CHAPTER FIVE

LEGATUS TUSCIE

On Monday, 23 June 1326, five galleys sailed up the Arno River from the Mediterranean Sea and put in at the harbor of Pisa. Curiosity-seekers crowded into the port and watched as Cardinal Giovanni Orsini disembarked with his retinue and entered the city. The mood of the crowd was at once festive and apprehensive: the formal entry of a cardinal-legate was a grand and solemn event, to be sure, and a novelty worth seeing; but it was hard to say exactly what the legate’s arrival portended for a city like Pisa, with its strong Ghibelline associations and increasingly troubled circumstances. Certainly, there was no reason to assume that the legate’s presence would do anything to slow the alarming growth of Angevin power in Tuscany. Worse still, it could only bolster the flagging fortunes of the upstart enemy, Florence, whose recent calamities had at the very least provided the Pisans with a welcome source of Schadenfreude. On the other hand, the legate might well keep Pisa from passing under the lengthening shadow of Castruccio, whose insatiable ambition extended no special consideration to cities with a history of Ghibelline attachments. For the moment, it seemed, the Pisans were willing to let hope prevail over fear. They extended the legate so cordial a greeting that the pope wrote to the Angevin signore of Florence, Duke Charles of Calabria, urging him to act favorably in his dealings with the Pisans.¹

Orsini immediately sent notice of his arrival to Bertrand du Poujet, Charles of Calabria and, somewhat surprisingly, Can Grande della Scala;² the pope may yet have held out hope that Can Grande could still be won over again to the cause of the Church. It is not clear whether Can Grande bothered to respond, but his ally Castruccio, of all people, made contact the legate at once, sending greetings and informing Orsini that he welcomed this latest opportunity to engage

¹ See RV 113, f. 355ra (10 July 1326).
² See RV 113, f. 355rb (21 August 1326).
in peaceful negotiations with the Florentines. It was, needless to say, a ploy. Castruccio was still convalescing from a serious illness that had laid him up for much of the summer, and Orsini’s arrival could hardly have come at a less opportune time for him; Castruccio was eager to buy time until his recovery was complete. Orsini, for his part, did not deign to reply.3

After a few days in Pisa, Orsini departed for Florence,4 where he received an altogether more unequivocally enthusiastic welcome. Jubilant throngs lined the streets and cheered as the leaders of the commune presented the legate with a lavish gift of 1,000 florins in a golden cup. After the festive celebration, Orsini took up residence in the Franciscan church of Santa Croce, which would serve as his official headquarters during the first two years or so of his legation.5 Here, on 3 July, he read out the formal announcement of Castruccio’s excommunication and deposition, to the exultation of the assembled Florentines; on the following day he published the mandate of his legation.6

Orsini was anxious to start planning his campaign against Castruccio but discovered, to his considerable irritation, that his partner, Duke Charles of Calabria, was absent from the city. At the time of Orsini’s arrival Charles was in Siena, where he had spent several weeks negotiating the conclusion of a long-standing feud between the powerful Tolomei and Salimbeni families. Charles was a dilatory and rather unenergetic man under the best of circumstances, but in this case at least there may have been a genuine cause for the long delay. He was at odds with the commune of Florence over the terms of the signoria to which the Florentines had appointed him the previous December.7 Within months of the appointment, Charles began

5 Unaware that Orsini had already done so, John XXII wrote to him on 13 February 1327, ordering him to establish his residence at Florence (or elsewhere) as a base of operations for his legation (RV 114, f. 61ra).
6 Villani, loc. cit.; “Cronaca Fiorentina di Marchionne di Coppo Stefani”, ed. N. Rodolico, RIS 30 I, p. 149, l.2–5. For the earlier condemnations, see RV 113, ff. 352vb–355ra. Castruccio had already been excommunicated in 1317, 1318 and 1325 (Green, Castruccio Castracani, pp. 195–196).
7 Villani, XI.ii (p. 632). For Charles’ signoria and the reforms associated with it, see Becker 1, pp. 84–89.