

## 'DEALING' WITH POVERTY IN FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ITALY: THE MERCHANT OF PRATO AND HIS POOR<sup>1</sup>

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When the great civic patrons of late medieval Tuscany shared their wealth with those they defined as being in need, they sought neither to gild the cage of poverty, nor to raise the needy out of their condition. The agents of the late medieval Church taught that God placed the poor on earth to help the rich get to heaven. The poor's sanctity stemmed from a combination of their economic condition and good moral character. Their toleration of the vicissitudes of earthly life cleansed them for eternal beatitude and made them effective intermediaries with God. The Gospel model of the rich man and Lazarus was the preachers' model.<sup>2</sup> By preaching the need for generous and open-handed charity, the Church sought to loosen the grip of the comfortable rich on the things of this world, saving them from the eternal and infernal fate of the greedy rich man.

The Church offered the well-off eternal salvation in terms understandable to the merchant-class mentality. The 'deal' was simple: the rich aided the poor with money or material goods, an act that was *ex operato* efficacious for the rich person's soul; in addition, the worthy poor directly aided the rich by praying for their souls, bodies, or other intentions. Of course, the worthier the poor, the more likely that God would listen and respond.

The worthiest poor chose to abandon the things of this world for a life dedicated to the Gospel. Holy poverty was a key element of mendicant religiosity, which developed in the early thirteenth century among the Franciscans, Dominicans and others.<sup>3</sup> The Benedictines, and other cloistered monks and nuns, could rely

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upon their estates and tenants for sustenance, while the mobile mendicants purposely depended on the charity of those they served spiritually. "The Poor", then, included the voluntary religious poor as well as those layfolk who suffered from genuine poverty<sup>4</sup>.

Recent scholarship suggests that urban poverty in the modern sense, economic destitution due to unemployment, was rather rare in the bustling cities of the thirteenth century.<sup>5</sup> By tradition the omnipresent orphaned and widowed, sick and crippled had long been wards of the church. With the economic and demographic catastrophes of the fourteenth century, however, the ranks of the urban poor swelled and provided real competition for the voluntary clerical poor.<sup>6</sup> The "needy", thus, in the later fourteenth century included both the mendicants and the poor laity of good character, and the former urged the urban patriciate to care for the needs of both. The "unworthy" poor, those impoverished because of their dissolute habits, were left to fend for themselves.<sup>7</sup>

Contemporary developments in trade and banking made many rich, but spiritual discomfort often accompanied such wealth. Merchants dabbled in many types of transactions whose morality was dubious at best, and guilt dogged the heels of many. As the French historian of poverty, Michel Mollat pointed out, "One of the merits of the mendicant orders was to have shown the way to salvation through alms to merchants whose occupation was the object of formal reproof."<sup>8</sup> This present study, of a single Tuscan businessman's charitable activities, highlights the variety of responses the mendicants' preaching evoked, and the understanding of the 'deal' articulated by the merchant and his circle. As a work of historical anthropology it adds detail to our conceptualization of late medieval popular piety and its social expression in aid to the poor, and to our portrait of one of the exemplary figures of late medieval Tuscany.

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Francesco Datini, the "merchant of Prato" made famous by the biography by Iris Origo<sup>9</sup>, has become an iconic figure in the historiography of the later fourteenth century<sup>10</sup>. Born about 1335 in Prato, some ten miles from Florence, Datini was orphaned in 1348, and began his mercantile career at a young age with a modest inheritance. As a member of the thriving Tuscan community in papal Avignon he traded in a broad range of goods and became quite wealthy. After the papacy returned to Rome, Datini and his small family returned to Prato, established households and offices there and in Florence, and additional **fondachi** in Pisa, Majorca and Barcelona. He died in 1410 by far the wealthiest man in Prato.

The vast cache of documents he left behind attests to his nearly monomaniacal obsession with business during the last quarter century of his life. Hundreds of account books and nearly 150,000 letters today fill the shelves of the upper room in the house that he built in the early 1390s, and that currently serves as the local archive.<sup>11</sup> Locked away and unknown until 1870, they constitute the most extensive personal and business record that we have for the later middle ages.<sup>12</sup> I have examined about 50 accountbooks and most of the 10,000 personal letters in the archive in search of evidence for his support or aid for the poor of Prato.

In addition to providing a rich anecdotal mosaic, the sources allow one to draw several general conclusions. Apart from the provisions in his will that made bequests to both lay and religious poor, and that set aside most of his estate for the establishment and endowment of a poorhouse, the **Ceppo**<sup>13</sup>, Francesco Datini was very stingy for a man of his wealth. The donations dribbled out of his coffers, usually a few pence at a time, and rarely were the individual gifts enough to sustain life on any level. Even his support for his favorite ecclesiastical institution, the Franciscan church and convent of San Francesco, a short walk



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from his palazzo, was spotty and idiosyncratic.

The letters make it clear that he and his agents were fully aware of the "deal" involved in support of the poor. When writing Datini on behalf of needy religious, his correspondents almost invariably informed him that the community in question promised to pray for him. Even when filling out the accounts, his wife, Margherita, sometimes wrote in terms of the "deal". On one occasion when recording a gift to the Franciscans, she added that it was made "so that they might pray to God for this business matter that Francesco will have in Florence".<sup>14</sup> The effect is not one of mere social convention or empty rhetoric, but of conviction. That the suppliant brothers themselves should promise prayer in return for alms is not surprising. More striking, however, is that the case was also made by hard-headed business agents and notaries and the man's wife of fifteen years, to an equally hard-headed merchant.

Thirdly, the rhetoric employed in the letters, and sometimes even in the accounts themselves, makes it clear that the worthiness of the objects of the charity was a major factor in Datini's decisions to answer or reject pleas. The secular religious were sometimes suspect: Datini's first major gift to the local **pieve**<sup>15</sup>, a chalice, was only made after he was informed by his closest friend that the canons had adopted a resolution not to sell certain types of gifts given them.<sup>16</sup> A shadow of doubt even fell over his mendicant friends: while away from Prato, Datini arranged to have a good deal of wine distributed from his house as alms; his servant wrote to him that he suspected that the Franciscans, who returned time and again with large jugs to collect the bounty, were selling it off.<sup>17</sup> The gift itself, the object, was imbued with almost thaumaturgic power. Neither the intention of giving, nor even the act itself was sufficient for Datini.<sup>18</sup>

If the religious poor could disappoint, how much more unreliable were the lay poor. Datini's concern for their worthiness



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was reflected not only in his own letters, but in letters to him on behalf of people in need. Requests for alms of various types, both monetary and in-kind, were invariably accompanied by descriptions of the supplicant's situation -- in prison, widowed with children, old and infirm -- as well as the statement that "this is good alms" or a reassurance that the person was of good character. The merchant could reject requests, even one from his oldest friend: "I don't know what you're talking about," Datini wrote to Niccolo di Piero Giunta in December 1399, "I don't know this good man (who was requesting money to help dower his daughter). The other day I gave alms of ten florins to a woman, and now she is dead...it is not my intention to give any woman alms if she wishes to marry this year"<sup>19</sup> -- a plague year, by the way.

In cataloging the recorded instances of Datini's aid to the poor it became obvious that the preponderance of his largesse went to women: women in need of a dowry, widowed women with children, mothers whose husbands were in debtors prison, old or infirm women who were deemed to be "very good". Dowries were terribly important, as few marriages were contracted without one, and could thus save a girl from spinsterhood or prostitution.<sup>20</sup> Except in the cases of his own servants, and in specific cases in his will, Datini never fully dowered anyone.<sup>21</sup> The amounts he provided were usually far too small even to constitute a sizeable part of a poor girl's dowry.

Records of in-kind gifts to women are rather rare, and the donations were usually in the form of old clothes or cloth. On one occasion, however, during the plague year of 1400, while away in Bologna to escape the pestilence, Datini had the servants left behind in Prato distribute about 100 yards of cloth and 60 bushels of grain and flour over several months' time. The servants recorded the names and/or identities of many of the eighty recipients. Over two-thirds (54) were women, and 26 were men. On a per-gift

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basis, the women received more cloth than the men did, eight **braccia**<sup>22</sup> to five. Many of the recipients had connections to Datini. The largest amount of grain and flour went in several gifts to Mona Domenica, who had recently lost her husband Sacciente, one of Datini's oldest servants, in the plague. Gifts also went to the mother-in-law of the carter whom Datini regularly employed, to the neice of a man staying with Datini in Bologna, to the servant of Datini's recently departed partner, and to the sister of a slave of his at his villa at nearby Palco. According to the account, many of the women and a few of the men had children; all but two of the women were or had been married. Not a single cleric was mentioned.<sup>23</sup>

Feeding the hungry and clothing the naked were but two of the corporal acts of mercy in which Datini participated. The practice of incarcerating debtors left many men in need of alms to pay off debts, and with families that needed support in their absence. On several occasions Datini aided a prisoner or his dependents. In one case, at least, it is clear that Datini indentured the services of the man in question after paying off his debt. Sometimes his agents had to track down the creditor, and in one case the debtor was not even aware to whom he owed the money.<sup>24</sup>

From one letter in particular we get a strong sense of the appeals the debtor and his family had to draw upon in seeking aid. The letter dates from the plague year of 1400 -- a time of great misery and also great spiritual anxiety. Datini's servant Barzalone in Prato wrote to his master, who was in Florence preparing for his flight to Bologna. Barzalone appealed to Datini's sympathy, but also invoked the "deal":

I was with Puccino Pellicciaio at the prison. He prayed that I might recommend him to you for love of God: I recommend him to you for the

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love of his children. Because of them a woman came to me, and in such good faith that I found myself giving from the alms of the ceppo; that is, for her family, twice in her own person, for the misery of her family. And I took from the house and gave to her family some things of which they had need: in part I sent them half a barrel of wine and half a staio of flour. I say this because it seemed to me a wretched situation, according to what I heard from their neighbors. I wish that he [the father] might be recommended to you, for the love of God and the Virgin Mary and of St. Francis to whom, it seems to me, you give great reverence. And it is now the time to carry out good works and to give the alms you wish to give to him while you are alive, since we can't take anything with us"<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, the preachers had done their job.

The accountbooks and some letters mention pittances handed out to "poveri" and "povere", but the sums never added up to much. His great gift that gained him a reputation for generosity in Prato, and among some scholars, was his posthumous establishment of the **ceppo** for the poor. Having no legitimate children, he could afford to leave all of his nearly 100,000 florins in the hands of a lay board of governors for the aid of the poor.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, he could not take it with him, but he could leave it in the best possible hands.

Shortly after they returned from Avignon to Prato, Datini wrote to his wife from Pisa that she should make gifts of some oranges and herring that he had purchased. Half of the shipment was to be sold, but the other half sent to "the monks of all the monasteries." His list began with San Francesco, and ended with four convents of nuns. He included his parish, San Pier Forelli, as



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an afterthought: "and remember the priest of San Piero, because we never send anything to him, since I do more for the church than any other parishioner."<sup>27</sup> His support for the various religious houses of Prato and the surrounding region was complicated, piecemeal and scattered through his records. The remainder of this paper outlines the Datini's patronage of the Franciscan convent of San Francesco. I am aware of no other study of this kind for the period.

In the minds of some churchmen, at least, il Poverello was a patron saint for businessmen. As Archbishop Federigo Visconti of Pisa put it in 1261, "Oh how much good hope there must be for merchants who have such a merchant intermediary with God!"<sup>28</sup> The sympathetic saint himself apparently established the first Pratese community in 1211 or 1212. In 1275 the present site was occupied and two decades later the present structure was built.<sup>29</sup> We know from his will that Marco Datini, Francesco's father, was buried in the church or churchyard in 1348<sup>30</sup>, and a letter by a friar to Francesco in Avignon, from early 1381, mentions that the merchant's "passati" are "all" buried there.<sup>31</sup> This letter, and its context, are worth noting. It seems that one Buonaccorso had left a piece of expensive cloth with Datini in Avignon, or perhaps had purchased it through him. In any case, Buonaccorso died, and his friends and relatives wanted the cloth made into a liturgical vestment (variously a cope, a chasuble and a hanging) and donated to San Francesco "per l'anima di Buonaccorso" ("for Buonaccorso's soul"). No fewer than four laymen wrote to Datini on behalf of this project.<sup>32</sup> The convent's prior used this as an opportunity for a more general appeal to the expatriate merchant. On February 1 he wrote, "Considering the devotion and love that you have had for this place of San Francesco, and here are all your passati buried in security and trust, thus I recommend to you this poor and needful place, whose fortunes are not good." He urged Datini "for the love

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of God...to do something for your memory and that of your passati." This kind of appeal is found in dozens of letters from friars and monks from all over Tuscany, all, except this rare early appeal, dating after his return to Prato.<sup>33</sup>

His relationship with the convent of San Francesco was unique, long-lasting (apparently preceding the letter of 1381), and truly patronal in nature. Rather than the odd act of beneficence, or reply to a request for aid, his support, niggardly as it often was, was nonetheless constant, unconditional<sup>34</sup> (except in terms of the deal) and purely voluntary. He attended their services, discussed religious matters with the friars, drew his confessor from among them, decorated their church and cloister, and had both his corpse and that of his illegitimate son buried at the foot of the church's altar.

The brothers came to rely upon his help, and naturally shaped a rhetoric of suppliance based upon the 'deal'. Two of their letters stand out. The first is from Datini's personal confessor, Fra Francesco Pucci.<sup>35</sup> The Poor Clare's<sup>36</sup> bell tower collapsed on 20 August 1390. Following mention of this fact, and a lacuna, the good brother wrote:

because I recall that rich and good men have been those who have built the churches in which the orders gather together, [and] made the monasteries for the glory of God, both from sancity and for the health of their souls, and especially of their bodies, and prosperity in things of this world. May you see fit to attend willingly to these works of piety and virtue [lacuna] and I consider this the day to recommend to you this church, now ruined, of these venerable women; to desire through the reverence for God and for Saint Clare to rebuild

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it with your power and riches as it was formerly in prosperity. [lacuna] in this world, and then as recompense for works of piety and virtue, they have eternal life. Afterward these venerable women will always be, out of love, obligated to pray for you before the eyes of God both in life and after.

The classic deal. None the less, the bell tower apparently remained in ruin, since eighteen years later Sister Cilia di Francesco di Stefano Barcosi di Prato wrote Datini "Now I am to build the campanile..., " and, of course, requested a donation.<sup>37</sup>

A second letter that enunciates the expectations of mendicant clients of their patrons is undated, but appears to have been written around the time of a Datini-sponsored wedding, unless the allusions are allegorical.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Datini married off two of his servants, but the reference is probably to the wedding of his illegitimate daughter Ginevra in November 1406.<sup>39</sup> The otherwise unidentified "oratore e lettore" of San Francesco wrote:

Most devoted son of San Francesco, and father and benefactor of the order and the governor of the convent: you know how all of us are called the brothers of Francesco di Marco (Datini), and it is not a fitting thing that brother Marco should not have a nuptial garment. It is not to your honor that he should be thus badly clothed... Are you going to say to him that which the king said to the man who had come to the wedding, "why have you entered, since you have no wedding garment?" This you should say to brother Marco: "why are you, among my brothers, so poorly dressed?" That agitated king said "chase him away!"<sup>40</sup> Say to brother



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Marco lovingly "come to my house so that I will dress you;" which I recommend to you. If [you do] not, I will speak ill of rich men.

Rhetorically, this is very rich: Datini is son of the saint, brother of the friars, governor of the convent, father and benefactor, and placed on the same level as the king in the parable. If indeed the occasion was a wedding, then the comparison worked wonderfully, and the advice flowed right from Scripture. Most notable, perhaps, is the threat with which he closed: he would condemn the rich in his sermons if Francesco did not comply. Such threats were understandably rare. This example also indicates that the message of the mendicants did not merely flow through the medium of the sermon. At least in the case of important supporters, it was delivered directly, at least in the form of letters; and, if Giles Constable is correct in that letters are a continuation of spoken discourse, then probably in person as well.<sup>41</sup>

Support for the members of the convent, apart from liturgical or church goods, took a number of forms. Most regularly provided was the bread, wine, money and two large candles for the communal celebration of the feastday of Saint Francis each October. As Datini's patron saint's day, it was also the equivalent of our modern birthday, thus both a communal and personal feast. The letters and accountbooks dutifully record the securing and provision of the goods for all but eight of the 26 years between 1384 and 1410. Often this was a matter of special-ordering candles from Florence, and arranging at a distance for delivery of the victuals and cash.<sup>42</sup>

A series of letters and accounting entries from the summer of 1399 documents Datini's efforts to supply 20 mattresses for the convent. The request was made, the cloth had to be secured, a craftsman found, a deal struck, more cloth secured, more

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mattresses were requested, and finally the task was completed. Fourteen years earlier he had turned down a similar request, and in 1406 he would fulfill such a request again.<sup>43</sup>

Although the brothers received from Datini no regular monetary support of which a record has survived, excepting his annual gift of 12 lire or 12 florins on the feastday of St. Francis, we have many references to gifts of food, such as beans, fruit, fish, bread, salt, mutton and veal, of wine and of oil, both for consumption and combustion. In one case a servant noted to Datini that the oil lamps in Datini's chapel had old dark oil in them instead of the new clear oil the merchant had provided: he opined that the brothers had taken the finer oil for their own internal use.<sup>44</sup> In the account books gifts of clothing, including sandals, cloaks, and capes for daily wear appear alongside donations of liturgical vestments. Datini rarely provided money without strings attached. Beside the record of any appreciable gift was its specific purpose: to allow for a friar's trip to Genoa, for example.<sup>45</sup> Generic gifts of cash only came at the time of the *festa* in October, and in an annuity provided in Datini's will.<sup>46</sup>

As a merchant, Datini could provide many services for the community. These included both selling to and for the convent, making substantial loans of cash or materials on credit, and of such things as horses and cooking pots for the brothers' use. Large amounts of food and wine were also provided in the form of loans rather than as gifts, underlining the fact that Datini was not the only supporter of the establishment, despite the brothers' rhetoric to the contrary, and the fact that the convent was indeed an economic entity within the larger community of Prato.<sup>47</sup>

Because the friars travelled a great deal, and had contacts with a whole network of convents throughout Italy, they often served Datini as letter carriers, being paid for their services at both ends of the trail. In addition, because of his connections, Datini

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could, occasionally, serve them at a distance, as by arranging to have several of their books released from pawn by paying off the debt in distant Bologna.<sup>48</sup> They, too, could provide the merchant with valuable information about local events or conditions, as when the convent in Arezzo tried to lure Datini to their city as an escape from the plague in 1400. In his letter of 18 June Brother Benedetto reiterated the "deal": "...we are visited by you through your devotion and beneficence, and you by us through [our] love and spiritual prayers, which are said here for the health of your soul and body..."<sup>49</sup> His reputation of a patron of Franciscans was widely known and not unearned.<sup>50</sup> As with his beneficence for the poor, however, it was not a matter of pure philanthropy, but rather of exchanges the likes of which were regular features of urban life.

Two generations after Datini's death, the Dominican preacher Savonarola warned his audience against a certain type of patron, one who "seeks to appear religious and dedicated to divine worship, but is concerned only with external appearances, such as church-going, alms-giving, building churches and chapels, donating church hangings and similar things, out of ostentation."<sup>51</sup>

Was Francesco Datini this type of pharisaical patron and benefactor? Placing his activities in a broader context, looking at the nature of his support, at the advice from friends and spiritual advisers, some of which he followed, some of which he ignored, and at his own private correspondence, in which one would expect to find the baldest statements concerning his motivations, I am left with the conclusion that, while his motives were mixed, his concern for the spiritual benefits of charity overrode any others. He relied upon the salvific power of his own actions and the prayers of those he helped; he found some slight comfort in the reassurances of others that charitable activities were good for his soul, reassurances that came in writing not only from the professional poor, but from his wife, best friends, business partners, and even servants.



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In this sense, he was no "Renaissance man," Burckhardtian or otherwise. "The things of this world" and his attachment to them haunted him, as did the criticisms of his closest correspondents. The inner tensions of his whole class, with its cognitive dissonance born of the juxtaposition of traditional Christian ethics and mercantile activities of questionable propriety, resolved themselves through charitable activity, "the deal." No doubt it was at the behest of some early mendicant that the first Italian merchant began the tradition of carefully labelling the top line of the first page of every business ledger "In the Name of God and Profit."

### NOTES

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2. Luke 16: 19-31. In the Gospel parable "the rich man clothed in purple and fine linen" died and went to Hell to suffer eternally, while Lazarus, "a beggar who sought only to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table", died and "was carried by angels to the bosom of Abraham." Once dead, the poor man could not help the rich one, since in life the rich had not helped the poor.

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3. On the Franciscan view as expressed by Giovanni di Caulibus in his *Meditations on the Life of Christ* see Daniel R. Lesnick, *Preaching in Medieval Florence*, (Athens, Ga., 1989), 146-149.

4. In the fourteenth century this was usually a matter of not being able to live in accord with one's status in life, and not of some absolute basis of need. According to Charles M. de la Ronciere, Franciscan literature defined the poor as those in need of food and clothing ("Pauvres et pauvreté à Florence au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle" in *Etudes sur l'histoire de la pauvreté, Moyen Âge - XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2 vols., ed. Michel Mollat (Paris, 1974), 2: 687-8.). Richard Trexler notes that the legists of the period distinguished between those simply lacking goods and those who could not "live correctly," and who often fell into debt ("Charity and the Defence of Urban Elites in the Italian Communes" in *The Rich, the Well Born and the Powerful*, ed. F.C. Jaher (Urbana, 1973), 72.). For a more recent treatment that stresses the imprecision of Florentine definitions of "the poor", see Lesnick, 25-27.

5. *Ibid.*, 22-25.

6. *Ibid.*, 25. He cites the chronicler Villani's figure of 17,000 paupers being fed in Florence in 1330, and contrasts it with the few hundred who were cared for by hospitals in the later 13th century.

7. That this was true not only in Tuscany may be gathered from such studies as that of John Jennings of fifteenth-century London, "The distribution of landed wealth in the wills of London merchants, 1400 - 1450," *Medieval Studies*, 39 (1977): 274-5.

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9. Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New Haven, 1986), 155. Of course, the reference here is to the profit-taking and usury associated with mercantile transactions, with which the late medieval Church was most uncomfortable.

9. Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato: Francesco di Marco Datini, 1335-1410* (Boston, 1986).

10. His ubiquity is accounted for by the extent of the documentary record he left historians, discussed below. He is otherwise neither typical of his class nor a useful counterexample, as he had neither children nor political ambitions, both of which were considered vital to members of his class.

12. Around 140,000 of these letters are filed as business correspondence, while about 10,000 are considered private or familial. On the Palazzo Datini see Origo, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-263; Amerigo Badiani, "Il Palazzo Datini," *Archivio Storico Pratese*, 19 (1941): 49-53; Nello Bemporad, *Il restauro del Palazzo Datini a Prato* (Florence, 1958); Bruce Cole, "The Interior Decoration of the Palazzo Datini," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 13 (1967): 61-82; M. and S. Cresci, "Francesco di Marco Datini e la sua casa di Prato," *Prato: Storia e Arte*, 17 (1967): 35-57; Renato Piattoli, "In una casa borghese del secolo XIV," *Archivio Storico Pratese*, 6 (1926): 113-119. On the Datini archive in Prato see Origo, *op. cit.*, pp. xvii-xxix; Giovanni Livi, "L'archivio d'un mercante toscano del secolo XIV," *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 31 (1903): 425-431; Guido Pampaloni, *Inventario sommario dell'Archivio di Stato di Prato*, (Florence, 1958). See also the introduction to Federigo Melis' *Aspetti della vita economica medievale* (Siena, 1962), a masterful study of the economic documents by the late director of the archive.



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12. Note for example the remarks of David Herlihy in his "Women and the Sources of Medieval History: The Towns of Northern Italy," in *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History*, ed. by Joel Rosenthal (Athens, Ga., 1990), 143-144.

13. For the volgare text of Datini's will see Cesare Guasti, *Lettere di un notaro ad un mercante del secolo XIV*, 2 vols. (Florence, 1880) 2: 271-310; for an English translation of the text see Joseph Byrne, "Francesco Datini, "Father of Many": Piety, Charity and Patronage in Early Modern Tuscany," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1989), 339-377; for a detailed discussion of the will see Philip Gavitt, *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence*, (Ann Arbor, 1990), Chapter One.

14. "...perche pragasono Idio per questa faccenda che avra a Firenze Franciesco." Prato, Archivio Datini, Libro #174/3 *Conti di casa*, 3v. (23 February 1393/4).

15. The church of Santo Stefano originally served as the local ecclesiastical administrative center or **pieve**, and was later raised to cathedral status.

16. "I had it yesterday from Niccolo di Piero that the officials of the **pieve** ... have decided against selling either chasubles or hangings; therefore I want you to find two of them already made, or have them made, such that they are good, and beautiful, and cheap." Prato, Archivio Datini, Carteggi Privati e Familiari, Prato to Florence, Francesco di Marco to Stoldo di Lorenzo, 6 January 1395/6.

17. Prato, Archivio Datini, Carteggi Privati e Familiari, Prato to Florence, Barzalone di Spedaliere to Francesco di Marco, 2 June 1405.

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18. That all mendicants did not share this attitude is attested to by the sermons of the Dominican Giordano da Pisa, who stated, "in giving alms you can have compassion of the heart -- which is more acceptable to God than the work ... God does not look at the works, but just at your will..." Lesnick stresses that "Dominican charity was, above all else, an act of the heart, bringing spiritual health and salvation to the bestower." (131) The attitude of the Dominicans is by no means irrelevant to Datini, since his favorite Preacher was the eminent Giovanni Domenici, whom he hosted and with whom he corresponded.

19. Prato, Archivio Datini, Carteggi Privati e Familiari, Florence to Prato, Francesco di Marco to Niccolo di Piero Giunta, 11 December 1399.

20. For the most recent treatment of dowries in Tuscany in our period see Anthony Molho, *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 11-18.

21. See the forthcoming article in *Feminea Medievale*, "Surrogate Motherhood in the Casa Datini, 1378-1410," by the author and Eleanor Congdon.

23. The Florentine **braccia** ("arm") measured about 23 inches.

24. Byrne, 123-126.

24. Byrne, 138-139. In 1406 the carpenter Cristofano di ser Francia agreed to serve Datini for one year for the sum of 40 florins. This was about the salary of a lower-level employee at the Datini office in Florence.

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25. Prato, Archivio Datini, Carteggi Privati e Familiari, Caffaggio to Florence, Barzalone di Spedaliere to Francesco di Marco, 7 May 1400. See Byrne, 136-137.

27. Byrne, 142-145; Gavitt, 45-50.

27. *Le lettere di Francesco Datini alla moglie Margherita* (1385-1410), ed. by Elena Cecchi, (Prato, 1990), 33-34. This volume contains transcriptions of all 182 extant letters. Margherita's letters to Francesco were published by Valeria Rosati, *Le lettere di Margherita Datini al suo moglie Francesco (1384-1410)*, (Prato, 1979).

28. Quoted in Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe*, (London, 1978), 217.

29. On the relevant history of San Francesco in Prato see Francesco Gurrieri, *La fabbrica del San Francesco in Prato*, (Prato, 1968), 21-23; L. Santini, *Memorie francescane pratese*, (Prato, 1977), 11; Renato Piattoli, *L'Atto di fondazione del San Francesco di Prato*, (Florence, 1939).

30. Enrico Bensa, "Il testamento di Marco Datini," *Archivio Storico Pratese*, 5 (1924): 74-79.

31. Prato, Archivio Datini, Carteggi Privati e Familiari, Prato to Avignon, Frate Paulo to Francesco di Marco di Stefano, 26 January 1380/1.

32. Prato, Archivio Datini, Carteggi Privati e Familiare, Prato to Avignon, letters of Guido di Ridolfo Angiolini (1 February 1380/1), Niccolao di Sinnibaldo (7 January 1380/1), Monte d'Andrea Angiolini (21 June 1381), and Niccolozzo di ser Naldo (20 June 1381) to Francesco di Marco.



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34. See Byrne, 206-209, for a sampling of such contacts.

34. Cash gifts, however, were usually made with specific ends in mind, as discussed below. The major exception to this rule was money, usually 12 florins or 12 lire, given the convent on the feastday of St. Francis.

35. Prato, Archivio Datini, Carteggi Privati e Familiari, Prato to Prato, Frate Francesco Pucci to Francesco di Marco, 10 September 1390; also quoted from in Amerigo Bresci, "Documenti inediti sui rapporti di Francesco di Marco Datini colla chiesa e il convento di San Francesco," in *La Chiesa monumentale di San Francesco in Prato*, ed. by Amerigo Bresci (Prato, 1904), 28.

36. The Poor Clares were the cloistered female Franciscans, named for St. Francis's friend and companion, Clare of Assisi.

37. Prato, Archivio Datini, Carteggi Privati e Familiari, Prato to Prato, Suor Cilia di Francesco to Francesco di Marco, 18 June 1408. Of course, the campanile may have collapsed again!

38. Prato, Archivio Datini, Carteggi Privati e Familiari, Prato to Florence, Oratore e Lettore dei Frati Minori to Francesco di Marco, undated.

40. See the forthcoming article in *Feminea Medievale*, "Surrogate Motherhood in the Casa Datini, 1378-1410," by the author and Eleanor Congdon.

41. Matt. 22: 1-14.

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41. Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter Collections*, *Typologie des sources du Moyen Age occidental*, fasc. 17, (Tournhout, 1976), 13.

43. Byrne, 174-177.

44. Byrne, 167-170, 178-179.

44. "...I give them some oil that is from here [Datini's house], and then I see in the lamps other oil, and I think that they are eating that from here: yours is clear and fine, and that which I see in the lamps is black and ugly." Prato, Archivio Datini, Carteggi Privati e Familiari, Prato to Florence, Barzalone di Spedaliere to Francesco di Marco, 9 May 1403.

45. On 1 June 1409 he recorded "for the love of God to a brother of San Francesco who wishes to go to Genoa", one florin 13 soldi. Prato, Archivio Datini, Libro #186, *Quaderno Disp[ese] di Francesco di Marco da Prato tenuto per Lionardo di Ser Tomaso nel Anno 1408*, p. 15

46. For the bequest see Byrne, 343. The annuity was 25 florins, and was to provide "for clothing for the brothers, and their nourishment and other necessities...providing that each year they make an especially fitting memorial to God for his [Francesco's] soul..."

48. Byrne, 185-187.

49. Byrne, 184-5.

50. Prato, Archivio Datini, Carteggi Privati e Familiari, Arezzo to Florence, Frate Benedetto de'Testi to Francesco di Marco, 18 June 1400.

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50. The Datini archive contains letters to, from or with reference to Franciscan houses in Pistoia, Arezzo, San Miniato, Pisa, Poppi Carmignano and Florence.

51. Quoted in Francis W. Kent, *Household and Lineage in Renaissance Florence*, (Princeton, 1977), 281.