



THE CONTEXT

Ser Filippo Mazzei was a Florentine notary whose career spanned the middle decades of the fifteenth century. The record of his professional activities has survived in twenty volumes of notarial protocols housed in the state archives of Florence. Copied in Ser Filippo's neat hand in a formulaic Latin learned in the notarial schools of central Italy, these protocols (together with the thousands of volumes compiled by his colleagues) constitute a fundamental source for the history of Florentine society in the Renaissance.

Notaries played an important role in the legalistic and litigious society of Florence. They were employed by people from every social stratum to draw up wills, property transactions, dowry contracts, and settlements of disputes. They also found employment in the civic bureaucracy, drafting legislation and keeping minutes of council meetings and court records. Though not as highly regarded professionally or as well trained as lawyers with doctoral degrees, they were men of learning who could read and write Latin and possessed some knowledge of the law. Together with lawyers, they belonged to one of the city's most prestigious guilds, the *arte dei giu-*

dici e notai. Like Ser Filippo, who was born in Castelfranco near Arezzo, many of these notaries were natives of rural districts adjacent to the city. They moved to Florence, seeking their fortunes in that metropolis of 50,000 inhabitants. While the majority achieved only modest success in their profession, some like Coluccio Salutati (d. 1406) gained wealth and renown as high civic officials and humanistic scholars.

In the mid-1440s Ser Filippo obtained an appointment as notary for the archiepiscopal curia. Thereafter, his clients included Archbishop Antoninus and his vicar general, the canons in the cathedral chapter, monastic foundations, and individual priests and monks. For these clerics and the religious communities to which they belonged, Ser Filippo drafted petitions for benefices, recorded the details of property transactions, and made transcriptions of the documents pertaining to judicial cases brought before the archiepiscopal court.

In his role as notary for the court, Ser Filippo compiled the dossier of an extraordinary case that was tried before Antoninus and his vicar general in the summer and autumn of 1455. The plaintiff was Lusanna, the daughter of an artisan named Maestro Benedetto di Girolamo, and the widow of a linen-cloth manufacturer, Andrea di Antonio Nucci. In his deposition to the court, Lusanna's procurator (her legal representative) asserted that after the death of her first husband, she had married Giovanni di Ser Lodovico della Casa, a wealthy merchant and scion of a prominent Flor-

entine family. Though disputes over the legality of marriages were not uncommon in Italian church courts in the fifteenth century, this case was highly unusual. Comprising some three hundred pages, the dossier is the most detailed and comprehensive record of a Florentine judicial process, in either secular or ecclesiastical courts, that has survived from the fifteenth century. Included in the dossier is the testimony of twenty-nine witnesses from a wide variety of social and economic backgrounds: aristocrats, artisans and their wives, apprentices and servants, peasants from the countryside, a Franciscan friar.

The lengthy, richly textured case illuminates many features of Florentine social experience. The dispute focused primarily upon the question of marriage, specifically, whether Giovanni and Lusanna had been legally wed. But inevitably that issue was linked to the emotional bonds between the lovers, the sentiments that they felt and expressed, and the reaction of their kinfolk and neighbors. On such themes as love, marriage, and the moral conventions governing relations between the sexes, the testimony of the witnesses is very instructive. Many of their voices were rarely heard in this world dominated by rich and powerful men: six of the thirty-one who testified in the archiepiscopal court were women, and nineteen others were from the lower ranks of Florentine society. The disparity in social status between Giovanni and Lusanna was a critical issue in the dispute, evoking a variety of reactions from the witnesses. The case raises important

questions about Florence's social hierarchy: its structure, its gradations, its rules. It also documents judicial procedure in an Italian ecclesiastical court, including a bitter fight over a jurisdictional issue between the archbishop and the *podestà*, the official responsible for criminal justice in the city. As often happened in this tightly knit community, a private quarrel escalated into a sensitive political issue, which may have created a rift in the Medicean party that governed Florence. The resonances of the dispute between two lovers extended far beyond their own lives and fortunes; its effects were felt throughout the social, political, and religious world of Renaissance Florence.

Born in 1420 (the precise date is unknown), Lusanna grew up in her father's house in the parish of San Marco, not far from the convent that later became renowned as the headquarters of the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola. Her father, Benedetto di Girolamo, was an immigrant from Dalmatia who earned his livelihood as a tailor. By his first wife, a native of the Casentino east of Florence, he had five children who were alive in 1433: Filippo, Antonio, Marco (who became a priest), Israello, and Lusanna. Benedetto's first wife died sometime after Lusanna's birth, and he then married a woman named Bartolomea (called Mea), the daughter of Domenico Fiocho, by whom he had three children: Girolamo, Caterina, and Domenico. Though not a native Florentine, Benedetto was quite successful in his business. He was described by artisans who knew him

as a worthy guildsman who practiced his trade honestly and competently. In 1433 he listed his property in his tax report (*catasto*): his residence on the Via del Cocomero (now the Via Ricasoli); two farms in the Mugello, a rural area north of Florence; and investments in the commune's funded debt, the *Monte*. For an artisan, this was a substantial bloc of property, considerably larger than the average patrimony of Florentine artisans and shopkeepers. When Benedetto arranged in November 1436 for the marriage of his daughter Lusanna to a linen-cloth maker, Andrea Nucci, he provided her with a sizeable dowry of 250 florins. This figure was considerably larger than the average marriage portion for daughters of artisan parents. Since Lusanna was the only girl among Benedetto's four children by his first wife, he could afford to give her a substantial dowry. Lusanna's husband, Andrea, was the son of a prosperous baker, Antonio Nucci, whose income came from his trade and from the rental of three bakeries in the San Lorenzo area.

Although Lusanna's father and her husband, Andrea, were more prosperous than most of their peers, their world was sharply defined by their artisanal, petit-bourgeois traditions and lifestyles. Florentine artisans were typically attached to a particular parish or neighborhood where they—and their parents and grandparents before them—had forged bonds of marriage, friendship, and clientage with their neighbors. Within those social enclaves they arranged marriages, selected godparents for their children, formed

business partnerships, and established clientele for their shops. Being a foreigner, Benedetto did not belong to an elaborate kinship structure that would have provided support for many of his fellow artisans. Still, he could expect to receive help and counsel from individuals linked to him by guild membership, marriage, godparentage, and friendship. Though no concrete evidence survives to support this conclusion, it is likely, too, that Benedetto found patrons and benefactors among the wealthy and socially prominent families in his neighborhood.

Concerning Lusanna's childhood and adolescence in her father's house, the documentary record is silent. We do not know when her mother died; we can only surmise that she was about seven when her father married Mea, who was eleven years older than her stepdaughter, and began to rear a second family. She was seventeen when Benedetto arranged for her marriage to Andrea Nucci, aged twenty-nine, in November 1436. The marriage contract and the dowry settlement were redacted by a notary, Ser Piero da Vulparia. Lusanna's husband lived in the Via San Gallo, adjacent to the Canto della Macina and not far from the church of San Lorenzo, which in those years was being rebuilt with Medici money under the supervision of the architect Filippo Brunelleschi. From her father's house to that of her husband was, for Lusanna, a move of a few hundred meters; after 1436 she was still living in very familiar surroundings. She would have attended religious services in San Lorenzo but also



A merchant in his shop

in the conventual church of San Marco, occupied since 1436 by the Dominican Observants and inhabited by Fra Antoninus from 1437 until his promotion to archbishop in 1444. Lusanna was also a frequent visitor to the Servite church of Santissima Annunziata, with its famed image of the Annunciation, a particular object of veneration of Florentine women hoping to become pregnant. While visiting one of these churches in the early 1440s, Lusanna was seen and admired by a young Florentine merchant, Giovanni della Casa, who lived in her parish of San Lorenzo and whose passion for the beautiful young woman is a central theme of this story.

Though born and reared in the parish of San Lorenzo, only a five-minute walk from Lusanna's residence, Giovanni della Casa inhabited a very different world. His family, the Della Casa, belonged to the upper echelons of Florentine society. His kinfolk associated with the Medici, the richest and most potent house in the city, and with other prominent families in the quarter of San Giovanni: Cerretani, Carnesecchi, Martelli, Ginori, Ciai. Giovanni was born in 1420; his father, Ser Lodovico della Casa, was a notary frequently employed by civic magistracies to record their formal acts. Ser Lodovico's tax declaration for 1430 listed his eight children: Francesco (a monk), Piera (a nun), Antonio, Ruggiero, Lotto, Alessandra, Jacopo, and Giovanni. He owned substantial real estate in the Mugello region north of Florence as well as a large bloc of shares in the commune's funded debt. Giovanni's older broth-

ers were all engaged in international trade and banking. Antonio had been an employee of the Medici bank in Rome in the 1430s; in 1439 he established his own company there in partnership with Jacopo Donati. Another brother, Ruggiero, was the head of Medici business operations in Geneva from 1433 until 1447. Giovanni was a salaried employee in Antonio's Rome company in 1439; sometime after 1444 he returned to Florence permanently to work in his brother's firm. By 1451 he and his brother Jacopo were the major partners of that banking and mercantile enterprise. Giovanni was also active in the manufacture of silk cloth in Florence, an expanding and profitable industry in these years. His tax declaration of 1458, submitted jointly with Jacopo, reveals that with gross assets of 5,800 florins the two brothers ranked among the most affluent citizens of their quarter of San Giovanni, though their wealth was modest by comparison with the huge fortune, calculated at 123,000 florins, of their neighbor Cosimo de' Medici.

As a young bachelor in the 1440s, Giovanni lived in his parents' home in the parish of San Lorenzo, when he was not away—in Rome, Venice, Milan, Naples—on business trips. He would not have thought seriously about marriage until he was thirty and had established himself in the competitive world of international trade and banking. Young men of his wealth and social rank were in great demand as potential husbands for Florentine girls of aristocratic lineage, whose fathers were willing to give large dowries (1,000

to 2,000 florins and more) so that their daughters could marry honorably. No evidence has survived to identify Giovanni della Casa as a prospective husband for the hundreds of teenage girls who were in the marriage market in the 1440s and 1450s. Some of these maidens and their parents and relatives might have seen Giovanni at wedding celebrations and other *feste* where upper-class Florentines met, exchanged greetings, and dined together. But Giovanni's interest in marriage subsided when, in 1442 or 1443, he met Lusanna (then married for five years), with whom he fell passionately in love and who, for twelve years, was the focus of his emotional and erotic interest.

Archbishop Antoninus (Antonio di Ser Niccolò Pierozzi) was born and reared in the same neighborhood near San Marco as Lusanna and Giovanni. In 1427 his widowed mother lived on the Via del Cocomero, the street also inhabited by Lusanna's father, Benedetto. Antoninus's father, Ser Niccolò Pierozzi, was a notary of modest social status. Antoninus entered the Dominican order in 1404, living in Observant convents in Cortona, Foligno, Fiesole, and Naples. From 1430 to 1437 he worked in Rome as an official of the Roman curia under Pope Eugenius IV. In 1437 he returned to his native city as a member of the newly established Observant convent of San Marco. Perhaps recalling Antoninus's legal and administrative expertise as an auditor of the Roman Rota (the high court of the papal curia), Eugenius IV chose him to be archbishop of Florence

in 1444. Antoninus was the most effective and influential head of the Tuscan archdiocese in the fifteenth century, indeed, one of the most illustrious prelates of his age. His years of service in the papal court had given him a perspective on the problems of ecclesiastical government that his conventual experience could not have provided. He was a reformer who worked hard to raise the moral and educational standards of his clergy and thus to improve the quality of spiritual guidance for the laity of his archdiocese. In his *Summa theologia*, which he wrote as a pastoral guide for his clergy, he revealed his sensible and pragmatic approach to the problems of living as a Christian in the secularized world of fifteenth-century Italy.

The Florentine bookseller and author Vespasiano da Bisticci had known Antoninus before and during his elevation to the archiepiscopal see. In his biographical sketch of the friar, he commented on his piety, for which he was well known, and on the austerity of his life in the archiepiscopal palace, so different from the opulence that characterized the life-style of most prelates in the Roman curia and the great Italian sees. So revered was the archbishop in Florence and throughout the peninsula that "when he passed along a road, everyone fell to his knees to honor him." According to Vespasiano, Antoninus was the most approachable of pastors; the doors of the palace were open to all who wished to consult him. Florentine merchants asked him for advice on the legality of business contracts and certain types of investments. Popes and prelates as well

as lesser folk sought his counsel on points of canon law and problems of conscience. In cases that came before his tribunal, he was never influenced by the reputation or status of the parties. Vespasiano described how Cosimo de' Medici once asked the archbishop to rule in his favor on a case before his court. Antoninus told Florence's most powerful citizen that "it was not necessary [to petition him], for if he was in the right, justice would be rendered to him, as it would be to the lowliest man in Florence." As a judge, Antoninus was knowledgeable, fair, and incorruptible; Vespasiano added that he had chosen as his deputy and vicar general a man (Messer Raffaello de' Primagis) as honest and virtuous as himself.

A testimonial to Antoninus's reputation in Florence was his election on 19 April 1455 by the Florentine government to head the republic's delegation to Pope Calixtus III to congratulate him on his recent election to the Holy See. The archbishop returned from this diplomatic assignment on 21 June. On 27 June, when he was in his palace adjacent to the cathedral, he was given a letter (*breve*) from the pope. The letter had been brought to the palace by Antonio di Benedetto, Lusanna's brother who was serving as her procurator. Dated 4 June from Rome, the letter read: "Our beloved daughter in Christ, Lusanna di Benedetto, a Florentine woman, has informed us that, despite a marriage legally contracted between herself and a certain Giovanni di Lodovico della Casa, he has married another Florentine woman in a public ceremony with an exchange

of vows and rings and with other customary solemnities." Calixtus's letter instructed Antoninus to investigate the case and, if Lusanna's allegations were found to be true, to dissolve the second marriage, compel Giovanni to accept Lusanna as his legal spouse, and impose certain penalties upon him for contracting a bigamous marriage.

Antoninus had actually learned about Lusanna's complaint more than a month before he received the papal *breve*. An entry in Ser Filippo Mazzei's protocol dated 15 May 1455 describes the interrogation by the archbishop and his vicar general of Fra Felice Asini, a Franciscan friar in the convent of Santa Croce. The subject of this inquest was the alleged marriage between Lusanna, widow of Andrea Nucci, and Giovanni della Casa. Fra Felice testified under oath that he had officiated at this ceremony. The case was thus known to the archbishop when he traveled to Rome as a member of the Florentine embassy to congratulate Calixtus III on his elevation. Antoninus may indeed have discussed Lusanna's complaint with officials in Rome, some of whom he would have known from his years of service in the curia. It is possible that one of the Florentine ambassadors or a member of the entourage had acted as Lusanna's agent in Rome to obtain the papal letter instructing Antoninus to investigate the case. The archbishop's personal interest in Lusanna's process is well documented in Ser Filippo's protocol. He presided over several court sessions; he personally interrogated witnesses; he was almost certainly involved in formulating the final decision of his court.