

Tommaso was born in Savoy, on August 27, 1454 and lived there till his father took him to Florence in 1463. following their father's death and their financial collapse both Tommaso and his younger brother Francesco were sent to Lyon by their uncle Manno to serve their apprenticeship in the rich bank of the Florentine Pazzi family.

Lyon had replaced Geneva in the second half of the fifteenth century as the most dynamic and important commercial center in northern Europe. Many Italian merchant and banking enterprises set up operations in Lyon in this period, and Italians constituted by far the largest "national" contingent in the city's rich and thriving community of foreign businessmen. Among the Italians, Florentines made up the most numerous group, with over forty individuals around the turn of the century. By at least 1483 they had organized formally into a resident "Nation," on the model of an earlier institution in Geneva, with their own government, elected representatives, and archives, in addition to their own church, Notre-Dame-de-Confort.

In an age, which has more than its share of brilliant economic success stories, Tommaso's is surely one of the more extraordinary. In 1480 Tommaso Guadagni left the Pam Company and with Francesco struck out on their own. They desperately needed investment capital so in 1485 Tommaso authorized Ulivieri to sell all his real estate in Florence. From these humble beginnings he rose rapidly to become one of the most successful and wealthy merchants in all of Europe. Tommaso seems to have made his initial fortune in the lucrative spice trade, which was dominated in Lyon by Italians and, above all, Florentines. By 1500-01 he figured among the leading spice merchants in the city. In recognition of his prominence he was elected in 1502 to

serve as one of the two councilors of the Florentine Nation In typical Italian fashion Tommaso acquired immense riches both through commerce and eventually through banking. He quickly rose to the pinnacle of Lyonnaise society. Tommaso's great wealth soon brought him to the attention of the French king, Francois I, who in 1521 made him his counselor. When Tommaso loaned the king 50,000 ducats for his ransom after his capture by imperial forces in the battle of Pavia in 1525, Francois showed his gratitude by appointing him to the town council of Lyon and by bestowing on him the honorific title of majordomo of the royal household.

Though most active in Lyon, Tommaso by no means abandoned his roots or his family back in Florence. Like most Florentine merchants abroad, he may have nourished thoughts of eventually making Florence his principle residence. Beyond his desire to assist his kin, his purchase of the house in Florence for Ulivieri's family in 1499 perhaps was a first step in that direction. Even after his meteoric rise to wealth and fame in Lyon, he continued to identify himself as a "Florentine citizen and merchant". The same appellation of "Florentine citizen" is sculpted on his tomb in the chapel he built in Lyon, in the Florentine church of Notre-Dame-de-Confort, for himself and his French wife.

Apart from maintaining his identification with his family's native city, Tommaso also invested some of the profits from Lyon in business ventures in Florence, specifically in the production and sale of textiles. Though only a shadow of its former glory, the Florentine woolen industry, famous for its refined and beautiful cloth, was still one of the strongest sectors of the local economy and was the city's largest

employer. Along with banking, moreover, commerce in textiles had traditionally been a Guadagni concern, so this must have seemed an obvious choice for rekindling the family's activities in the city. In 1498 he and his two brothers enrolled in the Lana or wool entrepreneurs' guild. As this suggests, they probably established a cloth-producing company at this time, though no clear evidence of this has yet surfaced. The first certain documentation of their activity in this sector comes from 1502, when Tommaso set up a small company to produce woolen cloth in partnership with Marchionne Dazzi. He contributed three-fifths, and Dazzi two-fifths, of the initial capital of 4,000 florins. Following the family-oriented business practices of the period, but also for simple logistical reasons, Tommaso involved his relatives in the enterprise, as he would regularly in the future. The third partner in this company, who invested no capital but was its acting manager, was Tommaso's nephew, Carlo di Niccolo Strozzi, son of his recently deceased sister Francesca (d. 1499), while his brother Ulivieri was responsible for keeping the company's accounts.

Tommaso must quickly have seen the potential in this sector, for in October 1503, he dissolved this first partnership and founded a new company now solely in his own name. He was the only investing partner, with a capital of 5,000 florins, while Carlo Strozzi was again taken into the partnership as managing director. In this enterprise Ulivieri took a more active role, though he was still not a partner. He was again placed in charge of keeping the general accounts, but the contract also stipulated that all of Strozzi's decisions regarding production, personnel, and sales had to meet with Ulivieri's approval, and it conferred on him the same authority as Tommaso when the

latter was absent from the city, as must very often have been the case. Three percent of the company's profits were set aside for charitable purposes, either for poor relief or to provide dowries for impoverished girls. Of the remainder, three-fourths were to go to Tommaso as return on his investment and one-fourth to Strozzi for his management and personal labor. This partnership proved to be highly successful, and it was renewed with the same conditions several times past its initial contractual term of five years until 1515, when the partners dissolved it and founded yet another company. The terms of this new enterprise reveal just how profitable the former one had been. The capital invested in the new partnership was raised to the considerable sum of 14,000 florins, comprised of Tommaso's initial 5,000-florin investment together with the joint profits of 9,000 florins produced by the previous venture. This represented a return of 180 percent over the earlier company's twelve-year lifetime. Moreover, the business was expanded, now consisting of two separate shops, the original one in the area known as San Martino, registered in Tommaso's name, and a second shop in the area of Garbo in Ulivieri's name. Carlo Strozzi once again was appointed managing director, but in addition now had 2,250 florins invested in the company. Ulivieri also seems to have had a small managerial role. The participation and perhaps the capital changed over the following years, but both companies were still in operation at the time of Tommaso's death in 1533. Tommaso also founded three other wool companies in this period that had shorter durations and were all terminated well before his death.

During this period Tommaso also diversified his interests by investing in the other major branch of the local textile industry, the production and marketing of silks. Since its introduction to Florence in the fourteenth century, the silk industry had grown steadily in scale and importance. By the early sixteenth century the city had become one of the major silk-producing centers in Italy, and was famed throughout Europe for the high quality of its luxurious products. In 1513 Tommaso founded a company to produce and sell silk cloth, in partnership with Matteo Mannelli and Giovanni Popoleschi, Ulivieri's son-in-law. Again he was the majority partner, putting up half of the initial capital of 10,000 florins; Mannelli provided 4,000 florins and Popoleschi 1,000, and the latter was also appointed managing director. Tommaso involved yet another family member in this enterprise, Ulivieri's eldest son Simone, in whose name (together with Popoleschi) the company was registered. This company was still in operation at his death, as was a second silk company he founded later, registered in the names of two other sons of Ulivieri, Jacopo and Filippo.¹⁰⁰

Building on his initial success as a merchant in Lyon and an industrial entrepreneur in Florence, Tommaso also devoted growing resources and energies in these years to the highly profitable field of international finance. The times were ripe in early sixteenth-century Europe for astute financiers to make immense fortunes. In a trend beginning in Renaissance Italy, with its sophisticated courts and its large and wealthy merchant-banking classes, and radiating outward from here across Europe, the tenor of upper class life was taking on an increasingly refined and aristocratic character. Demand was

growing for resources to provide for the lavish expenditures of nobles, rich commoners, and powerful churchmen alike on luxurious palaces and villas, landed estates, jewelry, clothing, and art. Money was needed as well as to support the ever-expanding state and ecclesiastical bureaucracies and to finance the devastating warfare that accompanied the decades-long struggle between the Hapsburg and the French monarchies for European supremacy.

Tommaso Guadagni was one of a handful of prosperous Florentines in a position to exploit this advantageous economic conjuncture. It was ultimately through his money-lending activities, especially his loans to the French throne, that he was able to accumulate truly fabulous riches. The Venetian ambassador to Florence in 1528-29, Antonio Suriano, drew attention to Tommaso's vast wealth and to his still strong identification with his native city in a report he sent to the Venetian Senate. His dispatch identified Guadagni and six other great international bankers as being among the eight or ten Florentines whose worth reportedly exceeded the immense sum of 100,000 gold florins. Another source estimates that Tommaso's fortune in France around the same time amounted to the staggering figure of 400,000 gold ducats. His wealth was such that the name Tommasino Guadagni became proverbial in his new country, where, when referring to someone who owns a huge fortune, people still say, "riche comme Guadagni".

Tommaso was also able to make good use of his money. The people of Lyons still bless his memory, for having built at his own expense, the grandiose hospital of San Lorenzo, for the people infected with plague. Tradition goes that, when the architect showed Tommaso the

plans for the hospital, the proud Guadagni said: "This hospital is too small for a Guadagni. Make it bigger!" At that, the architect replied: "If the hospital is for the people infected with the plague, it is even too large! However, if the building is intended to lodge all the people you have ruined with your banking, it is way too small!"

In Lyons we can still find the great palace that Tommaso built for himself in La rue de Gadagnell (Guadagni street). In that palace, now transformed in a historical museum, we can see a grandiose fireplace, with Tommaso's coat of arms sculpted on all sides. In the middle of the Nineteenth Century, two medals, struck in Tommaso's honor, were found in the bowmen courtyard, close to the Dominican church. Said medals are now kept in the city archives.

Tommaso also built a noble chapel in the church of Our Lady of Confort. Tommaso prepared a tomb for himself in the chapel. He buried his wife in it in 1521. The church was destroyed in 1817, to enlarge the square of the city hall. However, the arch that was leading to the Guadagni chapel was not destroyed. You can still see the Guadagni coat of arms on it. The arch now decorates the entrance of a house in Sully Street that is situated in the quarter of Brotteaux.

It was Tommaso's abilities as an international merchant and banker, and the fantastic wealth he accumulated that laid the foundation for the extraordinary revival of the Guadagni family in the early sixteenth century. The beneficiaries were ultimately his brother and, especially, his nephews. He enhanced the family's patrimony by buying two rural properties near San Miniato a Pagnolle in 1514 and 1516, plus a small house next door to the family's residence in via de' Calderai in 1521. Ulivieri remained the administrator of Tommaso's companies until his

own death in 1541. At least three of Ulivieri's seven sons appear to have been employed by Tommaso at some time in France, and eventually settled there permanently; in addition to Ulivieri himself, three others were brought in various capacities into his businesses in Florence. And since his marriage to a Lyonnaise woman produced no children of his own, Tommaso also left most of his princely fortune to them when he died in 1533, at the age of seventy-nine. In his testament drawn up in August 1532, Tommaso bequeathed the capital he had invested and his personal profits from all of his Florentine companies to three of Ulivieri's sons -- Jacopo, Filippo, and Paolantonio--although the administration of the companies remained in their father's hands until his death; in addition, he assigned one thousand florins in cash to each. As his principal successor in Lyon he designated his namesake, later known as Tommaso II (VIII, 1). At Tommaso's death he inherited his business, the numerous titled estates he had acquired, and much of his wealth including huge amounts of money, and the castles and dominions of Saint-Victor-de-la-Cote, in Languedoc, Cher and Verdun, in Burgundy, Gualargues and Beauregard, close to Lyons, Lunel, Rochemaure, Saint-Jean-en-Forets, Amberieux-en-Dombes, Chars and Prauveaux in the province of Lyons. Tommaso II settled permanently in Lyon, where he and his descendants enjoyed continuing success and honors. The Guadagni thus became one of the few great foreign merchant-banking families who established definitive residence in the city.

A marble plaque over Tommaso's tomb reads:

SIC MUNDI LAETALIS HONOS. HIC JACET NOBILIS VIR THOMAS DE
GUADAGNIS CIVIS FLORENTINUS CONSILIARIUS ET MAGISTER
DOMUS ORDINIS CHRISTIANISS: REGIS FRANCIÆ FRANCISCI I. QUI
OBIIT DIE..... ANNO DOMINI MD..... NEC NON NOBILIS PERNETTA
DE BOATERIIS EIUS UXOR AMATISSIMA QUAE OBIIT DIE XVIII
AUGUSTI A. D. MDXXI QUORUM ANIMAE REQUIESCANT IN PACE.

SO GOES THE HONOR OF THIS WORLD HERE IS BURIED THE
NOBLE MAN TOMMASO GUADAGNI FLORENTINE CITIZEN
COUNSELLOR AND MAJOR DOMUS AT THE ORDERS OF THE VERY
CHRISTIAN KING OF FRANCE FRANCIS I. HERE HE DIED ON THE
DAY..... OF THE YEAR OF THE LORD ONE THOUSAND FIVE
HUNDRED.. ... THE NOT LESS NOBLE PERONETTA DE BUATIER HIS
BELOVED WIFE WHO DIED ON THE EIGHTEENTH DAY OF AUGUST
ONE THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED TWENTY ONE AFTER CHRIST'S
DEATH
MAY THEIR SOULS REST IN PEACE.

