Guelphs and Ghibellines

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The **Guelphs** and **Ghibellines** were factions supporting the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor, respectively, in central and northern Italy. During the 12th and 13th centuries, the split between these two parties was a particularly important aspect of the internal policy of the Italian city-states. The struggle for power between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire had arisen with the Investiture Conflict which began in 1075 and ended with the Concordat of Worms in 1122, but the division between Guelphs and Ghibellines in Italy persisted to the 15th century.

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History

Origins

Guelph (often spelled *Guelf*; in Italian *Guelfo*, plural *Guelfi*) is an Italian form of Welf, the family of the dukes of Bavaria (including the namesake Welf, as well as Henry the Lion). The Welfs were said to have used the name as a rallying cry during the Battle of Weinsberg in 1140, in which the rival Hohenstaufens of Swabia (led by Conrad III) used Waiblingen, the name of a castle, as their cry. Waiblingen, at the time pronounced and spelled somewhat like "Wibellingen", became subsequently *Ghibellino* in Italian. The names were likely introduced to Italy during the reign of Frederick Barbarossa. When Frederick conducted military campaigns in Italy to expand imperial power there, his supporters became known as Ghibellines (*Ghibellini*). The Lombard League and its allies, defending the liberties of the urban communes against the Emperor's encroachments, became known as Guelphs. The Lombard League defeated Frederick at the Battle of Legnano in 1176. Frederick recognized the full autonomy of the cities of the Lombard league under his nominal suzerainty.

The division between two distinct "Guelph" and "Ghibelline" parties became defined during Frederick Barbarossa's reign (12th century). Ghibellines were the imperial party, while the Guelphs supported the Pope. Broadly speaking, Guelphs tended to come from wealthy mercantile families, whereas Ghibellines were predominantly those whose wealth was based on agricultural estates. Guelph cities, of course, tended to be in areas where the Emperor was more a threat to local interests than the Pope, and Ghibelline cities tended to be in areas where the enlargement of the Papal States was the more immediate threat. Smaller cities tended to be Ghibelline if the larger city nearby was Guelph, as Guelph Florence and Ghibelline Siena faced off at the Battle of Montaperti, 1260. Pisa maintained a staunch Ghibelline stance in contraposition to her fiercest rivals, the Guelph Genoa and Florence. Adhesion to one party or another could be therefore motivated by local or regional political reasons. Within cities factions broke down guild by guild, *rione* by *rione*, and a city could easily change party after internal upheaval. Moreover, sometimes traditionally Ghibelline cities allied with the Papacy, while Guelph cities were even punished with Papal interdict.

It must be noted that contemporaries did not use the terms Guelph and Ghibellines much until about 1250, and then only in Tuscany (where they originated), with the names "church party" and "imperial party" preferred in some areas.

13th–14th centuries

At the beginning of the 13th century, Philip of Swabia, a Hohenstaufen, and his son-in-law Otto of Brunswick, a Welf, were rivals for the imperial throne. Philip was supported by the Ghibellines as a relative of Frederick I, while Otto was supported by the Guelphs. Philip's heir, Frederick II, was an enemy of both Otto and the Papacy, and during Frederick's reign the Guelphs became more strictly associated with the Papacy while the Ghibellines became supporters of the Empire, and of Frederick in particular. Frederick II also introduced this division to the Crusader States in Syria during the Sixth Crusade.

After the death of Frederick II in 1250 the Ghibellines were supported by Conrad IV and later Manfred, while the Guelphs were supported by Charles of Anjou. The Sienese Ghibellines inflicted a noteworthy defeat on Florentine Guelphs at the battle of Montaperti (1260). After the Hohenstaufen dynasty lost the Empire when Charles of Anjou executed Conradin in 1268, the terms Guelph and Ghibelline became associated with individual families and cities, rather than the struggle between empire and papacy. In that period the stronghold of Italian Ghibellines was the city of Forlì, in Romagna. That city remained with the Ghibelline factions, partly as a means of preserving its independence, rather than out of loyalty to the temporal power, as Forlì was nominally in the Papal States. Over the centuries, popes many times tried to resume the control of Forlì, sometimes by violence or by allurements.

The division between Guelphs and Ghibellines was especially important in Florence, although the two sides frequently rebelled against each other and took power in many of the other northern Italian cities as well. Essentially the two sides were now fighting either against German influence (in the case of the Guelphs), or against the temporal power of the Pope (in the case of the Ghibellines). In Florence and elsewhere the Guelphs usually included merchants and burghers, while the Ghibellines tended to be noblemen. They also adopted peculiar customs such as wearing a feather on a particular side of their hats, or cutting fruit a particular way, according to their affiliation.

After the Guelphs finally defeated the Ghibellines in 1289 at Campaldino and Caprona, Guelphs began to fight among themselves. By 1300 Florence was divided into the Black Guelphs and the White Guelphs. The Blacks continued to support the Papacy, while the Whites were opposed to Papal influence, specifically the influence of Pope Boniface VIII. Dante was among the supporters of the White Guelphs, and in 1302 was exiled when the Black Guelphs took control of Florence. Those who were not connected to either side, or who had no connections to either Guelphs or Ghibellines, considered both factions unworthy of support but were still affected by the change of power in their respective cities. Emperor Henry VII was disgusted by supporters of both sides when he visited Italy in 1310, and in 1334 Pope Benedict XII threatened excommunication to anyone who used either name. In 1325, the city-states of Guelph Bologna and Ghibelline Modena fought over a civic bucket in the War of the Bucket, where the famous Battle of Zappolino was fought. The Ghibellines were the victors this time, and they made an impressive comeback.

Later history

In Milan, the Guelphs and Ghibellines cooperated in the creation of the Ambrosian Republic in 1447, but over the next few years engaged in some intense disputes. After the initial leadership of the Ghibellines, the Guelphs seized power at the election of the Captains and Defenders of the Liberty of Milan. The Guelphic government became increasingly autocratic, leading to a Ghibelline conspiracy led by Giorgio Lampugnino and Teodoro Bossi. It failed, and many Ghibellines were massacred in 1449, while others fled, including prominent Ghibelline Vitaliano Borromeo, who was sheltered in his countship of Arona. Public opinion turned against the Guelphs, and in the next elections the Ghibellines were briefly victorious, but deposed after imprisoning Guelph leaders Giovanni Appiani and Giovanni Ossona.[1] After Francesco Sforza captured Milan in 1450, many Ghibellines who had fled such as Filippo Borromeo and Luisino Bossi were restored to positions of prominence in Milan.[2]

In the 15th century the Guelphs supported Charles VIII of France during his invasion of Italy at the start of the Italian Wars, while the Ghibellines were supporters of emperor Maximilian I. Cities and families used the names until Emperor Charles V firmly established imperial power in Italy in 1529.

Allegiance of the main Italian cities

Main Ghibelline cities	Main Guelph cities	Variable adherence cities
Arezzo	Bologna	Bergamo
Cremona	Brescia	Ferrara
Forlì	Crema	Florence
Lodi	Genoa	Lucca
Modena	Mantua	Milan
Osimo	Orvieto	Padua
Pisa	Perugia	Parma
Pistoia		Piacenza
Siena		Treviso
Spoleto		Verona
Todi		Vicenza

In heraldry

During the 12th and 13th centuries, armies of the Ghibelline communes usually adopted the war banner of the Holy Roman Empire—white cross on a red field—as their own. Guelph armies usually reversed the colors—red cross on white. These two schemes are prevalent in the civic heraldry of northern Italian towns and remain a revealing indicator of their past factional leanings. Traditionally Ghibelline towns like Pavia, Novara, Como, Treviso and Asti, continue to sport the Ghibelline cross. The Guelph cross can be found on the civic arms of traditionally Guelph towns like Milan, Vercelli, Alessandria, Padua, Reggio and Bologna.

Some individuals and families indicated their faction affiliation in their coats of arms by including an appropriate heraldic "chief" (or horizontal band at the top of the arms). Guelphs had a *capo d'Angio* or "chief of Anjou", containing yellow fleurs-de-lys on a blue field, with a red heraldic "label", while Ghibellines had a *capo dell'impero* or "chief of the empire", with a form of the black German imperial eagle on a golden background.[3]

Families also distinguished their factional allegiance by the architecture of their palaces, towers and fortresses. Ghibelline structures had "swallow-tailed" crenellations, while those of the Guelphs were square.[4]



Coat of arms of Pavia with Ghibelline Cross



Coat of arms of Milan with Guelph Cross



Coat of arms of an Italian family with Ghibelline-style heraldic chief at top



Coat of arms of the Roberti family of Reggio, with Guelph-style heraldic chief at top



Ghibelline swallow-tailed merlons of the "Casa di Romeo", of the Montecchi family of Verona.

In literature

- Participants in the conflict feature prominently in Dante's *Inferno*, Mosca dei Lamberti being the character suffering in hell for the schism he was held responsible for.
- In *The Decameron* by *Giovanni Boccaccio*, one of the ladies is a firm adherent of the Ghibellines, to the point where she will not even praise Charlemagne.
- In the notes to the 1579 poem *The Shepheardes Calendar*, English poet Edmund Spenser's annotator E.K. claimed (incorrectly) that the words "Elfs" and "Goblins" derive etymologically from Guelphs and Ghibellines.
- *Valperga: The Life and Adventurs of Castruccio, Prince of Lucca* is a historical novel by Mary Shelley, influenced heavily by both Dante and Boccaccio, that deals directly with the Guelph and Ghibelline conflict, its central figure being one of the latter, while his love, the Duchess of Valperga, is a Guelph.
- In his Cantos, Ezra Pound makes repeated mention of both Guelfs and Ghibellines. The pro-Papal Guelfs are associated with usury and corruption while the pro-Imperial Ghibellines are associated with law and order. The famous "fascist" canto, LXXII, makes mention of Ezalino (who would appear to be the sometime Ghibelline leader Ezzelino), "who didn't believe the world was made by a jew" (e.g. rejected papal and Christian claims and embraced the anti-Semitism of the Second World War in the fascist milieu in which the Canto was written).
- In *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, Carlo Levi compares the peasants and gentry of Agliano to the Guelphs and Ghibellines, respectively, with the Fascist government as the Holy Roman Empire and the desire to be left alone for local rule as the Papacy.
- In the *Quentaris Chronicles* series, there are two feuding families based on the Guelphs and Ghibellines: the Duelphs and the Nibhellines.
- In *The Lost Steps* by Alejo Carpentier, the narrator refers to the Guelphs and Ghibellines to describe the nature of the sudden guerrilla fighting that breaks out in the streets of a Latin American city.

See also

- Royal Guelphic Order

References

1. ^ *A History of Milan under the Sforza.* Cecilia M. Ady, Edward Armstrong; Methuen & Co., 1907.
2. ^ Tolfo, Maria Grazia; Colussi, Paolo (January 23, 2009). "Storia di Milano ::: dal 1426 al 1450 [History of Milan ::: from 1426 to 1450]" (http://www.storiadimilano.it/cron/dal1426al1450.htm) (in Italian). *Storia di Milano*. Milano: Storiadimilano. http://www.storiadimilano.it/cron/dal1426al1450.htm. Retrieved May 6, 2010.
3. ^ *The Complete Book of Heraldry* by Stephen Slater (ISBN 1843096986), page 201.
4. ^ W.F.Butler (1906) *The Lombard Communes*, p.348

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External links

- Guelphs and Ghibellines (http://www.san-miniato.com/guelphs.htm)
- Machiavelli, Niccolò (First published 1532). (http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/m/machiavelli/niccolo/m149h/) History Of Florence And Of The Affairs Of Italy From The Earliest Times To The Death Of Lorenzo The Magnificent. http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/m/machiavelli/niccolo/m149h/. Retrieved May 6, 2010.
- World of Dante (http://www.worldofdante.org/) Multimedia website that offers Italian text of Divine Comedy, Allen Mandelbaum's translation, gallery, interactive maps, timeline, musical recordings, and searchable database for students and teachers. Database allows search for Guelfs and Ghibellines in the poem.

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