This volume is published thanks to the support of the Directorate General for Research of the European Commission, by the Sixth Framework Network of Excellence CLIOHRES.net under the contract CIT3-CT-2005-006164. The volume is solely the responsibility of the Network and the authors; the European Community cannot be held responsible for its contents or for any use which may be made of it.
Early Modern Tuscany: ‘Regional’ Borders and Internal Boundaries

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ABSTRACT
This chapter explores the various types of boundary in early-modern Tuscany: geographical, political, administrative, fiscal and religious. The aim is two-fold: first, to assess the impact of these boundaries on the political, economic and mental delineation of territory; and second, to verify to what extent it was possible to form one “regional identity” within this area. The shifting and diverse nature of the borders, however, meant that physical and mental space was always defined in different ways, and so a single, coherent regional identity is difficult to trace. Viewed in such a context, identity seems more like a river fed by numerous streams than a tree with deep roots.

In questo contributo sono prese in esame diverse tipologie di confini: geografici, politici, amministrativi, fiscali, religiosi. Per ognuno di essi si è cercato di evidenziare il loro possibile impatto nella delimitazione di un ambito territoriale, non solo politico, ma anche economico e mentale, nonché di verificare se e in quale misura entro questo ambito si sia potuta formare ‘un’ identità regionale'. Ma la continua ridefinizione dei confini porta a ritagliare spazi fisici e mentali sempre diversi, dove l’identità sembra un fiume che riceve le sue acque da sorgenti e torrenti diversi, piuttosto che una pianta dalle profonde radici.

The modern-day region of Tuscany is by and large of recent formation. It dates back to the unification of Italy and the need of the new state to have some subdivisions for administrative and statistical purposes. By using a mixture of criteria, geographical and political-administrative, the various “regions” of the new nation state were defined. Some, such as Tuscany, Liguria or Sicily, had their own historically identifiable ‘identity’ that could be traced back to the pre-unification Italian states as these had developed in the early modern period and the Restoration. Others were constructed in other ways: Emilia-Romagna was the result of an aggregation of territories; Umbria was defined on the basis of an administrative division going back to ancient Rome. In the present chapter various types of boundaries – geographical, political, administrative, fiscal and
religious – will be analysed. Our aim is to examine whether and to what extent these various kinds of borders had an impact on the delineation of space – territorial, political, and also mental and cultural – and to see whether or not it is possible to speak of “a regional identity” with regard to Tuscany. Broadly speaking, the period under examination runs from the constitution of the Medici Principality (1530) to the annexation of the Republic of Lucca (1847): it is during these three centuries that what is now the Tuscany Region was formed.

**TUSCANY, REGION, STATE**

The Florentine state that was taken over in 1530 by the Medici dynasty – styled dukes of Florence until well after the conquest of Siena (1555) when they took the title grand dukes of Tuscany (1569) – was clearly a political construction built with little reference to so-called ‘natural borders’. Following its great demographic and economic development in the later 13th century, in the following two centuries Florence succeeded in annexing nearby cities and their contadi (the rural areas under each city’s jurisdiction). Florence not only succeeded in conquering or annexing cities in the area that surrounded her geographically; she also had conquered territory on the other side of the Apennines, in northern Romagna, and her dominions reached the Mediterranean coast when she acquired Pisa in 1406. In the second half of the 16th century the Medici built the new port of Livorno (Leghorn), which soon became the fastest-growing town in early modern Tuscany. However – even after the conquest of Siena and its state, the acquisition of the territory of Pontremoli from Genoa (1650), and of the small fief of Pitigliano in the southern part of Tuscany, on the border with the Papal State (1608) – the Grand Duchy of Tuscany until the first decades of the 19th century, with its extension of 21,000 km², never reached the borders of Roman Etruria, and was even farther from reaching those of the present-day Tuscany Region (22,992 km²). The Republic of Lucca still remained outside of the Grand Duchy (retaining its independence through the centuries thanks to its international relations with such powers as the Visconti, the Papacy, the Empire and Spain). Likewise, the duchy of Massa (the territory of the Cibo-Malaspina dynasty), the principality of Piombino (a small enclave on the coast between Livorno and Grosseto), and the so-called Stato dei Presidi (a series of coastal fortifications belonging to Spain in order to control shipping on the Tyrrenian Sea) all lay outside the borders of the Grand Duchy. On the other hand, some territories beyond the Apennines in present-day Romagna (now part of the Emilia-Romagna Region) were part of the Grand Duchy. Moreover, until the reforms of Pietro Leopoldo [later emperor Leopold I] in 1765, the Florentine state (the “Old State”) and the Sienese State (the “New State”) continued to be two separate political entities, united only by the person of their prince. Thus the pre-1555 border between the Florence and Siena continued to separate two distinct political, administrative and judicial entities.
In the case of Tuscany, then, as in many other cases in Europe⁵, the present-day and the historical borders do not coincide. In reality, as we go back in time, it is clear that when we speak of the Tuscan “region” or the Tuscan “state” we must define in each period exactly which territory we are referring to.
In the early Middle Ages, there was a March of Tuscia, whose capital was Lucca and whose boundaries were not precisely defined, but which roughly corresponded to the northern central part of present-day Tuscany. But during the centuries that followed, the term “Tuscia” (in Latin texts), or Tuscany (if the vernacular was being used) was applied to various political entities. The territories indicated by the two terms vary not only in different periods, but also, in the same period, according to their context and the aims of the writer: in public acts, diplomatic or literary documents the boundaries could expand or contract, showing that borders in medieval Tuscany were not yet certain and well-defined.

Later, in the 16th century, the famous humanist geographer Leandro Alberti indicated the boundaries of the region as the River Magra to the north, the Apennines to the east, the sea to the west and the River Tiber to the south – thus including a part of northern Lazio. Whilst taking into account geographical references, these boundaries simultaneously took into consideration the area inhabited by the ancient Etruscans. The Etruscan reference was not a novel one. Florentine humanism had already turned its attention to the Etruscan period, attempting to reconstruct the history of this ancient people by studying the testimony of Latin authors and by searching for archaeological remains. The Medici had then placed new emphasis on the Etruscan heritage, and whilst the Florentine humanists had highlighted the Etruscan republican organisation (as for example in Leonardo Bruni’s Historiarum Florentini populi), the Medici glorified the mythical ruler Porsenna, who had conquered the Romans and founded an Etruscan kingdom. The Medici considered Porsenna as their ancestor. It was no coincidence that the new Latin title with which they adorned themselves was Magnus Dux Etruriae and not Tusciae, the later Latin word for Tuscany. In the early 18th century, as it become obvious that the Medici dynasty would soon be extinguished, the ruling classes and Florentine diplomats marched out the state’s ancient Etruscan origins in order to lay claim to an antiquity and autonomy that would remove the Grand Duchy, or at least the ancient Florentine Republic, from the claims of the Habsburg Empire.

To return to Alberti, historical references were particularly important in delineating territory, as there was an absence of conspicuous geographical borders. In an Italian context this was not surprising: Lucien Febvre, after all, identified the Italian states straddling the Apennines as prime examples of the inconsistency of the theory of natural frontiers. Moreover political borders – and it was Febvre again who emphasised this – did not seem to attract much attention in the early modern period: aristocrats, men of letters, and merchants could cross them without paying them much heed; the frontier existed only for princes and the military. It is also not by chance that Leandro Alberti’s previously mentioned Descrittione di tutta l’Italia fails to dwell on political borders. For example, the division between the states of Florence and Siena and Florence and the republic of Lucca (an enclave surrounded by the Florentine state) were not given much importance in his description of Tuscany.
Neither were travellers’ accounts very much concerned with state borders. Not even in more recent works such as Anton Federico Büsching’s *Nuova geografia*, of which the part regarding the Grand Duchy was translated and re-elaborated by Abbot Jagemann in 1778, is there the slightest mention of the existence of customs points or other places marking the border between states. This is not to say that such places were non-existent. At the border points there were customs houses, which – aside from the fact that the buildings themselves were evident – were staffed by people who checked that transit duties were paid, that goods (especially foodstuffs) were not taken illegally out of the state and that goods and persons had their *fedi di sanità* [documentation required to demonstrate that they were free of contagious disease]. Borders were visible, whether or not travellers and geographers mention them in their writings. In addition to the customs houses, there were series of *termini* [boundary markers] placed along the boundaries between states. The border markers were inspected periodically by the state officials resident in the communities along the borders; they were accompanied on their rounds by local experts. These *visite dei confini* [border inspections] were not simply acts aimed at checking that the markers were still in place; they were physical and ritual reaffirmations that the jurisdiction of the state extended up to the border.

**Valleys and Contadi**

In 1765, the earl of Halifax, British state secretary, asked the British ‘residents’ [diplomatic representatives of the Crown] in Naples, Florence, Venice and Genoa to report on the military, political and economic situation of their respective states. Horace Mann, the British resident in Florence, sent a detailed report on Tuscany, or rather on the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Tuscany, he begins, “makes at present about two thirds of the Ancient Heturia, which extended itself from the river Magra, the confine of the State of Genoa, to the Tyber.” The geographical area remained as Alberti had described it, but the subject of the work was the Grand Duchy – considerably smaller than what was presumed to have been the ancient Etruscan territory. The English diplomat wished, naturally, to give a picture of the economic, administrative and military aspects of the Grand Duchy, but it is interesting to note that, before turning to these topics (which were the ones explicitly requested by London) his report gives a lengthy description of the geography, environment, economic resources and population of Tuscany, divided valley by valley. As the author explained, “a true Idea of the country cannot be acquired by the minute Political division of it; it is therefore necessary to consider it as divided by its own Valleys.”

Edited and corrected by Mann, the report was actually the work of Riccardo Cocchi, son of Antonio, a famous Tuscan medical doctor and Horace Mann’s friend. The decision to divide the area into valleys was Riccardo’s. Such a division had already been advocated by the famous writer and naturalist Giovanni Targioni Tozzetti; and indeed the valley was
widely held to be a clearly delimited container of specific physical geographical, natural and anthropic features. It thus appeared to be an effective and rational unit to use for the description of states or regions. Using the ‘valley by valley’ method, naturalistic and geographical elements could be meshed to provide an explanation of particular economic or social conditions: all together, according to these authors, these elements could contribute to explaining the particular identity of each valley. This method seemed especially appropriate for Tuscany, with its proliferation of valleys and river basins. And while the Valdarno (albeit divided into upper Valdarno, Florentine Valdarno and lower Valdarno) might appear too large a division, many other smaller and more self-contained valleys – the Casentino, the Valdelsa, and the Valdinievole, to mention just a few – each with its own landscape and settlement pattern, seemed to bear out the contemporary favour for this division. This use of geographical characteristics and their connection with economic and social features of a given area was often to reappear in European historiography.

In the early 19th century another interesting work used this type of division, the *Atlante geografico-fisico-storico del Granducato di Toscana* (1832). It was described as an atlas because it contained maps, but it actually gave a cross-section of the history, economy, and the religious and administrative subdivisions of the region: twenty plates illustrated the entire territory of the Grand Duchy divided valley by valley. In each plate, next to the map, there was a physical geographical description, a short history, a list of the main economic activities, indications on administrative divisions and the population of the valley territory.

We may ask ourselves if and to what extent such geographic units, territories comprising a smaller space than the region, and having more homogeneous environmental, economic and historical characteristics, were more suitable for bringing to life a sense of belonging, and hence creating longer lasting local “identities”, more widely shared among the inhabitants? In reality, a model that attributes special characteristics, strong identitary elements and sense of belonging to valleys can perhaps be applied, in the Tuscan case, to small and isolated hydrographic basins, especially in areas where there no city had created a stronger form of aggregation.

In many instances, the relationship between city and the surrounding countryside was a highly significant factor. Prior to the expansion of the Florentine state, such cities as Pisa, Lucca, Siena, Pistoia, and Arezzo had conquered their contado and extensive outlying territories, forming states with substantial economic and demographic resources beyond the city walls. The social and economic privileges associated with citizenship (eligibility for public office, fiscal exemption or privileges) ensured that the attraction of the cities was strong: where the relationship between city and contado was marked by mutually beneficial relations, including trade, and not by a simple bond of subjection, the inhabitants of the contado also felt a profound sense of belonging to the city.
This helps to explain why during the process of expansion in Tuscany, as it conquered or acquired dominion over other cities, Florence systematically tried to break down the ties that linked these to their contadi. In this regard, we may consider two different examples of the reaction to these measures, or more generally to Florentine conquest, in order to understand better the forces involved. In the 15th century Florence reorganised the conquered territories, in part as punishment for recent rebellions by some cities. The aim of these reforms was to replace the traditional elites of the subject cities (who until then had governed their countryside as magistrates and officials) with Florentine citizens. Almost all the old contado of Pistoia was incorporated directly by Florence\textsuperscript{29}. Likewise the city of Pisa was deprived of its jurisdiction over its contado and the territory was reorganised into independent districts governed by Florentine officials\textsuperscript{30}. Although the measures were similar in purpose, the attitude of the rural communities affected were very different. In the case of Pistoia, where the citizens’ pressure on the countryside had been very strong, the reaction of the communities was generally favourable to the new state policy. In Pisa, on the other hand, where the city oligarchy was more interested in maritime trade, and so had given the inhabitants of the contado a relatively free rein, the country people gave strong support and participated with the Pisan citizens in their fight against Florence\textsuperscript{31}.

Another emblematic case is that of the Republic of Lucca. In this state there were no other cities, and so the city of Lucca was the only pole of attraction. The flat countryside around the city, the so-called Sei Miglia [Six Miles], was closely linked to the city both economically and administratively, and the inhabitants of the countryside felt tightly linked to the city. The situation was very different for the Vicarie, the outlying mountainous area, a poorer area whose inhabitants resented the Lucchese governors and officials, whose salaries they also had to pay; assimilation into the Lucchese state and acceptance of Lucchese rule was never very deep\textsuperscript{32}. However, there were other areas which conformed to neither pattern. For instance in the practically deserted, malaria-stricken area of the Maremma, on the southern coast of Tuscany, both conditions were missing; in addition, the vast areas suitable for grazing and for the cultivation of cereal crops attracted a continuous flow of temporary immigrants from the poorer areas of Tuscany. But in this case too, these particular elements (poverty, pastoral lifestyle, the population of herders and salaried agricultural workers), together constituted the characteristic features of this territory, able to induce a strong sense of identity in its resident population.

**Religious borders**

The population was very aware of and the governing bodies also paid careful attention to borders of another type, ecclesiastical borders of dioceses. Just as in other parts of Europe, Italian cities were distinguished by having an episcopal see: but the borders of each diocese did not necessarily coincide with those of the territory administered by the city administration, and in some cases the diocese extended even beyond the state.
borders. Diocesan borders were frequently the cause of controversy, and in Tuscany as in other territorial states there were many attempts, some of which successful, to obtain from Rome a reorganisation of diocesan boundaries, or to create new dioceses in order to make the ecclesiastical and the state boundaries coincide. In this way it was possible to limit the danger of interference by ecclesiastical authorities outside of the state. After the Reformation, the strong disciplining imposed by the Council of Trent forced all bishops to make regular visitations of their parishes, accentuating their control over the faithful. The fact that they belonged to a certain parish in a certain diocese now began to enter the consciousness of a large part of the population.

The Council of Trent also obliged parish priests to verify and record that all parishioners had received communion during the Easter observances: thus whether it was in the city or in the countryside, priests were obliged to establish the precise extent and composition of their parish. Obviously the parish borders had been established a long time before the Council of Trent, but the new emphasis on the role of the parish and the diocese had the effect, among others, of enhancing awareness of borders.

Another religious border, not always purely ideal, but which might also be physical was the border between religious groups. In the early-modern period in Tuscany, Medici policy for the development of Pisa and Livorno had, amongst other things, encouraged the settlement not only in the port city, but in Pisa as well, of Jews, Protestants (English, Dutch, and German) and Greek-Orthodox Christians, allowing them freedom of religious belief. Contrary to the situation in other Italian states, in particular in the Papal State, travellers and merchants of other religions had no problem in crossing the borders. In spite of this, these ethnic and religious minorities were well aware of their differences: they used different places of worship, had different cemeteries and often dwelt in specific parts of the city. Although there were no ghettos in Pisa and Livorno, as there was in Florence, nonetheless Jewish settlement there tended to be concentrated around the synagogue, giving rise to a Jewish quarter, albeit with a sprinkling of Christians.

**Economic Borders**

It was perhaps economic rather than ecclesiastic or religious borders, however, that were most important in the daily lives of ordinary people. In the first place these were borders of customs areas. In addition to customs points on the state border, which were fairly recent – insofar as they were set up in new places as the state expanded – there were internal customs barriers. From the entrances to cities, the gathering of duties and the control over the transit of merchandise first expanded to include the ‘contado’ and then the entire territorial state. Nonetheless, these activities also continued in the easiest place to gather duties and control transit: the city gates. Duties levied at the city gates continued to be the largest single entry in the overall income from customs duties. But the gates were not the only collection point. Many Tuscan place names are reminders
of the internal customs boundaries; for example the place name ‘Catena’, chain, comes from chains put across roads in order to force people to stop to pay excise duties\textsuperscript{36}.

The people of early modern Tuscany were also well aware of fiscal borders. City states started early to tax landowners in order to finance wars and bureaucracies, and individual communities were responsible for making a tax list, on the basis of the declarations made by each owner. In 1427 the Florentine republic undertook to produce the now famous \textit{catasto} [tax assessment] which recorded land, chattels and income from other sources, as well as members of all households – throughout the entire state\textsuperscript{37}. This registry was quite remarkable for its procedure and sophistication: Florentine officials oversaw individual communities as they compiled exhaustive lists after a process of self-assessment\textsuperscript{38}. The catasto is particularly interesting in the present context in two respects. It reveals a precise knowledge not only of the borders of the community but also of individual property. Each individual declaration was accompanied by exact indications on the extent and position of their possessions, giving the names of adjacent landowners, or of physical features (such as roads or rivers). Second, it provides evidence of the existence of another type of border, this time mental, but no less established and concrete: the social one. Taxpayers were divided into four groups: Florentine citizens, who presented their returns in Florence; the citizens of the formerly autonomous subject cities; the \textit{contadini} (the inhabitants of the \textit{contado}); and the clergy. Besides the tax regime there were also other differences that separated these categories: they had different magistrates’ courts, different penalties if found guilty, and were eligible for different public offices they. It was not just physical space therefore that was enclosed by boundaries: people’s lives were also shaped by judicial, administrative and religious borders\textsuperscript{39}.

Lastly, in extreme cases other temporary borders could be created, for example during warfare or in case of epidemics, when ad hoc borders for quarantine and pesthouses (\textit{lazzaretti}) to separate the healthy from the afflicted were established\textsuperscript{40}.

\textbf{Conclusions}

All the many types of borders considered could be crossed, and none was stable through time. Not only did the state borders undergo various changes, as we have seen, because of the conquests and annexations effected first by the Florentine republic and then by the Medici Grand Duchy; although the external boundaries shifted, their presence did not prevent a constant flow of people and goods, legal and illegal, across them in frontier areas. Peaceful or conflictual use of pasture land, forests and lakes, banditry and smuggling are phenomena that characterise all frontier zones and they often constitute, as they did in the Tuscan case, an important economic resource\textsuperscript{41}.

Administrative and ecclesiastical boundaries were also prone to change. As we have seen, Florentine territorial expansion recast many of the internal boundaries of Tuscany, and the eight new dioceses created between the mid 15th century and the end
of the 18th (not to mention the creation or suppression of parishes) show that ecclesiastical boundaries were also liable to alteration. During the early modern period economic and social boundaries were also redrawn. Changes in economic policies established revised excise districts; the remarkable development of Livorno and of smaller towns – both along the Florence-Livorno road and river network, and in the less urbanised areas within Tuscany – encouraged immigration and settlement in these centres. Nor were fiscal divisions impermeable. Citizenship, in the various Tuscan cities, or even the most desirable and empowering Florentine citizenship, could be acquired by the rich or after a period of service in the state bureaucracy. The dominant economic structure of the countryside, where there were small-scale landholdings only in a few areas, and where the prevalent agrarian contract was that of mezzadria [sharecropping], which had to be renewed annually, ensured mobility even among the peasants, traditionally considered to be the most strongly rooted to particularly territories.

Borders in early modern Tuscany, both physical and mental, have continuously been subject to changes and redefinitions, and the very construction of an “identity” appears to be a process that constantly undergoes variations and registers the impact of diverse and even conflicting influences. The recent article by Laven and Baycroft in which various models of identity formation are examined exemplifies well how the relationship with a changing context has a strong impact on the construction of identity and how borders and boundaries of various types intervene continuously in moulding it. In these circumstances an individual or collective identity is never fixed, but is always under discussion and reappraisal. The search for “roots of identity” actually has the flavour of an “invention of tradition”, for identity is too slippery and dynamic to allow such a once-and-for-all definition. Following Voltaire’s advice to become “global citizens” is perhaps the identity and the ideal border we should all aspire to.

**Notes**


2. The title grand duke was granted by the Pope in 1569 and by the emperor in 1575. In the context of the transformation of Florence from a republic to a dynastic principality, the Florentine oligarchy found the Venetian republican term ‘doge’ more acceptable.


5. See, for instance, the other contributions in this volume, especially by S. Ellis, R. Eßer.


36 See Pult Quaglia, *Confini doganali, politica, economia*, cit. pp. 80-81.


38 Venice had a similar *catasto*, but it has not survived; see *ibid.*, p. 190.


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