

Resisting and justifying changes

How to make the new acceptable in the Ancient,
Medieval and Early Modern world

ed. by

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FRANCESCO BORGHERO

**THE BLACK DEATH AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND
PROFESSIONAL CHANGES IN FLORENTINE TUSCANY:
THE CASE OF SER LANDO DI FORTINO DALLA CICOGNA***

Abstract

The Black Death that struck the Italian peninsula and the European continent between 1348 and 1351 can be considered a periodizing and paradigmatic event, representative of the concept of change. The biography of the Tuscan notary ser Lando di Fortino dalla Cicogna (†1376) represents an emblematic case study on the socio-economic and professional changes triggered by the plague in Florentine Tuscany. Born in a small village in the Upper Valdarno, from 1345 to 1348 ser Lando di Fortino was an itinerant notary in the Upper Valdarno villages. After the Black Death, he became notary and scribe for the general abbot of the monastic order of Vallombrosa. After the second plague of 1363, ser Lando di Fortino, at the height of his professional career, became notary and scribe for the bishop and the Florence episcopal curia. Ser Lando di Fortino's socio-professional rise constituted a point of departure for the career of his sons. Among them, Benedetto (c.1350/1406) and Paolo Fortini (c.1370/1433), who held prestigious positions in the Florentine main public offices, including the role of Republic Chancellor alongside Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni. Additionally, Bartolomeo di Benedetto Fortini (1402/c.1470), ser Lando di Fortino's nephew, was in touch with the Florentine humanistic circles.

1. The 14th-century conjuncture in Florence and Florentine Tuscany

Florence and its countryside are a privileged point of observation from which to study the socio-economic and professional changes triggered by the Black Death (1348/1351) and the more general 14th-century conjuncture¹. At the beginning of the 14th-century, Florence was a metropolis of more than 100,000 inhabitants, still in the midst of the demographic and economic growth which had begun in the previous century, due to the success of commerce, banking, and textile industries. During the 13th-century, the Florentine financial and commercial companies

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¹ Carocci 2016.

had progressively conquered European markets, making Florence one of the main economic development poles in the late Middle Ages. One-third of the city's inhabitants were employed in the textile industry, while the gold florin, minted from 1252, soon became the reference currency for international trade. At the height of its urban and architectural renewal, it was the city of Arnolfo di Cambio, Dante, and Giotto².

In the first decades of the 14th-century, however, some structural contradictions that had characterized this long expansionary phase began to emerge, which were determined by an increasingly evident imbalance between population growth and the available resources to sustain it. The cultivation of increasingly marginal lands and the consequent low agricultural yields, together with a generally unfavourable climatic conjuncture (in 1333 Florence was hit by a disastrous flood, possibly due to the cultivation expansion and deforestation)³, led to devastating cycles of bad harvests and famine that affected the city between the 1320s and 1340s. Dramatic rises in the prices of primary goods, with inflationary trends reaching 200%, resulted in social unrest⁴. Furthermore, the major Florentine commercial and financial companies' crisis and bankruptcy between 1343 and 1345 led to the first big financial crash in the history of the West⁵.

In the Spring of 1348, this already under pressure territory and city was hit by the first of a long series of plague epidemics that were going to upset the entire European continent. Originated in the heart of the Asian continent, where it had already been endemic for decades, the Black Death reached Europe via the caravan routes along the so-called 'Silk Road'. The plague was an infectious disease with a high mortality rate. Modern medical science determined that the plague was caused by the bacterium *Coccobacillus Yersinia pestis*, which was transmitted primarily to rodents and secondarily to humans via the Oriental rat flea⁶.

For the people of the 14th-century, the plague was an almost unknown disease. The decline and subsequent demographic and economic stagnation of the early medieval West, along with the dwindling of relations between Christian Europe and Asian civ-

² Cipolla 1982; Tognetti 2017b.

³ Salvestrini 2010.

⁴ Pinto 1978; Dameron 2017.

⁵ Tognetti 2017a; Tanzini 2018.

⁶ Namouchi *et al.* 2018.

ilizations, contributed to the disappearance of the great epidemics on European soil. Contrastingly, the demographic increase and economic expansion of the late Middle Ages, along with the formation of an integrated political area that stretched from the Pacific to Eastern Europe (the Mongol Empire), contributed—in a primary phase of trade ‘globalization’—to the return of the plague in Europe, a disease for which medical theories and practices were totally inadequate⁷.

The plague reached Florence in March 1348 and raged until September of that same year. Chronicle and literary sources often dwell on the “dolorosa ricordanza della pestifera mortalità trapassata”, describing a situation of disintegrating social ties. In the streets, the ‘Triumph of Death’ was staged, and in the cemeteries, the ‘Danse Macabre’ of the mass graves, where the bodies were thrown away in large layers divided by a thin veil of ground, “come si mettono le mercatantie nelle navi a suolo a suolo”, according to Boccaccio⁸, “come si minestrasse lasagne a fornire di formaggio”, according to Marchionne di Coppo Stefani⁹. The epidemic, moreover,

non per ciò meno d’alcuna cosa risparmiò il circostante contado, nel quale, (lasciando star le castella, che simili erano nella loro piccolezza alla città) per le sparte ville e per li campi i lavoratori miseri e poveri e le loro famiglie, senza alcuna fatica di medico o aiuto di servidore, per le vie e per li loro colti e per le case, di di e di notte indifferentemente, non come uomini ma quasi come bestie morieno¹⁰.

Between 1348 and 1351, the plague wiped out between one-third and one-half of Europe’s population and remained endemic until the early 18th-century. Mortality estimates from the plague in Florence vary between one-half and two-thirds of the population, which in a few months probably fell from just over 100,000 to around 40,000 inhabitants. Public authorities endeavoured with little success to take measures against the contagion’s spread, made more difficult by officers and government personnel decimation¹¹. In the immediate aftermath of the plague, there were also difficulties related to food supply, militia recruitment, tax

⁷ Cisam 1994; Capitani (ed.) 1995; Herlihy 1997.

⁸ Branca (ed.) 1956: 12.

⁹ Rodolico (ed.) 1903: 231.

¹⁰ Branca (ed.) 1956: 12.

¹¹ Henderson 1992.

collection, disputes over intestate inheritances management, and fluctuations in prices and wages¹². The new city walls (1284/1333), with their 600 hectares, were destined to enclose vast uncultivated areas and gardens until the 19th-century urban expansion.

2. *The Black Death as a periodizing event and paradigm of change*

Despite the apocalyptic scenario, the late medieval society was able to react to this cataclysmic event. The mid-14th-century demographic catastrophe reflected on the consciences of the men and women of the time, as Johan Huizinga (2020 [1919]) masterfully pointed out a century ago in *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*. After all, the “allegria brigata” of seven young women and three young men, the protagonists of the *Decameron*, is none other than a metaphor and a wish for the re-establishment of a broken social order, where one finds “del luogo e del modo nel quale a vivere abbiamo”¹³.

The historiographic debate on the Black Death’s role within the more general 14th-century conjuncture goes back to the socio-economic studies of the 18th and 19th-century, with various interpretations that have framed the epidemic and food crises as manifestations of a broader process of economic and social transformation. The Marxist and neo-Marxist strand (‘historical materialism’), which interpreted the 14th-century crisis as a transformation phase of economic structures and production reports¹⁴, was flanked by the Malthusian and neo-Malthusian strand, which observed the imbalance between population and resource growth as the fundamental cause of pre-industrial societies food and epidemic crises. Neo-Malthusian historians, such as Wilhelm Abel (1955) and Michael M. Postan (1950), also applied this model to the 14th-century conjuncture, which they interpreted as a long-term depressive crisis that began well before the Black Death¹⁵.

The long-term crisis interpretations are flanked by the parallel development of the ‘creative destruction’ concept, which emerged in the economic theory area from the studies of Werner Sombart (2015 [1913]) and Joseph A. Schumpeter (2001 [1942]). According to this interpretative model, every process of transition, innovation, and progress in the economic and social field inevitably passes through a parallel process of transformation and destruction of previous socio-economic structures. At stake is the concept of ‘resilience’: creative destruction is

¹² Falsini 1971; La Roncière 1982.

¹³ Branca (ed.) 1956: 21.

¹⁴ Hilton 1951; Kosminskij 1957; Bois 2000.

¹⁵ Cipolla *et al.* 1950.

survived by those who can adapt, cope, and not be subjected to change. This paradigm, which has recently been taken up by Stephan R. Epstein (1998; 2000; 2006), allows to grasp some fundamental dynamics of socio-economic change, as well as looking at the 14th-century plague crisis in a more periodizing way.

This topic was taken up in Italy by the economic historians Gino Luzzatto (1958) and Carlo M. Cipolla (1988), and further developed, for the Florentine context, by Richard A. Goldthwaite (1984; 1995; 2013), who explains in this way, starting from the redistribution and concentration of wealth, the apparent contradiction between economic crisis and cultural development between the 14th and 15th-centuries.

Il progresso economico ha sempre fatto le sue vittime. La vita è abbastanza dura, anche senza il pessimismo degli stagnazionisti¹⁶.

The most recent studies have highlighted the complexity of the economic and social transformations that took place in the second half of the 14th-century. In the Tuscan context, what emerges is a dense interweaving of individual and family paths of enrichment and social rise, as well as impoverishment and loss of status: a serendipitous interweaving of luck and skill, where wealth redistribution and contingent personal circumstances determined the fates of an individual or even an entire family. Young people were particularly the protagonists of social rises, as they were less affected by the epidemic and inherited their father's assets, businesses, and small amounts of capital, which could be re-invested in socio-economic terms¹⁷. As reported in a 'deliberation' (*provisione*) of the Florence Commune of 9 October 1348, "*multi divites sint depauperati et pauperes sint dotati*"¹⁸.

The Black Death of 1348/1351 and the subsequent epidemic crises thus represent a chronological divide concerning professional changes and social mobility, a topic that has been the subject of recent studies and research about late medieval Italy¹⁹. The population crisis, linked to famine and epidemic cycles, opened new and unexpected horizons for mobility at all social levels. Social mobility that, compared to the

¹⁶ Cipolla 1988: 180-181.

¹⁷ Alfani 2009; Poloni 2017; 2019; Luongo 2019.

¹⁸ ASFi, Provvisioni, Registri, 36: c. 16r.

¹⁹ Carocci (ed.) 2010; Tanzini, Tognetti (eds.) 2016; Carbonetti Vendittelli, Vendittelli (eds.) 2017; Carocci, De Vincentiis (eds.) 2017; Gamberini (ed.) 2017; Carocci, Lazzarini (eds.) 2018; Collavini, Petralia (eds.) 2019.

demographic and economic expansion of the 13th-century, did not stop but reshaped itself, as the more general economic context²⁰.

In this regard, the professional biography of ser Lando di Fortino dalla Cicogna (1345/1376), a Tuscan notary in the Florentine area, represents an interesting case study. It is a case that offers a synthesis of the social rise processes linked to the practice of the notarial profession, relating to the changes triggered by the Black Death, geographical mobility and urbanization, professional diversification, and family fortunes.

3. A case study: ser Lando di Fortino dalla Cicogna (1345-1376) and his descendants

In the Florentine area, the notary, as in the rest of late medieval Italy, was a profession with significant socio-professional potential, even in the public domain²¹. The notary was a writing professional and law social operator, endowed with *publica fides* for the drafting and authentication of public and private documents. In the 12th and 13th-centuries, the profession had undergone considerable development, in the context of the documentary and scriptural revolution, within the development of the communal society and institutions in central and northern Italy²². The political and economic importance assumed by the notary guilds and the notaries' role in the administrative apparatus development made the profession an indispensable social component for civic institutions²³. The notary became an organic intellectual of communal society²⁴, also active in the field of building identity and civic memory through the drafting of chronicles, memoirs, and narrative texts²⁵.

There were at least three consequences of the Black Death and subsequent epidemic cycles concerning the Florentine area notary. The first consequence was numerical: between the mid-14th and early 15th-centuries, the number of Florentine notaries registered in the guild's *matricula* was more than halved, and at the end of the 15th-century it was reduced to a quarter²⁶. Second, changes in the writing social practices meant that several legal transactions that were notaries' prerogative,

²⁰ Poloni 2014; 2015.

²¹ Luongo 2016.

²² About the Italian notary see Bartoli Langeli 2006; about the Florentine and Tuscan notary see D'Addario (ed.) 1984; Montorzi (ed.) 1985; Pinto, Tanzini, and Tognetti (eds.) 2018; about the documentary revolution see Cammarosano 1991: 267-276; Maire Vigueur 1995; Lazzarini 2012.

²³ Bartoli Langeli 1985; 1994; Tanzini 2017.

²⁴ Bartoli Langeli 2010.

²⁵ Zabbia 1999; 2017; Arnaldi 2016.

²⁶ Sznura 1998; 2012: 59.

especially in the mercantile context, were replaced by private agreements accepted by the courts²⁷. Finally, the sharp decrease in population reduced the professional opportunities for notaries. In this context, professional diversification and affiliation with other organizations and institutions became essential. On this matter, the socio-professional career of ser Lando di Fortino dalla Cicogna represents an exemplary case study.

3.1 Before the Black Death. Family origins and work as a country notary (1345/1348)

There is little information on the family origins of ser Lando di Fortino. Nevertheless, a fair amount of data is available from his deeds and other documentary and genealogical sources. Ser Lando di Fortino was from Cicogna, a small village in the Upper Valdarno, in the diocese of Arezzo, already part of the Florentine *contado*²⁸. Ser Lando belonged to a 'parentage' (*consorteria*) which, from the 1380s, would be called "degli Orlandini". It was divided into two branches: the branch of Lando di Buoso and the branch of Vanni di Buoso, both having a common founder and with many members active as notaries²⁹. The Orlandini owned considerable land and real estate in Cicogna and its surrounding area, including the nearby villages of Montelungo, Terranuova, Tasso and Castelveccchio. Properties included houses, mills and dozens of plots of land, a source of income through sales and renting³⁰.

The Orlandini are socially ascribable to the so-called 'country middle-class', a social élite consolidated from the 13th-century in the villages, castles, and *terrenuove* of the Florentine countryside. The 'country bourgeoisie' was made up of jurists, notaries, craftsmen, shopkeepers, and businessmen, whose anchorage and prestige in the community were based on the consolidation of a sizeable economic position, mainly based on land and property ownership³¹. It was a local nobility that also expressed itself in forms of social distinction and hegemony. The Orlandini, for example, exercised their right of patronage over the local parish of Santa Lucia in Cicogna, still attested at the end of the 15th-century³². In the context of diversification of professions within the same family, the initiation of one or more sons into the notary pro-

²⁷ Tanzini 2014b; 2017: 129.

²⁸ Repetti 1833: 731; 1845: 75.

²⁹ ASFi, Raccolta Sebreghondi, 2296; Battista 2012: 172-174.

³⁰ ASFi, NA, 11383; *passim*.

³¹ Pinto 2007a; 2007b.

³² ASFi, NA, 394: cc. 219v-220r; Battista 2012: 174.

fession represented an active and conscious channel of social mobility, which justified the financing of studies³³.

After the acquisition of basic literacy skills, the notaries' training in the late Middle Ages involved an apprenticeship in the workshop of an expert colleague³⁴. While it was necessary to master the writing of the law and its forms in order to practice as a notary³⁵, the possession of the *fides publica* was linked to the *privilegium tabellionatus*, the right to draw up deeds in public, which was granted by the highest universal authorities in the West: the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor. From the 13th-century, this prerogative had been progressively delegated to the local palatine counts who, by the 14th-century, had become numerous (see § 3.4), from members of aristocratic families to civic authorities. Between the 13th and 14th centuries, in the Valdarno area, the *privilegium tabellionatus* was granted by some members of the Guidi counts and by the bishops of Arezzo. In Florence, this prerogative was exercised by the notarial guild and, from the 1360s, also by the bishop³⁶.

Like other professions, those who wanted to practice as a notary, whether in the city or the countryside, also had to register to the specific trade guild. In Florence, jurists and notaries were bundled within the *Arte dei Giudici e Notai* ('Guild of Judges and Notaries'), also known as the *Proconsolo*, the title of the highest internal office. Given the relative ease of acquiring the *privilegium tabellionatus*, the rigid guild admissions examinations were an effective way to verify the competence of the aspiring notary and a mechanism to safeguard the privileges of the guild members, for whom access to public offices was reserved³⁷.

However, just as there is no information about ser Lando di Fortino's birth and education, we have no records about his enrolment with the *Arte dei Giudici e Notai*, to which he did refer as a notary from Florence countryside and of Florentine notarial culture³⁸. The standard minimum age to become a notary was 20 years, 18 for sons or siblings of judges or notaries³⁹. After passing the examination and paying the

³³ Verger 2006.

³⁴ Costamagna 1970: 101-105; Banti 1995: 401-407.

³⁵ About the Florentine area see Masi (ed.) 1943; Scalfati (ed.) 1997.

³⁶ Nicolaj Petronio 1983: 645; Bicchierai 2016: 68-69.

³⁷ Tanzini 2017: 121-124. About the Florentine notary guild see Calleri 1966; Martines 1968.

³⁸ Ser Lando di Fortino uses the Florentine dating style and the formulary used in the Florentine area, for example in the terms of agrarian contracts. See Sznura 2012: 54.

³⁹ Marchesini 1895; Calleri 1966: 50.

registration fee, the novice, having signed the *matricula* and taken the oath, had to wait six months before being able to work independently⁴⁰.

So, between 1345 and 1348, we find ser Lando di Fortino working as one of the many itinerant notaries of the countryside in the villages, castles, market towns, and *terrenuove* of the Upper Valdarno. Ser Lando di Fortino worked mainly along the Ascione creek valley, around the home village of Cicogna, and the villages of Tasso, Traiana, Montelungo, and Campogialli. In this time, ser Lando di Fortino was already an accredited notary, working for various rural municipalities and private individuals. Procurator for several rural communities, ser Lando di Fortino also served as an official for the rural Commune of Montelungo. Due to their training, notaries were favoured for assuming offices within village communities⁴¹.

In the years before the plague, ser Lando di Fortino drew up over 400 documents, that covered the usual categories of transactions overseen by a rural notary, which ranged from private documents for individuals, to documents for rural municipalities, parishes, confraternities, and hospitals⁴². In this regard, ser Lando di Fortino's deeds provide insight into the society and economy of the Upper Valdarno in the four years preceding the Black Death⁴³.

3.2. *After the Black Death. Notary and scribe for the general abbot of Vallombrosa (1348/1363)*

So, before the Black Death of 1348, ser Lando di Fortino was an established country notary, an activity even carried out by more illustrious colleagues. For example, Coluccio Salutati, future chancellor of the Republic of Florence (see § 3.4), practiced as an itinerant notary around his native village of Stignano, in Valdinievole, between the 1350s and 1370s⁴⁴.

The first fundamental turning-point for ser Lando di Fortino was the Black Death, which, as previously stated, struck Florence and its countryside in the Spring-Summer of 1348 (see § 1). Fortino di Lando, the father of ser Lando di Fortino, died during the epidemic⁴⁵. Ser Lando di Fortino and his brother, Bonamico di Fortino, however, survived. Ser Lando's deeds testify to the course of the contagion: the work pace

⁴⁰ Calleri 1966: 29-36, 100-121.

⁴¹ ASFi, NA, 11383: cc. 2r, 11r.

⁴² ASFi, NA, 11383: *passim*.

⁴³ La Roncière 2005; Fabbri 2012; Pirillo 2018.

⁴⁴ Petrucci (ed.) 1963; Sznura 2012.

⁴⁵ ASFi, NA, 11383: cc. 65v-66v.

drastically fell, with a complete suspension of the activity in June 1348. At the same time, the number of pious legacies and wills increased⁴⁶.

In this context of demographic and social crisis, in September 1348, ser Lando di Fortino took on the role of notary and scribe for the general abbot of the nearby monastery of Santa Maria di Vallombrosa on Pratomagno, at the head of one of the most prominent reformed Benedictine monastic orders in late medieval Italy, the Florentine religious family *par excellence* in terms of moral and reputation⁴⁷.

The main monastery of the Vallombrosian order, not even in the late Middle Ages, had a structured chancellery office comparable, for example, to Montecassino⁴⁸. Nevertheless, the monastery of Pratomagno, at least from the 13th-century, tended to converge on itself and then monopolize the activities of some notaries, particularly from the areas of Valdarno and Florence. Between the 14th and 15th-centuries, these notaries formed the backbone of increasingly consolidated practices of production, management, and preservation of documentation, strengthened by the consolidation of notarial families orbiting around the monastery and the general abbot of the order.

During the 14th-century, a family of notaries from Pelago, a small village in the Upper Valdarno within Vallombrosa asset area, worked for the monastery: ser Azzo di Davanzato and his sons ser Giovanni and ser Antonio. Like ser Lando di Fortino, the family's social and professional statuses were linked to their work for Vallombrosa. Indeed, this family of notaries might be a minor branch of the Florentine Davanzati family⁴⁹.

The da Pelago, like ser Lando di Fortino, were well-known notaries in the countryside, working for private individuals and rural municipalities in their home village and the surrounding area. They were in touch with various social backgrounds villagers and several Florentine citizens who were active in the country in land sale and loans. The da Pelago were themselves active in small loan transactions, which was quite usual for notaries belonging to the country middle-class⁵⁰. Nevertheless, the social and religious influence exerted by the Vallombrosa abbey over these territories led to the convergence of part of the work of ser Azzo di Davanzato (1299/1338) and of his sons, ser Giovanni

⁴⁶ Falsini 1971: 452; Luongo 2019: 147-148.

⁴⁷ About the monastic order of Vallombrosa see Vasaturo 1994; Salvestrini 1998; 2008; 2017.

⁴⁸ Dell'Omo 1999: 316-324.

⁴⁹ Chiostrini Mannini 1989: 23, 30; Salvestrini 2008: 117-118.

⁵⁰ ASFi, CS, 260 – 24: cc. 593r-598r; 97: cc. 1r-38v, 62r-68v, 136r-164v, 188r-190v; 122; 124; 127; 129.

(1337/1347) and, after the plague, ser Antonio da Pelago (1348/1397). The sepulchre that Simone, brother of ser Antonio, bought in 1366 in the church of San Clemente in Pelago for his father and brothers is a symbol of the social rise of the da Pelago⁵¹.

As previously mentioned, a change in the Vallombrosian notary took place after the Black Death. Although the more isolated monastery of Vallombrosa had been affected to a lesser extent by the mortality associated with the plague, the death or cessation of activities by the principal notaries working for Vallombrosa made it necessary to recruit new notaries. Among them was ser Lando di Fortino dalla Cicogna. The beginning of ser Lando di Fortino's work for Vallombrosa coincided with a difficult moment for the order, after the plague. The monks had to cope not only with the suffragan monasteries' demographic and economic collapse but also the vacancy of the abbey following the general abbot's death, which was probably due to the plague. Ser Lando di Fortino got in touch with leading figures of the 14th-century Vallombrosian monasticism: the future hermit and ascetic writer Giovanni dalle Celle (1310/1396)⁵², the new general abbot Michele Flammini (1348/1369) and his future successor, Simone Bencini (1369/1387)⁵³.

From the plague of 1348 to the plague of 1363, ser Lando di Fortino took over the role of notary and scribe for the general abbot of Vallombrosa⁵⁴. He went from being an itinerant notary in the countryside to deeding acts related to the spiritual and temporal administration of the monastery of Vallombrosa and numerous suffragan monasteries and priories. This professional change allowed ser Lando di Fortino to leave the context of the rural villages and markets, just as they began to lose their economic and social importance as a result of the mid-14th-century conjuncture⁵⁵.

As notary and scribe for the general abbot, ser Lando di Fortino followed the abbot's movements between Pratomagno and the Florentine area. The abbey palace of Guarlone in the eastern suburbs of Florence, and the second abbey palace, located within the city's eastern walls, were the two main places where he carried out his work. In March 1350, ser Lando di Fortino accompanied the general abbot to Rome, to the monastery of Santa Prassede, a journey perhaps related to the Jubilee⁵⁶.

⁵¹ Colivicchi, Meoni, and Spinelli (eds.) 1985: 22, 46-47; Ricci 1998: 32.

⁵² Moschella 2001.

⁵³ Salvestrini 2018.

⁵⁴ ASFi, CS, 260 – 24: cc. 597r-598r; 97: cc. 166r-178v; NA, 11377, 11383; *passim*.

⁵⁵ Barlucchi 2009.

⁵⁶ ASFi, NA, 11383: c. 88r.

This geographic expansion of mobility was accompanied by a widening of the 'documentary geography', which, in addition to the monasteries of the Vallombrosian order in central and northern Italy, came to include even Sardinia, a monastic province directly under the general abbot's jurisdiction⁵⁷. The documentation of ser Lando di Fortino's geographic expansion, in this sense, not only reflects the relations between the main monastery, the suffragan cloisters, and other lay and ecclesiastical institutions, but also the geographical and social mobility of people and clerical careers⁵⁸. Ser Lando di Fortino's leading role as a notary for the general abbot of Vallombrosa was also reflected in the drafting of the order's new constitutions, promulgated by the general abbot Michele Flammini in 1357⁵⁹.

To a certain extent, ser Lando di Fortino also continued to work for private individuals. It was a relatively common practice amongst notaries, as they tended to maintain relations with previous clients. For example, Coluccio Salutati, in the 1380s, when serving as Chancellor of the Republic of Florence, still had his registers available⁶⁰. Sometimes ser Lando di Fortino returned to his home village, where he kept in touch with his relatives and some trusted clients, including local notables like doctors, teachers, and other notaries.

Indeed, ser Lando di Fortino, since the early years of work for the Vallombrosian order—carried out mainly in the abbey palaces of Florence and Guarzone—had moved to the city. The demographic consequences of the 1348 plague and the progressive crisis of the small towns in the countryside encouraged a more liberal immigration policy, allowed by the Florence Commune, which granted immigrants various privileges and full citizenship rights⁶¹. Ser Lando di Fortino settled in San Giovanni quarter, in the 'parish' (*popolo*) of San Pier Maggiore, not far from the abbey palace, which was located near the *popolo* of Sant' Ambrogio.

In addition to residence in the city and the payment of communal 'taxes' (*prestanze*)⁶², the gradual acquisition of citizenship also involved family ties of a certain prestige. In Florence ser Lando di Fortino married *monna* Niccolosa di Bonifacio di Coppo, from the Bonaiuti family, a niece of the chronicler Marchionne di Coppo Stefani⁶³. Through

⁵⁷ Piras 2012.

⁵⁸ Cammarosano 1991: 93.

⁵⁹ ASFi, CS, 260 – 232.

⁶⁰ Sznura 2012: 52.

⁶¹ Falsini 1971: 475-479; De Angelis 2014: 154-155. This is a feature common to the entire Italian urban world. See Pinto 1996: 49-63.

⁶² ASFi, Prestanze, 9: c. 48v; 22: c. 52r; 106: c. 139r; 193: c. 140v; 270: c. 147r.

⁶³ ASFi, Manoscritti, 355: cc. 292r-293r; Sestan 1972; Astorri 1997: 189.

this marriage, ser Lando di Fortino also became related to the Albizzi, which lived among his own *popolo*: Niccolosa's aunt was the sister of Marchionne and wife of Vanni di Uberto degli Albizzi⁶⁴.

After settling in Florence, ser Lando di Fortino began also focusing on public offices, appearing in the *scrutini* list of notaries for the quarter of San Giovanni and being one of the *arroti* present at the councils of the Guild of Judges and Notaries⁶⁵. Ser Lando also began working for other religious institutions. In particular, ser Lando served as *notarius ad acta* in some ecclesiastical courts of judges delegated⁶⁶.

3.3. After the 'children's plague'. Notary and scribe for the bishop and the Florence episcopal curia (1363/1376)

As previously stated, the plague remained endemic in Italy and Europe, recurring every ten to fifteen years. In Florence, after the devastating wave of 1348, the plague raged once again in the city and the countryside in 1363. It became known as the 'children's plague', as it would mainly affect people who had not developed an immunity to the previous plague outbreak. Ser Lando, who in 1348 had lost his father, during the 1363 plague lost his brother, Bonamico di Fortino⁶⁷. Nevertheless, the second turning-point in ser Lando di Fortino's career took place in this renewed scenario of demographic and social crisis: his appointment as notary and scribe for the bishop and the Florence episcopal curia.

The consolidation of the social and familiar position and the prestige achieved by ser Lando in the circles of the Florentine Church were certainly determining factors in this professional advancement. On the other hand, there was no lack of contact between the monks of Vallombrosa and the bishopric of Florence: ser Lando di Fortino was in contact with Matteo, abbot of the suburban monastery of Ripoli, who was bishop's vicar in the 1350s⁶⁸. Also, Simone Bencini, the future general abbot of the order (see § 3.2), had personal contacts with the well-known jurist Lapo da Castiglionchio il Vecchio, who worked as a legal consultant for the episcopal curia and came into contact with ser Lando di Fortino⁶⁹.

⁶⁴ ASFi, NA, 11380: cc. 43r-44r.

⁶⁵ ASFi, GN, 28: cc. 53r-59r; Tratte, 569: cc. 11v-12r.

⁶⁶ ASFi, NA, 11378. On the figures and courts of delegated judges cf. Müller 2016: 210-219.

⁶⁷ ASFi, NA, 20028: cc. 55r-v.

⁶⁸ ASFi, NA, 11383: c. 98r.

⁶⁹ Salvestrini 1998: 86-91; 2008: 110-111. About Lapo da Castiglionchio il Vecchio see Sznura (ed.) 2005.

Similarly to the Vallombrosian experience (see § 3.2), the beginning of ser Lando di Fortino's service in the Florence episcopal curia coincided with the appointment of the new bishop, Piero Corsini, after the death, in the months of the plague, of his predecessor, Filippo dell'Antella. Even the cleric and scholar Francesco Nelli, who often served as a notary of the Florentine episcopal curia, died of the plague in Naples in the Summer of 1363, when he was working as *spenditore* for the *Gran Siniscalco* of the Kingdom of Naples, Niccolò Acciaiuoli⁷⁰.

In Tuscany, as in other contexts, the bishoprics and episcopal courts' documentary culture were based on the work of notaries, who contributed to structuring the episcopal documentation and archives⁷¹. The Tuscan episcopal courts tended to employ several notaries simultaneously, some of whom also worked for other ecclesiastical institutions, such as cathedral chapters⁷². From the 14th to the first half of the 15th-century, the documentary practices of the Florentine bishopric and episcopal curia were largely based on the work of a family of notaries. As noted earlier, this was a feature also found at the Vallombrosa abbey (see § 3.2).

This family of notaries came from the castle of Lutiano, in Mugello, a territory where the bishopric owned significant landed property and exercised jurisdictional prerogatives. In addition to ser Francesco di Ottaviano (1336/1362)⁷³, there were also ser Lorenzo di ser Tano (Ottaviano) (1359/1399), ser Francesco's brother—about whom we have some fragments of a *memoriale*⁷⁴—, his son ser Filippo (1375/1457)⁷⁵, and his nephew ser Jacopo da Lutiano (1430/1468)⁷⁶. Like the da Rabatta, the da Lutiano forged marriage ties between ancient families that revolved around the bishopric of Florence, particularly the Visdomini family, through whom da Lutiano also came into contact with the Albizzi, a family that ser Lando di Fortino was related to. The da Lutiano, owners of significant real estate and landed property in their home village in Mugello, also worked for private individuals and were active

⁷⁰ Francesco Nelli served as a notary for the episcopal curia many times under the bishops Francesco Silvestri da Cingoli (1323/1341), Angelo Acciaiuoli (1342/1355), and Filippo dell'Antella (1357/1363). See Garbini 2013. Francesco da Barberino, another well-known literary man (1264/1348), served as a notary for the Florence bishop across the 13th and 14th-centuries. See Pasquini 1997.

⁷¹ Tanzini 2020: 46–49, 56–59. This feature is also found in some centres in northern Italy, for example, in Milan. See Belloni 2003.

⁷² Borghero 2020a.

⁷³ ASFi, NA, 8043–8045.

⁷⁴ ASFi, NA, 12136–12146; Brocchi 1977 [1748].

⁷⁵ ASFi, NA, 7447–7457.

⁷⁶ ASFi, NA, 11083–11094. A register of the da Lutiano is conserved at ASAFi, ND, 46.

in land sales, loans, and economic investments. Like the da Pelago, the da Lutiano had a family burial chapel in the parish church of Borgo San Lorenzo.

Ser Lando di Fortino worked as a notary for the Florence episcopal curia from 1363 to 1375, under the bishops Piero Corsini (1363/1370) and Angelo Ricasoli (1370/1383)⁷⁷. Ser Lando di Fortino's activities, like other notaries in the bishopric, encompassed the various areas of the bishop's ministry. Different notaries often appear together, or at work on different document types. Asset management, episcopal justice, relations with the clergy and secular institutions represent, through law and writing, an organic whole of the diocesan governance:

la figura del notaio si prestava a fungere da tratto di collegamento tra le logiche di governo della curia, la cultura del vicario e le consuetudini locali, che i notai potevano conoscere anche tramite la loro esperienza di professionisti *ad instrumenta* per privati o incaricati degli uffici comunali⁷⁸.

The usual place for drafting acts was the episcopal palace, near which stood the chapel, the church of San Salvatore al Vescovo, the seat of the episcopal court, which was presided over by the bishop's vicar. The vicar was assisted not only by notaries but also legal counsels. These were prominent figures, canonists, or doctors *in utroque iure*, who also worked outside the bishopric. At the bishopric and the Florence episcopal curia, ser Lando di Fortino had the opportunity to meet some of the leading jurists of 14th-century Florence: Ristoro Canigiani, Guido Bonciani, and Lapo da Castiglionchio⁷⁹. During his years at the bishopric, ser Lando di Fortino also became acquainted with ser Giovanni Cambini, part of that "folta schiera dei notai che furono insieme uomini di legge, buoni cultori delle lettere ed amici di umanisti"⁸⁰, in contact with Coluccio Salutati.

Ser Lando di Fortino took care of various legal negotiations for Lapo da Castiglionchio⁸¹ and maintained wider relationships with the family of the bishop Angelo Ricasoli, who also came from the Upper Valdarno⁸². Relations between the Orlandini and Ricasoli continued even after

⁷⁷ ASFi, NA, 11379-11382, 11384-11386; ASAFi, AB, A1: cc. 44r-188r; ND, 45, 47.

⁷⁸ Tanzini 2020: 93.

⁷⁹ Tanzini 2020: 94-101, 178, 225, 261-262.

⁸⁰ Orvieto 1974.

⁸¹ ASFi, NA, 11380: cc. 19v-22r, 29v-30v, 131r-v, 135r, 180v, 206r; 11384: cc. 19v, 145v; 11381: cc. 121r, 142r.

⁸² Tanzini 2014a; Borghero 2020b.

ser Lando di Fortino's death and were further strengthened through a marriage and asset policy⁸³.

In 1369 ser Lando also drafted the constitutions of the chapter of the church of San Lorenzo, on commission from the bishop⁸⁴. We also find deeds in favour of Vallombrosian monks, other religious institutions and individuals, as well as private individuals, friends, and relatives. Ser Lando di Fortino appears as *aroto* or *consigliere* in some of the Guild of Judges and Notaries councils, where Guido Bonciani and Lapo da Castiglionchio, as well as their colleagues working at the episcopal curia, often acted as *consoli* and *consiglieri*⁸⁵. Along with them, we find well-known jurists, notaries, and politicians of the second half of the 14th-century Florence⁸⁶.

Conclusively, working for the bishop and the Florentine episcopal curia was, for ser Lando di Fortino, a fundamental and definitive way of expanding his socio-professional network, at the base of his descendants' fortune.

3.4. *The descendants. Between the Republic Chancellery and Florentine Humanism*

Ser Lando di Fortino had several sons, some of whom followed in his footsteps and worked as notaries. The first was ser Zanobi, born perhaps from a previous marriage, followed by Piero, ser Benedetto, ser Paolo, and ser Francesco. Other sons worked in trading and manufacturing, such as Jacopo, Andrea, and Giovanni, enrolled in the *Arte della Lana*, and Stefano, a merchant. There were also three daughters: Nofria, Lorenza and Caterina, the latter a nun at the Vallombrosian monastery of San Giovanni Evangelista in Florence in 1372⁸⁷. Ser Lando di Fortino died in July 1376, as reported in a *provvisione* of the Commune of Florence approved the following month. According to the statutes of the guild of notaries, members of the guild were required to attend the funeral of a colleague, while notaries should have to keep their shop's doors half-closed⁸⁸.

One of the primary traces for identifying successful itineraries in ascending social mobility at the family level is the adoption of patro-

⁸³ ASFi, Catasto, 499: cc. 603v-611r; Manoscritti, 355: c. 292v.

⁸⁴ ACSL, Manoscritti, 800, 2132.

⁸⁵ ASFi, GN, 19, 22, 26, 28: *passim*.

⁸⁶ Among others, Alessandro dell'Antella, Bene di Jacopo del Bene, Donato Barbadori, Donato Velluti, Filippo di messer Tommaso Corsini and Ristoro Canigiani.

⁸⁷ ASFi, Catasto, 499: c. 611r; Raccolta Sebgondini, 2296; BNCF, Collezione Genealogica Passerini, 187 – 66; Magliabechiani, II.1.136: c. 9v; Panella 1930: 248-249.

⁸⁸ ASFi, Provvisioni, Registri, 64: cc. 126v-127r; Calleri 1966: 94.

nymics that gradually become distinct surnames. This is the case of the descendants of ser Lando di Fortino, who assumed the *cognomen* Fortini⁸⁹. The Fortini family was not a part of the Florentine political class until the 1380s, but in the following decades they became increasingly influential. On several occasions, they were appointed to public offices, including the *tre maggiori*, and ambassadors⁹⁰. The Fortini also diversified their activities and interests, achieving a significant economic status. According to the 1427 Catasto, with an asset of 19,874 florins and numerous real estates declared, the Fortini were among the wealthiest taxpayers in the San Giovanni quarter. By this time, the Orlandini family had separated into two branches but continued to maintain various undivided properties in the village of Cicogna, as well as houses in Florence, and *poderi* in the countryside⁹¹.

Some of ser Lando di Fortino's sons were active in the business field, taking interest in wool and silk manufacturing, with good profits. Andrea owned a wool draper's workshop in the *popolo* of San Martino al Vescovo and held various offices for the *Arte della Lana* and the *Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore*, which was patronized by the same guild. Stefano was active as a merchant in Palermo since the mid-1380s, but business was perhaps not going so well, since in 1392 his mother and brothers rejected his inheritance. Giovanni, who was also a merchant, died in a shipwreck in 1396⁹².

The most important family member was ser Benedetto (di ser Lando) Fortini (c.1350/1406), an established notary. From 1374 he was appointed *coadiutore* to the Republic Chancellor for the *Tratte*, an office previously held by Coluccio Salutati, who was, shortly after, appointed Republic Chancellor. The intermediation of ser Giovanni Cambini, episcopal notary already in contact with ser Lando di Fortino, and of Donato Acciaiuoli, related to the bishop Angelo Ricasoli, was fundamental. This relations network, in which was involved the faction of the *Parte Guelfa* led by Lapo da Castiglionchio, also in contact with Ser Lando di Fortino (cf. § 3.3), allowed ser Benedetto Fortini to become a collaborator and then a colleague of the most important representative of the first generation of Florentine humanists⁹³.

Owing to his culture and ability as *dettatore*, ser Benedetto Fortini began a brilliant career, wherein he held offices of considerable prestige

⁸⁹ Klapisch-Zuber 1980.

⁹⁰ ASFi, Manoscritti, 287: *passim*; Battista 2012: 180-181.

⁹¹ ASFi, Catasto, 80: cc. 375r; 556v-568v; Ciappelli 1997b.

⁹² ASFi, Ripudie di eredità, 4: c. 70v; Brucker 1980: 65; Franceschi 1993: 29; Ves-
tri (ed.) 2015: 37.

⁹³ Marzi 1910: 106-187; Arrighi 2012; Battista 2012; Klein 2012.

and longevity. From the complex phase of the War of the Eight Saints (1375/1378) to the Tumult of the Ciompi (1378/1382), up to the war against the Visconti of Milan (1385/1402), he maintained relations with the highest representatives of the Florentine governing class. He was appointed ambassador on several occasions and in 1402, together with his brother Paolo, he received the title of palatine count from Emperor Robert of Bavaria in Padua. In 1405 ser Benedetto Fortini was sent to assist the Florentine ambassadors in the negotiations for the acquisition of Pisa. The relations ser Benedetto Fortini kept with the different factions allowed him to retain his prestigious positions, promote his brothers to important offices, and structure fruitful family relationships despite the changing political circumstances. Ser Benedetto Fortini's career ended brilliantly in 1406 when, after Coluccio Salutati's death, he became Republic Chancellor. Ser Benedetto Fortini died in December of the same year and was buried with a solemn funeral in the Basilica of Santa Croce⁹⁴.

Following in his brother's footsteps, ser Paolo Fortini (c.1370/1433) held prestigious offices from the 1390s until he became Republic Chancellor in 1411, succeeding the well-known humanist Leonardo Bruni. His family's relationship with the Albizzi and his role in the political struggle between the Albizzi and the Medici, nevertheless, led to the loss of his office as chancellor in 1427. Ser Paolo Fortini was, however, able to maintain a leading position in Florentine politics as a member of the Albizzi faction until his death, which came shortly before Cosimo de' Medici's exile in 1433⁹⁵.

At this time, Bartolomeo Fortini, son of ser Benedetto (1402/c.1470), despite his uncle and family ties with the Albizzi, was part of the *balia* that recalled Cosimo from exile in 1434. Like his father, Bartolomeo undertook mercantile activities in the silk and wool businesses, together with Bardi and Frescobaldi. Despite some financial difficulties, Bartolomeo continued to have considerable resources at his disposal and went on to hold various intrinsic and extrinsic public offices until 1444. In that year, he was banned because of conflicting interests with the Diotallevi family (also known as Neroni), which had also been affected by similar measures after the anti-Medicean conspiracy of 1466. Bartolomeo was in close relation with well-known exponents of Florentine Humanism, such as Lapo da Castiglionchio il Giovane, nephew of Lapo da Castiglionchio il Vecchio, already in contact with ser Lando di Fortino (cf. § 3.3). Bartolomeo was part of the circles of the Accademia Platonica of

⁹⁴ About ser Benedetto Fortini see Astorri 1997.

⁹⁵ About ser Paolo Fortini see Ciappelli 1997b.

Marsilio Ficino, and he was himself the author of a work of religious subject and possessed some valuable manuscripts⁹⁶.

The construction of ennobling family memory accompanied the emergence of the Fortini within the Florentine political class and their professional diversification. As early as the end of the 14th-century, the Fortini explicitly associated themselves with the surname *de Orlandini-is*, while, at the beginning of the 17th-century, scholars and genealogists identified the origins of their descendants to the countryside nobility, defining them as ancient castle lords⁹⁷. At this chronological height, the family already had its own coat of arms⁹⁸.

4. Conclusions

“La gente nuova e i sùbiti guadagni” (*Inferno* 16.73); this is likely how Dante, a few decades earlier, would have referred to the Fortini: families of recent immigration from the countryside, a social class that recently emerged in Florence’s economic and political world, destined to play a central role in Florentine society in the second half of the 14th-century⁹⁹.

Forte di piccoli capitali e di capacità tecniche, spesso priva di scrupoli, avvantaggiata dai vuoti lasciati dai fallimenti e dalla peste, premiata socialmente da matrimoni con membri di antiche famiglie ormai in declino, la ‘gente nuova’, dopo la metà del secolo, si aprì impetuosamente ai rischi di quelle attività commerciali e bancarie da cui si ritraevano, paghi delle ricchezze accumulate nella città e nel contado, i membri delle più antiche casate mercantili¹⁰⁰.

Emigration from the countryside was a socio-professional turning point, which lead to social rise paths, especially if the migrants had the economic, professional, and cultural capital to join the right social networks. The same applied to notaries: in Florence, the demand for notaries, required both for public offices and for private practice, was met mainly by the immigration from the countryside. Between 1343 and 1382, 65% of the notaries working in Florence public offices belonged to recently immigrated families¹⁰¹.

⁹⁶ About Bartolomeo Fortini see Ciappelli 1997a.

⁹⁷ ASFi, Manoscritti, 252: cc. 1137v-1139r; 421: c. 283v; BNCF, Conventi Soppressi, A.I.774: 375-376. On the construction of a family memory for ennobling purposes see Boutier, Pia Paoli 1996; Bizzocchi 2009; Pazzagli 2012.

⁹⁸ ASFi, Ceramelli Papiani, 2095.

⁹⁹ Becker 1962a; Brucker 1962.

¹⁰⁰ Luzzati 1987: 718.

¹⁰¹ Becker 1962b: 370.

Ser Lando di Fortino was among a group of notaries who, following the plague epidemic, moved to Florence from the Upper Valdarno and Casentino areas. What emerges is a network of notaries who, perhaps followings a few ringleaders, tried to start or increase their fortunes in the city. Among them was ser Piero di ser Grifo, from Pratovecchio, a village which was, at the time, under the domain of the Guidi counts. Ser Piero di ser Grifo, son of a notary, in 1336, after handing over his business in his native village to his brother—who maintained a prestigious position in his rural community—moved to Florence, thanks also to the pro-Florentine sympathies of the Guidi counts. In Florence, ser Piero di ser Grifo embarked on a dazzling public and political career, becoming one of the leading professionals in the city's major institutions and offices, and taking the nickname ser Piero delle Riformagioni¹⁰².

The economic and social rise of ser Ristoro di ser Jacopo da Figline, a notary from the Upper Valdarno who emigrated to Florence in the middle of the 14th-century, is another example of these dynamics. Ser Ristoro da Figline became a reference point for the compatriot transferred to Florence, for prominent families and ecclesiastical institutions. Later on, he also held important public offices and political positions. At the same time, he diversified his professional horizons by founding a wool company and a financial and commercial company, which, after his death, were handled by his sons and nephews. From the socio-professional fortune of ser Ristoro came the Serristori, an important patrician family in late republican and grand-ducal Florence¹⁰³.

Recent studies, arguing the issue and methodologies of social mobility studies, have re-evaluated and highlighted the potential of a qualitative approach based on individual case studies, such as personal and family biographies¹⁰⁴. Regarding the relationship between the notary, professional changes, and social mobility in the late Middle Ages, the abundance of sources that characterizes specific documentary contexts, such as the city of Florence, make it possible to reconstruct certain paradigmatic profiles, which, considered as a series, are extremely useful for deducing interpretative models about careers and dynamics of social rise. The biography of ser Lando di Fortino, “*pater familiæ imprenditore di sé stesso e dei suoi discendenti*”¹⁰⁵, is certainly a representative case study.

¹⁰² Barlucchi 2016.

¹⁰³ Tognetti 2003.

¹⁰⁴ Berteaux, Thompson 1997.

¹⁰⁵ Battista 2012: 178.

Tutte le avventure individuali si fondono in una realtà più complessa, quella del sociale [...]. Non vi è fatto in cui non sia possibile distinguere una parte di individuale e una parte di sociale, una parte di contingenza e una parte di regolarità¹⁰⁶.

Despite some historiographical trends in recent decades tended to consider the 14th-century epidemic crises as an external and accelerating event of long-term economic and social processes, the demographic shock that hit Italy and Europe—although in a different dramatic way—must be considered, also concerning the current sanitary, social, and economic effects of a worldwide pandemic, as a periodizing event related to socio-economic and professional changes.

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¹⁰⁶ Braudel 1973: 39, 108.

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