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Renaissance attachment to things: material culture in last wills and testaments¹

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Over the past decade ‘material culture’ has become a sub-discipline of Italian Renaissance studies. This literature, however, has focused on the rich and their objects preserved in museums or reflected in paintings. In addition, the period 1300 to 1600 has been treated without attention to changes in the relationship between people and possessions. The article turns to last wills and testaments, which survive in great numbers and sink deep roots through late medieval and Renaissance cities and their hinterlands. They reveal aspirations and anxieties about things from post-mortem repairs to farm houses to pillows of monk’s wool. These aspirations changed fundamentally after the Black Death. Earlier, during the ‘commercial revolution’, ordinary merchants, artisans, and peasants on their deathbeds practised what the mendicants preached: stripping themselves of their possessions, they converted their estates to coin to be scattered among pious and non-pious beneficiaries. After the Black Death, testators began to reverse tack, devising ever more complex legal strategies to govern the future flow of their goods. This work of the dead had larger economic consequences. By encouraging the liquidation of estates, the earlier mendicant ideology quickened the velocity of exchange, while the early Renaissance attachment to things did the opposite.

Who would find it easy, after a visit to Ravenna and its solemn mosaics, to think of noisy children in Byzantium, or who thinks of haggard peasants in the Flanders of Rubens?
E. H. Gombrich²

Few new studies of wills over the past 20 years have changed our view of late medieval and Renaissance Italy, especially as regards the testament’s possibilities for tapping the world of things—everyday household items, clothing of artisans and shopkeepers, as well as houses and landed property of merchants, elites, or subaltern classes.³ This absence is all the more striking given the recent infusion of funding, new books and articles, and new enthusiasm for the ‘Renaissance’ world of things.⁴ The surprising absence of new work on wills coupled with this new

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² Gombrich, ‘Art and scholarship’, p. 108.

³ For new works on disinheritance and legal aspects of wills, see Kuehn, *Law, family, and women*; idem, *Heirs, kin, and creditors*. For a survey of the literature, see Cohn, ‘Last wills and testaments’.

⁴ ‘The material Renaissance: costs and consumption in Italy 1300–1650’, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board and the Getty Grant Program. See, for instance, O’Malley and Welch, eds., *Material Renaissance*;

enthusiasm for what now ranks as a sub-discipline within Renaissance studies has prompted this article, which returns to the will to explore its possibilities within this new arena of study and its larger implications for the economic history of the later middle ages and Renaissance. In defining the range of objects that constitute any study of material culture, this article returns to one of its pioneers. Like Braudel's, my notion reflects not only possessions that were 'mobile', whether precious jewels or banal utensils, but the built environments that housed them and the anxieties and aspirations that linked persons to these 'things'.⁵ The dichotomy of things—*bona mobilia et immobilia*—were not rigidly fixed as we often assume. By the sixteenth century across the Italian peninsula, testamentary clauses of *fideicommissum* restricted and redefined precious movable objects, legally transforming them into 'immovables',⁶ while in the north of Europe houses, and even land, were often legally defined as movables.⁷ Why should the interior decoration of a Renaissance palace be considered mainstream in studies of material culture, while improvements to farm houses that obsessed more humble testators on their deathbeds are placed outside it?

To examine the contours of this new sub-discipline for Renaissance Italy, we turn to two of its best-known products: Jardine's *Worldly goods* and Welch's *Shopping in the Renaissance*. Both present rich panoplies of the material culture of the Renaissance but are limited largely to prized possessions of elites, for the most part objects or their representations now on display in museums, palaces, or churches. Jardine's *Worldly goods* presents a lush description of objects depicted in Renaissance paintings—exquisite gems, jewellery, interior designs, and especially lavish clothing, such as the ceremonial dress of Doge Leonardo Loredan and the colossally expensive gold helmet studded with pearls, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds created for the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in the 1530s—hardly the everyday attire even of elites.⁸

Many of the same objects and patrons parade through Welch's more nuanced *Shopping in the Renaissance*, especially the Renaissance's supreme matron of arts, Isabelle d'Este, and her shopping sprees to clothe herself and to fill her *studiolo* and *grotta* with works from antiquity and of the best artists of her time. Welch's material world descends lower down the social ladder than Jardine's with rare illustrations of artisans at work, brief mentions of shopkeepers' records, and poetry depicting 'low-life'.⁹ Although the thin threads of interpretation in the two books run in opposite directions, they share other aspects: both treat the Renaissance without chronological distinctions, c.1300 to 1600, and neither contrasts this

Cavallo and Evangelisti, eds., *Domestic institutional interiors*; and other works discussed below. For an earlier signalling of the centrality of material culture for defining and understanding the Renaissance, see Findlen, 'Possessing the past'.

⁵ Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle*. On Braudel as a pioneer of the history of material culture in the second half of the twentieth century and criticism of him, see Allerston, 'Clothing', pp. 367–70, 375, 378. On definitions of cultural materialism and material culture that stress the importance of societal relationships between possessions and people, see Perry, 'Introduction', esp. pp. ix–xii; Martines, 'Renaissance'; Miller, *Material culture*. For definitions that consider the home and built property as central to material culture, see Auslander, 'Beyond words', p. 1023; and essays in Cavallo and Evangelisti, eds., *Domestic institutional interiors*.

⁶ Findlen, 'Ereditare un museo', p. 52.

⁷ Howell, *Commerce before capitalism*, pp. 49–92.

⁸ Jardine, *Worldly goods*, pp. 121, 137–81; see the criticisms of Jardine in Martines, 'Renaissance'.

⁹ Welch, *Shopping*, p. 44. Several essays in O'Malley and Welch, eds., *Material Renaissance*, penetrate further across the social spectrum; see especially Matchette, 'Credit and credibility', and Hohti, 'Innkeeper's goods'.

supposed period with what came before or afterwards. For Jardine, works from the thirteenth-century Sieneese painter Duccio form part of a seamless world that stretched to the Middle East and in time to the seventeenth century.¹⁰ Similarly, Welch's Renaissance runs from the fourteenth century to the end of the sixteenth with little sense of change or development: descriptions of local markets, peasants, and women depicted by a mid-fourteenth-century Florentine poet buttress those of Bolognese society described in a poem of the 1590s.¹¹ Finally, neither pays great attention to the economics of material culture—trends in production, standards of living, patterns of consumption, or the impact of luxury production and ideology on other aspects of the economy.¹²

Ultimately, notions of the Renaissance in the two differ. Jardine reconfirms Burckhardt's Renaissance modernity; the origins of our present aspirations are found in the Renaissance spirit of 'discovery and innovation' that 'kindled the desire to purchase the rare and the beautiful'.¹³ By contrast, Welch distances herself from Burckhardt and his modern economic interpreter, Goldthwaite, who, in analysing Renaissance palaces, their furnishings, and other luxuries, argued that these industries raised artisans' purchasing power, thereby creating the first stirrings of a consumer society.¹⁴ Welch keeps the old chronological divisions in tact, arguing that not until the eighteenth century and then only in England did capitalism reach that stage. However, she never compares economic data on consumption from Renaissance Italy with eighteenth-century England.¹⁵ For her, Italian Renaissance goods and their consumption by merchant princes and princesses remained deeply embedded in social relations: 'Renaissance buying practices were a multiplicity of interconnected events and acts, dependent as much on time, trust, social relations and networks as on the seemingly impersonal issues of price, production and demand'.¹⁶ Her Renaissance was akin to Polanyi's near timeless world of pre-capitalist economies of reciprocity that characterized economic life from pre-historic tribes to the eve of modern industrial capitalism.¹⁷ How then did this Renaissance splendour and spending differ from the commercial revolution of the thirteenth century?¹⁸ How does such a blanket description differentiate the Renaissance, not only from the eighteenth century, but from more advanced capitalist development?¹⁹ Even today, goods and their trade are

¹⁰ Jardine, *Worldly goods*, p. 119.

¹¹ Welch, *Shopping*, p. 35.

¹² For England, see Dyer, *Standards of living*; idem, *Making a living*; Kowaleski, 'Consumer economy'. For Florence and Italy, see the works of Goldthwaite cited below, n. 14, and Stuard, *Gilding the market*.

¹³ Jardine, *Worldly goods*, p. 436. See Burckhardt, *Civilization*, pt. IV, 'The discovery of the world and man'.

¹⁴ Goldthwaite, *Building of Renaissance Florence*; idem, *Wealth and the demand for art*; idem, *Economy of Renaissance Florence*; idem, 'Economy of Renaissance Italy'. More recently, he has changed his mind: 'As has often been observed, preindustrial economies were not yet driven by consumerism and offered few outlets for modest savings . . .'; idem, *Economy of Renaissance Florence*, p. 366.

¹⁵ As Bettoni, *I beni dell'agiatezza*, has shown for Brescia, the eighteenth century did not suddenly inaugurate a 'consumer revolution'; instead, these new patterns of consumption arose from changes in the well-being of the upper and middling classes during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

¹⁶ Welch, *Shopping*, p. 303. Also, see idem, 'New, old and second-hand culture'.

¹⁷ Polanyi, *Great transformation*, pp. 54–5.

¹⁸ On the Commercial Revolution, see Lopez, 'Trade'; Jones, *Italian city-state*, pp. 152–332.

¹⁹ The theme of embedded prices is further developed in O'Malley and Welch, eds., *Material Renaissance*, which describes the complexities and instability of coinage, the importance of social relations and government corruption, barter, and haggling in affecting prices. Yet, similar to Welch, *Shopping*, the essays fail to draw distinctions between the Renaissance world of exchange and that which preceded or followed it.

embedded in relations of trust and often in economies of the gift with prices reflecting who you are or who you know.²⁰ To be sure, the degree and character of this ‘embeddedness’ have changed fundamentally from the early middle ages to industrial capitalism and beyond. As this article will suggest, this history does not necessarily chart a linear progression over the course of western civilization.

I

Despite the new enthusiasm for the material culture of Renaissance Italy, there seem to be few new works that analyse changes in consumer patterns, ownership, fashion, or attitudes towards property from marriage contracts, inventories,²¹ or last wills and testaments.²² Inventories survive for late medieval and early modern Italy but remain few in number (in comparison with wills) and are found almost exclusively for elites—merchant princes or their wives—until at least the sixteenth century.²³ As a result, historians know of the luxury items at death of the rich and famous such as Marco Polo, the Venetian doge Francesco Dandolo, and the Merchant of Prato, Francesco di Marco Datini.²⁴ Last wills and testaments, on the other hand, survive in great numbers, not only for capital cities of Renaissance Italy, but for small towns and villages, and extend to those with little property,

²⁰ On the persistence of pre-capitalist forms of economic behaviour and symbolic values (rather than exchange values) of objects to the present, see Ago, ‘Using things as money’, p. 44; Howell, *Commerce before capitalism*, pp. 145–207.

²¹ By contrast, these documents have been the principal source for the study of material culture and patterns of consumption in early modern England; see, for instance, Arkell, Evans, and Goose, eds., *When death do us part*; Nenadic, ‘Middle-rank consumers’; Muldrew, *Economy of obligation*. Goldthwaite, *Economy of Renaissance Florence*, p. 395, claims that ‘Oriental rugs show up in the inventories of the houses of people in all classes’, suggesting that these records may survive in great numbers and penetrated all classes in Florence by the sixteenth century, but he gives no evidence for it. Hohti, ‘Innkeeper’s goods’, p. 243, mentions several sixteenth-century inventories and describes one of a Siense innkeeper in 1533, but offers no quantitative analysis of these records, of how consumption patterns may have changed over time or differed between classes and geographic regions. Also, see Stuard, *Gilding the market*; and nn. 22 and 23 below for Italian studies using inventories.

²² Howell, *Commerce before capitalism*, pp. 177–81, 203, uses wills to discuss the varieties of gifts from 1300 to 1600. From the north (principally Douai) she charts no change in the grants of objects (with their particular ties and emotional freight) as opposed to legacies rendered as monetary values.

²³ On late medieval and Renaissance inventories, see Mazzi, ‘Gli inventari dei beni’. To date, no one has written a guide to Renaissance Italian inventories or studied how their clientele may have changed over time or differed regionally. In addition to appendages to wills, occasionally these records appear in the *ricordanze* of elites. By the sixteenth century, Florence (Ufficio de’ Pupilli), Venice (Giudici di Petizion), and Brescia (Congrega della Carità Apostolica) kept inventories of the properties of wards. On these, see *ibid.*, pp. 208–9; Fisher, ‘State’; Thornton, *Scholar*, p. 15; and Bettoni, *I beni dell’agiatezza*, p. 38. Palumbo-Fossati, ‘L’interno della casa dell’artigiano’, pp. 111–12, 118, suggests that notarized inventories did not become prevalent in Venice until the second half of the sixteenth century; these pertained mainly to orphans or elites. Even in eighteenth-century Italy inventories were mostly of the rich; see Tessari, *Trasferimenti patrimoniali*, p. 162; Bettoni, *I beni dell’agiatezza*. Inventories of artisans and peasants survive in small numbers for certain regions of Italy by the fifteenth century; see Mazzi, ‘Gli inventari dei beni’, pp. 210–14. After an exhaustive search through thousands of notarial acts for Florentine Tuscany, Mazzi and Raveggi, ‘Masserizie contadine’, and *idem*, *Gli uomini e le cose*, pp. 319–408, find only 65 inventories of supposed peasants; most of them, however, appear as substantial and wealthy farmers. On the historiography of inventories in early modern Italy, see Mazzi, ‘Gli inventari dei beni’; Bettoni, *I beni dell’agiatezza*, pp. 23–34.

²⁴ Stuard, *Gilding the market*, has summarized the literature on inventories in the late middle ages. Of the dozen she cites, only one cuts beneath the world of merchant elites, that of the Florentine artist Doffo di Bandino, redacted by his mother in 1383. Stuard maintains that ‘inventories of fourteenth-century Italy lack both the quantity and descriptive power of later runs’ but have been an ‘underutilized source for studying demand and the role played by new patterns of consumption’; *ibid.*, p. 47. Other studies using inventories have concentrated on early modern Italy: Thornton, *Scholar*; Palumbo-Fossati, ‘L’interno della casa dell’artigiano’; Brown, ‘Behind the walls’; Muzzarelli, *Guardaroba medievale*.

including peasants and disenfranchised workers in the wool industry.²⁵ These documents highlight possessions across societal divides and, more than inventories or objects in museums, can reveal concretely the aspirations and relations between persons and possessions.

In the 1980s I collected a sample of 3,200 wills from six cities and their *contadi* (hinterlands) in Tuscany and Umbria (Arezzo, Assisi, Florence, Perugia, Pisa, and Siena), and in the 1990s more than 1,000 from Douai in Flanders from the end of the twelfth century to 1425. These sources chart changes in mentality over time and distinctions over space, within Italy and between Italy and cities across the Alps,²⁶ but I did not then use the testament to understand Renaissance material culture per se, that is, the changing relations between persons and possessions—whether landed property or objects from used clothes to reconstructions of houses. This article returns to these sources to examine the distinctiveness of early Renaissance material culture that ensued from the Black Death to the fifteenth century.²⁷ Unlike the beautifully illustrated works selected from the very top of society, few surviving objects can be found in wills before the sixteenth century. The material culture uncovered by these documents is largely one that now can be analysed by words alone. Nonetheless, these sources allow the historian to penetrate beneath the aspirations of elites and the vagaries of surviving objects, to enter the bowels of Renaissance society and economy—worlds of shopkeepers, artisans, and peasants—and to examine change over time in aspirations and anxieties about their possessions.

From thousands of pious and non-pious bequests, I have argued that the second plague of 1362–3, a traumatic reliving of the major one in 1348, was the caesura in testamentary practices and of mentalities. Perhaps most immediate and most understandable were changes in burial practices. These testamentary demands reflect directly on material culture: the preservation and commemoration of physical remains—the body—and the objects commissioned post-mortem to achieve these ends. After 1348, but increasingly so after the second plague, testators in Tuscany and Umbria no longer left these matters to their executors' whims but instead demanded where they were to be buried. During the thirteenth century more than three-quarters of Florentine testators, for example, left these final decisions to heirs or executors. In the plague year 1363 that proportion dropped precipitously to 10 per cent and remained at this level until the end of my analysis in 1425. Moreover, within churches and graveyards testators specified the exact place of their burial grounds. Most spectacularly and of importance to late medieval and Renaissance art history was the late fourteenth-century boom in chapel building commissioned with monumental graves, fresco cycles, and perpetual light shows of various coloured waxes to be burnt and accompanied by sung masses, employing dozens of priests or friars. In the six cities of Tuscany and Umbria

²⁵ In addition, testaments were often bound in separate notarial books, especially by the sixteenth century in Florence and Siena, but not Milan.

²⁶ Cohn, *Death and property in Siena*; idem, 'Le ultime volontà'; idem, *Cult of remembrance*; idem, 'Burial in the early Renaissance'; idem, 'Testamenti e storia'; idem, 'Piété et commande'; idem, 'Piety and religious practice'; idem, 'Collective amnesia'; idem, 'Place of the dead'; idem, 'Two pictures'; idem, 'Culture and memory'.

²⁷ In the present article, I make no attempt to analyse differences in material culture and attitudes seen in testaments from one city-state to the next or between the city and countryside as I have done for other questions using testamentary evidence. Renaissance Italian wills, however, make such comparisons possible.

commissions for chapels rose from less than 0.6 per thousand pious bequests before 1300 to 28 per thousand immediately after the second plague of 1363, an increase by 50-fold.²⁸ These objects were generally matters of the rich, as with the colossal commission of a member of the Tarlati family, then Arezzo's ruling dynasty, for a burial complex to be built within the Franciscan mountain shrine of La Verna in 1348 (this was not built until the early fifteenth century).²⁹

By the late fourteenth century, however, shopkeepers and even artisans could aspire to construct such objects (even if on a more modest scale) to memorialize their bones and assist the future journey of their souls. Such was the Black Death commission by a Florentine druggist, whose testament contained only one pious legacy, an order to build a burial chapel within San Lorenzo.³⁰ In 1361 an Aretine ironmonger³¹ left the entirety of his residual estate to build a chapel in that city's Augustinian church, and in 1416 a cobbler from Vinci, who earlier had worked in the working-class parishes of Florence, left a mere 50 florins to construct a chapel to commemorate his remains within his native village and named after his recently minted family name.³² The cobbler had not necessarily overstepped the bounds of possibility for post-Black Death Tuscany. In 1390, the wife of a belt-maker endowed a chapel to be constructed in the ancient Aretine abbey of Santa Fiora.³³ In 1411, a widow of a tanner ordered a chapel to be constructed in the Perugian friary of Monte Morciano.³⁴ And in 1348, the Aretine widow of a weaver (in Tuscany, a disenfranchised worker with no rights of citizenship) sold all her possessions for one pious bequest, the construction of a chapel in Arezzo's Santa Maria in Gradibus.³⁵

Post-plague testators designated their graves topographically with financial outlays far less costly than chapel commissions or monumental graves by referencing objects already in place to memorialize their bones. Such was the design of a Pisan furnace-maker's widow in 1411, who insisted that her heirs bury her 'next to the olive trees in the Campo Santo'.³⁶ Where no olive trees stood, testators commissioned cheap paintings to specify their exact place of burial. Such commissions descended even into the worlds of peasants, as with the labourer Nullo di Pepe, who lived along the border of Perugia and Todi. His testament commissioned a 'Maestà' for 10 lire to hang above his grave in his village church.³⁷ In the city such designs cost more. A Perugian without a family name left 25 lire for a 'Maestà' to include Christ on the Cross, the Virgin Mary, and Saints John and

²⁸ I have presented the statistics as per pious bequest instead of per testator, because some commissioned more than one chapel. To be sure, not all testamentary commissions were executed and as with Strozzi testaments bequeathing property to the Dominican Alexio could be contested. Percentages of such contested wills have yet to be estimated for any Renaissance city. A glance through the civil court records of Florence (a much underutilized archive) shows that they were rare.

²⁹ Archivio della Fraternità, Arezzo, register 726, 47v–50v, 1348.ix.27.

³⁰ Archivio di San Lorenzo, Florence, n. 886, 1348.vi.2.

³¹ In late medieval Tuscany, an ironmonger was a craftsman or a small shopkeeper and in Florence a minor guildsman.

³² Archivio di Stato, Firenze (hereafter ASF), Diplomatico, Archivio Generale, 1416.x.13. In addition to the new construction, the 50 florins were to supply his chapel with a silver chalice, missal, altar cloth, and other ornaments, including the painting of an altarpiece.

³³ Archivio Capitolare, Arezzo, Testamenta Ser Johanne Cecchi, 3r, 1389.i.6.

³⁴ Archivio di Stato, Perugia, Pergamene, Monte Morciano, no. 335, 1411.vii.29.

³⁵ ASF, Notarile antecosimiano, no. 20833, n. p. 1348.vii.11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 8066, 268r–v, 1410.ii.16.

³⁷ Archivio di San Pietro, Perugia, Liber contractuum, no. 495, 203v–204v, 1348.vi.9.

Constantine on the wall above his sepulchre. He sought further to individuate and memorialize his physical remains by granting a house and mill to his brother, on condition that after his death the brother supply two *mediolia* of oil annually to illuminate these, his gravesite objects.³⁸ With the second plague of 1363, a notary of Assisi left 100 lire for his grave, which he elected to be ‘near the door of the Franciscan church’. To demarcate further his earthly remains he commissioned a painting for the spot (*in dicto pilo*), demanding that ‘Our Lord, Jesus Christ’ be painted on the cross, with the Virgin ‘to the right’, Saint John the Evangelist ‘to the left’, and the Blessed Francis and Mary Magdalene ‘at the foot of the cross’.³⁹

This new post-plague, post-mortem attachment to objects and their creation to demarcate and memorialize earthly remains must be placed within the context of Black Death horrors. In addition to the unprecedented mortalities that could wipe out entire monasteries and eviscerate as much as 75 per cent of cities in less than six months, chroniclers and storytellers painted scenes of mass burial ‘without tears, candles, or processions’ in which last rites, funerals, and other matters of the soul were curtailed or dispensed with entirely.⁴⁰ ‘In honouring the dead’, Giovanni Boccaccio lamented, ‘no more care was given to dead men than that done for dead goats’.⁴¹ With tragic humour the Florentine chronicler Marchionne di Coppo Stefani compared Black Death mass burials to the baking of a lasagne: bubo-speckled corpses served as layers of meat separated by light scatterings of dirt that was its cheese before a second layer of corpses was added to the dish.⁴² For some, the threat of mass burial and the absence of objects to memorialize their last remains surpassed the physical horrors and pain of plague itself. After describing the burial of his five children with his own hands in the summer of 1348, Siena’s Agnolo di Tura ended his Black Death lament with what he considered too horrible to report in full: ‘I’ll not write about the cruelty that took place in the countryside (*contado*), of the wolves and other wild animals, which ate the bodies of those poorly buried, and of other atrocities which would be too sad for anyone to read’.⁴³

II

This same urge to concretize and memorialize post-plague survivors’ earthly remains seeped into other testamentary customs with both pious and non-pious bequests and bears directly on early Renaissance material culture. The contrast with pre-plague testaments illuminates the new attention to possessions and objects. During the thirteenth century (when the number of wills in Tuscany begins to mount significantly) much less is revealed in testaments about material culture. This does not result from the shortness of the will or from a lack of attention to detail by the testator or notary; rather, it is tied to sentiment and

³⁸ Archivio di Stato, Perugia, Notarile Bastardello, no. 39, 60v–67v, 1348.vii.1.

³⁹ Sacro Convento di Arezzo, Buste, Z, n. 3 (1363–1543), 1363.

⁴⁰ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, p. 17.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴² ‘Cronaca fiorentina’, p. 231.

⁴³ ‘Cronaca senese’, p. 555. Similar impulses appear elsewhere in Europe as with the increase of parish lay fraternities in English towns after the Black Death to ensure decent burial, candles, and singing at members’ funerals; see Barron, ‘Parish fraternities’, pp. 14, 23–4. In York, Beverley, and Hull ‘a dwindling percentage left their final resting place to “wherever God wills”’; Kermodé, *Medieval merchants*, pp. 135, 140.

religious ideology. Thirteenth-century wills are stuffed with long lists of pious and non-pious legacies that could exceed 200 individual bequests. However, they rarely describe or even list clothes, furnishings, farms, or palaces; instead, their gifts were most often expressed as monetized values as minuscule as pennies to be scattered over vast landscapes of charitable beneficiaries from cathedrals to hermits, to kin and friends. On their deathbeds, these testators of the ‘commercial revolution’ showed little desire to extend their memories to future generations by bequeathing specific objects intact, whether land, houses, or clothes, to particular beneficiaries as mementos of their lives as hard-headed merchants or artisans. Instead, their wills instructed executors to liquidate their estates, immediately transforming their things into the abstractions of monetized value that re-invigorated the marketplace. Against ‘ill-gotten gains’ and usurious practices that had filled their lives of commercial activity, on their deathbeds, merchants, shopkeepers, and artisans reversed tack and ordered the dismembering of their estates. They now practised what the mendicants preached, tearing asunder earthly fetters to worldly goods to free their souls for everlasting salvation.

For the six cities of central Italy where I collected wills, between 84 and 92 per cent of bequests were gifts of money at the end of the thirteenth century. By 1400 that proportion expressed in coin had sunk to less than half of all their bequests. Not only do various products of the early Renaissance—cloth, capes, dresses, farm implements, pieces of armour, houses, and palaces—emerge more boldly from the pre-plague haze of monetized values, post-plague testators show new attitudes to property, a new attachment to worldly possessions.⁴⁴ With the second plague of 1363, they replaced earlier blanket instructions to executors to liquidate estates with the opposite—new and increasingly complex conditions and contingencies to bar their goods from entering the marketplace and to govern the future flow of these things through successive generations of friends and kin, or within repositories of charitable institutions.

Earlier conditions placed on legacies are found in only 7 per cent of wills, and these are found almost exclusively for wealthy landowners, merchants, and magnates, as with the 1291 will of a magnate from Florence’s powerful dynasty—the Cerchi⁴⁵—or in the 1301 will of a nobleman from the ancient *stirpe* of the Abbati.⁴⁶ Moreover, these feudal holdovers pertained exclusively to large landed properties or palaces; they were entails (*fideicommissa*) on property to ensure that these were channelled through the male bloodlines of the family. With the second plague of 1363 such clauses infiltrated for the first time testaments of artisans and even disenfranchised wool workers. In addition, they pertained to more than just the testator’s universal heirs—usually sons—and became more detailed and varied with personalized conditions as testators through their possessions created future relations with kin and friends.⁴⁷ In the year following the 1363 plague, the

⁴⁴ From works of art and literature Tenenti, *Il senso della morte*, interpreted the Renaissance ‘mito della gloria’ as an attachment to earthly things; his analysis, however, was one of ideas and high culture and did not consider serial evidence such as testaments.

⁴⁵ ASF, Diplomatico, Archivio Generale, 1291.viii.30. On the Cerchi and Donati feud, see Ricciardelli, *Politics of exclusion*, pp. 89–99.

⁴⁶ ASF, Diplomatico, Santa Maria Novella, 1300.ii.9.

⁴⁷ In a number of publications, Goldthwaite (see, for instance, ‘Economy of Renaissance Italy’, p. 31) maintains that such clauses encumbering the free exchange of property declined sharply in the fifteenth century to be revived only later in the sixteenth. No quantitative evidence, however, supports his claim, and the spread of these

Florentine Alamanno di Tolosino Tolosini, son of an ironmonger, appointed his only son as his universal heir along with ‘all others born through the male line and all their sons and all their legitimate and natural male descendants of this Alamanno through his male line’. If his son died without heirs, the estate would pass to his nephew and then as above through his male line. In a separate itemized act the ironmonger’s son further detailed the property ascent, boosting his recently minted family name with legal language that previously had been the preserve of magnates: the estate would pass to the *consortes*, the legitimate male descendants of the house and stock (*domus et stirpe*) of the Tolosini and ‘through its great masculine line (*per lineam masculinam magnam*) to those kin closest to the testator, divided proportionately by head and not by stock’.⁴⁸

This new relationship between possessions and the dead sank deep roots through the social fabric of Florence, not only in the city but also in the countryside. In 1416, the Vinci cobbler who had worked in Florence entailed his ‘new’ house in his native Vinci, along with its small plot of vineyards and olive trees measuring only eight *starii*. Childless when writing his will, the cobbler gave the house to a friend for the recipient’s lifetime and thereafter to the friend’s sons, and then to their sons, in stock and not by the individual (*in stirpe et non in capita*). In return, the friend and his future sons and grandsons were required to have a mass celebrated annually for the cobbler’s soul at an altar he commissioned to be built and painted in his parish church. If they failed in this performance, half the property would pass to supplement the endowment of the chapel and the other half would be bequeathed as dowries to poor girls. Finally, the cobbler imposed further restrictions on the future of his possessions by restricting the friend, his sons, his grandsons, and ‘any of their descendants until the infinite degree’ (*usque infinitium gradum*) from ever selling the property in its entirety or in any particular. If they contravened the command, his possessions would be divided between the Florentine hospitals of San Gallo and Santa Maria Nuova.⁴⁹ Such legal restrictions and language, previously limited to aristocratic elites and their future property relations, now even entered workers’ testaments: in 1368 a wool carder left his estate to any sons born to him; otherwise it would devolve to his son-in-law and his brother and to their heirs *in stirpe et non in capite*.⁵⁰

Before the Black Death, these deathbed conditions are, moreover, found only in wills of men. The earliest woman’s will to entail a property does not appear in my samples until 1377. This was no ordinary woman but a member of one of Florence’s most powerful families, the Strozzi, and the recipient, no ordinary man but a Dominican friar, later to be beatified. She left him the *usufructus* and rights to lease a large farm (the single most important property mentioned in her testament). After the son’s death, the farm would devolve to the testatrix’s four brothers and then ‘to their male children and descendants in perpetuity through the legitimate and naturally born members of the male line, by stock and not by

clauses in Florentine wills contradicts it. Other areas of Italy show a similar increase in these testamentary practices, from the early fifteenth to the eighteenth century, removing possessions from the marketplace; see Leverotti, ‘Uomini e donne di fronte all’eredità’, p. 50; Findlen, ‘Ereditare un museo’, pp. 50–1; Lanaro, ‘“Familia est substantia”’; Chauvard, *La circulation des biens*, esp. pp. 229–33 and 333–8.

⁴⁸ ASF, Notarile antecosimiano, no. 205, 28r–29v, 1364.vii.20.

⁴⁹ ASF, Diplomatico, Archivio Generale, 1416.x.13.

⁵⁰ ASF, Diplomatico, Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova, 1368.viii.24.

head'. She further prohibited any of these descendants from selling, alienating, or renting the farm beyond five years and stipulated other measures to prevent her brothers after her decease 'from compelling or coercing her son the friar to loan them anything from the revenues of this property'.⁵¹ These were not empty formulaic provisions but reflected her concerns over years of court battles between these brothers, who earlier had vigorously contested the young son's paternal inheritance.⁵² She further orchestrated material matters post-mortem by forcing the brothers and their male descendants to pay six florins annually from the farm to a daughter of one of her brothers, who had become a nun.⁵³ Rapidly thereafter women became active in entailing landed estates; such clauses penetrated the wills of non-patrician women and placed restrictions on property that was bequeathed to friends and kin, who were not these women's immediate heirs. In 1402 a widow from an Arno village near Pisa gave a small plot to a married woman who bore no kinship to her on condition that the property be passed *in perpetuum* to this woman's children of the 'masculine sex and from them to their descendants'.⁵⁴ These were not simply legalistic or technical matters of inheritance; the new early Renaissance testamentary desires restructured the relationships between objects and persons.

Entail was not testators' only obsession with post-mortem control of their goods and landed property. With legacies of prized objects they tried to manipulate the future actions of beneficiaries to extend beyond the grave their grip over these persons and their possessions. In the year of Florence's conquest of Pisa, 1406, a rural notary from the village of Calci, 10 kilometres east of Pisa, gave his principal possession, a farm house 'mostly burnt to the ground' to two brothers unrelated to the testator on condition that within six months of the testator's death they would re-roof it and reside there with their families and his household possessions.⁵⁵ Such future concerns with preserving cherished possessions by demanding specific repair jobs post-mortem increase in number during the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In 1374 an Aretine was so zealous to ensure his house would never be sold, that he forbade any alienation 'even by permission of the Pope or the Holy Roman Emperor'. Further, he instructed that if a certain Bernardo did not wish to 'repair and ornament' a wall in the house, then one of the testator's debtors was to spend half the debt for the restorations.⁵⁶ Such requirements could also be demanded of the church. The Misericordia of Arezzo could take possession of this testator's possessions only after their rectors had sculpted in stone a plaque over the door of his house stating the year, month, and day he gave them to the confraternity, along with the name of the notary who redacted his will.

In the same plague year, 1374, another Aretine, a notary, demanded that his heirs have his coats of arms carved in stone, painted, and displayed 'so that they could be seen easily and clearly on the back of his house facing the street'. He then

⁵¹ On rents and produce from landed property treated legally as 'movables' and 'immovables', see Howell, *Commerce before capitalism*, pp. 60–7.

⁵² The case of Alexio's inheritance from his father was a 'cause célèbre' with extended litigation between Santa Maria Novella and the Strozzi family; see Orlandi, *Necrologio*, vol. I, pp. 131, 623–47.

⁵³ ASF, Diplomatico, Santa Maria Novella, 1377.vii.21.

⁵⁴ Archivio di Stato, Pisa, Diplomatico, Primaziale, 1402.i.25.

⁵⁵ ASF, Notarile antecosimiano, no. 8066, 14r–16r.

⁵⁶ Archivio della Fraternità, Arezzo, reg. 726, 60r–61r, 1374.vi.2.

reiterated his demand for entail, that his urban dwelling was never to be sold or alienated 'but always passed through the direct line' to his sons' sons and, if none survived, to their closest male relatives. If it were ever put up for sale, the Misericordia could lay claim to the property.⁵⁷

In 1416, the Aretine merchant Baccio di Maso was obsessed on his deathbed with details of post-mortem remodelling of his house attached to a stable. He ordered his two sons, Francesco and Girolamo, to have the stable removed and at their own expense construct a balcony in its place 'extending from the back side to the front' of the house, which he had bequeathed to Francesco and to this son's lineage.⁵⁸ Such demands, moreover, were not exclusive to merchants or men. A peasant woman from a village six miles outside Arezzo made only one itemized act in her testament of 1411: she 'confirmed' that she had earlier given her husband 10 florins, which he was to spend on her home for 'improvements, works, and beautification'.⁵⁹

In post-plague Tuscany last legacies could delve further into future actions and relations between possessions and people, directing divisions of property and movements or rights of way of heirs and friends within them. In 1371, a Florentine of the Nigri family named his male children still to be born as universal heirs. If no sons were sired, the *usufructus* of all his property would devolve to his sister on condition that she spend 100 florins to construct a cottage within the testator's parish of San Lorenzo. He then left his wife (as long as she remained a widow) the rights to remain there. However, unlike any will I have spotted before the Black Death, even by those from the grandest magnate families, he went further, directing in detail the future rights and restrictions of passage for his wife within the new cottage: 'She might enter by the main passageway and have access to the entire building above the entrance to this passageway but only by using the steps that led to a passageway to be constructed'. She was not to have any access to that part of the building reserved for his sister 'existing above the stairs and under the study (*scriptorium*) and the cloakroom (*guardarobas*)'.⁶⁰

Such post-plague testamentary blueprints governing future movements of beneficiaries within testators' possessions also begin to appear beneath the horizons of those with family names or even citizens of towns. In the plague year 1374, a villager near Poppi in the Aretine sought to control the future movements of a blood relative and the testator's brother within his home. To the first he bequeathed (as a right to be passed down to that relative's sons) half the courtyard located behind the house. His brother and afterwards his family were given rights to enter this courtyard to fetch water at a well, that is, so long as the blood relative happened not to be entering the courtyard at the same time. He further ordered his brother to build a wall to divide the courtyard.⁶¹

In 1416 another villager near Arezzo laid out the rights of passage between his two daughters, who would share habitation in his urban dwelling. One would receive the back of the house as far as the pantry (*cellarius*) and might debar the testator's son from its use and habitation. The front including the pantry along

⁵⁷ Archivio della Fraternità, Arezzo, no. 726, 1374.iii.26.

⁵⁸ ASF, Notarile antecosimiano, no. 9981, 38v–42v, 1416.viii.5.

⁵⁹ ASF, Not. antecos., no. 9982, 16r, 1411.viii.1.

⁶⁰ Archivio di San Lorenzo, no. 841, 1370.iii.8

⁶¹ Archivio della Fraternità, Arezzo, reg. 726, 51r–52r, 1374.v.23.

with a bedroom and a well, located at the back of the house, was granted to the second daughter with rights to use these portions ‘communally’ with her sister. The sisters were to hold the vineyards, plough lands, and the house communally, except for those properties previously given to his wife. As for the son, we hear no more about him. It appears he had been disinherited.⁶²

Testators not only divided and directed the use and movement of heirs and friends in residential properties; on occasion they tried to determine their future beneficiaries’ movements within their business properties as well. The Aretine spice and clothing merchant Baccio di Maso did not leave his residual estate to be shared equally by his surviving sons as had been standard procedure in pre-plague testaments even of Tuscan and Umbrian noblemen; instead his will was largely devoted to describing this residual legacy and mapping its precise divisions to ensure equality along with future obligations towards and movements within these properties. He first dealt with his son, ‘the egregious physician and doctor of medicine’ Maestro Tommaso, and Battista, the testator’s grandson, giving them rights in common over the dowry of Maestro Tommaso’s deceased wife valued at 475 florins. To the doctor’s sons and any sons he might later sire, Baccio further bequeathed houses, farm huts, vineyards, olive groves, arable lands, the goods as well as the furnishings the merchant-father possessed in Villa Marcena—half a mill on the Arno river and its equipment; a farm (*podere*) and all its houses, vineyards, and so on, in the villages of Corte and Nofri, near the Arno. The merchant then enumerated in detail the farm animals, clothing, cloth, ornaments, and books to ascend to this ‘stock’ of his family. One of these itemized bequests coupled two mules with ‘all the books pertaining to medicine and its science’ along with the wine casks found in the merchant’s home in Florence.

To equalize the patrimony among his sons, the merchant-father made an accounting of the expenses previously incurred by the doctor: a thousand florins which the testator maintained he had spent on Tommaso’s education, books, and doctoral expenses; a 300-florin loan to the son when the son had been a resident of Florence; 79 florins which the doctor owed to the cloth manufactory—its shop (*fondaco*) and for its commercial assets (*traffico*) managed by Baccio’s son Francesco and his partners. The father next entered the credit side of the doctor’s inheritance: his two other sons were to pay the doctor two parts of their mother’s dowry of 450 florins. Finally, the testator declared that his company and cloth shop had earned 2,400 florins in goods, equipment, and credits over the past five years and that his son, the doctor, was owed half the profits from this capital.

The father assigned his estate with equal precision to his other two sons, Francesco and Girolamo. Again, the legacies were not simple statements about equal shares with little hint of the materiality of these shares, as had been the custom of pre-plague testaments. Furthermore, with each legacy, whether objects such as the tools of the cloth industry (*purgi*), *caldarii*, *domibus tinte*, landed property, or even credits, the merchant-testator made clear that they were bequests to be kept and passed down from son to son. Finally, the business divisions between the two sons extended to fine lines of architecture, dividing a house containing the testator’s shop and warehouse (*apotheca sive fondacis*) with its giant basement and storage bins (*cella magna cum celletta*). The father imposed on these

⁶² ASF, Notarile antecosimiano, no. 9982, 33r–34v, 1415.ii.25.

two brothers (also his business partners) their future rights of passage in the shop and home: Girolamo was to have the ground floor *in principale parte* and Francesco the *secunde parte* with the right 'to enter and leave the upper bedroom by the upper veranda'.⁶³

As this last testament indicates, the use and symbolic value of palaces and other landed properties were not the only objects whose futures early Renaissance Tuscans attempted to govern from the grave. Testators' desires to keep control post-mortem over possessions could involve items of much less value than the tools of cloth production. In 1360 a citizen of Pisa divided various articles of clothing equally between his two sisters provided that neither ever sold or gave any of them to their brother.⁶⁴ In 1415 a widow of a prominent Florentine family 'out of love and charity' left her son 600 florins in coin and in Monte shares (state bonds). He was required, however, to use it to repurchase a house, where she had previously resided with her deceased husband along with all household possessions that had been there. Moreover, the son was required to live in it, and never to alienate or even bequeath it by testament 'for matters of the soul'. The mother's demands did not end with the house: she further pried into her son's future possession of itemized objects, insisting that he 'conserve' her linen, rings, and jewellery until he married or reached adulthood.⁶⁵ Again, such post-plague demands from the grave touched more than elites alone. The testament of another woman, a widow of a grave-digger and an émigrée from Cremona then living in the Pisan countryside, shows no evidence of possessing any landed property, not even a worker's cottage. Instead, her will seized upon one prized pillow of monk's wool (*pilandram meam monachinam*), which she bequeathed to a friend, a married woman, on condition that that friend retain it for her own use and never 'sell it, alienate it, use it as a pawn, or barter it'.⁶⁶ Such post-mortem direction and attachment to individual items is also seen in pious donations of the humble. In the year of the plague's return, 1362, in the region of Pisa, the widow of a notary from Pontedera, who lived in Pisa, wished to preserve her best underwear and a cloak after death by offering them 'to Our Lady next to the cross at the altar of Thomas Becket in the Cathedral of Pisa'⁶⁷ (perhaps pinned to the sculpture as can be seen with later testamentary evidence and religious cults today).⁶⁸ As Findlen has shown, testamentary demands to restrict objects from entering the market increased in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the formation of private collections of precious objects and museums.⁶⁹ Wills of ordinary citizens and even the humble show that similar obsessions reached further back in time to as early as the Black Death and had seeped deeper down the social hierarchies of post-plague Italy.

⁶³ Ibid., no. 9523, 30v–42v, 1412.viii.5.

⁶⁴ Ibid., no. 12394, 159r–61v, 1361.v.7 [Pisan style].

⁶⁵ ASF, Diplomatico, Santa Maria Novella, 1415.vi.9. On women's limited rights to these properties, see Klapisch-Zuber, 'Le "zane" della sposa'. Lady Pellegrina appears to have had more control over what probably was her 'corredo' than was customary in Quattrocento Florence.

⁶⁶ ASF, Notarile antecosimiano, no. 8068, 2330v–231v, 1414.vi.27.

⁶⁷ Ibid., no. 12394, 156bis r–159r, 1363.vi.21.

⁶⁸ Ago, 'Using things as money', p. 55.

⁶⁹ Findlen, 'Ereditare un museo'.

III

For insights into material culture, testaments have rarely been studied for any period and at best have played second fiddle to inventories.⁷⁰ However, as seen above, testaments have advantages over inventories when it comes to understanding aspirations and relationships between people and property. Unlike inventories, testaments were not static documents portraying objects arranged at one moment in time and often not by the possessor. Not only did wills reflect on previous gifts made during a testator's lifetime or leave property behind with instructions to preserve and guide their future pathways, they also left instructions to create new objects to stand for the individual testator, his or her family, and ancestors. Late medieval and early modern Italian art historians have yet to study quantitatively these deathbed commissions. They were numerous in cities such as Florence, Douai, and Tournai, and their trajectory is significant.⁷¹ Rare before the Black Death, they climb steadily during the second half of the fourteenth century. This increase encompassed new patrons from social classes heretofore unrepresented in testaments or other documents as commissioners of art. Alongside requests for monumental fresco cycles in newly commissioned chapels, Tuscan and Umbrian artisans and peasants suddenly appear in the art market stirring new demand for sacred paintings costing as little as 10 lire.

Vividly, commissions of such deathbed paintings to be placed above testators' graves reflect a new 'Renaissance' relationship between donors and objects that would depict the self and the ancestors 'in their very likeness' at the feet of patron saints, their lives and souls to be remembered by neighbours and God alike. Such was the Black Death creation of an Aretine blacksmith living in the mountain town of Bibbiena, who devoted the major portion of his modest testament to one bequest, a commission for a new work of art, a painting of the Virgin and Child with St John the Evangelist on one side and Mary Magdalene and St Anthony on the other to be hung above his grave in the friary of the Blessed Mary. The blacksmith's testament went further: the artist was to depict this donor kneeling at the Virgin's feet, on one side, and his father, at the other. So that future generations would not miss the point he ordered the artist to label the figures: 'Here is Montagne the blacksmith; here is Pasquino, his father'.⁷²

Other deathbed commissions for sacred art—priestly vestments, chalices, and candlestick holders—also mounted in number and show further attempts through physical objects to create bonds between the living and dead. Often these could cost less than column paintings or graveside altarpieces commissioned for country parishes, and they penetrated the worlds of peasants and artisans. These too came

⁷⁰ Stuard, *Gilding the market*, refers to a few testaments for examples of luxury goods but relies mostly on inventories of the wealthy, and Chojnacki, *Women and men*, views testaments to chart the exchange of dowries and objects between generations of noble women. For eighteenth-century Puglia, see Tessari, *Trasferimenti patrimoniali*. Moreover, when used, testaments have been employed as second-rate inventories and not to their advantages.

⁷¹ These are analysed quantitatively in Cohn, *Cult of remembrance*, pp. 203–80; idem, 'Piété et commande'; idem, 'Culture and memory'; idem, 'Place of the dead'.

⁷² Diplomatico, Olivetani di Arezzo, 1348 (day and month not specified). For the increase in deathbed commissions and their penetration down the social ladder, see Cohn, 'Piété et commande'.

with strings attached as testators demanded that their coats of arms be embroidered or embossed on their gifts of sacred objects as inexpensive as candlestick holders. In all six cities of Tuscany and Umbria, such conditional demands placed on sacred objects (even those commissioned by magnate families) post-dated the plague of 1363. The earliest (1368) is also one of the most extraordinary in illustrating the degree to which such sentiments of family pride and remembrance had swept through society by the second half of the fourteenth century.⁷³ A Florentine wool worker left a large candle (*torchettus*) to the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova to be kept burning during masses at the altar in the women's section of the hospital. It was to be held in a candlestick holder, which the wool worker then commissioned to be 'painted and inscribed' with his coats of arms, even though this carder did not possess a family name.⁷⁴

To summarize, the relationship between goods and people, 1300 to 1600, is not a subject without structural change or development as currently depicted in the Renaissance history of worldly goods; nor is it a history that must pertain to elites alone, and their consumption and production of objects presently adorning major art collections. Instead, last wills and testaments allow us to view material worlds of shopkeepers, artisans, workers, and peasants, and especially their changing aspirations and relations to possessions. These aspirations chart a sharp break in the relationship between people and possessions before and after the Black Death and especially after the second plague of 1362–3. The post-plague reaction to mass burial and immediate loss of ties to friends, kin, and ancestors triggered new attitudes and obsessions. In the case of magnates and peasants alike these affected relations to property, from palaces to pillows of monk's wool. Whereas during the commercial revolution of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, testators simply instructed executors to sell off their possessions to create a myriad of small bequests expressed in monetized sums, now testators pried into the actions, even routine daily movements, of their beneficiaries to dictate from the grave the future use of the testators' worldly possessions. No doubt other changes crucial to attitudes towards objects occurred in early modern Italy: these await detection by historians of testaments.

IV

For art history the importance of these post-Black Death differences in attitudes is clear. It propelled new generations to invest in the preservation of self and family memory through commissioning objects of sacred art and architecture, and was a principal motor boosting the art and building boom of the Renaissance.⁷⁵ The testaments show that such attitudes and strategies were not, however, the sole preserve of merchant princes. Post-1363, peasants in humble mountain villages could now use the same technical devices of entail to direct the future flow of their

⁷³ Sacchetti's biting irony (*Il Trecentonovelle*, novella LXIII, pp. 122–3), repeated with bravado 160 years later by Vasari, against a petty shopkeeper ('*uomo di piccolo affare*'), so arrogant as to think he could commission Giotto to paint his coats of arms, may not have been so far-fetched from late fourteenth-century realities as might be expected.

⁷⁴ Diplomatico, Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova, 1368.viii.24.

⁷⁵ For this building boom and increase in the demand for art in fifteenth-century Florence and (to some extent) Italy, see the text at n. 27 above.

properties and to commission art to blazon family pride and through the preservation of other objects preserve their memories.

Did this change in aspirations have wider cultural and economic implications? For the most part, historians have looked at the rise of mendicant religious sentiment and ideology, particularly of the Franciscans, as a sharp reaction against the early commercialism of the thirteenth century—the abuse of wealth, greed, avarice, waste, and luxury. Evangelical poverty, hatred of money, and the renunciation of worldly possessions poignantly illustrated by St Francis's stripping off his father's wealth down to the last article of clothing became glorified with a new vigour not seen since the desert fathers.⁷⁶ Historians have shown the gradual accommodation of these doctrines of poverty to the realities of the commercial revolution with internal attacks against radical spiritualists and the Fraticelli, who desired to maintain Francis's original rule of poverty. By the early fourteenth century, the radicals had been defeated, branded as heretics, and in their place more 'respectable' Observants and Conventuals in both Dominican and Franciscan orders devised doctrines more pliable to worldly accumulation and merchant values. While continuing to condemn monopolies, ill-gotten gains, and unfair trading practices, the mendicants began to see the utility of mercantile credit serving 'the common good'.⁷⁷ Even in the thirteenth century Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas had found loopholes in the severe sanctions levelled against interest-bearing loans, insurance, and other credit relations to oil the wheels of commerce. After the Black Death and especially by the early fifteenth century San Bernardino of Siena and Sant Antonino, Archbishop of Florence, developed this economic thinking further, widening a positive view towards credit, profit, and other forms of mercantile activity.⁷⁸ In so doing (as Schumpeter and others have argued), they may have anticipated the founders of 'scientific economics' of the Enlightenment.⁷⁹

Avarice as a cardinal sin is a telling barometer of these changes in ideology. Dante's *Divine comedy*, written in the early fourteenth century near the height of the commercial revolution in Florence, placed avarice as a deadly sin deeper down the circles of hell than lust or gluttony: of all the forms of incontinence it was 'by far the most important and injurious'.⁸⁰ Other thinkers of the commercial revolution went further, elevating avarice to the worst of all the vices.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Little, 'Pride goes before avarice', pp. 46–7.

⁷⁷ See Little, *Religious poverty*, and Lesnick, *Preaching*, who correlate the economic realities of the commercial revolution with changes in religious ideology.

⁷⁸ See de Roover, *San Bernardino*; idem, 'Labour conditions in Florence', pp. 278–86. For earlier anticipations such as Peter John Olivi's theory of utility in the thirteenth century and John Duns Scotus's economic ideas in the fourteenth, see Kirshner, 'Raymond de Roover', pp. 23, 28–9; Opper, 'Poggio', pp. 571–2; Howell, *Commerce before capitalism*, pp. 278–9; Todeschini, *Franciscan wealth*; and esp. de Roover, *San Bernardino*, pp. 8, 11, 19, 41. Goldthwaite, *Economy of Renaissance Florence*, p. 421, maintains that mendicant preaching against usury intensified at the end of the fourteenth century, but shows no evidence for it, nor do testaments corroborate it.

⁷⁹ On Schumpeter, Sapori, de Roover, and others concerning scholastic economic thought and its anticipation of liberal ideas about capitalist markets, see Kirshner, 'Raymond de Roover', pp. 19–20. For the complex devices that notaries, merchants, and even craftsmen used to disguise interest on loans, see Goldthwaite, *Economy of Renaissance Florence*, pp. 408–83; and Epstein, *Economic and social history*, pp. 132–45.

⁸⁰ Dante Alighieri, *La divina commedia*, p. 64, who placed the usurious moneylender, Castello Gianfigliuzzi, in the deepest, seventh circle of hell (*Inferno* 17).

⁸¹ Little, 'Pride goes before avarice', pp. 38–9, combines an analysis of individual religious thinkers with a quantitative analysis of representations taken from the Index of Christian Art (Princeton University). In the early middle ages, avarice came fifth among the seven cardinal vices; the shift of emphasis to avarice began in the

In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries attitudes changed again: even religious ascetics such as the Franciscan Observant, Bernardino of Siena, now praised the accumulation of wealth and mercantile exchange, if not avarice, as beneficial to the common good.⁸² Humanists of the early fifteenth century—Leonardo Bruni, Matteo Palmieri, Poggio Bracciolini, and Leon Battista Alberti—went further still, seeing riches as indicative of the health of households and the city, as ‘instruments in the pursuit of virtue’.⁸³ Inspired by classical writers, they created a new ethos of magnificence: private wealth strengthened the body politic.⁸⁴ Alberti turned the old ascetic ideal on its head, arguing that rich fabrics and gold increased the dignity and piety of a man at prayer.⁸⁵ If the humanist Antonio Loschi is taken as representing Poggio (argued by some, denied by others)⁸⁶ then his dialogue, *De avaritia* (1429), transmogrified avarice from vice to virtue. Nevertheless, no matter how this or other humanist works of the fifteenth century are interpreted, it would be going too far to assume that they anticipated Calvinist ideals of seventeenth-century English preachers and other thinkers in praise of the accumulation of wealth for its own sake. In the work of these fifteenth-century thinkers, like their less famous contemporary testators, the utility of wealth and the splendour of objects and possessions—not exchange value—was being extolled.

Last wills and testaments, however, suggest that the anti-materialist ideology of the Franciscans (Spiritualists and Fraticelli included) may not have been as contradictory to the development of the commercial world as is thought.⁸⁷ This is not just because of the work of the less radical in these orders in finding loopholes to their own doctrines that benefited the commercial world. The mendicants’ outcry against cupidity and attachment to worldly things compelled merchants and artisans generationally to dump their landed properties as well as other goods onto the market and in so doing spurred on commercial recirculation, quickening the velocity of exchange. The early Renaissance attachment to things, its new zeal to preserve and channel possessions through future generations to maintain individual and family memory, on the other hand, did the opposite. The complex thicket of legal impositions and contingency clauses placed on heirs to guide the

eleventh century but it did not begin to compete with pride until the thirteenth; *ibid.*, pp. 19, 20, 25. Huizinga saw avarice’s elevation as early as the twelfth century, a position challenged by Bloomfield, *Seven deadly sins*, p. 95.

⁸² Oppel, ‘Poggio’, p. 571.

⁸³ Wood, *Medieval economic thought*, p. 52.

⁸⁴ Goldthwaite, *Economy of Renaissance Florence*, p. 378.

⁸⁵ Cited by Stuard, *Gilding the market*, p. 219.

⁸⁶ On this debate, see Oppel, ‘Poggio’, pp. 581–7. More recently, Nardi, ‘Post-fazione’, argues that Poggio anticipated capitalist ideas of the eighteenth-century British political economists Mandeville and Smith. Nardi cites Loschi’s words in Poggio’s dialogue as though they reflected Poggio’s opinions, without recognizing the ambiguities of the Renaissance dialogue.

⁸⁷ For Florence, 30% of clauses decrying usury and ill-gotten gains are found for the last quarter of the thirteenth century (42 of 142 such clauses). In the first quarter of the fifteenth century, they fell to 2%. For Arezzo, Pisa, and Siena their decline was more precipitous, having fallen to less than 1%, 1%, and just under 2% of pious bequests (3 of 398, 5 of 421, and 3 of 178 pious bequests), respectively, even if researchers can still point to the odd case of such clauses in single testaments (de Roover, ‘Restitution’). Ideologies of *contemptus mundi* remained a part of Christian doctrine (see Allerston, ‘Consuming problems’), but no one has assessed the extent to which these attitudes changed over time as can be charted in testaments. For Siena, the Counter-Reformation transformed testamentary practices profoundly; however, earlier clauses decrying sins of usury and ill-gotten gains did not resurface (see Cohn, *Death and property in Siena*, pp. 161–84).

future of worldly goods could now clog the wheels of exchange, as is seen most clearly with ecclesiastical institutions, such as Florence's oldest confraternity, the Bigallo, the church of Orsanmichele, and Siena's Misericordia and University. The new post-plague outpouring of pious bequests now coming with strings attached that prevented benefactors' possessions from entering the marketplace suddenly created a managerial nightmare for these institutions, driving some to the brink of bankruptcy and others, as with Siena's Misericordia, over it. Moreover, as Chauvard has shown for early modern Venice, these testamentary conditions certainly did place landed property and palaces outside market exchanges for generations: sales of them became extremely rare, occurring only as a last resort to financially stricken estates.⁸⁸

It is more difficult to establish the market consequences of this psychology of attachment to things when they concerned mundane goods such as artisan's clothes. Perhaps the beneficiary, lay or ecclesiastic, could simply dump them on secondhand markets, as the Cathedral of Milan did from 1380 on by creating its own secondhand shop.⁸⁹ Findlen, however, has shown that this was difficult to achieve even with powerful heirs greedy to get their hands on ready cash, when clauses of *fideicommissum* were attached to objects as in the wills of late sixteenth-century patricians seeking to preserve their precious collections as testimony to their cultivation and memory.⁹⁰ As Ago has commented, 'As long as things must be used to make exchanges possible, they cannot be kept, collected or cherished'.⁹¹ Testaments show that such sentiments to keep and cherish goods, even after death and through successive generations, suddenly surged through urban and rural populations of central Italy, elites along with ordinary citizens and even peasants, after the Black Death.

V

As Caferro has recently argued, a central debate of the Renaissance initiated by Lopez in 1953—'the Renaissance depression'—may finally have run its course. By forcing historians to take sides on the total performance of the Renaissance economy, when the data do not warrant such broad conclusions, its effect on research may be deleterious.⁹² As Goldthwaite, one of the principal contenders, has recently shown, the Renaissance economy was complex and variegated; one sector could be in decline with another on the rise, as with international banking and textile manufactory in the late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florentine

⁸⁸ Chauvard, *La circulation des biens*, pp. 333–8, 554–8.

⁸⁹ See Welch, 'New, old and second-hand culture', pp. 108–9. As Fontaine, 'Introduction', p. 1, has recently argued, historical studies of second-hand goods are in their infancy. Thus far, they cluster from the late sixteenth to the eighteenth century. It is not clear if the absence of the late middle ages from recent studies reflects the weakness of these markets compared to the late or post-Renaissance one. At any rate, not even for the early modern period have studies charted clear patterns of their growth and decline. Moreover, as Dereulaer, 'Second-hand dealers', has argued, a weakness or strength of these markets could indicate a variety of economic possibilities.

⁹⁰ Findlen, 'Ereditare un museo', pp. 59–73, neatly contrasts the fate of Pietro Bembo's collection that was quickly dispersed after his death with that of later collections protected by testamentary clauses of *fideicommissum*.

⁹¹ Ago, 'Using things as money', p. 57. Also, see Fontaine, 'Introduction', on how gifts for ornaments of worship and the perpetuation of donors' memories effectively withdrew objects from the market, terminating their lives of exchange value.

⁹² Caferro, 'Warfare', pp. 167–8; Lopez, 'Hard times'.

economy.⁹³ Moreover, the rise of one sector of the economy can have simultaneously positive and negative effects. Like Goldthwaite, Stuard has argued against Lopez's thesis by emphasizing the rise of local luxury production and consumption in cities such as Florence and Venice during the fourteenth century. Her argument, however, shows no simple, straightforward accounting. Instead, the new early Renaissance obsession with fashion, the wearing of precious metals on fingers and sleeves, simultaneously had negative consequences for Renaissance economies. By the 1390s it contributed to the 'bullion famine' of the fifteenth century, which depressed commerce and production.⁹⁴ New 'Renaissance' obsessions to covet property and objects for family memory into the grave illustrated in hundreds of post-plague testaments show a similar contradictory duality.⁹⁵ While the new Renaissance attachment to things may have benefited artistic and luxury production, it may have had other consequences for commerce more broadly. Paradoxically, the previous mendicant strictures against usury and the accumulation of wealth may have provided unintended encouragement for what on the surface they condemned. Instead of being entirely contradictory to commerce, their strictures were an ideological force that converted tangible goods into fungibles or coin and, in so doing, recharged exchange.

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⁹³ Goldthwaite, *Economy of Renaissance Florence*.

⁹⁴ Stuard, *Gilding the market*, pp. 182, 194, 227–8.

⁹⁵ Testaments in northern France and the Netherlands show sentiments similar to those of Tuscany, demarcating and honouring burial remains in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries with a sudden increase in commissions of sacred art. Unlike in Tuscany, however, this new celebration of earthly remains was directed toward husbands and wives or the nuclear family and rarely to commemorating lineages. As a result, these testaments rarely encumbered property with complex webs of conditions and contingency clauses to honour ancestors and keep properties within male bloodlines; see Cohn, 'Place of the dead'. Perhaps this post-plague northern mode of achieving memory and stimulating local artistic production may have favoured northern economies over older centres of early capitalist development such as Florence. Moreover, Howell, *Commerce before capitalism*, pp. 87–92, shows no new post-plague obsession with the objectification of property and its removal from markets in northern Europe. Instead, the gradual decay in divisions between movables and immovables suggests the opposite trend. In places such as Ghent, houses and even land became defined as fungibles, thereby becoming more exposed to market forces, even if citizens then responded by devising other means to preserve their patrimonies.

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