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Mothering in the Casa Datini

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Abstract

The Datini archive in Prato, Italy, provides much detailed information about mothers and children in a merchant-class household of late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Tuscany. Over some thirty years the childless Margherita Datini supervised and cared for children of friends, relatives and business associates, and her husband's illegitimate daughter. Letters, household financial records, and Datini's business ledgers reveal many aspects of the lives of Margherita – as surrogate mother – and the children. The data show a fluid environment overseen by a strong-willed and caring mistress. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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During the later middle ages, one woman's concern and care for the offspring of another was a common phenomenon. Both societal and natural factors encouraged surrogate-mothering practices including wet-nursing, fostering, and step-parenting. The well-documented Tuscans of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries provide some of the best information available about these child-rearing patterns. With the wealth of its

JOSEPH P. BYRNE began his work with the Datini archive during research for his dissertation, 'Francesco Datini, "Father of Many": Piety, Charity and Patronage in Early Modern Tuscany' (Indiana University, 1989). He has published articles on Francesco's participation in the Bianchi movement of 1399 and on the Datini correspondence. He is currently preparing articles on Datini's patronage of artists and of Tuscan Franciscan communities. He is also preparing for publication translations of Marco and Francesco's wills and codicils. He is continuing research into Datini's patronage of early Renaissance artists. His research has been partly made possible by Kennesaw State University in Georgia.

ELEANOR A. CONGDON uses the Datini archive principally to study late-medieval commerce. Her dissertation, 'Venetian Mercantile Presence in the Western Mediterranean, 1398–1405' (Gonville and Caius College, University of Cambridge, 1997) looks at how some Venetians wanting to do business in Aragon/Catalonia contacted, and even worked in partnership, with Datini personnel. She has published articles on merchants' use of correspondence to transmit news around 1400, Venetian private ships, the Venetian merchant network in Syria around 1480, and on imperial commemoration and ritual in one Byzantine church. She is continuing research on Venetian mercantile networks and private Venetian ships. Her research on this project was conducted at the same time as her dissertation research, using grants from the Ellen McArthur Fund and the Prince-Consort/Thirwall Fund, and continues today while she teaches at Berkshire Community College in Massachusetts.

surviving documentation, the household (*casa*) of Francesco (1335–1410) and Margherita (1360–1423) Datini, based in Prato and Florence, provides researchers with a wide variety of mothering practices and experiences.

Francesco di Marco Datini was an innovative and successful international merchant with a predilection for record-keeping. His desire that his heirs keep his personal and business documents in his house after his death, and much good fortune over the centuries, have resulted in the survival of over 151,000 letters and several hundred record-books dating from the 1360s to 1411.¹ This treasure-trove was preserved serendipitously by having been sealed away under a stairway in the *palazzo* that Francesco built in the 1380s and 1390s.² Today, scholars may consult these documents in the part of this same house that serves as the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, sezione Prato.

The Casa Datini flourished in a region and during a period that historians have carefully explored for decades. Despite its value, however, few researchers travel to Prato to use the Datini collection. Neither Italian nor international scholars have published much of the material in Datini's vast archive; the three collections of letters that bear most directly on this paper are among the few exceptions.³ The reason for this neglect is probably the collection's nature; among all these documents, there is no single account-book, series of accounts, or set of letters that recites all household expenditures, features of family life, or even Datini's business activities. The surviving volumes overlap, duplicate each other, and contain significant gaps in coverage. Family members and employees kept household financial records in a great many account books – many of which included *ricordi* or *ricordanze*⁴ – and even scattered throughout the Datini companies' ledgers. As a whole – and notwithstanding the best efforts of the archivists – the Datini collection is a difficult maze in which to find information.

The most important published work about the Datini household remains Iris Origo's

¹Federigo Melis, *Aspetti della vita economica medievale: Studi nell'archivio Datini di Prato* (Siena, 1962), 10, 17–25. The count is not complete because of the number of unidentified fragments and the size of the collection. Datini's will is published in: Cesare Guasti, *Lettere di un notaro ad un mercante del secolo XIV*, vol. 1 (Florence, 1880), cxi; and Cesare Guasti, *Lettere di un notaro ad un mercante del secolo XIV*, vol. 2 (Florence, 1880), 273–310. It is translated in: Joseph Byrne, 'Francesco Datini, 'Father of Many': Piety, charity and patronage in early modern Tuscany' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1989).

²The story of the collection's survival is related in: Melis, *Aspetti*, 7–8; Guasti, *Lettere*, vol. 1, ii–iv; Enrico Bensa, *Francesco di Marco da Prato: Notizie e documenti sulla mercatura italiana del secolo xiv*, (Milan, 1928), 2–3; Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato* (London and New York, 1957; Milan 1959), 7–8; Gaetano Corsani, 'I fondaci e i banchi di un mercante Pratese dell Trecento: Contributo alla storia della ragioneria e del commercio da lettere e documenti inediti,' *Archivio Storico Pratese*, supplemento 2 (1922), 1.

³The first of these to be published was Guasti, *Lettere*. It contains the letters of Datini's notary and friend, Lapo Mazzei. Valeria Rosati published Margherita's letters in installments in the *Archivio Storico Pratese* in 1974 and 1976; these were then reprinted as a complete set as, *Le lettere di Margherita Datini a Francesco di Marco*, vol. 2 of *Biblioteca del Archivio Storico Pratese* (Prato, 1977). Aside from the odd textual note, the letters are not annotated. Elena Cecchi has recently published an edition of Francesco's letters to his wife: Elena Cecchi, *Le lettere di Francesco Datini alla moglie Margherita 1385–1410*, vol. 14 of *Biblioteca del Archivio Storico Pratese* (Prato, 1990). Cecchi and Rosati include 424 of the roughly 10,000 non-commerce-oriented letters in the Datini collection; citations for these documents will refer to the respective printed edition instead of the archival notation.

⁴*Ricordanze*, or *ricordi* were short written accounts of important events in the life of an individual or family in later medieval Italy. These were often kept in one or more large books. They constitute one of the best types of source for information on personal and family issues during the period.

The Merchant of Prato.⁵ The Archive's staff continue informally (and rather bitterly) to characterise the book as *un romanzo* because of its lack of scholarly rigour. For the serious student it has two principal flaws: (1) it includes many undocumented or poorly referenced citations to archival material; and (2) it unfairly characterises certain members of the Casa Datini without sufficient evidence, especially Margherita, who comes across as a bitter, shrewish woman hardly capable of love. Origo was writing for the popular market, not for scholars. She hired several Italians to do her research for her; she based her portrait of the Datini household on this limited, although well handled, exploration of the archive's contents. She glorified the collection without an intimate personal familiarity with it. The fact that at least one document upon which she relied heavily – the book of *ricordanze* that covered the years 1386–1388, which she cites as *Quadernacci e memoriale di Francesco di Marco proprii, Quadernaccio A (1386–1388)* – cannot be located by the archive's staff makes trust in her conclusions more difficult. Nevertheless, Origo's book is almost the only non-Italian-language monograph on the Datini companies and household. Most English-language discussions of Tuscan social history which mention Datini and his family have relied, uncritically, on Origo. Recently, interest in Datini seems to be increasing; the number of English-speaking researchers studying his papers also seems to be increasing, albeit slowly.⁶

The Casa Datini existed, as a documented household, between 1376 and 1411. At various times, it consisted of, besides Francesco and Margherita, his illegitimate daughter Ginevra, friends, relatives, children, staff, and members of his companies. These people followed as the couple moved between Avignon, Prato, Florence, Pistoia, and Bologna. The household was not an entity defined by the Datini *palazzo* in Prato. It disappears from the historical record with Margherita's death in 1423, after thirteen years of widowhood. Its only known descendant was a grand-daughter, Brigida,

⁵The original English and Italian editions included many more citations than the revised edition first printed by Penguin Books in 1963 and still widely available. In 1986, David R. Godine Inc. reprinted the text and citation in its 1957 format, with the addition of a forward by Barbara Tuchman. In this article, references to Origo will refer to the page numbers in the Godine edition.

⁶The following is a list of the works from the last two and a half decades which use material about the Datinis in discussions of social issues entirely or partly based on Origo, or specifically in reaction to her. Joseph Byrne, 'Reading the medieval woman's voice: reflections on the letters of Margherita Datini, an Italian housewife on the eve of the Renaissance', *West Georgia Review*, 25 (1995), 5–13; Joseph Byrne, 'Crafting the merchant's wife's tale: Historians and the correspondence of Margherita Datini', *Journal of the Georgia Association of Historians*, 17 (1996), 1–17; Philip Gavitt, *Charity and children in Renaissance Florence: The Ospedale degli Innocenti, 1410–1536* (Ann Arbor, 1990); Frances and Joseph Gies, 'Margherita Datini: An Italian merchant's wife', in: *Women in the middle ages* (New York, 1978), 184–209; Louis Haas, 'Women and childbearing in medieval Florence', in: *Medieval family roles: A book of essays*, ed. Cathy J. Itnyre (New York, 1996), 87–99; David Herlihy, 'Women and the sources of medieval history: The towns of northern Italy', in: *Medieval Women and the Sources of Family History*, ed. Joel Rosenthal (Athens GA, 1990) 133–154 [reprinted in David Herlihy, *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe: Historical Essays 1978–1991* (Providence, 1995), 13–32]; Thomas Kuehn, *Law, family, and women: Toward a legal anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago and London, 1991), 363; Lauro Martines, 'A way of looking at women in the Italian Renaissance', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 4 (1974), 15–28; James Bruce Ross, 'The middle class child in urban Italy, fourteenth to sixteenth century', in: *The history of childhood*, ed. Lloyd de Mause (New York, 1974), 183–228; Natalie Tomas, 'A Positive Novelty': *Women and public life in Renaissance Florence* (Monash Publications in History: 12, Victoria, Australia, 1992), 14–26; Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980), esp. 132–158.

presumably orphaned, mentioned as living in a surrogate family in 1427.⁷ Throughout the history of the Casa Datini, Margherita was the centre of the household, dominating the day-to-day activities of the people who made up the *famiglia*. Francesco, on the other hand, was the founder and force behind the Datini commercial enterprises and wealth; through his professional contacts and his promiscuity, he created the household's many instances of surrogate mothering.

The Datini history of foster-mothering began with Francesco himself. He was born in Prato around 1335. In 1348, the Black Death claimed his father Marco – a taverner – and mother Mona Vermiglia. Within Prato, his orphaning was not unusual; Klapisch-Zuber found that the plague's initial episode, and return visits throughout the second half of the fourteenth century, reduced the number of households in the town by over seventy percent.⁸ Marco Datini's will and codicil appointed the cloth merchant Piero di Giunta del Rosso of Prato to be guardian of his children and administrator of their inheritance.⁹ Mona Piera di Pratese Boschetti, whose blood-relationship to the family is unknown and who is not mentioned in the will, took Francesco and his surviving brother, Stefano, into her home after their parents' deaths. Francesco's later correspondence shows that he had at least one aunt, and perhaps other relatives in Prato, with whom both Mona Piera and Piero were close friends, but who played no discernible role in raising the boys.¹⁰ Francesco formed strong emotional bonds with Mona Piera and the family of Piero di Giunta del Rosso. After he left Prato for Florence in 1349, and then left Tuscany in 1350 to pursue a career in Avignon, he often wrote letters to Mona Piera in which he affirmed that he loved her as he would his own mother. He asked her for advice on such matters as how to find a wife, shared with her his personal joys such as when he settled on the girl he would marry, and endured a barrage of letters which demanded that he return home to Prato and start a family.¹¹ No documentation remains that specifies how much of a role Piero di Giunta played in finding either Francesco's apprenticeship in Florence or his position in Avignon, or whether he played a significant role in the young man's slow rise to financial security through traffic in a wide variety of goods, including armour, religious art-works, salt, and cloth. The quality of Francesco's relationship with Piero's family, however, is suggested by Francesco's life-long friendship and commer-

⁷Guasti, *Lettere*, xlvii–xlviii.

⁸Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, 'Demographic decline and household structure: the example of Prato, late fourteenth to late fifteenth centuries', in: *Women, family and ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1985), 26.

⁹These are published in: Enrico Bensa, 'Il testamento di Marco Datini', *Archivio Storico Pratese*, 5 (1924), 74–79; Renato Piattoli, 'Codicillo al testamento di Marco Datini', *Archivio Storico Pratese*, 7 (1927), 20–23. The codicil survives as: Florence, Archivio di Stato, Diplomatico R. Aug. Verzoni–Muzzarelli, 19 June 1348.

¹⁰Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1114, letter Avignon to Prato, Francesco di Marco Datini to Mona Piera, 22 March 1372: ... e chosi quello di Monna Agiuole di ser Biagio e di Monna Christiana e di Monna Tina mia zia.

Note: throughout this article we will present the Italian as it appears in the primary documents – without corrections or modernisations.

¹¹For example: Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1114, letter Avignon to Prato, Francesco di Marco Datini to Mona Piera, 7 March 1371, 28 August 1376; Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1101, letters Prato to Avignon, Mona Piera to Francesco di Marco Datini; Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1101, letters Prato to Avignon, Nicolozzo di Ser Naldo to Francesco di Marco Datini; Origo, *Merchant*, 20–29; Melis, *Aspetti*, 45–46.

cial association with his son Niccolò, and the fact that Piero's nephew Lionardo eventually became Francesco's son-in-law.

Margherita was the youngest of Domenico Bandini's seven children. Her mother, Dianora, was from the noble Gherardini family of Florence.¹² Her father apparently was a disaffected Florentine Ghibelline in a very Guelf world. His participation in a plot against the powerful *Parte Guelfa* resulted in his proscription in 1358 and execution by the state two years later. Gene Brucker describes the episode as a minor action against the sitting government.¹³ Francesco, ill-informed or possibly influenced by current anti-Florentine sentiment in papal Avignon, says, when describing Margherita to Mona Piera, '[Domenico] had his head cut off in Florence some time ago, for having been accused of wishing to hand it [Florence] over to our Lord [the Pope]'.¹⁴ After Domenico's death, Dianora and her children lived in exile in the papal city of Avignon – home of many other politically disaffected *fuorusciti* from Tuscany, as well as of merchants, clerics, and fortune hunters. While Margherita's sex and her mother's nobility would suggest that she ought to have been wet-nursed and weaned away from the household, her family's hardships almost certainly made this impossible. Its poverty – a result of the confiscation of Bandini's property in Florence – is evident in the absence of a dowry for Margherita.¹⁵

In August 1376, when he arranged his marriage to the sixteen-year old Margherita, Francesco was about forty years of age and a successful merchant. While this had been a typical age for a first marriage for a Pratese male during the late thirteenth century, by the 1370s, thanks in large part to the Black Death and its continued recurrences, the average age had dropped to twenty-four years for men (sixteen for women).¹⁶ This certainly explains his Pratese friends' concern for his extended bachelorhood, and their joy at his eventual marriage. Francesco had every right to expect that his and Margherita's would be a large family. He had already proven his potency by siring a bastard son. All that is known about this child is that he was born in the summer of 1375 and died the following January; Mona Piera greeted the baby's arrival joyfully (although she could not help but add that Francesco ought to beget a legitimate heir), and mourned

¹²Origo, *Merchant*, 26; Melis, *Aspetti*, 48; Bensa, *Francesco*, 27; Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1114, letter Avignon to Prato, Fograncesco di Marco Datini to Mona Piera, 28 August 1376:

Io credo che dio ordine quando naqua esio dovese avere moghe che fosse fiorentina e pertanto io credo averlla vol[ut]ta una fanculla ch'a nome Margherita...La Madre di questa fanculla a nome Mona Dianore, seroche {sic; Bensa suggests 'sirocchia'} del pelica {sic} Gherardini; rimase di questo Domenico 3 fanculle e 3 figliuoli... [one sibling had already died.]

Bensa transcribes this same passage and modernises the Italian. His efforts, however, are not above question: he writes 'Lianora' instead of 'Dianora'. His solution to the problem of 'pelica' is interesting and possibly correct: he suggests that it is a personal name, 'Pellicia'; the significance of the reference, however, is not clarified by this solution.

¹³Gene Brucker, *Florentine politics and society, 1343–1378* (Princeton, 1962), 185–6.

¹⁴Origo, *Merchant*, 26; Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1114, letter Avignon to Prato, Francesco di Marco Datini to Mona Piera, 28 August 1376:

...la quale (Margherita) fue figliola di Domenicho Bandini al quale fue tagliate la testa a Firenze giافة piu tempo che fue acholpato che vole a dare Firenze a nostro Signore.

¹⁵In his will, Francesco clearly states that Margherita brought no dowry to her marriage; Byrne, 'Father', 352; Guasti, *Lettere*, vol. 2, 286.

¹⁶Klapisch-Zuber, 'Demographic decline', 27–29.

his early death.¹⁷ Margherita's potential child-bearing capability was suggested by the fact that Mona Dianora had borne seven living children. The couple, however, was to be disappointed; despite good advice, quack cures, false alarms, and a deep desire on her part, Margherita proved barren.¹⁸ Although the topic rarely surfaces in the letters between them, a critical tension in the household must have been her inability to conceive. The prescriptive, moralistic and personal writings of the period stress the importance of bearing and raising children for members of middle and upper classes. The Christian perspective of the married woman's role as mother and the procreative imperative behind licit sexual activities both encouraged conception and child-raising. Molho has suggested that the Black Death and its recurrences created a secular 'natalist mentality' that encouraged reproduction among Tuscans.¹⁹ More powerful, perhaps, was the social pressure on women of the upper classes to provide their mates with heirs. Klapisch-Zuber declares that, 'the mistress of the household, we may state, has no other mission than the governing of her little world and the procreation of children'.²⁰ The Casa Datini, however, was destined to be populated with other women's children.

In spite of her failure to bear Francesco a child, Margherita's world still centred around the household, children, and women. During the long years when she tried numerous cures and urged Datini to return to her and her bed, and the many disappointments, as mistress of the household Margherita was rarely without children in need of her attention. The offspring of relatives, friends, servants, and business associates, and sometimes the children's mothers, populated her house and absorbed her extra energies and affections. David Herlihy, in a discussion of the structure of late medieval Tuscan households based on the Florentine *catasto* of 1427, noted the frequency of this practice,

...the poorer households were consigning many of their children into the care of the wealthy... Wealthy households were carrying, as it were, disproportionate numbers of the community's children during the dangerous years of early life. This top quartile was rearing nearly one-half of the children.²¹

A sympathetic reading of Margherita's many letters to Francesco on matters relating to children, and the testimony of others, show that she conscientiously cared for the members of her household. Part of this concern, undoubtedly, was anxiety about the image that the Casa Datini presented to society through these children and women. Part, however, seems to have been genuine affection.

¹⁷Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1101, letter Prato to Avignon, Mona Piera to Francesco di Marco Datini, 29 January 1376, 6 March 1376; Origo, *Merchant*, 25.

¹⁸Origo, *Merchant*, 165–168; Haas, 'Women and Childbearing', 88–91; Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 212, Spese di Casa 1394–5 and 1397.

¹⁹Anthony Molho, *Marriage alliance in late medieval Florence* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), 27–28.

²⁰Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, 'Women servants during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,' in: *Women and work in preindustrial Europe*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Bloomington, 1986), 69. Natalie Tomas, however, skillfully shows that Margherita played an important role in Francesco's business by supplying him with local information and acting as his agent to certain important people who could influence such things as his tax assessment: Tomas, *Positive Novelty*, esp. 20–26.

²¹David Herlihy, *Medieval households* (Cambridge MA, 1985), 153–154.

Margherita and Francesco first took on the responsibilities of foster parenting soon after their wedding in Avignon. In August 1377, one of Datini's associates, Bonacorso di Vanni da Prato, died while on a business trip in Rome. His will appointed Francesco to be the guardian of Bonacorso's four young children.²² Their mother, Caterina, was still alive, although it is unclear from the documentation whether she lived in the Casa Datini along with her children. It is unlikely that she was separated from them completely while they lived with Francesco and Margherita. In August 1379, Francesco wrote to Mona Piera, saying:

I am still the guardian of the four children of the late Bonacorso di Vanni, brother of Mona Agostanza. Their father strongly commended them to me both orally and in writing and left me [as in a bequest] as their guardian.²³

By January 1380 only the eldest, Maddalena, was still resident in the Datini household; the others had returned to their mother.²⁴ Datini continued to watch over Maddalena's needs and her assets until she was married in September 1382. He probably chose her husband, carried out the marriage negotiations, and saw to it that her wedding gown of red woollen fabric was properly becoming to her.²⁵ Margherita's role as foster-mother to the children is not documented by the records; at seventeen when Bonacorso's children first moved in, she was only a few years older than Maddalena. Nonetheless, she must have learned much about fostering other people's children during the five years that they lived in her house.

In early 1383, Francesco and Margherita returned to Tuscany; Margherita soon gathered around her the women and children – some who worked for her, some who were related, and a few who were just friends – who would form her *brigata* over the coming years. The next recorded child to enter her world was her niece Caterina, daughter of her sister Francesca and Niccolò di Ammanato Tecchini. This Caterina first

²²Origo claims, although on what grounds is not specified, that these children were not legitimate: Origo, *Merchant*, 190.

About his fulfilling of his friends' bequest, Francesco wrote to Mona Piera:

La chagione di questa lettera si e per mandare chon essa una lettera che va a Mona Aghostanza Pinzochera, figliuola che fu di Vanni per la quale lettera la significho la morte di Bonachurso suo fratello lo quale e morte a Roma a di 27 agosto. Io la significho de' fatti suoi di qua pero che ne so e grande parte perche detto Bonachurso m'amore forte e de lui e suo procuratore mi lascia quando di que parti e rachomandomi 4 sue fancielle che gle nostro Signore a be' miserichordia della sua anima, che buono uomo...

Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1114, letter Avignon to Prato, Francesco di Marco Datini to Mona Piera, 22 September 1377.

²³Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1114, letter Avignon to Prato, Francesco di Marco Datini to Mona Piera, 21 August 1379:

Io sono rimaso ghovernatore delle quatro fanculle [e] figliuole che furono di Bonachorso di Vanni fratello di Monna Aghostanza. Il padre loro me le rachomando forte e a bocha e per scritta. e a lasciatomi loro procuratore...

²⁴Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1114, letter Avignon to Prato, Francesco di Marco Datini to Mona Piera, 20 January 1380:

la magiore fanculla ch'e una bella e buona figliuola...e l'altra [si] ghoverna la madre.

²⁵Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 214, filza 3, Spese di Casa 1384–1392, f. 4v:

4 octobre 1382: pan[n]o rosato di Bersela de picholi per una chotandita per la Madelena quando si sposa—£12.

appears in Margherita's letters to Francesco in 1385 when she is described as being well.²⁶ Five years later, her age still unrevealed by the sources, Caterina was resident in Prato with Margherita instead of with her parents in Florence. Margherita relates to Francesco how, when they were out together one day, the precocious girl was asked whose daughter she was and she promptly replied that she was the daughter of Francesco di Marco Datini. Margherita continued, possibly with a smile, 'she has more arrogance than you and would be better off with her mama'.²⁷ Despite Caterina's troublesomeness, or at least high spirits, Margherita seems to have enjoyed her presence and cared about her; she remained within the *brigata* until at least 1396. As the Tecchini fortunes gradually declined, Margherita does not seem to have resented paying some of Caterina's expenses; in 1396 Niccolò di Ammanato felt sure enough of his sister-in-law's good-will to ask her to cover his daughter's expenses for attending a festival.²⁸ Francesco and Margherita may have helped to find a job for her when she reached a suitable age. By 1401, when her own mother died and her father looked as if he too would pass away, Caterina was a maid in the Florentine household of Tomaso Piaciti, who was one of Datini's business acquaintances. Her plea to Francesco and Margherita after her mother's death was appropriate for a poor but beloved relation; she professed to love them as if they were truly her parents and hoped that they would treat her as their own child.²⁹ Her hope for their protection was not disappointed. Francesco arranged for Caterina to marry Luca del Sera when he moved home from Valencia in order to become the partner in charge of Datini's Florentine office in 1403; he also provided her dowry.³⁰ In addition, he gave her an expense account with which to pay off her accrued debts to Piaciti.³¹

Francesco di Marco's lifelong friend, Niccolò di Piero di Giunta, also had a daughter named Caterina – usually called Tina in the records – who frequented the Datini household. She first appears in the *brigata* when, as a young child, she accompanied Francesco and Margherita to Pistoia in order to escape an outbreak of plague in 1390. Her conscientious father periodically sent her new clothes while she was away from Prato, instead of taking advantage of Datini's generosity.³² Margherita was quite fond of

²⁶Rosati, *Lettere*, 18.

²⁷Rosati, *Lettere*, 52; Origo, *Merchant*, 195.

²⁸Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1103, letter Florence to Prato, Niccolò di Ammanato Tecchini to Margherita Datini, 5 June 1396.

²⁹Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1103, letter Florence to Bologna, Caterina di Niccholo di Ammanato Tecchini to Francesco di Marco Datini, 10 July 1401:

Charisimo padre, sempre v'ò abiato a ticiuto [accetato?] per padre e chosi Mona Margherita per madre, e pregovi per amore di Messer Domenedio che ora piu che mai mi dobieate acutare [acietare?] per figuolla chosiderate el mio bisogno e i'ò grande fiducia in voi.

³⁰Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 614, Francesco di Marco Proprio, f. 110v, 20 May 1403:

Richordanza che Lucha del Sera stava per noi a Valenza a di 20 di maggio 1403 chol nome di dio e salvamento d'anima e di corpo chon promise e giuro la Chaterina figluola di Nicholo del Amanato la quale abbiamo in chasa charta per mano di Ser Lapo Mazi.

Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 598, Libro Nero A, f. 93v, 1403:

Mona Chaterina figuola di Nicholo del Amanate e dona del Lucha del Sera de e dare di 12 luglio £600 prometemo per lei a Lucha del Sera suo marito per la dota sua in queste.

³¹Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 598, Libro Nero A, f. 94r, 18 September 1403.

³²Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1099, letter Prato to Pistoia, Niccolò di Piero di Giunta to Francesco di Marco, 29 July 1390:

mando vi 2 chamicie che m'adatte Mona Simone per la Chaterina e piu una paio di pianella per detta Chatterina.

Tina and her mother Mona Simona.³³ In August 1395, she wrote to Francesco, ‘Niccolò di Piero came here on Sunday in order to collect Tina so that they could go to the Ghonfienti festival; I didn’t want to let her go because I am alone and because you aren’t here’.³⁴ Tina ceased being a regular member of the Casa Datini sometime before 1400. In that year she did not accompany the Datini household to Bologna to escape a recurrence of the plague but remained instead with her family; it was she who wrote to Francesco and Margherita with the news of her father’s death.³⁵ Datini’s *ricordanze* do not indicate Tina’s fate after this date. He did not have to look after her marriage or other arrangements because she had many relatives and because her father had been able to flourish financially during the difficult 1390s. If Tina stayed in Prato it is likely that she remained in contact with Margherita.

Margherita fostered both Caterinas, individually and together, for long periods as part of her household despite the fact that their parents were alive. The exact dates when each was resident in the Casa Datini cannot be established because they were not always named specifically but instead were included within Margherita’s *brigata*. They are very difficult to separate in the records, except when their parents’ names are mentioned, because of their identical Christian names and because Margherita and Francesco did not consistently use nick-names for either of them. Margherita’s treatment of them apparently did not differ even though they were related to her in different ways. As their surrogate mother, when they were under her roof she provided for all their needs; the household expenses from 1397–1400 show similar numbers of undergarments, shoes, gowns, and other goods bought for ‘Caterina’ as for Francesco’s daughter.³⁶ In 1397, Margherita sent a particularly biting letter to Francesco about the need to make a gown for Caterina that was befitting to her as a member of the Casa Datini; the reproach directed at him for the poor quality of the fabric, in comparison with the new gown of Stroza di Carlo’s daughter, indicates her concern for the image that one of her *brigata* presented to Pratese society.³⁷ Both Caterinas learned how to read and write, although whether they did this in the Casa Datini is not established. Margherita learned how to read and write from the family friend and notary Ser Lapo Mazzei around 1396; this would have been a good opportunity for the Caterinas although the documentation does not support or deny their participation in her lessons.

Two other little girls were also attached to Margherita’s *brigata* for various lengths of time. Madonna first appears in the household expenses in 1397 when she received several articles of clothing. She may have been in the household longer than this, however, hidden and nameless within the group of children for whom Margherita

³³Origo, *Merchant*, 198.

³⁴Rosati, *Lettere*, 114.

³⁵Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1103, letter Prato to Bologna, Tina di Nicolo di Piero in Prato to Francesco di Marco, 3 August 1400.

³⁶Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 212, Spese di Casa 1394–5, 1397, f. 20r, 20v and 21v:

20r: Pani si darano di 17 di magio 1397: 3 chamice di Mona Margherita, 3d; 2 camice dela Ginevra, 2d; 2 camice dela Caterina, 2d.

20v: Pani si darano di 30 di giugno 1397: 4 chamice di Mona Margherita, 4d; 9 chamice di queste fanciulle, 9d; 1 guarnello della Chaterina, 2d; 2 chamice della Chaterina, 2d; 2 chamice della Ginevra, 2d;... 2 chamice di Madonna, 1 chamice di Ginevra, 1 chamice de la Chaterina.

21r: lana pani...11 d’agosto 1397: 1 guarnella della Chaterina, 4d; 6 chamicie di Francesco, 6d; 5 chamicie della Chaterina, 6d; 4 chamicie della Ginevra, 5d; 3 bavarelli della Ginevra [...].

³⁷Rosati, *Lettere*, 209.

provided various items of clothing.³⁸ The Casa Datini continued to care for her long past her childhood; between February and April 1408, one ledger records a series of payments to her by Francesco after the birth of her child; his justification for these is not recorded.³⁹ The other child under Margherita's supervision for a while was Nanna, daughter of the Casa Datini's servants Meo and Mona Domenica. Margherita did satisfy her needs for clothing, although not as lavishly as for relatives' children; Nanna was, after all, part of the *brigata* that surrounded Margherita and displayed her social station.⁴⁰ Nanna accompanied Francesco and Margherita to Bologna in 1400–1 when they moved in order to avoid another outbreak of the plague.⁴¹ After the journey, she too disappears from the household records.

For these four children, Margherita acted as a mother, teaching, providing for, and apparently enjoying their company. Two other children, however, entered this world: Francesco's illegitimate offspring. Their presence could only have reminded her of her inability to bear her husband's children. Sexual activity outside the conjugal bed was by no means unknown among males of Datini's class. Like many, Francesco was away from that bed for months at a time; moralists and his wife's relatives notwithstanding, few contemporaries would have condemned his extra-marital activities. He clearly consorted with at least two women besides his wife during his marriage. The two resulting children began their lives outside the Datini household cared for by wet-nurses. Although the boy died early, the girl, Ginevra, eventually entered the *famiglia* and thus provides an example of the mistress of the household acting as step-mother.

The boy, Francesco's second illegitimate son, was born on 6 September 1387. Origo must be relied upon for most of the information about this child because she culled her details about this child from a ledger (*Quadernaccio A*) which is now missing from the Datini collection. The mother was a servant-girl of whom Datini had written to Margherita three years earlier, 'Ghirigora is a girl of little sense: don't let her out of your sight'.⁴² Sexual relations between masters and servants were not uncommon in Tuscan society of this period: according to Richard Trexler, the resulting children made up a large part of the children abandoned to foundling homes while the rest were raised as bastards among the legitimate children.⁴³ Francesco's response to his servant's pregnancy was to marry her off quickly, during her third month, to a young merchant who sometimes worked for the Datini companies. A *ricordanza* memorialised the solution to Ghirigora's problem: 'on March 11, 1387, I gave in marriage Ghirigora, who lives with me – that is, I signed her marriage contract with Cristofano di Mercato di Prato.'⁴⁴ The

³⁸Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 212, Spese di Casa 1394–5 and 1397, f. 20v and 21v, 17 May 1397, 30 June 1397, 5 November 1397.

³⁹Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 213, Spese di Casa 1408–9, f. 9r–12r. During February and March 1409, Francesco made eight payments totalling 25s 2d.

⁴⁰Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 218, filza 1401, Spese di Casa, 17 September 1401: per tre paia di scharpette nero, uno per Ginevra, uno per la Nana, uno per [Margherita] s17.

⁴¹Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 613, Quadernaccio Francesco di Marco da Prato proprio, f. 60r, 27 June 1400; Melis, *Aspetti*, 56–7.

⁴²Cecchi, *Lettere*, 34; Origo, *Merchant*, 174.

⁴³Richard Trexler, 'The foundlings of Florence, 1395–1455', *The history of childhood quarterly*, 1 (1973), 262; Klapisch-Zuber, 'Women Servants', 70.

⁴⁴Origo, *Merchant*, 174.

sources do not reveal whether her future husband realized that she was already pregnant. Francesco provided her with a dowry of 165 *florins* in cash and forty-five *florins* worth of clothing and household goods.⁴⁵ According to Klapisch-Zuber, many young Tuscan women entered domestic service during the later fourteenth century in order to obtain a dowry; the amount they typically received, however, was about eighty *lire* (around twenty *florins* in 1400).⁴⁶ The amount of Ghirigora's dowry, therefore, suggests either that Francesco was being uncharacteristically generous, or that he had to convince Cristofano to take her as his wife. As soon as the child was born, Datini arranged for him to be baptised. Francesco noted in a *ricordanza* that '[Ghirigora] says he is the child of Francesco di Marco [Datini]'.⁴⁷ While the child may not actually have been his, his willingness to record the event in the manner that he did, and subsequent references to the child as *il fanciullo mio* indicate his own belief in his paternity.

Datini immediately arranged for the child to be nursed by the wife of Prato's miller. By the mid-fourteenth century, the practice of putting a child out to nurse with a *balia* was quite common among the Tuscan middle and upper classes.⁴⁸ This custom gave the mistress of the household greater freedom to pursue her duties and responsibilities on behalf of the *famiglia*; it also made her re-impregnation more likely because the act of nursing is a very effective form of birth-control. According to Klapisch-Zuber, masters had enough control over the members of their households to rent out lactating servants as *balie* after their own children died, were abandoned, or were sent off to another nurse.⁴⁹ Ghirigora, however, no longer remained in Datini's household after her marriage, and her child survived birth. Why Francesco arranged for its suckling under the circumstances, except possibly out of fatherly concern, is uncertain since the child and mother were now another man's responsibility owing to marriage. Maybe Ghirigora refused to suckle the child in order to hire herself out as a *balia*: Ross cites several Florentine *ricordanze* in which payments to *balie* ranged between four and six *lire* per month, while Klapisch-Zuber, using a different set of evidence, says that country nurses received between nine and fifteen *florins* a year.⁵⁰ Francesco may have retained enough control over her because of her dowry to enforce a desire to separate mother and son. Perhaps he believed that an older woman's milk would be better for the boy.⁵¹ Maybe he wanted to control with whom the child bonded, or it is possible that he made these arrangements simply because they were customary. It seems clear, however, from Francesco's level of interference, that he intended to establish custody and raise the boy as his own.

Francesco made all the necessary arrangements throughout the child's nursing. Besides paying for the *balia*, he also supplied the baby's clothing needs. He sent a number of swaddling bands, a cover for the cradle, and a pillow to the miller's wife for

⁴⁵ Origo, *Merchant*, 175, 302.

⁴⁶ Klapisch-Zuber, 'Women Servants', 68, 74.

⁴⁷ Origo, *Merchant*, 175.

⁴⁸ Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, 'Blood parents and milk parents: wet nursing in Florence, 1300–1530', in: *Women, family and ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1985), 133. Also on this subject, see Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the middle ages* (New York, 1990), esp. 53–76.

⁴⁹ Klapisch-Zuber, 'Blood Parents', 141.

⁵⁰ Ross, 'Middle-class child', 188, 190–2; Klapisch-Zuber, 'Blood Parents', 136.

⁵¹ Shahar, *Childhood*, 56.

the child.⁵² Providing clothes for a baby when sending it to the *balia* was customary in Tuscany; the amount and type depended on the family. Ross notes the items which Antonio Rustichi – a modest man from a great Florentine family – sent along with his son Lionardo: lined cloaks, bibs, shirts, robes, and caps.⁵³ Fancy wardrobes such as this one were probably more a means of displaying affluence than providing the child with usable clothes. By contemporary standards, the small number and value of items provided by Francesco were appropriate to the child's illegitimacy.

Francesco kept close watch on the health of the wet-nurse and of the baby. After the baby had spent three months with the miller's wife, he decided to change the *balia*. His records give no reason for the move; he might have believed that the excellence of her milk was declining, or the impetus may have come from the woman herself. The quality of the *balia* and of her milk, as Margherita explained to Francesco almost ten years later, had to be very carefully and constantly watched, if the parents wanted the child to survive. In 1397 the grave condition of Barzalone di Spedalieri's child provoked an outburst from her about women who provided milk for children for too long or went for too long between nursing children: they were dangerous to use as wet-nurses lest the child be virtually poisoned by their milk.⁵⁴ Changing the *balia* apparently was not uncommon. According to Klapisch-Zuber, an average Tuscan child nursed for a year and a half, and then was weaned over a period of several months. In a study of 318 Florentine babies nursed during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, she found that the average stay with a *balia* was ten months, or about half the time needed to bring the child to the age of weaning. She also found that one third of the babies had two nurses, while eight percent had three.⁵⁵ The second nurse which Francesco chose lasted only ten days; the third, two and a half months. Unfortunately for Francesco, the unnamed boy died on 6 March 1388 in Prato after contracting 'the accursed sickness' at six months of age. This child was later re-buried in a grave beside his father inside the church of San Francesco.⁵⁶

What of Margherita's response to her husband's illegitimate child? The records are silent. During the child's last months, Margherita was living in Florence; Francesco was drawn back to Prato from Pisa by the news of the baby's illness. Margherita's silence is probably explained by the fact that she herself was sick at this time.⁵⁷ She did, however, make a gesture of grief after the child had died by making a coverlet for it and giving twenty-five *lire* on Ghirigora's behalf to the nuns of Sanmichele.⁵⁸

The story of Ghirigora has an epilogue. In 1390, the Datini household moved to Pistoia in order to escape a particularly virulent outbreak of the plague. While there, Francesco received a letter from Niccolò di Piero di Giunta in Prato informing him that Cristofano di Mercato, Ghirigora's husband, was dying and that she was suckling a child and would need help if her husband passed away. Niccolò reminded Datini that he had

⁵²Origo, *Merchant*, 175.

⁵³Ross, 'Middle-class child', 191, 195.

⁵⁴Rosati, *Lettere*, 174.

⁵⁵Klapisch-Zuber, 'Blood Parents', 145, 153–4.

⁵⁶Origo, *Merchant*, 175.

⁵⁷Cecchi, *Lettere*, 49.

⁵⁸Origo, *Merchant*, 175–6.

brought Ghirigora to Prato (probably from Florence) and given her a dowry; Niccolò suggested to his friend that for his honour's sake he should not leave her without means of subsistence. He offered to look after her for some time, on Francesco's behalf, if need be.⁵⁹ Francesco's answer to this plea does not survive. Niccolò continued to report Cristofano's condition; a month later he implied that he was improving and likely to live.⁶⁰ Thereafter, Niccolò does not mention the matter again. Cristofano did recover; two months after the illness began, he himself wrote to Datini begging for aid on his and Ghirigora's behalf.⁶¹ Again Datini's response, if any, has not survived. No mention of Ghirigora appears in the documentation after this date.

The last of Francesco's known children, Ginevra, was born during the spring of 1392. Although nothing in any of the Datini papers directly substantiates her maternity, Guasti (copied by Origo, and therefore by everyone else) states that the mother was a young slave named Lucia.⁶² In 1392, she was about twenty years old and had been in the Datini household for at least three years.⁶³ Klapisch-Zuber states that one of the most important functions of female slaves in Florentine households was the satisfaction of the master's sexual needs, as well as those of his sons or of family friends.⁶⁴ Unlike his affair with Ghirigora – a servant – the slave Lucia's pregnancy would have brought no shame to the merchant in society, and should not have been viewed as reprehensible by Margherita's family. If Lucia was the mother, Margherita was not upset by the fact. Her surviving letters suggest that she and Lucia were quite close. The latter often accompanied her mistress on trips between Florence and Prato, such as in November 1398,⁶⁵ and in April 1399 when Francesco instructed Margherita to come to Florence with Lucia and a few others, but to leave Caterina and Ginevra behind in Prato.⁶⁶ Even after marrying one of the Casa Datini's servants, Nanni di Martino Pagni da Prato, in 1399, Lucia remained a part of the household. Francesco and Margherita manumitted her before her marriage, and apparently gave her a dowry.⁶⁷ Lucia and Nanni accompanied the Datini household to Bologna in 1400. It was probably there that their first child was born in May 1401; Francesco covered all the expenses for this baby.⁶⁸

⁵⁹Origo, *Merchant*, 176; Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1099, letter Prato to Pistoia, Niccolò di Piero di Giunta to Francesco di Marco, 28 September 1390:

...e pertanto ditte quello che vi pare ch'io abia a fare della Ghirighora se'lla mene a chasa vostra o alla mia, o se'lla ista cholla elle altro fanciullo a Prato, se'lle i'lascia o se'lle il tiene ele in sara maltratta e ara charo d'avere del panne...io vi richordo l'ammo e'l'tuo onor vostro; voi suette sanio sapette quello diliberette ch'io facia farro.

⁶⁰Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1099, letter Prato to Pistoia, Niccolò di Piero di Giunta to Francesco di Marco, Prato to Pistoia, 2 October 1390, 6 October 1390, 22 October 1390.

⁶¹Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1103, letter Prato to Pistoia, Cristofano di Mercato to Francesco di Marco, 20 November 1390:

...in tutti l'altri miei debitori sono venuti a me a proferemesi datare i voi guatate didi farmi m'a'tanto vi dicho che se dio il suo male; io ista male, la Ghirighora fate bene.

⁶²Guasti, *Lettere*, vol. 1, xlvi; Origo, *Merchant*, 177.

⁶³Cecchi, *Lettere*, 52; Rosati, *Lettere*, 42.

⁶⁴Klapisch-Zuber, 'Blood Parents', 141.

⁶⁵Rosati, *Lettere*, 254.

⁶⁶Cecchi, *Lettere*, 260.

⁶⁷Guasti, *Lettere*, vol. 1, xlvi. Lucia was a beneficiary of a moderate sum in both the 1400 and 1410 versions of Datini's will: Byrne, 'Father', 344.

⁶⁸Guasti, *Lettere*, vol. 1, 353 n. 1. He references a ledger which cannot now be located in the Datini collection.

Margherita's response to Francesco's last illegitimate child – whoever actually was the mother – was to take her for her own, and mother her. Her reaction was probably conditioned by final acceptance that she was barren. As far as can be seen through the scanty documentation, Ginevra's life in the Casa Datini was full of love, not the resentment of a cruel step-mother.

The precise details about when and where Ginevra was born, and what her immediate fate was, are unknown. During May 1392, Francesco was resident in Florence. On the 15th of that month, he recorded in his company's ledger that he bought a cover for a cradle, an outer-garment, and six under-shirts for 'his girl-child which was being sent to village of Montelupo' to be suckled. The entry does not name the mother and child, record the date and place of birth, or identify the *balia*.⁶⁹ That this entry refers to Ginevra is confirmed only by later records specifying where she was fostered, and by what is known about her age.

Before sending her to the care of a wet-nurse, Francesco apparently kept this baby in Florence for a short time. A passage in the 1400 recension of his will indicates that Santa Maria Nuova in Florence was the site of this interlude; he left a dowry of one thousand gold *florins* in the care of this hospital for the marriage of 'a certain girl who was placed in secret with the overseer of that hospital'. His notary, Ser Lapo Mazzei, also knew that she had been placed there in secret.⁷⁰ This passage has caused Origo, and most scholars since, to assume that Ginevra was abandoned – left as a foundling – at Santa Maria Nuova, and only later reclaimed and placed with the *balia* in Montelupo.⁷¹ Tuscan custom and a slave child's position in the household make such an interpretation seem plausible. Richard Trexler, in his study of Florence's foundlings, established that parentage by a slave-girl was reason enough to warrant abandonment.⁷² Girls born to slave mothers were far more likely to be abandoned than boys because, even if they were legitimated, they could not carry on the father's name or bloodline; Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber found that in the Florentine Catasto of 1427, reported male bastards under the age of thirteen outnumbered females two to one.⁷³

Ginevra's stay at Santa Maria Nuova, however, probably was not necessitated by her mother – whoever she was – being a slave; several other reasons for the association

⁶⁹Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 557 Libro Nero di Francesco di Marco e Stoldo di Lorenzo in Prato 1390–94, f. 79v; Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 613, Quadernaccio Memoriale Ricordanza Proprio Segnata A, f. 176r:

Francescho di Marcho proprio de dare a di 15 maggio 1392 56s paghamo per uno copetta e uno ghuarnelo e 6 chamice per la fanciula sua mandamo a Monte Lupo 14s 8d.

⁷⁰Gavitt, 45; Guasti, *Lettere*, vol. 1, xv; Guasti, *Lettere*, vol. 2, 283, no. 2.

Item: reliquit Hospitali Sanctae Mariae Novae de Florentia, pro nubendo quamdam puellam, quam Hospitalario dicti Hospitalis posuit in secreto... item etiam mihi notario infrascripto, et cuique ipsorum idem dixit et posuit in secreto.

⁷¹Origo, *Merchant*, 177.

⁷²Richard Trexler, 'Infanticide in Florence: new sources and first results', *History of Childhood Quarterly*, 1 (1973), 101. Klapisch-Zuber and Boswell also found that slave-mothers heightened the chance that a child would be abandoned. Christine Klapisch-Zuber, 'Childhood in Tuscany at the beginning of the fifteenth century', in: *Women, family and ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1985), 104; John Boswell, *The Kindness of strangers: The abandonment of children in western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York, 1988), 419–20.

⁷³David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their families: A study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven, 1985), 146; Trexler, 'Foundlings', 101, 261, 270–1.

with this house prior to being sent to the wet-nurse are much more compelling. First, Francesco may have wanted to wait to see whether the child would survive its earliest days; the infant was a girl, not a possible heir, yet she still was his daughter. Secondly, by the time of her birth, it seems likely that he already had decided to send her ‘out into the healthy countryside’ to Montelupo; a trip through this hilly terrain would last at least one day and require that the baby have more strength to endure the hardships than was usual for newborns. Presumably, somebody in Santa Maria Nuova – the infant’s mother or another woman – suckled her for the first days. Thirdly, this particular house was a strange choice for the deposit of any child, abandoned or claimed, secretly or publicly. The *Entrata* and *Uscita* records from Santa Maria Nuova reveal no evidence that it accepted children at this time; it was, in fact, an institution for the care of old people nearing death.⁷⁴ Margherita resided in the house for just this reason when near death in 1423.⁷⁵ In his 1400 will, Datini left no bequest specifically to Santa Maria Nuova to pay for services for children; he did, however, leave significant amounts to the two primary Florentine *ospedali* for foundlings operating at this time – Santa Maria di San Gallo and Santa Maria della Scala – and in his 1410 will he founded the Ospedale degli Innocenti.⁷⁶ His charity for abandoned children later in life, however, should not be used as proof that Ginevra was abandoned; it arose at a time when he was increasingly aware of his own mortality, his sins, and of the miseries of poor people in the society around him. Fourthly, the connection cannot be explained by an association with the intended *balia*; Santa Maria Nuova’s records produce no evidence that anyone in Montelupo was involved with the house.

Ginevra’s stay in this house, however, is very easily explained by the reference to Datini’s notary, trusted neighbour, and good friend, Ser Lapo Mazzei; he was the full-time notary for Santa Maria Nuova.⁷⁷ Because the child was born in Florence,⁷⁸ Francesco may have asked Mazzei to help find medical care for the baby among the Santa Maria Nuova’s doctors or tenants capable of acting as mid-wife. Mazzei certainly knew that Francesco was nearing sixty years of age, that he and Margherita were frustrated at the lack of legitimate children, and the extent of the Datini fortune. He was the couple’s chief advisor on religious and ethical matters; it is difficult to imagine that

⁷⁴Florence, Archivio di Stato, Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova 4446, Libro di Entrata (1391–3); Florence, Archivio di Stato, Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova 5038, Quaderni di Casa (1391–3); Florence, Archivio di Stato, Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova 5740, Poderi e Casa.

⁷⁵Florence, Archivio di Stato, Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova 4473, Libro di Entrata (1422–4), f. 4r, July 1423.

⁷⁶Boswell, *Kindness*, 415–17; Gavitt, *Charity*, 43–44. Enrico Bensa perpetrated a barely forgivable fallacy when he claimed Datini chose Santa Maria Nuova because the most famous of all the foundling hospitals, the Ospedale degli Innocenti, had not yet been built (*non era sorto*): Bensa, *Francesco*, 39.

⁷⁷Florence, Archivio di Stato, Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova 4446, Libro di Entrata (1391–3); Florence, Archivio di Stato, Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova 5038, Quaderni di Casa (1391–3); Florence, Archivio di Stato, Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova 5740, Poderi e Casa; Florence, Archivio di Stato, Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova 60, Testamenti; Florence, Archivio di Stato, Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova 68, Testamenti; Florence, Archivio di Stato, Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova 69, Testamenti.

⁷⁸There is no evidence that the child was in Prato before being sent to the nurse, whereas these notices in Datini’s Florentine register and will substantiate that she was born in Florence. Prato’s foundling hospital was founded in 1333. Boswell, *Kindness*, 415, n. 55.

he, as a friend, would not help Francesco with the best possible care for this child, even though it had turned out to be a girl.

Francesco chose Montelupo as the site for his daughter's nursing for several reasons. First, another recurrence of the plague was expected in Florence during the spring and summer of 1392.⁷⁹ Francesco probably sent his daughter out to the countryside in order to protect her health by getting her away from the crowded city environment of both Florence and Prato where, as Klapisch-Zuber notes, the mortality rate for infants was very high in comparison.⁸⁰ Secondly, Datini knew that the wife of Piero di Strenna was available to act as wet-nurse. Why she was available and lactating is not discussed in the records. She probably had just given birth to a child of her own; it may have died a few days after birth, or her husband may have placed it with someone else so that she could offer her services as a *balia*. Strenna was a retailer of metals; he occasionally supplied Datini's companies with lead. His house in Montelupo was close to one of the main routes between Florence and Pisa; Datini agents, and possibly Francesco himself, several times stopped over there when making the journey between the two cities. The small consignment of lead which he sold to Datini's agent in 1392 may have been intended for the use of the painters working on Francesco and Margherita's *palazzo* in Prato, which was nearing completion.⁸¹

Ginevra's absence from the household accounts during her first few years of life should not be viewed as surprising. Origo and others have interpreted the lacuna in Francesco's records as proof of a conspiracy on his part to keep Margherita from knowing about her, or to keep the unwelcome girl out of the house. The reason for her absence in the records, however, is that a *balia* usually took care of most of the baby's requirements during its first few years. The father chose the nurse, decided when to change, and provided a basic wardrobe, but the nurse looked after the child in all other ways. Relating to Ginevra, one of the *balia*'s duties may have been to baptise her at an appropriate time; that she is not named in the 1392 ledger-entry, and that she probably did not face any life-threatening illnesses in her first few days – if she had, she would certainly not have been taken all the way to Montelupo – suggest that she was not christened before being placed in the Strenna household. Piero di Strenna's wife proved to be a good nurse; Datini saw no need to move his daughter to someone else, unlike Ghirigora's son. According to the customs of wet-nursing, Ginevra normally would have returned to her true family in 1394. She remained in Montelupo, however, for another two to three years, necessitating that Francesco provide a small amount of very expensive blue and scarlet cloth to di Strenna, possibly for making new dresses.⁸² Her

⁷⁹Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 619, filza 4, Quadernaccio e altra mutili, f. 13r, 24 June 1392.

⁸⁰Klapisch-Zuber, 'Blood Parents', 151.

⁸¹Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 557, Libro Nero di Francesco di Marco e Stoldo di Lorenzo in Prato 1390–94, f. 106v, 29 April 1394; Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1086, letter Prato to Florence, Francesco di Marco to Stoldo di Lorenzo, 4 September 1391; Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 619, filza 4, Quadernaccio e altra mutili 1383, 1395–8, f. 13r, 14 April 1384; Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 669, letter Florence to Montelupo, Piero di Strenna to Francesco di Marco.

⁸²Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 613, Quadernaccio Memoriale Ricordanza Proprio Segnata A, Francesco di Marco Proprio, f. 184r.

De dare a di 10 marzo 1394: F12 14s 4d, sono per bracia 1 2/3 d'azzurino per Nanino manovale, e braccia 2 1/3 di scharlatino per mandare e a mandare a Monte Lupo.

extended stay in Montelupo may have been caused by Margherita's chronic poor health during the mid-1390s.⁸³ The presence of the Caterinas in the Casa Datini, however, suggests that this was not the only cause; other plausible ones might be the state of the *palazzo*, Margherita's feelings towards very young children, Francesco's conviction that the country was more healthy for a baby, or at di Strenna's request. In 1395, Piero wrote a letter to Datini, expressing his own and his wife's affection for the child; he sent it along with Ginevra when she made a visit to Prato of unknown duration.⁸⁴ Origo, citing the missing *Quadernaccio A*, says that in 1394 Datini paid Piero di Strenna twenty-six *florins* for Ginevra's wet-nursing. In the surviving Datini ledgers, no mention is made of this payment.⁸⁵ If this sum was a payment for Ginevra's nursing, it probably did not represent the whole cost for her stay in Montelupo because she lived there through 1396. She remained in Montelupo, for whatever reason, at least until she was almost five years old.

Ginevra's arrival in the Casa Datini is undocumented. The first record of her physical presence in the household appears in an expense account for 13 April 1397 when Margherita bought her two under-shirts.⁸⁶ Throughout her first year in Prato, Margherita bought shirts, shoes, shifts, stoles, and other items for Ginevra and Caterina, although the surviving documents do not reveal a buying spree that would suggest her homecoming.⁸⁷ These notations also do not show any marked disparity in the number of goods bought for her versus Caterina; as far as can be seen from these accounts, Margherita provided them with equal amounts of new clothes. The amount of second-hand or rebuilt clothing which each had, however, cannot be ascertained. Ginevra first appears in Margherita's letters to Francesco in June 1398 in a request that he buy silver buttons for a coat for her.⁸⁸ This incident shows that she was already demanding that the

⁸³Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1090, letter Florence to Prato, Giovanni di Banduccio da Prato, physician, to Francesco di Marco, 17 May 1396.

⁸⁴Melis, *Aspetti*, 48; Origo, *Merchant*, 198; Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1109, letter Montelupo to Prato Piero di Strenna to Francesco di Marco, 8 August 1395:

Riceveti vostra lettera ch'io ve ne mandassi Ginevra vostra figliuola... l'amore che la dona mia ed io l'avamo... era chome fosse nostra figliuolo per piu chagioni e perche ll'e buona fancella e de molto paoussa... a Firenze faremo insieme.

⁸⁵Origo, *Merchant*, 177; Ross, 'Middle-class child', 195.

The ledgers do contain two substantial payments to di Strenna, in April and May 1394; one of these, however, is specifically for lead, while the other is not the amount mentioned by Origo: Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 557, f. 106v, 107r:

106v Piero di Stenna {sic} da Monte Lupo de dare adi 29 1394 d'aprile F7 {sic} 16s i quali sono per pionbo gli mando da Pisa a Francescho da Marcho chome al meno.

107r Piero di Stenna da Monte Lupo de avere a di 6 di magio 1394 F27 16s i qua dar abiamo posto che debe dare a Libro rosso.

⁸⁶Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 218, filza 1397, Spese di Casa, f. 1 April 1397, 13 April 1397: 2 chamicie della Ginevra, 2d.

⁸⁷Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 218, filza 1397, Spese di Casa, f. 1 April 1397, 13 April 1397, 11 February 1398, 3 May 1398; Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 212, Spese di Casa 1394–5 and 1397, f. 20v, 21v, 26v, 17 May 1397, 30 June 1397, 5 November 1397, 11 August 1397.

⁸⁸Rosati, *Lettere*, 216–7.

child be dressed exceedingly well; the buttons, which Margherita deemed unsatisfactory, cost Francesco £8 4s 8d.⁸⁹

Ginevra's upbringing at the hands of her step-mother does not seem to have differed significantly from that of the household's other children. Margherita seems to have taken up the task of step-mothering with gusto and lavished her attention on the growing girl. In December 1398, the six year old developed a throat ailment and a head injury. Margherita hovered over the child, during this illness. She wrote to Francesco, who understandably was quite concerned about his only remaining child:

Don't worry yourself over Ginevra because I believe that that [problem] with her throat, with luck, will not get any worse. And there's no need for me to have told you, because I know that you are certain that I look after her better than if she were my own; indeed, I consider her to be mine. I did not want to tell you anything about her illness because I know you have other worries. Besides, there is no more need for you to fear for her now. The broken head is a small thing; my fear, however, was for this problem with her throat. The doctor told me he did not believe it would get any worse. We are following his directions; she has not had a fever or any other bad signs.⁹⁰

Throughout the household accounts there is evidence of Margherita's concern over the provision of good food under her own roof, especially because of the children. She also was concerned about their diet even when they were living in another woman's household. In April 1399, Ginevra and Caterina were staying in Florence with the latter's mother, Francesca. Margherita sent the ingredients for a special dish (*zanella*) made with onions, almonds, twelve eggs and strong herbs for them.⁹¹ This reference shows that Margherita was not averse to allowing the children in her *brigata* to live in someone else's *brigata* for periods of time, the same way the Caterinas did with her; this practice allowed mothers to have time with their children and to be foster parents to other children.

The Datini records give few details about what children learned, how they spent their time, and how they interacted with grown-ups as they grew. Play was indulged in and allowed. Ginevra and the Caterinas had a few toys; in August 1398 a tambourine costing £2 10s was purchased in Florence for them from one Paganino.⁹² She had the two Caterinas to play with, although they were much older than she was, and the young Nanna. Margherita had taken her niece, Caterina di Niccolò di Ammanato Tecchini, to a dinner party in 1394 where the children of the noble Florentine Chavigliati and Strozzi

⁸⁹Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 613, Quadernaccio Memoriale Ricordanze Proprio, Segnata A, f. 69v, 7 June 1398.

On buttons as a signifier of wealth and taste in fourteenth-century Italy, see Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, 'La disciplina delle apparenze. Vesti e ornamenti nella legislazione suntuaria bolognese fra XIII e XV secolo', in: *Disciplina dell'anima, disciplina del corpo, e disciplina della società tra medioevo et età moderna*, ed. Paolo Prodi (Bologna, 1994), 763.

⁹⁰Rosati, *Lettere*, 260; Origo, *Merchant*, 198.

⁹¹Rosati, *Lettere*, 283–4.

⁹²Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 613, Quadernaccio Memoriale Ricordanza Proprio, Segnata A, fol. 70v, 10 August, 1398; Origo, *Merchant*, 199.

families argued over their social standing in reference to each other;⁹³ this type of party was an important tool for teaching children about their place in society and she took Ginevra to similar ones. Ginevra learned to read between the years 1399–1402; she probably also learned to write, although nothing in her hand has been found in the archive. In 1399, Ginevra was being taught by Mona Mattea, ‘who lives in Santa Maria Novella’ in Florence; in 1401, while the family was in Bologna, one Madonna Orosini continued her lessons; Datini omitted her next Florentine teacher’s name in a payment entry from 1402.⁹⁴ Other than reading, we know very little about what she was taught or how she spent her days.

Margherita only mothered her for ten years. Ginevra was fifteen when, on 24 November 1407,⁹⁵ she married Lionardo di Tommaso di Giunta, nephew of Niccolò di Piero di Giunta and grandson of Francesco’s guardian Piero di Giunta. According to Niccolò, a marriage broker first approached Lionardo about this match in February 1401.⁹⁶ In the following years, the young man matured while working within the Datini companies, spending most of his time in Prato under the tutelage of Barzalone di Spedalieri. He continued working for Datini until 1410, when Francesco made him a partner in the Florentine branch for five years with a stake of 500 gold *florins* and named him as one of his will’s five executors.⁹⁷ On his engagement to Ginevra, Datini set up an expense account with which Lionardo was to pay for the goods in her trousseau. He purchased many rich fabrics for gowns, household fabrics, furniture, rings with diamonds, pearls, and other precious stones, and a host of other beautiful and costly goods which he bought between April and November for ‘his woman’. By the wedding, fewer than 200 of the original 1000 *florins* remained to be paid in cash to the young man as her dowry.⁹⁸ Whether Margherita influenced his purchases in any way cannot be ascertained from Datini’s accounts, although it is tempting to suggest on the basis of her past actions concerning her *brigata* that she specified what would be fitting possessions for a wedding which united the Datini and di Giunta houses.

The surviving correspondence between Francesco and Margherita during the last three years of his life is taken up with preparations for hosting some of the delegates to the 1409 church council in Pisa. Margherita’s voice falls silent about children in her household. Nonetheless, she continued to have an important relationship with Ginevra and Lionardo. The young couple lived close to the main house, and Lionardo continued

⁹³Rosati, *Lettere*, 110.

⁹⁴Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 613, Quadernaccio Memoriale Ricordanza Proprio Segnata A, f. 23v, 31 October 1399; Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 614, Francesco di Marco Proprio, f. 5v, 20 February 1403; Guasti, *Lettere*, vol. 1, xlv; Origo, *Merchant*, 199.

⁹⁵Origo, *Merchant*, 201–5, Bensa, *Francesco*, 49; Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 189, Libro da Prato, A, Debitore e Creditore, de Barzalone di Spedalieri (1406–8), f. 155r:

Lionardo di Ser Tomaso di Giunta chol nome di dio questo di 24 d’aprile 1407 e’l di di San Giorgio di Domenicho dopo adesmarte in San Francescho in Prato giura e chonpromisse la Ginevra nostra figluola di Francescho di Marcho con promise si in Luca del Sera e Barzalone di Spedaliere la deta charta a per mano di Ser Lapo Mazzei notario fiorentino al modo Firenze.

⁹⁶Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini carteggio 1110, letter Prato to Florence, Niccolò di Piero di Giunta to Francesco di Marco, 14 February 1401.

⁹⁷Byrne, ‘Father’, 354–5.

⁹⁸Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 599, Libro Bianco B, f. 329v, 344v, 383v, 397v; Origo, *Merchant*, 202–3, 296–8.

in his role as an important Datini employee: it is his hand that recorded the payments to Madonna, once a member of Margherita's *brigata*, in early 1409. Shortly after that, he stopped keeping the household records in Prato because he, and probably Ginevra, joined Margherita in Florence.⁹⁹ They were all living in Prato together, however, when Francesco died in August 1410. The household inventories made at that time show that Ginevra retained her own room in the *palazzo*, although the absence of clothing in the inventory, and of a room assigned to Lionardo, show that she was not living full-time with her step-mother, now about 50 years of age.¹⁰⁰ Datini's will gives the main house to his heir, the 'Ceppo di Francesco di Marco Datini da Prato', a charitable trust to be headquartered in the Datini *palazzo*.¹⁰¹ He did, however, provide Margherita and Ginevra with 'a house for them in which to live in Prato, for as long as they shall live, with the household goods truly necessary'.¹⁰² Whether mother and daughter ever shared the residence is not known. Ginevra is occasionally mentioned in the records made during the liquidation of Datini's vast commercial enterprise; the last recorded payment to her was made in 1417.¹⁰³ She must have been alive in 1421 in order for Guasti's report of her daughter Brigida to be accurate. The last record of Lionardo is dated to 21 May 1421 when he was recorded as owning land alongside a piece the Ceppo was procuring.¹⁰⁴ Both may have died in that year or the next because of the plague. Margherita apparently outlived them. She died in Santa Maria Nuova in Florence – the hospital for old people without family who could care for them – in July 1423.¹⁰⁵ Guasti affirms that she hired Tommaso di Pieragnolo di Cioni, the notary of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, to draw up her will on 25 June 1423; this document cannot now be located. He also claimed that her tomb was placed in Santa Maria Novella, along with the rest of her family; if these claims are true, it is strange that she would choose to die in one religious house but be buried in another, without choosing to be buried in Prato with her husband.¹⁰⁶ Soon after her death, Luca del Sera, husband of her niece, Caterina, wrote to the Ceppo informing the organisation of her death and listing the few goods that she had possessed at the end which were being brought to the *palazzo* in Prato.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁹Prato, Archivio di Stato, Datini busta 213, Spese di Casa, f. 17r, August 1409.

¹⁰⁰Prato, Archivio di Stato, Ceppo Nuovo 1618, f. 56v, 20 August 1410: Nela camera di Mona Ginevra: una lertiora con predelle interno dale due faccie, due cassapanetre catuuna atee screami, mecco saccone tra bianco e vermiglio, una matarassa bi bordo di sorto di panno lino rosse . . .

¹⁰¹Gavitt, *Charity*, 45–56; Melis, *Aspetti*, 7; Bensa, *Francesco*, 51–54; Guasti, *Lettere*, vol. 1, cxxx–cxxxvii; Guasti, *Lettere*, vol. 2, 270–310.

¹⁰²Byrne, 'Father', 349–52.

¹⁰³Prato, Archivio di Stato, Ceppo Nuovo 1579, Libro, f. 143v, 29 October 1417.

¹⁰⁴Prato, Archivio di Stato, Ceppo Nuovo 2340bi, filza 2, Ceppo di Francesco di Marco in Prato, f. 17v, 19 May 1421.

¹⁰⁵Florence, Archivio di Stato, Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova 4473, Libro di Entrata (1422–4), f. 4r, July 1423:

- Dare dita di Mona Margherita fue di Francesco di Marcho di Matteo {sic} da Prato £25 9s 6d rico Alesandro d'Antonio nostro che gli trovo in casa levati dal quaderno segnato S a carta 145 it di poste ala redita a le libro nero aventari a carte 122.
- Da dessa redita per vino vendite uglimecione li nati daesso quaderno as 14 per tutto £5 11s 6d e desa inventar a carta 122.

¹⁰⁶Guasti, *Lettere*, vol. 1, cxxxvii n. 2; Origo, *Merchant*, 387, 175. Origo argues away this seeming incongruity by accusing Margherita of resenting Francesco; the more likely explanation, however, is that Guasti made an error in saying 'Novella' instead of 'Nuova'.

¹⁰⁷Prato, Archivio di Stato, Ceppo Nuovo 1785, filza 1, Florence to Prato, Luca del Sera to the Rettore del Ceppo, 11 August 1423.

And what about Brigida? Francesco di Marco Datini's grandchild was raised mostly by distant kin. Ginevra and Lionardo apparently were dead by the time the 1427 Catasto recorded that she was six years old and living in the household of Nanni di Bertino.¹⁰⁸ The plague may have made her an orphan, as it did her grandfather eighty years before. Guasti notes that her relative Meo di Nanni di Giunta, and Andrea di Gino, whose relationship to her still has to be established, administered her assets. These included land worth 462 *florins* and a dowry from her mother valued at 628 *florins*.¹⁰⁹ In spite of these riches, all three of her overseers apparently were poor; Prato's economy seems to have suffered when Francesco Datini died, and his companies closed. What was Brigida's experience in a surrogate household? Was she cared for and loved by a stern but warm woman such as Margherita? Did she receive all the clothes, food, and other things she needed? Or did the administrators take advantage of her youth and powerlessness to use her assets for their own needs? On these matters the documents fall mute.

The history of mothering in the Casa Datini provides examples of wet-nurses, foster mothers, and a caring step-mother. Clearly the household membership, and thus the role of its mistress, was constantly shifting. Relatives, friends, servants, her husband's business associates and even his mistresses presented Margherita with children for whom she had to care. Some of these, like the Caterinas, moved in and out, their own mothers reciprocating by caring for Ginevra from time to time. Although Margherita's own barrenness made her an unusual mistress of such a household, the fluidity of its make-up seems to have been typical for the time and for Tuscany. The deaths of Ghirigora's baby, as well as Francesco's son from before his marriage, were not unusual; infant mortality was relatively common. Amid the clatter of construction, the periodic relocations of the Casa Datini, the frequent absences of her husband and his extra-marital affairs, and the press of every-day business from the Datini companies spilling over into her household, Margherita is never recorded as displaying resentment, anger or ill will towards her charges. While the records of the Datini archive give a far from complete picture, from what they do tell Cinderella had no counter-part in the Casa Datini. Instead, over its life the household contained several bundles of youthful energy for Margherita to channel and teach. The types of mothering illustrated in the Datini letters were not necessitated by the need to train the children – as, for example, one finds in English sources for the late middle ages such as the Paston letters¹¹⁰ – but instead by the health of the mothers and offspring, and the still vital Tuscan sense of *famiglia*.

¹⁰⁸Guasti, *Lettere*, vol. 1, xlvi. Guasti cites 'Archivio di Stato. Catasto. Porto Gualdimare e Porta Leone di Prato, 656.'

¹⁰⁹Guasti, *Lettere*, vol. 1, xlvi–xlvi.

¹¹⁰For example, compare to the children's experiences portrayed or prescribed in: *The Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Norman Davis, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1971, 1976); *The Babees Book*, ed. Frederick Furnivall (London and New York, 1969); *Manners and Household Expenses of England in the Thirteenth and Fifteenth Centuries; Illustrated by Original Records*, ed. Beriah Botfield (London, 1841).

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