CHAPTER SIX

PEACEMAKING, PERFORMANCE, AND POWER IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY SAN GIMIGNANO

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On 10 April 1258, the four brothers of the Salvucci lineage—Maso, Abate, Palmerio and Michele—came together “to seek peace humbly with members of the Mangeri family: namely, Mangerio, along with his sons Ranuccio, Rainaldo, Offreduccio, Forciore, Orlandino (all commonly known as the sons of Mangerio) and Ranieri, son of Ildebrandino della Torre.” The Salvucci men were seeking peace because they had violated the city statute of 1255, which had placed height restrictions on San Gimignano’s towers.

San Gimignano is well known as the archetypal city of medieval towers. Taddeo di Bartolo’s panel painting captured that city’s skyline in 1381 (Fig. 6.1), but tower construction had begun at least two centuries earlier at the beginning of the communal period. Though only 16 towers remain of the medieval 72, or of the 25 noted in the sixteenth century, the most imposing tower by design was “la Rognosa,” the tower of the palazzo del podestà, which rose to a vertiginous 85 braccia, almost 50 meters tall. A building code written into statute law protected its dominance on the
Fig. 6.1. Taddeo di Bartolo, panel painting of San Gimignano and his city (1381). The Rognosa tower, atop which a flag waves, is located in the rear center of the skyline. Museo Civico, San Gimignano. Photo: Gianni Dagli Orti / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.