval Italy, also exercise police power through the collective body of citizens entitled to participate in government. As a mode of governance, then, police is arguably as old as civilization.

Indeed, for most of the word's history, “police” signified a mode of governance, not merely the government’s internal security organ. From the time the word appeared in French in the thirteenth century as a translation of the Latin *politia*, it signified both the good ordering of the polity and the public measures ensuring that order. On the European continent, early modern states sought to provide for their populations’ “good police” (gute Policey in German) through police ordinances (*Polizeiordnungen*) that encompassed commerce, urban planning, public safety, public health, public morals, and so forth. By the eighteenth century, the administration of internal order in Germany had developed into the academic discipline of “police science” (*Polizeiwissenschaft*). In the words of one Parisian police commissaire, police was nothing less than the “science of governing men.” European governments also institutionalized their police power through police departments manned by police officers. It was only in the nineteenth century that the word “police” principally came to signify these law enforcement officers rather than an all-encompassing function of governance.
Dubber highlights several characteristics of police as an ideal type of governance that are pertinent to this study. First and foremost, the purpose of police is to maximize the welfare of the household or polity. Thus, the touchstone of good police is its benefit to the entire body politic, not the individuals who comprise it. The other characteristics derive from police’s collective, population-level orientation. Police is also heteronomous, meaning it governs “others” as subjects of the policer’s authority. In this respect it stands in tension with the autonomy of citizens, especially in republics where otherwise equal citizens place themselves under the rule of an executive with police power for the sake of the common good. Third, police is radically discretionary and indefinite in scope. The head of household or executive determines what is expedient to maximize the welfare of his household or polity; though there may be practical limitations on his ability to act on his determinations, his discretion in making them is essentially unchecked. Here again, police power stands in tension with the autonomy of individual householders to govern their households as they see fit, especially in republics. Fourth, police is preventive in nature. It is fundamentally forward-looking, seeking to remove or mitigate threats of harm rather than punish harms committed. For example, police measures may criminalize the possession of certain weapons in order to prevent assaults or homicides with those weapons. In the case of such “police offenses,” neither a criminal act (actus reus) nor malicious intent or forethought (mens rea) is required for guilt; the mere act of disobedience is enough to merit discipline.27 Finally, in Dubber’s terminology police is “ahuman,” meaning it treats both people and things as objects to be managed for the good of the household. To this end, “[t]he job of the policer is to classify everyone and everything properly, and to treat each object according to its classification.”28 For example, police ordinances might classify vagabonds, stray livestock, and obstructed roadways alike as public nuisances in need of correction or removal. In this respect, police has much in common with James C. Scott’s concept of “legibility.” At the level of the state, police aims to make society more “legible,” which is to say more comprehensible and therefore more controllable.29

27 “Police offenses” are police measures that employ criminal sanctions; other police measures, such as quarantines and licensing schemes, do not entail such sanctions. Police offenses are also called regulatory offenses, public welfare offenses, public order offenses, and mala prohibita. However, because these categories are notoriously imprecise and difficult to define—not to mention anachronistic for medieval Europe—I have eschewed using them in this study. Dubber and Valverde, “Introduction,” 12.
28 Dubber, The Police Power, 179.
29 Scott, Seeing Like a State.
In the thirteenth century, the Italian communes developed institutions that exhibited all these hallmarks of police governance. Statutes proliferated as citizens passed a host of new disciplinary and regulatory measures to provide for public safety, public health, and good commerce. Many of these statutes were preventive in nature. They criminalized common behaviors like bearing arms and betting on dice games because these behaviors could lead to real crimes against persons and property. There were virtually no limits to what citizens would attempt to govern through statute, from the length of women’s dresses to how many priests could preside at a funeral service. Furthermore, statutes classified people into legal categories so as to better manage them. Magnates were subject to more severe penalties because of their alleged propensity to act violently, while public gamblers, beggars, and taverners (among others) were singled out for special police attention as threats to public order. The communes’ citizen-legislators also hired foreign police forces to patrol their streets on a full-time basis to prevent crime and deter threats. In practice, there were few real checks on the discretionary power of these third-party enforcers to arrest anyone who seemed to be breaking the law within the commune’s jurisdiction. Finally, lawmakers justified these preventive rules and enforcers by appealing to the common good (bonum commune or utilitas publica), or alternatively to the good state (bonum statum) or good governance (bonum regimen) of the commune. In all these ways, the Italian communes developed institutions that prefigured the Policey of the early modern period. Importantly, the net outcome of these innovations was a loss of personal autonomy for citizens vis-à-vis the government. Paradoxically, the podestà exercised police power over the self-governing citizens who employed him as if they were his subjects. Thus, Foucault’s concept of police—well-grounded in the word’s historical usage—provides a valuable tool for describing the nature and scope of police power in the communes.30

Police and Impersonal Rules

Explaining the rise of police power in the communes, however, requires a closer analysis of its political and social context. This study uses the conceptual framework developed by North, Wallis, and Weingast (NWW)

30 Without recourse to Foucault, Giustiniano degli Azzi argued at the turn of the last century that “police” was a prominent feature of communal statute collections, despite the word’s absence; see Della polizia, 7.
to interpret institutional change. NWW define institutions as the “rules of the game”: the written laws and formal and informal norms—as well as the means of enforcement—that constrain individuals’ behavior. Institutions tend to follow one of two basic logics: they can be based on social identity, meaning they apply differently to different people, or based on impersonality, meaning they apply to everyone equally. A prime example of an identity rule from medieval Bologna was the privilege of certain political elites to have their accusations believed in court without the need for witnesses (see Chapter 2). Here, the standard of proof hinged entirely on the social identity of the accuser. The commune’s prohibition on gambling outside of designated public areas, by contrast, applied to everyone. Of course, many institutions exist on a spectrum between identity rules and impersonal rules. A law might proscribe everyone from carrying a lance in a public street, for example, while prescribing different fines according to the social status of the lawbreaker. That said, most societies in human history have been governed primarily by identity rules, and the Italian communes were no exception. NWW call these societies “limited access orders,” because they are predicated on exclusion from the governing elite. In this default social arrangement, a dominant coalition of elites agrees to allocate political, economic, and social privileges (or rents, to use the term favored by economists) among its members, in rough proportion to what each brings to the coalition. The benefits of membership in the coalition—as well as the simple fact that even the most powerful individual is never more powerful than the coalition of his peers—help to organize and control violence, which is the fundamental aim of all social orders. However, limited access orders are prone to cycles of political and economic upheaval, because the social order depends on the personalities of individual elites and the agreements they make with each other, which are relatively unstable.

As hinted above, there is a fundamental question as to why elites in a limited access order would ever move toward a system of impersonal rules, since elites, by definition, derive numerous benefits from identity rules. For NWW, this is one of the fundamental problems of economic development.
Only a handful of societies—all within the last two centuries—have established systems capable of enforcing impersonal rules, and these societies have enjoyed political stability and sustained economic growth well beyond the historical mean. NWW call these societies “open access orders” because elites have opened up political, economic, and social organizations to non-elites. In other words, elites have agreed to abide by rules that (at least to a significant extent) treat everyone equally, which, it turns out, is good for society as a whole. NWW therefore seek to understand how societies transition from limited access to open access orders.

NWW’s conceptual framework is not a theory of state development; it does not explain how social orders transition from limited to open access, from identity-based to impersonal institutions. However, it does provide a valuable toolkit for case studies, not only of societies that have made the transition but also of institutional change in general. Their central insight is that institutional change must occur within the logic of the existing social order. In the context of the Italian communes, that means the growth of police power cannot be explained simply as a byproduct of the state’s natural extension of its monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. Rather, the explanation must lie in the dynamics of competition among elites who alter the “rules of the game” to suit their interests, not to change the social order itself. Because it hinges on elite interests, institutional change tends to proceed in fits and starts rather than sweeping transformations, and its outcome is never a foregone conclusion.

This book describes the growth of police power in the Italian communes as a shift toward more impersonal institutions. As such, it is part of a long historiographical tradition that identifies the transition from personal to impersonal justice—often framed in terms of a transition from *acusatio* to *inquisitio* procedure—as a hallmark of modern state formation. In the context of medieval Italy, Massimo Vallerani and others have rightly criticized the teleology of earlier scholarship in this tradition and shown that the transition from *acusatio* to *inquisitio* procedure was hardly linear. But as Sarah Blanshei and others have argued, the transition to *inquisitio* procedure did ultimately take place between the thirteenth

33 For case studies that utilize NWW’s framework, see Lamoreaux and Wallis, eds., *Organizations*; North et al., eds., *In the Shadow of Violence*.
34 For a classic example, see Pertile, *Storia del diritto italiano*. More recently, the development of impersonal institutions is a central question of Francis Fukuyama’s two-volume history of the modern state: *The Origins of Political Order* and *Political Order and Political Decay*.
and fifteenth centuries as the government increased its control over public justice, making it more efficient and repressive. The growth of policing was a part of the same overarching trend. To be sure, the communes remained limited access orders throughout the period of this study, governed by identity rules and an exclusive coalition of elites. Yet by instituting third-party policing, citizens subjected themselves (and non-citizens) to their government to an unprecedented degree. They criminalized common behaviors, such as carrying a knife or playing dice in a tavern, that caused no obvious harm to persons or property. Although the statutes did not treat everyone equally, these rules applied (at least initially) to everyone in the commune, and third-party policing greatly increased the likelihood that elites would be disciplined for violating them. Thus, public justice was increasingly less a matter for citizens to negotiate according to their social status and relationships, and more the responsibility of a central authority tasked with prosecuting and punishing offenders according to the law.

In keeping with NWW’s framework, this book explains this shift in terms of intra-elite competition, as a product of expanding political access in the communes. As popular coalitions rose to power in the thirteenth century, they sought to consolidate their constitutional gains and level the playing field with the old elite. For this expanded coalition, impersonal, preventive rules were essential to keep powerful individuals in check—both internal and external to their coalition—and third-party policing became an important vehicle for coordinating and enforcing such rules. Thus, the thirteenth-century communes offer an intriguing case study of why political elites might agree to cede some of their coercive potential to a government or, more broadly, how “modern” institutions might emerge from the logic of a premodern society.

The Plan of the Book

Roughly speaking, this book seeks to answer in turn the “what,” the “why,” and the “so what” of police power in the communes. The first two chapters

36 Blanshei, “Bolognese Criminal Justice.” See also Cucini, “Législation statutaire,” 1:95–96, 1:337–48; Dean, Crime and Justice, 37; Dean, “Criminal Justice,” 17. Joanna Carraway Vitiello found less than one percent of trials were initiated by accusatio in late fourteenth-century Reggio Emilia but argues, like Vallerani, that inquisitio adopted many of accusatio’s features; see Public Justice, 79–80.
deal with the “what.” Chapter 1 describes the police functions of the podestà’s\textit{familia} and the procedures they followed in pursuing and prosecuting alleged lawbreakers, using Bologna as the primary example. It then presents case samples of curfew, arms-bearing, and gambling offenses discovered by police patrols in Bologna, Perugia, Siena, and Orvieto. The evidence shows that foreign magistrates’\textit{familiares} were effective at forcing locals to stand trial for these offenses, and greatly enhanced the government’s capacity for hegemonic justice. Chapter 2 addresses the question of impersonality in policing. It describes the significant discretion enjoyed by the podestà’s\textit{familia} to interpret the statutes in the street and compel locals to appear in court. Further, it shows that the\textit{familia} regularly denounced political elites to the court. By enforcing the law as impersonally as the statutes allowed, the\textit{familia} infringed significantly on the personal autonomy of elites and non-elites alike.

The next three chapters seek to explain the rise of third-party policing in the context of the Italian communes. Chapter 3 explores how the logic of the communal social order led citizen-legislators to enhance the police power of their government. It unpacks the political-legal rhetoric used to justify third-party policing to show how the expansion of political access fueled its growth. Chapter 4 explores how policing addressed perceived external threats to the governing regime. It shows how the policing of gambling, arms-bearing, and curfew served to counter threats from “real” criminals and out-groups—not only thieves, assassins, and highway robbers, but also political rebels, vagabonds, con men, and the like. By forcing hundreds of minor offenders into court each year, the\textit{familia}’s patrols helped judges root out and punish threats to the established order. Chapter 5 turns to the question of internal threats, especially feud-related violence. It shows how the policing of arms-bearing allowed the\textit{familia} to discipline and prevent violence between feuding locals through routine interventions. The\textit{familia} also policed behaviors, like gambling and playing music at night, that could create enmity between locals and therefore posed a threat to the commune’s political stability.

Finally, Chapter 6 examines the impact of third-party policing on communal society. The core legacy of the\textit{familia}’s patrols was to make government

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37 As Trevor Dean points out, the Latin word for “feud” (\textit{faida}) does not appear in the sources for medieval Italy. However, I follow Andrea Zorzi in using the term more loosely to refer to a conflict between personal enemies, which the sources usual indicate by reference to enmity (\textit{inimicitia}), hatred (\textit{odium}), or war (\textit{guerra}). None of these should be confused with “vendetta” (\textit{vindicta}), which refers to a specific act of vengeance within a feud. See Dean, \textit{Crime and Justice}, 124; Zorzi, \textit{La trasformazione}, 131.
coercion a routine feature of urban life. They gave the commune’s laws teeth and inspired fear of punishment in locals, who now had to weigh the possibility of government prosecution in their behavioral calculus. The familia’s policing also reinforced the value of legal literacy, since defendants who knew the statutes and their procedural rights enjoyed an advantage in the public courts. In these ways, the growth of police altered the “rules of the game” in the communes. However, third-party policing did not transform the ground rules of communal society, which continued to hinge on social identity. Relationships of amity and enmity still governed the social order in large part, and the podestà’s familiares, insofar as they were susceptible to corruption and abuses of power, proved no exception. Increasingly, the same political elites who had designed third-party policing to enforce impersonal rules shielded themselves from impersonal enforcement through legal privileges. On the one hand, it was a testament to the efficacy of the familia’s enforcement and the new ascendancy of written law that the kinds of privileges customarily enjoyed by elites now had to be enshrined in legislation. On the other hand, the proliferation of privilege and closure of political access undermined the growth of impersonality in public justice. The government’s police power increasingly became a tool of repression for narrow factional interests.

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