CHAPTER THREE

OLIGARCHY: COUNCILS OF THE POPOLO

As noted in Chapter Two, one of the major criticisms of the oligarchical interpretation of communal political experience is that studies concentrate on the executive councils (priors at Florence, anziani et consules at Bologna), which are ipso facto restrictive and elitist in nature. In this chapter, however, I analyze the composition not only of the anzianate, but also of the Consiglio del Popolo, the major legislative body of the commune and popolo, a body that reached 1,400 members each semester at its peak size. The surviving documentation makes it possible to ask how great were the ties of family among the members of the councils, how frequently individuals and families held office, and if and how those patterns changed between 1282, when the popolo achieved supremacy, and 1327, when the anzianate and Consiglio del Popolo were suppressed by the establishment of the signoria of Cardinal Bertrando del Poggetto.

The surviving documentation for the membership of the Consiglio del Popolo extends from 1283 through 1325 and constitutes a huge mass of approximately 30,000 recorded names. However, it also constitutes a series with serious gaps, and for some semesters the records are seriously damaged. I have selected and compiled a database of twenty-five sets, all complete except for that of 1283 II, which has only thirty-three of the forty-two guilds and arms societies that existed that year, but which I have included because it is the earliest surviving

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2 ASB, Consigli ed ufficiali del comune, Consiglio del Popolo, Fascicolo 2 for 1284, Fascicolo 9 for 1304, Fascicolo 24 for 1314. Fascicoli 35 and 36 for 1318 I and Fascicolo 53 for 1323 were in restoration at the time of this research.
list. For eleven of the selected semesters, documentation for both the guilds and arms societies survives. For four semesters documentation survives only for the arms societies, and for two semesters there is documentation for the guilds only. The documentation for one semester consists only of “additions” (1305 II), comprising the six additional or extraordinary members elected by each guild and arms society for that particular semester.

All extant documentation (other than those damaged registers in restoration) for the period 1283 II–1313 II has been included except for the first semester of 1309 which is partially damaged, the first semester of 1310, which comprises only two quarters or 50 percent of the members for that semester, and the documentation catalogued for 1312 II since that manuscript is undated and the attribution uncertain. From 1314 the documentation has survived more fully and I have therefore selected semesters for which the documentation is undamaged, complete and which constitutes an overall database that divides as equally as possible between the periods 1283–1306 and 1307–1322. The reason for the division is that in 1307 the contingents sent to the Consiglio del Popolo by the merchants and bankers were reduced from thirty-three each to the maximum of fourteen members for each guild and arms society. Since the data for the second period usually include not only ordinary members, but “additions” appointed by the executive council, the number of appointments in the second period is larger than that of the first period. The sample contains the names of 11,585 officeholders.

I have analyzed these data in two ways, first by how many and which societies had one or more relatives in the contingents they elected to the Consiglio del Popolo in a particular semester, and secondly, by family affiliations in those contingents over time, in order to test for the persistence of particular families’ participation over the period 1283–1322 and under the diverse regimes of that period. The data by society for the entire sample period are displayed in Appendix D, Table III.1 in descending order of frequency, both by sets of relatives, that is, by how many groupings of relatives from diverse families there were in the contingents, and also by the number of relatives, since the

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3 The eleven semesters are 1284 II, 1286 II, 1292 II, 1302 II, 1303 I, 1309 II, 1313 II, 1317 I, 1320 II, 1321 II, and 1322 II.

4 For the arms societies the semesters are 1302 II, 1305 I, 1306 II, and 1307 I. For the guilds the semesters are 1302 I and 1307 II.